A-FUNCTIONAL SITUATION IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S REPRESENTATIVE PLAYS

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A study of the lack of relative situation for the characters of Waiting for Godot, Endgame and Happy Days, and of their complex and seemingly irrational presence on the stage, as a reflection of a social condition. This study deals mainly with the a-functional situating or placing of these characters within a system in which the sense of proportion is blotted out, because of the removal of a coherent superstructure of correspondences whereby they are able to refer to a chain of organic relations.

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INTRODUCTION

Much critical literature has been written on Samuel Beckett.* Many critics have explored the negative side of his ideology, such as Louis Perche in his book Beckett. L'enfer à notre portée. Some have traced the philosophic traditions that have influenced Beckett, mainly positivism, Buddhism, existentialism and Cartesianism, such as Richard N. Coe in his Beckett. Others, like Hugh Kenner in his Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study, have pointed to the laws of stagnation that govern Beckett's novels and plays. Others, such as Frederick J. Hoffman in his Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self, have explored the problem of the definition of the self in Beckett. A critic like Ruby Cohn has analysed the comic devices used by Beckett in her book Samuel Beckett. The Comic Gamut. Nathan A. Scott Jr. has related Beckett to the French literary tradition in his Samuel Beckett. Ludovic Janvier has even devised a critical glossary of Beckett in his Beckett par lui-même, where items such as "Bicyclette," "Chapeau," "Corps," "Contradiction," "Demeures," etc. are listed alphabetically and discussed in their artistic contexts.

Yet there seems to remain one aspect of Beckett's work, especially of his plays, which has not been dealt with fully: the

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*See the checklist of Beckett criticism at the end of this thesis.

lack of relative situation for his characters, their complex and seemingly irrational presence on the stage, as a reflection of a social condition. Relative situation means a functional situating or placing within a coherent system of correspondences and references, whereby the characters are able to refer to a chain of organic relations. All Beckett's characters are cut off both from the wider framework of the setting, which Beckett presents as bare most of the time, and from each other. With the abstraction of a determining structure, the sense of proportion is blotted out. Therefore, the characters cannot measure themselves against a spatio-temporal system outside themselves. Being non-situated, the characters' presence in the world is functionless, solipsistic, and thus superfluous and irrational. They are there, but they have no assigned place there. They are present in order to prove that they might as well be absent.

This problem is very obvious in Beckett's major full-length plays: Waiting for Godot, Endgame and Happy Days. Furthermore, there is in these three dramas a clear move on Beckett's part towards an obliteration of presence: in the first of the three plays, Waiting for Godot, there is an unequivocal presence of four characters; in Endgame, out of four characters two are enclosed within ashcans, and a third covers his face with a blood-stained handkerchief at the beginning and at the end of the play, throughout which his eyes are hidden behind black

glasses; in Happy Days, one character is buried to the waist in the first act and to the neck in the second, and the other is hidden behind a mound for most of the play.

In chapter I, an exposition of the problem of non-situating and non-situated presence of the characters will be presented. Subsequently, the three major plays will be discussed singly --Waiting for Godot in chapter II, Endgame in chapter III, and Happy Days in chapter IV-- in the light of the thesis. The outcome will then be summed up in a concluding chapter. Finally it should be mentioned that Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who is very often quoted in this thesis, has influenced the shaping of many of the ideas contained in it.

I - PRESENCE AND THE ABSENT FUNCTIONAL SYSTEM

Presence and the absent functional system

In his article "Samuel Beckett ou la présence sur la scène" Alain Robbe-Grillet affirms, talking of Estragon and Vladimir, the two major characters in Waiting for Godot: "Nous saisissons, tout à coup, en les regardant, cette fonction majeure de la représentation théâtrale: montrer en quoi consiste le fait d'être là[1] . . . La condition de l'homme, dit Heidegger, c'est d'être là. Probablement est-ce le théâtre, plus que tout autre mode de représentation du réel qui reproduit le plus naturellement cette situation."[2]

In this observation Alain Robbe-Grillet starts from the premise of Heidegger's notion of Dasein, and takes it for granted in his whole appraisal of the play. But the actual ideological backbone of Waiting for Godot, and of the whole Beckettian oeuvre at that, remains to be elucidated. The issue involved in the problem of "being there" as a philosophical condition is vaster, and implies further investigation into the spatial--since we are talking of location--as well as the temporal dimension which the fact of "being there" entails. The question is why these

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[1]Alain Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman(Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 131.

[2]Ibid., p. 121.

characters are merely there. It is thus a question of relevance of their spatio-temporal situation.

As an alternative to Robbe-Grillet's observation, it is useful to refer to a passage by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in which the idea of spatio-temporal situation is succinctly delineated. In his Phénoménologie de la perception he says:

> Ce qui importe pour l'orientation du spectacle, ce n'est pas mon corps tel qu'il est en fait, comme chose dans l'espace objectif, mais mon corps comme système d'actions possibles, un corps virtuel dont le "lieu" phénoménal est défini par sa tâche et par sa situation. Mon corps est là où il a quelque chose à faire . . . Mon corps est en prise sur le monde quand ma perception m'offre un spectacle aussi varié et aussi clairement articulé que possible et quand mes intentions motrices en se déployant reçoivent du monde les réponses qu'elles attendent. Ce maximum de netteté dans la perception et dans l'action définit un sol perceptif, . . . un milieu général pour la coexistence de mon corps et du monde . . . l'être est synonyme d'être situé.[3]

This quotation is important, for it helps clarify the condition of the Beckettian character. The human subject cannot merely be physically present in a Newtonian space: "ce n'est pas mon corps tel qu'il est en fait dans l'espace objectif." This subject is defined by its orientation and its situation. Its presence implies a task based on a meaningful relative function, which in its turn determines the subject's phenomenological location. A close relationship with the environment based on a clear perception of it is ex definitione necessary. Only then can there

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[3] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie de la perception (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), pp. 289-291.

be a significantly unambiguous coexistence between the body and the spatial dimension around it.

A look at Beckett's three major plays is mandatory at this point. Waiting for Godot was first published in 1952 in French under the title En attendant Godot and was translated into English in 1954 by the author. The play has four characters, in two sets of two: the tramps, Estragon and Vladimir on one hand, and the master-servant pair of Pozzo and Lucky on the other. The first couple do not take part in any occupational pattern, they just sit and wait for an enigmatic being called Godot, and they spend the time of the play showing the audience that they are bored. Pozzo is a master who in the first act is powerful and in the second act utterly helpless and blind; Lucky is his slave who obeys him passively in Act I, and who becomes dumb and as helpless as his master in Act II. Endgame was also first published in French in 1957 under the title Fin de partie, and was translated into English in 1958 by the author. It also possesses four characters: Hamm, who at the beginning and at the end of the play has a large "blood-stained handkerchief over his face,"[4] is paralysed in his chair, and constantly asks Clov, his servant, to give him his "pain-killer". The other two characters, Nagg and Nell, are Hamm's senile parents who speak from ashbins, and

[4]Samuel Beckett, Endgame (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1958), p. 1.

who by the end of the play are heard no more: they both seem to be dead. In Happy Days, first published in English in 1961, translated into French by the author and published in 1963 under the title Oh, les beaux jours, a middle-aged woman, Winnie, is in Act I imbedded to her waist in a mound, and in Act II buried to the neck. She spends her time taking all sorts of objects out of a bag (tooth-brush, mirror, magnifying glass, handkerchief, etc.), and remembering the happy days of the past. Her husband, Willie, is hidden behind the mound and answers (if at all) monosyllabically or reluctantly, and it is only towards the end that he crawls out to face her.

It is clear at first glance that none of Beckett's characters in these three plays are overtly situated either socially or historically. They are there, but the "there" is nowhere. The Beckettian scene is impersonal, and spatially as well as temporally non-situated. It is outside of any recognizable historical setting. The landscape in Waiting for Godot is "A country road. A tree."[5] That of Endgame is a "Bare interior,"[6] shut off from the world outside, where all is dead. That of Happy Days is an "Expanse of scorched grass rising centre to low mound,"[7] in the

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[5]Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1965), p. 7.

[6]Samuel Beckett, Endgame, p. 1.

[7]Samuel Beckett, Happy Days (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1961), p. 7.

midst of nowhere.

The actual physical space is devalued by this bareness of the stage setting. Beckett's characters can only move on a reduced, symbolic space level. The hypothesis to be explored in this thesis is that such a reduction of symbolic space is the logical result of Beckett's ideological system--that this space is an aesthetic transmutation on the stage of Beckett's ideational frame of reference. In each subsequent play Beckett eliminates more elements. In Waiting for Godot, where a hopeful image was still conceived of--the characters were waiting for something, one still had some vegetation: a bare tree on which four or five leaves grew in Act II. In Endgame the world is coming to an end, the characters know it--"Finished, it's finished"[8] are the very first words of the play--and they have stopped waiting. They are slowly dying with a whimper. Here flora has totally disappeared, and the fauna that remains dies: Clov kills the last flea, and the rat he finds in the kitchen is bound to perish. Just a few minutes before the end of the play Clov reports that he thinks he sees a small boy outside, but Hamm predicts the same fate for him as for the others: he too will die.[9] In Happy Days the dramatis personae are reduced to two characters. Here, Beckett

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[8]Samuel Beckett, Endgame, p. 1.

[9]Ibid., p. 78. This important episode of the small boy will be discussed at length in the chapter on Endgame.

tends towards an annihilation of movement and of presence: Winnie is already half-buried in Act I and almost totally interred in Act II, and Willie is hidden for most of the duration of the play. Beckett's dramas have become shorter and shorter. The stress on the vacuity of human existence is translated into having less and less to say about it and about the physical reality in which such increasingly insubstantial being takes place. Thus, Beckett's scenic space has been shrinking to bare essentials. Equally, nothing is resolved in time: what is given is both beginning and end.

Relative situation in two other major contemporary dramatists: Brecht and Genet

This aesthetic structure of Beckett's scenic universe shrunken to bare essentials rests on his regression from social reality. In this matter, Beckett's point of view can be comprehended more clearly if one compares him with other major contemporary dramatists whose aesthetic attitude, as different from his, does involve an overt concern with social reality. The most striking examples are Brecht and Genet. Both deal with social reality, though in very different ways, as will be discussed shortly. Brecht's attitude is diametrically antipodal to Beckett's: where the latter is passive, Brecht is dynamic. On the other hand, Genet's elaboration of theatrical devices is unlimited: where he increases, Beckett decreases. Both are thus, in their respective ways, Beckett's counterparts. In Brecht and Genet there is always a tangible social dimension; Brecht's is typified and parabolic,

Genet's is typified and hyperbolic. Because of the overt presence of a social dimension, their characters are situated spatially and temporally. In Beckett, any overt social dimension is removed, therefore the characters cannot be situated in a system of relative relations.

Brecht's scenic horizon is based on his concern with a critical understanding of the social set-up in view of its possible transformation. Therefore his dramatic perspective cannot be removed in a radical way from actual human relationships. The cognate quality between Nature and Art (to use Aristotelian terms) is made clear by Brecht himself in his notes to The Life of Galileo: "Furniture and props should be realistic (including doors) and, particularly, should have social-historical charm." And: "The casting of the church dignitaries must be done particularly realistically."[10] Unlike in Beckett, the function of the characters in their relations to one another and to the universe in which they have a place, as well as the space in which they move, are clearly situated. Let us take a look at the list of dramatis personae of The Caucasian Chalk Circle, for example: Peasant Woman, Young Peasant, A Very Young Worker, Agriculturist Kato, Girl Tractorist, Wounded Soldier, The Delegate from the Capital, The Governor, The Governor's Wife, The Singer,

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[10]Bertolt Brecht, The Life of Galileo (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1966), pp. 13-14.

Grusha Vashnadze a kitchen maid, Azdak village recorder, etc.[11] A look at the early play The Jungle of Cities shows: Shlink, the lumber dealer; Skinny, a Chinaman, Shlink's clerk; Collie Couch known as The Baboon, a pimp; J. Finnay, known as The Worm, hotel proprietor; etc.[12] The spatial and temporal locations are also precisely given. In Mother Courage and her Children: "Spring, 1624. In Dalarna, . . ."[13] Also: "In the years 1625 and 1626 Mother Courage journeys through Poland in the baggage train of the Swedish army . . . Tent of the Swedish Commander."[14] In The Life of Galileo: "10th of January, 1610 . . . Galileo's Work-Room in Padua."[15] And: "1616: the Collegium Romanum . . . It is night."[16] In The Caucasian Chalk Circle: "Summer 1945. Among the ruins of a war-ravaged Caucasian village..."[17] In The Jungle of Cities: "C. Maynes's Lending Library in Chicago.

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[11]Bertolt Brecht, The Caucasian Chalk Circle (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1965), p. 16.

[12]Bertolt Brecht, The Jungle of Cities (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1966), p.12.

[13]Bertolt Brecht, Mother Courage and her Children (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1967), p. 3.

[14]Ibid., p. 13.

[15]Bertolt Brecht, The Life of Galileo, p. 35.

[16]Ibid., p. 62.

[17]Bertolt Brecht, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, p. 19.

The Morning of the 8th of August 1912."[18] As we can see, dramatic reality is always specific and corresponds to a tangible social time and place. In Beckett it is vague, though even this corresponds in a very roundabout way to a highly abstracted social time and place, as will become clear in this thesis. Because Brecht's art aims at changing the audience by identifying the evils of capitalistic greed, it is dynamic. His art "does not copy Nature as the only reality," it is not "a Pseudo-Nature, reflected and purified,"[19] but, as Darko Suvin has pointed out, it "brings forth a specific reality."[20] Brecht's theatre "is a simile of Nature, a Meta-Nature."[21] This is what Suvin terms as The Dynamo which belongs to critical and dialectical aesthetic attitudes, as opposed to The Mirror which is the outcome of illusionist and individualistic aesthetic attitudes.[22]

Genet's modus operandi is that of a ritualized, highly elaborated physical reality projected onto the stage. He is concerned with effect mainly produced by the glorification and

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[18]Bertolt Brecht, The Jungle of Cities, p. 13.

[19]Darko Suvin, "The Mirror and the Dynamo" Tulane Drama Review, XII (Fall 1967), p. 60.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Ibid.

hyperbolization of an image or images. Like Brecht, Genet's touchstone is society, and through highly lavish and baroque props and paraphernalia, he imposes a supremely present social reality. Again, like Brecht, his characters are vested with a social role: they are Maids, or in The Balcony, the Bishop, the Judge, the Executioner, the General, the First Photographer, the Beggar, the Chief of Police;[23] in The Blacks--the Queen, the Judge, the Valet, the Governor, the Missionary;[24] in The Screens--the Mother, the Gendarme, the Maid, the Lieutenant, the Sergeant, the Academician, the Soldier, the Vamp, the Banker, etc.[25] Unlike Brecht, Genet's goal is not to change any state of affairs, only to execrate it: "Une chose doit être écrite: il ne s'agit pas d'un plaidoyer sur le sort des domestiques. Je suppose qu'il existe un syndicat des gens de maison--cela ne nous regarde pas."[26] His aim is to transfigure reality into an extremely complex "loufoquerie grandiose."[27] His domain is that of the theatre that is twice theatrical. Setting and characters are

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[23]Jean Genet, The Balcony (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1966), p. 6.

[24]Jean Genet, The Blacks (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1960), p. 5.

[25]Jean Genet, The Screens (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1962), pp. 7-8.

[26]Jean Genet, Les Bonnes (Décines: Marc Barbezat, 1963) p. 11.

[27]Jean Genet, Lettres à Roger Blin (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p.17.

overdone:

> On the ceiling, a chandelier, which will remain the same in each scene. The set seems to represent a sacristy, formed by three blood-red, cloth-folding screens. The one at the rear has a built-in door. Above, a huge Spanish crucifix, drawn in trompe-l'oeil. On the right wall, a mirror, with a carved gilt frame, reflects an unmade bed which, if the room were arranged logically, would be in the first rows of the orchestra. A table with a large jug. A yellow armchair. On the chair, a pair of black trousers, a shirt and a jacket. THE BISHOP, in mitre and gilded cope, is sitting in the chair. He is obviously larger than life. The role is played by an actor wearing tragedian's cothurni about twenty inches high. His shoulders, on which the cope lies, are inordinately broadened so that when the curtain rises he looks huge and stiff, like a scarecrow. He wears garish make-up.[28]

Yet through this theatrical exaggeration, the social dimension is always recognizable spatially as well as temporally.

In Beckett, the social scene is abstracted. He is concerned neither with changing nor with execrating social reality. His ideology tends towards reduction and cancellation, for he is presenting a metaphysical vacuity of meaning and an irrevocable reductio ad absurdum. That is why the setting is, in almost all his plays, bare. Where objective reality is annihilated, one can only move on a symbolic space level. Thus, in Roger Blin's production of Endgame the setting represented the interior of a skull.[29] But Beckett's symbolic space is in its turn reduced to

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[28]Jean Genet, The Balcony, p. 7.

[29]Bernard Beckerman, Dynamics of Drama (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1970), p. 125.

a minimum. When he sets his scene in a desert or on a deserted country road, what he stresses in this physical barrenness is a parallel mental barrenness. Against this undefined background are set characters that are there to prove that they are there for nothing. They do not affect the general system of things. They are either naturally idle such as Estragon and Vladimir, or they are made forcibly inactive because they are confined or paralysed such as Winnie, Nagg, Nell and Hamm. Only Lucky's function as attached slave is clearly delineated. Clov's function is thwarted, as will be demonstrated in the discussion of Endgame.

The question then, is one of situation. Brecht's characters are situated in their social function, in a way which makes it possible to explore it, so are Genet's though in a quite different way, but Beckett's are not.

The dissociated entity

What is painfully felt as lacking for the characters in Beckett's cosmogony is the existence of efficient determining forces, of some universal, or social, or cultural signs that would specify their incumbent role or roles. Naturally, these characters, cut off from the social spatio-temporal framework, have no history. They bear no relationship with external forms of experience, and therefore cannot orient themselves vis-à-vis this experience. There is no historical continuity in Beckett's characters, yet their need for it, is pressing. That is why Hamm tells stories. That is why Winnie recalls stories. In this

connection Maurice Merleau-Ponty has rightly remarked that "l'histoire . . . est le milieu où se forme tout sens et en particulier le sens conceptuel ou philosophique dans ce qu'il a de légitime. Ce que Marx appelle praxis, c'est ce sens qui se dessine spontanément dans l'entrecroisement des actions par lesquelles l'homme organise ses rapports avec la nature et avec les autres."[30]

The close intercourse with the outside macrocosm that we see in Brecht and Genet has totally disappeared in Beckett. Sometimes it is not even essential for some of the characters to be there, such as Godot who is both cardinally present and absent. They are useless, yet they are there. Beckett has illustrated the situation of the dissociated entity very explicitly in one of his own novels, Watt. Watt sees a picture of a point and a circle in a room:

> The only other object of note in Erskine's room was a picture, hanging on the wall, from a nail. A circle, obviously described by a compass, and broken at its lowest point, occupied the middle foreground, of this picture. Was it receding? Watt had that impression. In the eastern background appeared a point, or dot. The circumference was black. The point was blue, but blue! The rest was white. How the effect of perspective was obtained Watt did not know. But it was obtained . . . Watt wondered how long it would be before the point and the circle entered together upon the same plane . . . Watt wondered if they had sighted each other, or were blindly flying thus, harried by some force of merely mechanical mutual attraction, or the playthings of chance. He wondered if they would eventually pause and converse,

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[30] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Eloge de la philosophie (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p. 80.

> and perhaps even mingle, . . . And he wondered what the artist had intended to represent . . . a circle and its centre in search of each other, or a circle and its centre in search of a centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and its centre in search of its centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of its centre and its circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of its centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, in boundless space, in endless time . . . and at the thought that it was perhaps this, a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, in boundless space, in endless time, then Watt's eyes filled with tears that he could not stem, and they flowed down his fluted cheeks unchecked, in a steady flow, refreshing him greatly.[31]

Here is a graphic representation of irrational coexistence. What is yielded is the feeling that the macrocosm, represented by the circle, and the microcosm, represented by the dot, coexist, but they are two separate, dissociated entities, and that the microcosmic point is going adrift.

The determining social climate

This Beckettian stance rests on a twentieth century ideological attitude which assumes as given the superflucusness of man in a universe where he is irrelevant. This point of view has been clearly articulated by Jean-Paul Sartre in the famous closing lines of his book Qu'est-ce que la littérature?: "le monde peut fort bien se passer de la littérature. Mais il peut

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[31]Samuel Beckett, Watt (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1959), pp. 128-129.

se passer de l'homme encore mieux."[32] Here, a brief view of the social conditions that have nourished such an alienated attitude is necessary.

The twentieth century has been particularly marked by a series of alienating events and processes in politics, science, capitalist economy, and day to day social relations. This century has been the bed of two disastrous world wars, has witnessed the Nazi concentration camps and assassinations, and the mass annihilation of human beings in Hiroshima and Nagazaki by the atom bomb--not to mention the grim prospect of possible imminent nuclear warfare that may wipe out civilization. It was of these examples of "strange, systematized bestiality" that Erich Kahler was thinking when he analysed a distinctively modern phenomenon in human values: "What we are concerned with . . . is . . . not inhumanity, which has existed all through history and constitutes part of the human form, but a-humanity, a phenomenon of rather recent date."[33]

The political governments that stand at the head of nations and dictate political decisions, have become increasingly complex and removed from most areas of culture. In his study of the evolution of the modern state, Ernst Cassirer writes: "With Machiavelli we stand at the gateway of the modern world. The

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[32]Jean-Paul Sartre, Qu'est-ce que la littérature? (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 357.

[33]Quoted in Eric and Mary Josephson, ed., Man Alone (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), p. 48.

desired end is attained; the state has won its full autonomy. . . The sharp knife of Machiavelli's thought has cut off all the threads by which in former generations the state was fastened to the organic whole of human existence. The political world has lost its connection not only with religion or metaphysics but also with all the other forms of man's ethical and cultural life."[34]

Science in the modern world has also tended to develop independently from common life and personality. W. Macneile Dixon declared that "Science is the view of life where everything human is excluded from the prospect. It is of intention inhuman, supposing, strange as it may seem, that the further we travel from ourselves the nearer we approach the truth, the further from our deepest sympathies, from all we care for, the nearer we are to reality, the stony heart of the scientific universe."[35] Georg Lukàcs had already mentioned this scientific objectivity, when he referred to the impersonality of "the modern specialized methodologies" as opposed to the medieval scientific ones. In the Middle Ages, science was "bound up with personality . . . a single individual personally would command an entire sphere of knowledge (e.g., chemistry, astrology), and masters passed on their know-

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[34]Ibid., pp. 45-46.

[35]Ibid., p. 36.

ledge or 'secret' to the pupils."[36]

Another dimension has yet to be added up to science in the twentieth century: its misused powers for destruction. The A bomb, the H bomb and the neutron bomb are supreme examples of it. In his article "Reflections on the H bomb," Günther Anders points to the change in sensibility that has taken place in the concept of omnipotence: "Creatio ex nihilo, which was once the mark of omnipotence, has been supplanted by its opposite, potestas annihilationis or reductio ad nihil."[37] Seen in this perspective, the Beckettian abstraction of the stage scene, especially in Endgame, can be easily comprehended--though this is by no means the only dimension in Beckett. Darko Suvin reports that in the Zagreb Drama Theatre 1958-59 season, he has "seen Endgame convincingly performed with the fundamentally directing ideal of an atomic shelter after global destruction, i.e., as prophetic anti-utopian science-fiction."[38]

Alienation is in almost every sphere of social activity, especially in capitalist society. Modern machine civilization is characterized by a rigid mechanical time-table. Arbitrary temporal

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[36]Georg Lukács, "The Sociology of Modern Drama" in Eric Bentley, ed., The Theory of the Modern Stage (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd.; Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc.; Ringwood: Penguin Books Australia Ltd., 1968), p.432.

[37]Günther Anders, "Reflections on the H bomb" in Eric and Mary Josephson, ed., Man Alone, p.288.

[38]Darko Suvin, "Beckett's Purgatory of the Individual; or the Three Laws of Thermodynamics." Tulane Drama Review, XI (Summer 1967), p. 34.

regularity imposes an impersonal and strenuous discipline over the human being, "at whatever sacrifice to health, convenience, and organic felicity."[39] Moreover, in capitalist society, man is removed from significant functional relations with his fellow men, as he finds himself in an increasingly anonymous technocratic set-up, and with his professional occupation in which he is not a subjective creator, but only one cog in the wheel of mechanized activity and production.

In his essay "The Sociology of Modern Drama," Georg Lukács refers alienation to the process of objective abstraction of personality under capitalist economic organization:

> Perhaps the essence of the modern division of labour, as seen by the individual, is that ways are sought to make work independent of the worker's capacities, which, always irrational, are but qualitatively determinable; to this end, work is organized according to production outlooks which are objective, super-personal and independent of the employee's character. This is the characteristic tendency of the economics of capitalism. Production is rendered more objective, and freed from the personality of the productive agent. An objective abstraction, capital, becomes the true productive agent in capitalist economy, and it scarcely has an organic relation with the personality of its accidental owner; indeed, personality may often become superfluous, as in corporations.[40]

Already as early as 1914, when this essay was written, Lukács pointed to the superfluousness of personality, a problem which

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[39] Lewis Mumford, Technics and Civilization (New York and Burlingame: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1963), p. 271.

[40] Georg Lukács, "The Sociology of Modern Drama" in Eric Bentley, ed., The Theory of the Modern Stage, p. 431.

Sartre, almost half a century later (in 1948), and after two world wars, re-states explicitly in the conclusion, mentioned above, of Qu'est-ce que la littérature?

Decomposition and solipsism

The Beckettian character is marked by lack of contact with the outside world. He is the microcosmic point going adrift, because he is desocialized and irrelevant. Being irrelevant, he is absurd, and therefore anything he does is absurd. From the start his attempts, actions and productions are doomed to failure since they are not necessary, and since they do not present the least importance to the outside world. The result is impotence. Beckett emphasizes this fact by deliberately making his dramatis personae physically handicapped, so that contact as such with any externality is obliterated. Beckett's work is strongly characterized by a pathological climate of decomposition. The characters lose sight, hearing or speech: Pozzo goes blind, Lucky dumb, Hamm is blind. In Happy Days, Willie's bald head is trickling blood. In Waiting for Godot, Vladimir cannot control his bladder. The most explicit descriptions of decomposition are to be found in Beckett's novels, as in the description of the moribund Lynch family in Watt:

> There was Tom Lynch, widower, aged eighty-five years, confined to his bed with constant undiagnosed pains in the caecum, and his three surviving boys Joe, aged sixty-five years, a rheumatic cripple, and Jim, aged sixty-four years, a hunchbacked inebriate, and Bill, widower, aged sixty-three years, greatly hampered in his movements by the loss of both legs, . . . and his only surviving

> daughter, Mary Sharpe, widow, aged sixty-two years, in full possession of all her faculties with the exception of that of vision. Then there was Joe's wife, . . . aged sixty-five years, a sufferer from Parkinson's palsy but otherwise very fit and well, and Jim's wife Kate . . . aged sixty-four years, covered all over with sores of an unidentified nature . . .[41]

And such descriptions go on and on, listing congenital, endemic, degenerative, marasmic, organic, functional, circulatory and neurological deficiencies, and presenting a massive image of spreading cancerousness and incapacitation, tinged with a morbid humour.

The characters deteriorate irremediably because they are condemned to solipsism: "all the mortals I saw were alone and as if sunk in themselves,"[42] says the character of The Calmative, one of Beckett's short stories. Winnie is alone, Hamm is alone, Clov is alone. So is Vladimir, as is made explicit in his exclamation to Estragon: "(Joyous.) There you are again... (Indifferent.) There we are again...(Gloomy.) There I am again..."[43] He moves from a joyous "you" that sets him outside himself to the indifferent "we" that includes him, as he realizes that he is turning more and more upon himself, at last to the gloomy "I" that cuts him incurably from any familiar circumjacence. To

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[41]Samuel Beckett, Watt, op. cit., p. 168.

[42]Samuel Beckett, No's Knife (London: Calder and Boyars, 1967), p.35.

[43]Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot, op. cit., p.59.

Vladimir's words Estragon answers: "I feel better alone too."[44]

Irrelevant, receiving no nourishment from the outside macrocosm, alone, impoverished from lack of contact, the microcosmic unit goes through a process of decrescendo until it is decimated. Meanwhile all it can do is wait in an inoperable stasis, stuck to a chair like Hamm, buried to the neck like Winnie, or just not moving like Estragon and Vladimir at the end of each of the two acts in Waiting for Godot.

Power vacuum

This sense of power vacuum and dramatic atrophy is not new in literature. It is very familiar for instance to the readers of Chekhov. The impossible consummation of efforts, the irrevocable inefficiency of characters drifting away, the suspension of energy and a benumbed impotence pervade the climate of The Three Sisters, to take only one striking example from Chekhov's plays. In spite of their perennial wish to move to Moscow in the hope of finding a more fulfilling existence, the sisters are incapable of actually undertaking the trip. Moscow stands until the end as an ever receding image of happiness. This elusiveness of a possible salvational reality we find in Waiting for Godot associated with the figure of Godot who is supposed to come and save Estragon and Vladimir from boredom. The hopeless

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[44]Ibid.

ideological ambiance of The Three Sisters is emphasized by one of the characters, Chebutykin, in his repeated defeatistic words: "It's all nonsense."[45] "That's only how it seems. ... We don't exist, nothing exists, it only seems to us that we do."[46] "I'm sitting on a tomb-di-ay. ... What difference does it make?"[47] But whereas in Chekhov one still gets a few characters, mainly the young ones, who contemplate the auspiciousness of a bright future, such as all the young characters of The Cherry Orchard, for example (one of them, Trofimov, a student, welcomes the future with the words: "Greetings to the new life!"[48]), in Beckett all speak in Chebutykin's vein.

Beckett's characters cannot be active. Since their existence serves no purpose, they do not know whether they are alive or dead. Nothing new is invented, nothing happens. Activities are cyclical, levelled out to a monotonous sameness. One of Beckett's novels, Murphy, starts with: "The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new."[49] And Estragon in Waiting for Godot stresses

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[45]Anton Chekhov, Plays (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd.; Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc.; Ringwood: Penguin Books Pty Ltd., 1954), p. 314.

[46]Ibid., p. 318.

[47]Ibid., p. 329.

[48]Ibid., p. 397.

[49]Samuel Beckett, Murphy (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1957), p. 33.

the stagnating quality of this vegetative state of being : "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, . . ."[50]

It is Hugh Kenner who first remarked that Beckett's world was "locally freakish but totally shaped by two laws, the law of conservation of energy and the second law of thermodynamics. The former law states that nothing is added to or subtracted from the system, but simply mutated, and the latter states that the degree of organization within this closed system grows constantly less and so constantly less improbable, all actions being irreversible."[51] Darko Suvin has, however, added a "third law of thermodynamics (Nernst's theorem: absolute zero can only be approached asymptotically, i.e., getting ever closer to it without ever reaching it)."[52] The state of being in Beckett is that of a coma of existence where any manifestation is neither positive nor negative. Everything is neutralized: characters, their actions, emotions, cogitations are dulled and rendered impotent. They are made ineffective by indefiniteness and lack of purpose. In fact, as Bernard Dort has stated, this art sticks to zero, "and

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[50]Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot, op. cit., p. 41.

[51]Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study (London: John Calder Ltd., 1962), pp. 182-183.

[52]Darko Suvin, "Beckett's Purgatory of the Individual; or the Three Laws of Thermodynamics," op.cit., p. 25.

the emphasis is to be placed on the sticking."[53] What Beckett himself affirms of artistic creation as he sees it in his dialogues with the art critic Georges Duthuit can very well be applied to his own art of inexpressive expression: his is "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."[54]

In sum, Beckett's characters are not situated temporally, and the space in which they move is abstracted. This is correlative to an impossibility to identify with a general system outside themselves. If being is synonymous with being situated, then being is nothing if it is not situated. Yet there is presence since the characters are there. But it is a presence that represents vacuity ("there is . . . nothing to express"), and that points to the vacuum within which it moves ("there is . . . nothing from which to express"). In the following treatment of Waiting for Godot, Endgame and Happy Days, the fundamental features of this Beckettian void will be explored. It will also be demonstrated how Beckett obliterates what he calls "an unbearable presence."[55]

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[53]Quoted in Nathan A. Scott Jr., "The Recent Journey Into the Zone of Zero: The Example of Beckett and his Despair of Literature," The Centennial Review of Arts and Science, VI (Spring 1962) p. 150.

[54]Martin Esslin, ed., Samuel Beckett (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1965), p. 17.

[55]Ibid., p. 18.

II - WAITING FOR GODOT: PORTRAIT OF A POWER FAILURE

Power failure and anti-climax

> VLADIMIR: (looking round). It's indescribable. It's like nothing. There's a tree.[56]

In this limbo landscape of Waiting for Godot, two tramps, Estragon and Vladimir, are idling about, doing nothing in particular, gnawing on carrots, radishes and turnips, complaining the one about his legs, the other about his bladder, waiting for some kind of a saviour called Godot who keeps sending messengers to say that he will not come today but surely tomorrow. A master and a slave, Pozzo and Lucky, halt on their way to the fair where Pozzo, strong and domineering, plans to sell Lucky. In the second act Pozzo has gone blind and utterly helpless, and Lucky has gone dumb. They leave, and Estragon and Vladimir resume their waiting for Godot who does not come. Curtain. That is all. A promised climax--Godot will come--results in an anti-climax --Godot will not come. The play is built on a power failure of active energy, and what Beckett does is to deactivate data to their neutral denominator, as will become clear in what follows.

The play starts with a struggle. "Estragon, sitting on a low mound, is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting." (p. 9) But from the very beginning

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[56]Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1965), p. 87. All subsequent references to the play will be made to this edition.

the struggle is not sustained, because of the impotence of the two characters that Beckett presents to us. Estragon "gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again . . . (giving up again). Nothing to be done." (p. 9) Vladimir, on the other hand, less conderned than Estragon with the rudiments of everyday living, rationalizes over the empirical quality of life: "All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle." (p. 9) And he comes to the same conclusion as Estragon: "I'm beginning to come round to that opinion" (p. 9)--i.e., that there is nothing to be done. Besides, his appearance is enough to counterbalance the effect of any struggle: he is physically hampered (and that is typically Beckettian)--he advances "with short, stiff strides, legs wide apart." (p. 9) Here we have two levels of a) physical struggle, with Estragon trying in vain to take off his boot, and b) mental struggle, when Vladimir, generalizing on Estragon's defeatistic "Nothing to be done" about his boot, refers to the philosophical idea of life being a struggle. They agree that there is nothing to be done, the one on the physical and the other on the cerebral level. In this very compact introduction, where the literal is ironically transmuted to acquire an extra metaphysical dimension, Beckett hits two birds with the same stone, conveying the sense of the impossibility to cope with "the struggle" either on the physical or on the mental level. The struggle is neutralized by the impossibility to live up to it.

After brooding on "the struggle" for a while, Vladimir, turning to Estragon, says: "So there you are again." (p. 9) They meet, after having thought they had "gone for ever" (p. 9) each on his own way:

> VLADIMIR: I'm glad to see you back. I thought you were gone for ever.
> ESTRAGON: Me too.
> VLADIMIR: Together again at last! We'll have to celebrate this. But how? (He reflects.) (p. 9)

And, unspontaneously, Vladimir concludes: "Get up till I embrace you." (p. 9) The balance joy of meeting-indifference is set. The forced enthusiasm of "Together again at last" is an anti-climax, first of many such in the anti-climactic atmosphere of the play as a whole.

There is an incurable sense of arrested latency throughout Waiting for Godot:

> VLADIMIR: Nothing you can do about it.
> ESTRAGON: No use struggling.
> VLADIMIR: One is what one is.
> ESTRAGON: No use wriggling.
> VLADIMIR: The essential doesn't change.
> ESTRAGON: Nothing to be done. (p. 21)

Differences and opposites are blurred. There is no progression. Everything is the same, featureless:

> ESTRAGON: Fancy that. (He raises what remains of the carrot by the stub of leaf, twirls it before his eyes.) Funny, the more you eat the worse it gets.
> VLADIMIR: With me it's just the opposite.
> ESTRAGON: In other words?
> VLADIMIR: I get used to the muck as I go along.
> ESTRAGON: (after prolonged reflection). Is that the opposite? (p. 21)

There is no evolution, no movement from latent to active, only

cyclic repetition of monotonous sameness, irrevocably iterative, and so, stale and meaningless. This is the feeling that is imparted by Vladimir's song about the dog at the opening of Act II:

> A dog came in the kitchen
> And stole a crust of bread.
> Then cook up with a ladle
> And beat him till he was dead.
>
> Then all the dogs came running
> And dug the dog a tomb . . .
> And wrote upon the tombstone
> For the eyes of dogs to come:
>
> A dog came in the kitchen
> And stole a crust of bread.
> Then cook up with a ladle
> And beat him till he was dead.
>
> Then all the dogs came running
> And dug the dog a tomb--
> He stops, broods, resumes: etc. (pp. 57-58)

The characters chosen to express this climate are drop-outs. They spend the night in ditches. They have withdrawn from the occupational, sexual, and all other patterns of human relationships. So, when Estragon tells Vladimir to button his fly, he is pointing at this unsocialness, and Vladimir's proverbial wisdom on the matter is absurd: "True. (He buttons his fly.) Never neglect the little things of life." (p. 10) Likewise, Estragon's unsocialness is reflected by his keeping his boots on for sleeping. Cultural order has broken down for these two, and there is "nothing to be done" (p. 11) as far as they are concerned.

Suddenly a forceful and histrionic note breaks through, and for a while the audience is tempted to expect a climax:

enter Pozzo and Lucky, the first one bullying the second into stopping, moving, serving him. It is a picture of the traditional master-slave relationship. The effect is formidable so that Estragon and Vladimir have to cringe "away from the menace," (p.21) huddled together. Pozzo's apparent might is impressive as he vociferates, orchestrating himself with cracks of his whip. When we first see him he is a personification of power. His name could be derived from Italian "posso" which means I can or I may. The substitution of the double "z" for the double "s" emphasizes the forceful quality of the name: z is a voiced consonant, louder than s. In his presentation of Pozzo and Lucky, Beckett works on the opposition of power-powerlessness, and then on the reduction of power to powerlessness. But before reducing power, he pushes it to its extreme degree so that the effect of the fall is even more drastic.

In the image of the Pozzo-Lucky duo, there are two opposed poles: Pozzo is omnipotence, Lucky is impotence. Pozzo is active, Lucky is passive. Lucky then, apparently, is Pozzo's counterpart. But Beckett gradually minimizes the "posso" image, hinting as he goes along, at Pozzo's subsequent helplessness in Act II in which, now blind, he gropes his way. (p. 77) When Pozzo with a "terrifying voice" (p. 22) bellows his name to Estragon and Vladimir, imposing silence upon them, the effect is grand and ought to be intimidating: "I am Pozzo! (Silence.) Pozzo! (Silence.) Does that name mean nothing to you? (Silence.) I say does that

name mean nothing to you?" (p. 22) But the power connotation in "Pozzo" is destroyed by Estragon's and Vladimir's mis-spelling of the name:

> ESTRAGON: (pretending to search). Bozzo...Bozzo...
> VLADIMIR: (ditto). Pozzo...Pozzo...
> POZZO: PPPOZZZO!
> ESTRAGON: Ah! Pozzo...let me see...Pozzo...
> VLADIMIR: Is it Pozzo or Bozzo? (p. 22)

The voiced quality of the b instead of the p cancels the loudness of the z by neutralizing and balancing it. And when Pozzo advances threateningly towards Estragon and Vladimir to repair the blunder in his own way, Vladimir (conciliating) says: "I once knew a family called Gozzo. The mother had the clap." (p. 23) Now, instead of bursting into an uncontrolled fit of rage, Pozzo (halting) says: "You are human beings none the less. (He puts on his glasses). As far as one can see. (He takes off his glasses). Of the same species as myself. (He bursts into an enormous laugh). Of the same species as Pozzo!" (p. 23) Not only is he not angry, but he also points at the resemblance between himself and Estragon and Vladimir: they are of the same species.

The strong and masterful Pozzo is vulnerable, he is worried about weakening: "I have such need of encouragement! (Pause.) I weakened a little towards the end, you didn't notice?" (p. 38) Then, he admits that his memory is defective: "You see my memory is defective." (p. 38) Soon, he is "groaning clutching his head" and he sobs: "I can't bear it any longer...the way he goes on... you've no idea...it's terrible...he must go...(he waves his

arms)...I'm going mad...(he collapses, his head in his hands)... I can't bear it...any longer..." (p. 34) It is he who remarks that "Indeed all subsides." (p.36) And then, he notices that his whip, the symbol of his power, is "worn out." (p. 37) A sense of cosmic entropy develops as night approaches, and it is Pozzo again who comments on it:

> What is there so extraordinary about it? Qua sky. It is pale and luminous like any sky at this hour of the day. (Pause.) In these latitudes. (Pause.) When the weather is fine. (Lyrical.) An hour ago (he looks at his watch, prosaic) roughly (lyrical) after having poured forth ever since (he hesitates, prosaic) say ten o'clock in the morning (lyrical) tirelessly torrents of red and white light it begins to lose its effulgence, to grow pale (gesture of the two hands lapsing by stages) pale, ever a little paler, a little paler until (dramatic pause, ample gesture of the two hands flung wide apart) pppfff! finished! it comes to rest. But--(hand raised in admonition)--but behind this veil of gentleness and peace night is charging (vibrantly) and will burst upon us (snaps his fingers) pop! like that! (his inspiration leaves him) just when we least expect it. (Silence. Gloomily.) That's how it is on this bitch of an earth. (pp. 37-38)

In Act II, he has undergone a total change: he is blind and helpless, he falls, he cries for help and calls for pity. He "writhes, groans, beats the ground with his fists." (p. 78)

On the linguistic level, Pozzo's supposed power and energy are translated by imperative exclamations, his helplessness and ignorance by questions. In the first act, he is strong, he orders: "On!...Back!...(p. 22) Up pig!...Up hog!...Back!...Stop!...Turn! Closer!...Coat! Hold that!...Whip!...Stool!...Closer!...Basket! ...Further!..." (pp. 23-24) His incapacitation is emphasized by the questions of Act II: "What is it? . . . Who is it? . . . (p.77)

Where am I? . . . (p. 81) Who are you? . . . What happened? . . . (p. 82) Are you friends? . . . You are not highwaymen? . . . What time is it? . . . Is it evening? . . . (p. 85) Where are we? . . . (p. 86) Where is my menial? . . . Why doesn't he answer when I call? . . . What happened exactly?" (p. 87) The imperative of power is counterbalanced and finally supplanted by the interrogative of ignorance and uncertainty. In both cases Pozzo, acting as he does, is cut off from the world: in the first case he antagonizes the entourage through intimidation, and in the second, he is alienated by his invalidation and helplessness. Pozzo's function is comprised within an antithesis of power-powerlessness, and these have neutralized each other. He was introduced by a climax, he ends anti-climactically.

If Pozzo is the prototype of the bombastic capitalist, possessing the commodities of consumptive civilization--he even has a mouth spray, his human condition in the final analysis is not very different from the economically non-privileged characters of the play. If he can afford chicken and wine (p. 25) while Estragon and Vladimir can only afford carrots and radishes, he is as alienated as they are. This is clear in his estrangement from the very things he consumes: is his vaporizer a spray or a "pulverizer?" (p. 40) (let us note the destructive connotation contained in the word), and does he smoke a pipe (pp. 26, 27, 28, 29) or a Kapp and Peterson? (p. 35) "Purposeless materialism"[57]

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[57] Lewis Mumford, Technics and Civilization, op. cit., p. 273.

that is symbolized in him by his use of the vaporizer--or the paramount example of superfluous, consumptive aberration, awards him only a delusive power. When he is deprived of these commodities he is lost: "What have I done with my spray? (He fumbles.) . . . (He looks up, consternation on his features. Faintly.) I can't find my pulverizer!" (p. 40) Furthermore, as a capitalist, he has to summon up almost superhuman powers to be able to cope with other overwhelming competitive enterprises of the consuming market--the fair where he hopes to get a good price for Lucky. In the face of such economic pressures, Pozzo turns helpless. One important fact to note about him is that, as opposed to his slave, he is ignorant: he becomes suitably blind and asks questions. All these factors contribute to the dualism of power and powerlessness which he embodies.

Lucky, Pozzo's beast of burden, is the first of the two to appear on the stage. He is seen carrying a heavy bag (which, we are told later, is full of sand), a folding stool, a picnic basket and a greatcoat. (p. 21) He is bullied by Pozzo who calls him "pig" and "hog" and who violently jerks the rope around his neck every time it grows taut. Lucky does not complain. He is passively and blindly obedient. "Closer!" bellows Pozzo, and Lucky advances. "Stop!" orders Pozzo, and Lucky stops. "Coat!" demands Pozzo, and Lucky "puts down the bag, advances, gives the coat, goes back to his place, takes up the bag." (p. 25) Lucky never puts down the bag unless Pozzo asks him to bring

something to him, and although he sags rhythmically "until bag and basket touch the ground, then straightens up with a start and begins to sag again." (p. 25)

Lucky is tired, as Vladimir remarks, (p. 25) but he has a great force of endurance. Endurance is a kind of maimed strength. Lucky's sagging is an indication of loss of energy. When Pozzo likens him to "Atlas, son of Jupiter," (p. 31) the effect is doubly ludicrous, because 1) Atlas was not the son of Jupiter but the son of one of the Titans who fought against the gods (Pozzo has it all mixed: Atlas is Greek and Jupiter is Roman), and 2) he was involved in a cosmic design: he was condemned by Zeus to support the celestial vault on his shoulders for having taken part in that struggle against the gods. In this sense, the connection between a Titan opposing the gods, supporting heaven on his back, and a pathetic, weeping specimen of a man--"Old dogs have more dignity," (p. 32) miserable and impotent, carrying a bag full of sand, can only be ludicrous.

It was Marx who, extending Hegel's observation on history, declared that historical events and characters repeat themselves twice, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.[58] This certainly applies here. The same can also be said about Estragon when he compares himself with Christ. (p. 52) Seen in this historical perspective, the farce is intensified and the

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[58]Karl Marx, Le 18 Brumaire de Louis Bonaparte (Paris: Editions sociales, 1969), p. 15.

characters' ineptitude and senseless predicament emphasized. Atlas and Christ were subjects of a supreme involvement in the complex of mythological concepts on the cosmic destiny of man and Earth. It becomes clear that Lucky and Estragon are more akin to the dog of Vladimir's song.

The dance that Pozzo orders Lucky to perform is stiff, tense, crippled, almost the opposite of a dance. A dance's chief property is to execute cadenced movements to the sound of music. Here, motion has deteriorated: from being able to dance "the farandole, the fling, the brawl, the jig, the fandango, and even the hornpipe," (p. 40) now Lucky can only do "The Scapegoat's Agony" or "The Hard Stool" or "The Net" for "he thinks he's entangled in a net." (p. 40) There is a clear move from the socially recognized, energetic collective dances that implied some kind of cultural integration, to a desocialized, solipsistic dance expressing a maimed individual condition. As opposed to Pozzo, he is lucid: he knows his, as well as everyone else's condition. This, he expresses in a long speech which is discussed in the next section of this chapter. When we see Lucky in Act II, he is dumb.

For all these characters, power has failed: the least hint of energy, such as in the impression given by Pozzo, has been replaced by a power vacuum.

The correlative factors to the power failure

a) The disintegration of certainty

Beckett does not offer any redemptive perspective for these characters. All he does is to state the correlative factors to this power failure. He explains this by exposing the undermining process that the foundations of the Western collective consciousness have undergone, especially in religion and scientific progress. Lucky's long oration, a flow of a jumbled excogitation, is an expression of the disintegration of a socio-cultural complex of certainties. Lucky's speech calls a number of human activities and values into question by deflating their validity. This is mainly done by way of an incoherent and unschematic linguistic system that has lost a logical syntax. Sentences are incomplete --"with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment plunged in fire whose fire flames if that continues and who can doubt it;" (p. 43) notions are abruptly juxtaposed and telescoped--"figures stark naked in the stockinged feet in Connemara in a word for reasons unknown no matter what matter the facts are there and considering what is more much more grave than in the light of the labours lost of Steinweg and Peterman;" (p. 44) and words are deformed by the stuttering repetition of a syllable with the purpose of deriding the object that is represented: thus the Academy of Anthropology becomes the "Acacacacademy of Anthropopopopometry." (p. 43) The institution that is concerned with the natural history of man is dismissed

as excremental as is clear in the repetition of "caca" (French for shit) and "popo" (German for arse). Anthropology, the science that involves the physiological, psychological and sociological study of man is used with anthropometry, the science that identifies criminals. And human history has recorded many instances of grand-scale crimes: only a decade before Waiting for Godot was published, Hitler directed the mass annihilation of the Jews; and on the 6th of August 1945, the Americans launched the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, exterminating sixty thousand human beings, and the second atomic bomb only three days later on Nagazaki, killing this time forty thousand people.

There is a stress on investigation that is fruitless, for in spite of the scientific pursuits of "Puncher and Wattman" (p. 42) and of "Testew and Cunard" (p. 43)--with the scatological connotations in the names, "man is seen to waste and pine waste and pine." (p. 43) The implication is that scientific achievements have not been paralleled by social development. Many a social thinker has called attention to this incongruousness between the scientific and the social. In their introduction to Man Alone Eric and Mary Josephson write:

> Confronted with such mighty opposites--with apocalyptic visions of mass annihilation on one hand, and on the other with dreams of progress and a vastly better life for increasing numbers of people--no wonder Western man feels deeply troubled as he faces the immense gulf between his finest achievements of hand and brain, and his own sorry ineptitude at coping with them; between his truly awe-inspiring accomplishments and the utter failure of his imagination to encompass them and give them meaning.

Modern Western man is "Powerless in the face of modern mechanical and social forces."[59]

The wasting and pining of man in Lucky's speech is not the lot only of man in esse ("in Essy" (p. 43)), but also of man in posse ("in Possy" (p. 43)). The prospective view of the speech is indeed incurably pessimistic and eliminatory. The wasting and the pining of man are certainly mental, for man is seen to deteriorate "in spite of the strides of alimentation and defecation," (p. 43) and in spite of physical culture "tennis football running cycling swimming flying floating riding gliding," (p. 43) and of the medical efforts for preserving health: "in spite of . . . penicilline." (p. 43) It seems impossible to stop this loss of energy, to which Beckett gives cosmic proportions. It resides "in the plains in the mountains by the seas by the rivers running water running fire the air . . . and then the earth in the great cold the great dark the air and the earth abode of stones in the great cold . . . " (p. 44) And recurring again and again is the phrase "for reasons unknown." (pp. 43-44) The orthodoxy of reliable cultural truths has been obliterated in Beckett and his characters are strongly affected by it. Hence Estragon's and Vladimir's strategic regression from active cultural reality to idle boredom, hence Lucky's verbal dementia counterbalanced in

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[59]Eric and Mary Josephson, ed., Man Alone, op. cit., p. 9.

Act II by his dumbness (what more can he say?), hence Pozzo's loss of energy in Act II.

b) The lack of coordinating mythologies and the unmanifested deity

The reason for this breakdown of culture Beckett assigns to the absence of this "personal God" (p. 42) that Lucky mentions at the beginning of his speech. God is made fun of: "a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua," (p. 42) and he is described as insensitive, indifferent, impervious to human suffering and dumb: "who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown." (p. 43) This problem of the unmanifested deity, very apparent in the figure of Godot who never appears, is very western and indeed not new. It belongs to the secular scientific world view that has dominated the West since the breakdown of the Middle Ages, or the pre-industrial age where organic unity revolved around God. Science has de-mythologized a cultural superstructure that claimed to be historically accurate. As Theodore Roszak affirms: "The story of the Garden of Eden is a 'myth' we say, because insofar as any believing Christian or Jew has ever tried to locate the story geographically and historically, skeptics have been able to call his evidence, if any, quite cogently into question." And also: "Science is the infidel to all gods in behalf of none."[60] Thus when

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[60]Theodore Roszak, The Making of a Counter Culture (New York: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1969), pp. 210-211.

Vladimir asks Estragon: "Do you remember the Gospels?" (p. 12) Estragon answers: "I remember the maps of the Holy Land. Coloured they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. That's where we'll go, I used to say, that's where we'll go for our honey moon. We'll swim. We'll be happy." (p. 12)

The Bible has been shorn of its transcendental holiness and the sense of awe before the divine design is effaced. Consequently, any value system that is attached to it is relinquished. The omniscience of the Absolute, the everlasting quality of life, the messianic theophany of a supreme sacrificial deity, the ineffable supraphysical sense of mystery around a Supreme Being that was also a Preserver of life, all this is reduced to the utterly mundane by Estragon. The Bible has become a picture book, and the Holy Land a tourist spot that makes his mouth water.

The "great coordinating mythologies" that Joseph Campbell talks about in his book The Hero With a Thousand Faces,[61] have lost the emotional impact that they provided in the past, because the unverifiable accuracy of these mythologies cannot be accepted. However, the secular outlook provoked a cultural shock, for the old religious systems involved some of the most crucial metaphysical and spiritual issues of man's ultimate lot. And science

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[61]Joseph Campbell, The Hero With a Thousand Faces (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 388.

has not been able to fill the gap, at least not for Beckett: that is precisely what is expressed in Lucky's speech.

The answer: the hampered attempt at re-mythologization

There is, however an attempt at re-mythologization in the creation of the figure of Godot as a justification for the characters' being there. But the re-mythologization is frustrated and results in de-mythologization. Godot is important in the play since Estragon and Vladimir cannot move because of him, for they are waiting for him to save them. But the importance of Godot is neutralized by ambiguity as to his identity, by uncertainty as to the time and place of the appointment the two characters have with him, and by uncertainty as to whether Godot will keep the appointment or not:

ESTRAGON: . . . You're sure it was here?
VLADIMIR: What?
ESTRAGON: That we were to wait.
VLADIMIR: He said by the tree. (They look at the tree.) Do you see any others?
ESTRAGON: What is it?
VLADIMIR: I don't know. A willow.
. . . . . .
ESTRAGON: Looks to me more like a bush.
VLADIMIR: A shrub.
ESTRAGON: A bush.
VLADIMIR: A--. What are you insinuating? That we've come to the wrong place?
ESTRAGON: He should be here.
VLADIMIR: He didn't say for sure he'd come. (p. 14)
. . . . . .
ESTRAGON: You're sure it was this evening?
VLADIMIR: What?
ESTRAGON: That we were to wait.
VLADIMIR: He said Saturday. (Pause.) I think.
. . . . . .

ESTRAGON: But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? (Pause.) Or Monday? (Pause.) Or Friday? (p. 15)

Godot is both inside and outside the play. He never appears yet the action is centered around waiting for him. What he looks like, what he does, where he is, let alone who he is, remain vague. Is he a man who transacts business, and who, in order to deal with Estragon and Vladimir, has to consult his "agents," his "correspondents," his "books," his bank account," before taking a decision? (p. 18) Or is he Pozzo? Estragon asks Pozzo timidly: "You're not Mr Godot, sir?" (p. 22) And later, just before the end of the play, he asks Vladimir if he was sure Pozzo was not Godot. Vladimir first answers vehemently: "Not at all," and then less sure: "Not at all" and still less sure: "Not at all." (p. 90) And then, is Godot's name Godot, Godet or Godin? (p.29) Estragon and Vladimir themselves are not sure of his name:

ESTRAGON: His name is Godot?
VLADIMIR: I think so. (p. 21)

Godot is as supremely present as he is absent. In this connection, he is suitably presented through a kind of prosopopeia that is concretized by the Boy(s). Within the viewable framework of the play he is unmanifested, therefore he cannot be submitted to any experimental testing. He is made substantial only through what the Boy(s) says of him. By removing any possibility of verifying Godot's identity, Beckett has neutralized

him. Likewise, the Boy(s) who serves him, and who supposedly has direct contact with him, himself is of almost neuter gender. It was Louis Perche who remarked about him that he was "un jeune garçon . . . qui sebtrouve encore au stade où le sexe n'affirme pas d'une façon précise l'individualité . . . un personnage que l'on pourrait qualifier d'incorporel."[62] He is not informative:

VLADIMIR: I've seen you before, haven't I?
BOY: I don't know, sir. (p. 50)
. . . . . .
VLADIMIR: You work for Mr Godot?
BOY: Yes, sir . . .
VLADIMIR: He doesn't beat you?
BOY: No, sir, not me.
VLADIMIR: Whom does he beat?
BOY: He beats my brother, sir. . .
VLADIMIR: And why doesn't he beat you?
BOY: I don't know, sir.
VLADIMIR: He must be fond of you.
BOY: I don't know, sir. . .
VLADIMIR: You're not unhappy? (The Boy hesitates.) Do you hear me?
BOY: Yes, sir.
VLADIMIR: Well?
BOY: I don't know, sir.
VLADIMIR: You don't know if you're unhappy or not?
BOY: No, sir. (p. 51)

At the end of Act II, one is not even sure that the Boy is the same one as in Act I, for Beckett does not specify it is the Boy, but that it is simply a Boy, any boy: "Enter Boy right," (p. 91) he says. Never any precise information about Godot is given. What does Godot do? "He does nothing, sir." (p. 91) And when Vladimir asks the Boy whether Godot's beard is fair or

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[62] Louis Perche, Beckett. L'enfer à notre portée (Paris: Editions du centurion, 1969) pp. 92-93.

black, he answers: "I think it's white, sir." (p. 92) He "thinks." He is not sure.

Senseless waiting: sleep and improvisation

It is for this enigmatic, elusive, absent being that the characters are waiting. The purpose of the wait is thus neutralized. The act of waiting itself implies a neutralization, since to wait is to abstain from action or departure till some expected event occurs. Godot is an impediment to any kind of motion on the part of Estragon and Vladimir. They are limited by the fixation "we are waiting for Godot," by the tree. Any progress is paralysed by their pause.

But waiting for Godot is too long, and one must fill in this time of interminable expectation. In Beckett, one can either sleep it off or just waste time doing nothing in particular. The temporal heaviness of the wait certainly has an anaesthetic effect on Estragon who can sleep at any time, anywhere, and quite suddenly. In the second act, right after he kicks Lucky with great fury, "hurling abuse at him as he does so," (p. 88) working himself up to hurting his own foot, he moves away, and immediately "disposes himself for sleep." (p. 88) Here, there is a time-lag between cause and consequence. The move from violence to the inactivity of sleep is too sudden. By removing the intermediary stages between the two actions, Beckett has neutralized the drastic quality of brutality: inaction has

replaced extreme action quite arbitrarily. Here Beckett makes two points: 1) the character's reactions are stunted and rendered inconsequential, and 2) his safest resort is to withdraw from the reality of this unpleasant experience. So, when Estragon is awakened by Vladimir, he is "restored to the horror of his situation." (p. 15) "I was asleep," cries Estragon despairingly, "Why will you never let me sleep?" (p. 15)

Sleep, in the play, has a threefold function: 1) it is one way of whiling away the time until Godot comes; 2) it is a good way of avoiding the "horror" of one's situation, for by sleeping one neutralizes the painful awareness of the world around (in the case of Estragon and Vladimir the world around is "the Cackon country" where Estragon has "puked" his "puke of a life;" (p. 62) and 3) it explicitly emphasizes a Beckettian stance: passiveness. Merleau-Ponty has analysed the process of sleeping in the following manner: "Dormir n'est pas . . . un acte, une opération, la pensée ou conscience de dormir, c'est une modalité du cheminement perceptif--plus précisément, c'en est l'involution provisoire, la dédifférenciation, c'est le retour à l'inarticulé, le repli sur une relation globale ou prépersonnelle avec le monde, qui n'est pas vraiment absent, mais plutôt distant, dans lequel il continue d'entretenir un minimum de relations qui rendront possible le réveil."[63] Here is a pertinent parallel

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[63]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Résumés de cours, Collège de France 1952-1960 (Paris: Gallimard, 1968) p. 67.

to the ideological features of Beckett: the coiling inwards, a levelling down of everything, a return to an inarticulate stage of the speechless and dull, the abstraction of a world that still exists objectively but from which the characters have withdrawn. Sleep is one of the modes of obliterating "the unbearable presence," of sustaining the balance between objectification and distanciation of this reality, without destroying it completely.

There is another device that Beckett uses in order to abstract reality: durational cancellation and forgetfulness of things past. Günther Anders has pertinently remarked that although Vladimir's and Estragon's life continues,

> such a life doesn't go on, it becomes a 'life without time.' By this I mean that what we call 'time' springs from man's needs and from his attempts to satisfy them, that life is temporal only because needs are either not yet satisfied, or goals have already been reached, or objectives reached are still at one's disposal. Now we have seen that in Estragon's and Vladimir's lives, objectives no longer exist. For this reason in the play time does not exist either, life is 'treading water,' so to speak; . . . we are filled with the horror which we feel in front of people who suffer from amnesia.[64]

Even the most immediate events are forgotten. Estragon is incapable of remembering what happened the day before. And when Vladimir asks him to remind him of what he was talking about only a few minutes before, Estragon answers: "I'm not a historian." (p. 65) Pozzo, blind in the second act, has lost

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[64] Günther Anders, "Being Without Time: On Samuel Beckett's Play Waiting for Godot," in Martin Esslin, ed., Samuel Beckett, op. cit., p. 146.

the notion of time: "I don't remember having met anyone yesterday. But tomorrow I won't remember having met anyone today. So don't count on me to enlighten you." (p. 88) This is how durational consciousness is abstracted. This is how the past, and everything that is attached to it in terms of action, thinking, activities and values, in a word, everything that happened within its framework, is lost. The present moment in Beckett is preceded and followed by a gap. This temporal disparateness enhances the feeling of historical discontinuity which is connected with the breakdown of culture that Lucky talks about in his speech. And, as far as the characters are concerned, it emphasizes the lack of occupational patterns that imply some kind of continuity.

It follows that on the dramatic level, the preordained order of a connected system of action, a <u>plot</u> in the conventional sense, cannot work. In a play where the characters themselves say "What are we doing here, <u>that</u> is the question," (p. 80) the only suitable technical device is improvisation. Improvisation has a quality of unpremeditation, unpreparedness, unguidedness and--since the characters are will-less: they have given up the struggle--of off-hand involuntariness. Therefore, it exposes the lack of significant motivation of these characters. They are left relying on chance happenings, on recalling anecdotes that have no direct connection with the central idea of the play, on singing, or on gimmicking:

VLADIMIR: Calm yourself.
ESTRAGON: (voluptuously). Calm...Calm...The English say cawm. (Pause.) You know the story of the Englishman in the brothel? (p. 16)

The apprehension of the unfilled gaps begets more improvisations:

Long silence.
VLADIMIR: Say something!
ESTRAGON: I'm trying.
Long silence.
VLADIMIR: (in anguish). Saymanything at all! (p. 63)

And the question is always:

ESTRAGON: What de we do now?
VLADIMIR: While waiting.
ESTRAGON: While waiting.
Silence.
VLADIMIR: We could do our exercises.
ESTRAGON: Our movements.
VLADIMIR: Our elevations.
ESTRAGON: Our relaxations.
VLADIMIR: Our elongations.
ESTRAGON: Our relaxations. (p. 76)

Although they realize that they spend their time "blathering about nothing in particular" (p. 66)--"That's the idea, let's contradict each other," (p. 64)or "That's the idea, let's ask each other questions," (p. 64) or "That's the idea, let's abuse each other" (p. 75)--and although they themselves realize that "This is becoming really insignificant," (p. 68) still the outcome is: "There's nothing we can do." (p. 68) The randomness of the dialogue, the characters' reliance on indeterminate contingency are again in line with the absence of a coherent design. The parts cannot be related to a whole. Their activities are perfectly gratuitous.

Death extempore and the impossible generation

One of Estragon's suggestions for filling up the emptiness of the expectation is: "What about hanging ourselves?" (p. 17) In the context of boredom and vacuity of time, the idea of death is introduced rather flippantly as though it were an activity like any other. Ceasing to be does not contain a catastrophic element in Beckett. Death is not a tragedy as it was for Clytemnestra facing the prospect of Iphigenia's sacrificial slaying in Euripides' Iphigenia in Aulis, or as it was for Marlowe's Dr Faustus who clung desperately to life, or as it was also for the tormented Brutus in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, or again as it was in Racine's Horace for Sabine confronting the brother who killed her lover. The characteristic of dreadful calamity that is essential to tragedy in the traditional sense cannot be present in a play where the characters and the dimensions in which they move are from the outset in articulo mortis. Furthermore, as Günther Anders has noted, "Where a world no longer exists, there can no longer be a possibility of a collision with this world, and therefore the very possibility of tragedy has been forfeited."[65] By removing the catastrophic element, Beckett has neutralized the idea of death as supreme agony. Its power has failed. He even went further: he made of death the field of an involuntary and absurd sexual mechanism. When

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[65]Ibid., p. 142.

Estragon suggests to Vladimir that they hang themselves, Vladimir remarks: "Hmm. It'd give us an erection." (p. 17) Estragon, highly excited, marvels: "An erection!" (p. 17) What they cannot do anymore while they are living, they do at their death, and this suits them perfectly, for they do it passively: as they cannot act, they must be acted upon.

This passage about death and suicide (pp. 17-18) contains much more than it appears to. It is very compact but its effects are complex. There are several questions to consider apart from death: sex within a Beckettian framework, fertility in what follows the erection, and suicide. The first two are results of death, the last one is cause of death. Generally speaking, sex involves several factors: an affective state of being, external or internal stimuli, intentionality, contact, action, and possible fertilization. An affective state implies an active disposition towards the world, and desire. This does not exist in the play: Estragon pushes Vladimir away when the latter tries to embrace him. There are no stimuli: the landscape is bare. There is no intentionality, for there is no purpose or design. There is no contact: Vladimir has repulsive breath and Estragon has stinking feet, and both characters are repelled by each other. There is no action, and this is obvious. There is no fertilization because there is no female character, and besides, how can one think of procreation when one is so bent towards death?

In this connection, it is again useful to report a passage on the matter in which Merleau-Ponty says:

> Il faut qu'il y ait un Eros ou une Libido qui animent un monde original, donnent valeur ou signification sexuelles aux stimuli extérieurs et dessinent pour chaque sujet l'usage qu'il fera de son corps objectif . . . La perception érotique n'est pas un cogitatio qui vise un cogitatum; à travers un corps elle vise un autre corps, elle se fait dans le monde et non pas dans une conscience . . . Même avec la sexualité qui a pourtant passé pour longtemps pour le type de la fonction corporelle, nous avons affaire, non pas à un automatisme périphérique, mais à une intentionnalité qui suit le mouvement général de l'existence et qui fléchit avec elle. Schn. ne peut plus se mettre en situation sexuelle comme en général il n'est plus en situation affective ou idéologique . . . le monde est affectivement neutre. La sexualité n'est donc pas un cycle autonome. Elle est liée intérieurement à tout l'être connaissant et agissant.[66]

For characters who are there without being socially, historically and affectively situated, sexual significance, with all its dramatic and personal involvement, is non-existent. Beckett suitably sets it within the context of death. There is the same suspension of sensibility through grim comic effects in many of Beckett's works. We think, for example, of Malone's sexual relationship with the old, ugly, toothless, decrepit repulsive Moll. On the other hand, Watt's grotesque romance with Mrs Gorman, a fishwoman, is reduced to absurdity by the debility of the two characters. The fishwoman was "advanced in age and by nature also denied those properties that attract

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[66] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie de la perception, op. cit., pp. 182-184. "Schn." (sic): Merleau-Ponty is here referring to a patient.

men to women."[67] She had only one breast "the left having unhappily been removed in the heat of a surgical operation."[68] Their relationship is soon stultified and reduced to inertia, for they had neither strength nor time for even "the most perfunctory coalescence."[69] And in the end this "romance" is shown as being no romance at all: "were they not perhaps rather drawn, Mrs Gorman to Watt, Watt to Mrs Gorman, she by the bottle of stout, he by the smell of fish? This was the view towards which, in later years, when Mrs Gorman was no more than a fading memory, than a dying perfume, Watt inclined."[70]

After Estragon marvels at the idea of an erection, Vladimir pursues: "With all that follows. Where it falls mandrakes grow. That's why they shriek when you pull them up." (p. 17) Here is the idea of fertility turned on its head: it is the outcome of death and not of life. Any possibility of generation is annihilated. Life and death are very subtly integrated here. Murphy's "spermarium" and "crematorium"[71] are contained within each other. The choice of mandrakes is very appropriate: a mandrake is a

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[67]Samuel Beckett, Watt, op. cit., p. 138.

[68]Ibid., p. 140.

[69]Ibid., p. 141.

[70]Ibid., p. 142.

[71]Samuel Beckett, Murphy, op. cit., p. 77.

plant whose root resembles human form, so the relation vegetable-man is established. And the characters of Waiting for Godot can only bring forth vegetative systems. Furthermore, the properties of a mandrake could not be more in line with the climate of the play: it is poisonous, narcotic and emetic. It is the plant of Estragon's "Cackon country" where he has "puked" his "puke of a life" in absolute listlessness.

If the circumstances of suicide are as exciting as that, then Estragon wants to commit it immediately. But suicide does not work in Beckett, because it is a strong act of will and his characters are incapable of that. So, Beckett neutralizes the idea of suicide, he boycotts it:

> ESTRAGON: Let's hang ourselves immediately!
> VLADIMIR: From a bough? (They go towards the tree.) I wouldn't trust it.
> ESTRAGON: We can always try.
> VLADIMIR: Go ahead.
> ESTRAGON: After you.
> VLADIMIR: No no you first.
> ESTRAGON: Why me?
> VLADIMIR: You're lighter than I am.
> ESTRAGON: Just so! (p. 17)

And Estragon explains;

> ESTRAGON: (with effort). Gogo light--bough not break--Gogo dead. Didi heavy--bough break--Didi alone. Whereas--
> VLADIMIR: I hadn't thought of that.
> ESTRAGON: If it hangs you it'll hang anything.
> VLADIMIR: But am I heavier than you?
> ESTRAGON: So you tell me. I don't know. There's an even chance. Or nearly.
> VLADIMIR: Well? What do we do?
> ESTRAGON: Don't let's do anything. It's safer. (p. 18)

Thus Beckett has neutralized will, sex, generation and death,

in fact, life itself in its most crucial issues and aspects.

When a structure crumbles, and when there is no prospective view as to an alternative design, there can be no situation, only the hopeless stagnation of unsituated presence that can justify itself only through inconsequential mechanisms, such as the passive stage of sleep and the fragmented mode of improvisation. Power can only be promoted by a conscious and motivated ability to act. This can only flow from a supply of an existing and concrete system of energy. In Waiting for Godot, there is none.

III - Endgame: NEAR NULLIFICATION AND THE PROBLEM OF ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE

Near nullification

What Beckett is outlining in Endgame is a stability of near nullification in a world that he describes as being devoid of thermal energy. There is no manifestation of natural and organic functions either: Clov reports that "The light is sunk," and Hamm, relieved, replies "Pah! We all knew that!"[72] There is nothing on the horizon, (p. 31) the waves are "lead" and the sun is "zero." (p. 31) The light of this world is not black, not white, but "gray" (p. 31): Beckett keeps a neutral equilibrium. He is removing the tangibility of an existing structure with its system of meaning in regard to which the characters could be situated.

In Waiting for Godot, there was a road, there was a tree, and one could still see the sun and the moon. In Endgame the landscape is reduced to a "bare interior," (p. 1) closed on its own void and shorn of any item that could particularize or specify some kind of identification, and to the basic elements of land and water outside. Significantly, there is one picture, but its face is turned to the wall. When Hamm tells Clov that "nature has forgotten" them, (p. 11) Clov replies: "There's

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[72] Samuel Beckett, Endgame (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1958), p. 30. All subsequent references to the play will be made to this edition.

no more nature." (p. 11) Hamm himself states that "Outside of here it's death." (p. 9) And Clov emphasizes the fact that all is "corpsed," (p. 30) not only in the vicinity, but also in the far distance: he looks at the landscape outside with a telescope, and reports that what he sees is nothing but a magnified zero: "Let's see. (He looks, moving the telescope.) Zero... (he looks)...zero...(he looks)...and zero." (p. 29) This is a picture of grand-scale annihilation. If all is zero, then no favourable milieu can be available, and any possibility of development is removed. There is only sterility as in Waiting for Godot:

> HAMM: Did your seeds come up?
> CLOV: No.
> HAMM: Did you scratch round them to see if they had sprouted?
> CLOV: They haven't sprouted.
> HAMM: Perhaps it's still too early.
> CLOV: If they were going to sprout they would have sprouted. (Violently.) They'll never sprout! (p. 13)

Yet there are three other living creatures in the play: a flea, a rat, and a small boy. But the three are doomed to die. Clov, scratching himself, discovers that he has a flea. (p. 33) Hamm panicks: "But humanity might start from there all over again!" (p. 33) Let us note in passing how humanity is brought down to the insect level, the parasitic, the small and contemptible, but also the vulnerable and easily crushed. Clov rushes to get the insecticide in order to exterminate this potential procreator. When he looks to see if it is still living, he says that it is "laying doggo." (p. 34) Hamm corrects him: "Laying!

Lying you mean. Unless he's lying doggo." (p. 34) The play-on "lying" which in this case suggests motionlessness and death, and "laying" which is connected with fecundity, reproduction and propagation of life, achieves a levelling of the two notions of life and death. The two are neutralized by being yoked together. "Laying doggo" is thus more than a mere malapropism. Hamm points it out to Clov: "Use your head can't you. If he was laying we'd be bitched." (p. 34)

Clov also discovers a rat in the kitchen. (p. 54) But neither he nor Hamm worry too much for the rat is bound to die anyway: "If I don't kill that rat he'll die," (p. 68) says Clov. Yet the most interesting discovery of a living creature comes a few minutes before the end of the play. Clov thinks he sees a small boy. (p. 78) But the possibility of a solution is discarded. The choice of a boy rather than of a girl thwarts any off-chance viability of generation. It should be noted here that the framework that Beckett presents in Endgame manifests itself in physical and biological references: no more nature, no more sea gulls, have your seeds sprouted, etc. This is a figurative representation of a philosophical condition which clearly moves in the opposite direction of productive creation. In that sense the choice of a boy rather than of a girl is suitable. And even this small boy is doomed. First, Hamm rejects the actual possibility of there being any boy at all: "(sarcastic): A small...boy!" (p. 78) Then, Clov wants to get the gaff to kill

him. (p. 78) But Hamm stops Clov: there is no need to exterminate him, for, like the rat, "he'll die there." (p. 78) Besides, "It's the end, Clov, we've come to the end." (p. 79)

It is important to mention here that interesting modifications of this small boy scene have been undertaken by Beckett, from the first draft of Endgame[73] to the last one. In her article "The Beginning of Endgame," Ruby Cohn reports that the boy in question actually appears, in the first draft, to the sight of the audience through "Clov dressed in red cap, short trousers, and the grey smock of.French school-children. Changing voice with costume, Clov complains of hunger, . . . Offering Clov chocolate . . . Hamm teaches the boy Clov to push his wheelchair, to bring his gaff. Refusing to be deflected by Hamm's offer of the toy drum or the toy dog, the boy-Clov insists upon chocolate. But of course there is no chocolate . . . The boy-Clov leaves the stage when Hamm pleads that he come to him."[74] As one can see, more time and attention are devoted to the scene in the first draft. Furthermore, the boy is concretized. In the final draft, one does not even see him, nor is one sure of his possible existence. In the first draft, he has a social status--he is a school-boy. He has a mind of his own--he insists on obtaining what he has requested. When he does not get what he wants, he

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[73]The first implicit mention by Beckett of Endgame is dated December 27, 1955. See Ruby Cohn, "The Beginning of Endgame," Modern Drama, IX (1966), p. 319.

[74]Ibid., p. 322.

leaves. In the final draft, Clov does not go. In the earlier text, there is a child, with his own independent mind, making his own decisions. It is also important to note that this child was metaphorically conceived: Hamm decides to engender. He orders "Clov to bring him a woman--two breasts and a vulva. Clov re-enters, wearing a blond wig, false breasts, and a skirt over his trousers."[75] These two strikingly interesting disguise scenes are omitted in the final text. In the first draft, the conclusion is open: the boy, who stands presumably for the future, leaves the dying universe of Hamm. In the final version, the optimism of an open end is rejected and superseded by an obvious lack of perspective. Everything and everybody will die in Endgame. The "game" is lost and ended. Beckett has obliterated the unbearable presence.

Only death is the normal occurrence:

HAMM: ... That old doctor, he's dead naturally? (p. 24)
CLOV: . . . Naturally. (p. 25)

Endgame is stagnation suffused with a sense of moribundity. In Waiting for Godot the potential of power was neutralized. There was a power failure: Estragon and Vladimir were introduced by a struggle, and Pozzo in Act I and the Boy(s) sent by Godot could be considered as media through which some potential power could be transmitted. But, as was argued, this power failed. In Endgame, the potential itself is evoked only by its absence.

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[75]Ibid., p. 321.

The result is utter helplessness and slow putrefaction. Hamm is presented as blind and paralysed, he has wounds, and he urinates with a catheter. (p. 24) Nagg and Nell, his two senile and infantile parents (they spend their time asking for sugar plums and pap), have lost their legs: "Do you remember . . . when we crashed on our tandem and lost our shanks. (They laugh heartily.)" (p. 16) They are relegated to the level of residue and ordure: they are placed in ashcans. As for Clov, Hamm's fag and adopted son, his walk is "stiff and staggering," (p. 1) and his eyes and his legs are bad. (p. 7) Clov himself knows that he cannot go very far. So, they all remain and vegetate.

The opening lines themselves establish the homeostatic equilibrium on which the play is built:

> CLOV: (fixed gaze, tonelessly). Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. (p. 1)

Endgame is thus a drawn-out postlude. It is a result, a consequence. Because it is the outcome of something that has already had an active course in the past, it is ineffectual. This end-product cannot be operative. It is a static sum-total. It is opposed to the stimulant and active motives of a cause. The play is precisely an after-effect, and as such, a dramatic dead-end. Being so, it is stretched out to show this dead-end situation. The action is reduced to commenting on stagnation:

> HAMM: (gloomily) Then it's a day like any other day.
> CLOV: As long as it lasts. (Pause.) All life long the same inanities. (p. 45)

Lethargy

The game is an empty one. The characters cannot even play anymore or improvise as Estragon and Vladimir did in Waiting for Godot. Though Hamm's first words are: "Me . . . to play," (p. 2) they are broken in the middle by a yawn: possible activity is neutralized by somnolence. Hamm's opening passage itself is full of yawns that occur at the time he is speaking of superlatives: "Can there be misery--(he yawns)--loftier than mine? . . . No, all is a--(he yawns)--bsolute, . . . And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to . . . to end. Yes, there it is, it's time it ended and yet I hesitate to--(he yawns)--to end. (Yawns.)" (pp. 2-3) The effect of high qualitative degrees--"loftiers" with its sublime and dignified connotations, and "absolute," and the attribute of an extreme point contained in "to end" (death)--is abolished by an expression of boredom and lethargy. This passage establishes the lifeless indolence, the languid slowness, and the dull apathy that are at the basis of the play. Like Estragon, Hamm wants to sleep all the time:

> HAMM: Get me ready, I'm going to bed.
> CLOV: I've just got you up.
> HAMM: And what of it? (p. 3)

This suspension of consciousness that sleep brings is logical in the framework of the play. Consciousness is the notion of knowing physical, mental, affective and volitional phenomena. It implies perception. This, Hamm cannot have for he is blind, and even if he were not, the surroundings are made blank by the

physical and social leucosis which Beckett presents. Where a structure does not exist, the sense of perception is effaced. The reactions to this kind of world cannot but be in its likeness: neutral. By abstracting the scene as such, Beckett has removed stimuli. Therefore, the response element to stimuli that is found in the dialogue between one and an objective pattern of things, is thwarted. The affective quietism of the Endgame reality results in insentience, incurious numbness, unimpressibility and flat staleness:

> HAMM: Apart from that, how do you feel?
> CLOV: I don't complain.
> HAMM: You feel normal?
> CLOV: (irritably): I tell you I don't complain. (p. 4)
> . . . . . .
> HAMM: I'll give you nothing more to eat.
> CLOV: Then we'll die.
> HAMM: I'll give you just enough to keep you from dying. You'll be hungry all the time.
> CLOV: Then we won't die. (pp. 5-6)

This azoic georama and the affective anaemia that accompanies it constitute an exposition of the characters' lack of social or historical situation. There are no landmarks, and time has come to an absolute standstill:

> HAMM: What time is it?
> CLOV: The same as usual. (p. 4)

The question of choice

In a structure almost nullified as it is here, choice is obliterated. Choice is based on discrimination and tendency, and it implies the existence of various possibilities. When these possibilities are removed, as in the world described in Endgame

which is clearly the reflection of a mental achromatism, there cannot be choice. Choice is also based on freedom of movement. This is symbolically impeded in the play: Hamm's paralysis, his parents' leglessness and confinement, and Clov's stiff and staggering walk are correlatives of the impossibility of making any move. That is why Hamm can only dream about going into the realm of affective states, contact and consciousness. It is only as a fantasy that this move is possible: "If I could sleep I might make love. I'd go into the woods. My eyes would see...the sky, the earth. I'd run, run, they wouldn't catch me. (Pause.) Nature!" (p. 18) And when he asks Clov to build a raft for him so he can sail away, (p. 35) he is obviously not serious about it, for he changes the conversation immediately. (p. 35)

Nagg and Nell can only recall the days when they could row on Lake Como. (p. 21) Clov, on the other hand, who can still move, decides at the end of the play to go--he is "dressed for the road. Panama hat, tweed coat, raincoat over his arm, umbrella, bag." (p. 82) Yet, all he can do is halt by the door and stand there, "impassive and motionless, his eyes fixed on Hamm, till the end." (p. 82) Even if Clov had indeed left, one wonders where in the Beckettian design of things he could go. In Waiting for Godot the characters could choose to be somewhere, for they could still conceive of a possible solution, even though the choice was restricted to one alternative and this solution failed. They came to a place near a tree, and went away again. None of

the characters in Endgame has the freedom to choose. All lack access to a rational structure that could guide their sense of choice. In the play no alternative place is left.

Merleau-Ponty was aware of the importance of an existing rationality in the close rapport between oneself and an objective structure when he said: "J'ai reçu avec l'existence une manière d'exister, un style. Toutes mes actions et mes pensées sont en rapport avec cette structure, et même la pensée d'un philosophe n'est qu'une manière d'expliciter sa prise sur le monde, cela qu'il est. Et cependant, je suis libre, non pas en dépit ou en deçà de ces motivations, mais par leur moyen. Car cette vie signifiante, cette certaine signification de la nature et de l'histoire que je suis, ne limite pas mon accès au monde, elle est au contraire mon moyen de communiquer avec lui."[76] The close communication between an existing objectification and oneself is in Merleau-Ponty the medium through which freedom can take place. Where the objective frame of reference is reduced nearly to zero as it is here, there can be no freedom, only mere presence: "Well, there we are, there I am, that's enough." (p. 83)

The impossible relative

Any general spatio-temporal level within the scenic universe of the play is abstracted except for the measurable idio-

[76]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie de la perception, op. cit., p. 519.

verse that the four characters occupy. Clov states that his kitchen is precisely "ten feet by ten feet by ten feet, . . . Nice dimensions, nice proportions." (p. 2) Hamm is in his armchair in the middle of the stage and he insists on being in the exact centre: "I was right in the center, wasn't I?"(p. 25) "Am I right in the center?" (p. 26) "Put me right in the center! . . . Bang in the center!" (p. 27) This concern with measurable quantification is a concern with relative proportions that would situate the characters in some relative position within an objectification outside themselves. These geometrical estimates of Clov and Hamm prove to have no value beyond their own independent limits, for what does it matter that Hamm be at the exact center and Clov in a kitchen with nice proportions? All that is known is that they are stationed in a stopping place, that they are there, present, waiting for nothing, doing nothing.

In fact, these geometrical concerns underline that they are not part of any wider system of correspondences. When Hamm states that all is absolute, (p. 2) he means that all is above any correlation. The characters exist isolated from "Nature." Hamm's is a statement about the incommensurability of elements that are not situated in a wider pattern. That is why he is so concerned about his situation in space. One thing on which he insists is to touch the wall. The wall is a tangible structure that circumscribes this spatial situation. It is a secure foothold, for it is his only relationship with the environment, and

the relative dimension about him:

> HAMM: Hug the walls, then back to the center again . . . Are you hugging?
> CLOV: (pushing) Yes.
> HAMM: (groping for wall) It's a lie! Why do you lie to me?
> CLOV: (bearing closer to wall) There! There!
> HAMM: Stop! (Clov stops chair close to back wall. Hamm lays his hand against wall.) Old wall! (p. 25)

Nevertheless, Hamm knows that the wall is meaningless and hollow: leaning against the wall and applying his ear to it, he says: "Do you hear? (He strikes the wall with his knuckles.) Do you hear? Hollow bricks! (He strikes again.). All that's hollow!" (p. 26) The wall is hollow because it is no solution to the problem of relative meaningful situation of the characters in a wider context. This is made clear in what Clov says about the wall in the kitchen. He tells Hamm quite often that he has "things to do." (pp. 3, 12) This seemingly diligent exertion of energy is proved to be quite absurd. Clov is busy indeed, busy looking at the wall:

> CLOV: . . . I'll leave you, I have things to do.
> HAMM: In your kitchen?
> CLOV: Yes.
> HAMM: What, I'd like to know.
> CLOV: I look at the wall. (p. 12)

The actual fact of looking at the wall represents an activity that is very different from those undertaken within a defined historical structure. Symbolically, it is the perception of impassable limits. The wall is also the image and objective correlative to an incurable condition:

> HAMM: The wall! And what do you see on your wall? . . .
> CLOV: I see my light dying. (p. 12)

Clov sees his light dying because the wall is blank, therefore abstract, and it represents his imprisonment within his own being. A wall divides space. Its property is to enclose, and it emphasizes stasis since the spatial limits it sets restrict unhampered free motion. The wall shows Clov his own consciousness closed in upon itself: the absoluteness of his isolation.

The irregular rhythm and its annihilation

The lack of relative relation is not only in space but also in time, since space and time are coterminous. When Clov asks Hamm about the story that he has been telling himself all his days, (p. 58) Hamm corrects him saying that it is not a story, but more accurately, a "chronicle." (p. 58) A story involves a narrative yarn that is characterized by continuity in the account of events. It implies historical coherence and therefore a set of related happenings and experiences. But Hamm makes it clear that there is no connecting logical thread between one fact and another. These exist as absolutes ("All is absolute") and not as relatives. That is why he has to specify that what he tells himself is not a historical overview of meaningful events, but a recital of facts co-existing in a quantitative temporal sequence. Whereas a medieval chronicle emphasized Providential design, for Hamm the chronicle (in place of a story) yields an emphasis on temporal fragmentariness and irregular non-sequitur. The time of Hamm's chronicle is "le temps des battements irréguliers

entre l'apparition et la disparition des rythmes--ces énigmatiques séries d'intervalles et d'instants placés entre les durées. C'est le temps de l'incertitude par excellence, où la contingence se trouve particulièrement accentuée." Significantly, Georges Gurvitch allots this kind of time to the

> rôles sociaux et des attitudes collectives où se heurtent les rôles sociaux réglementés et les rôles sociaux refoulés, aspirés, fluctuants, inattendus. Tel est le temps des modèles techniques, surtout dans les sociétés des XIX^e et XX^e siècles. Tel est le temps des masses à l'échelle microsociologique, des masses passives en particulier. Tel est aussi le temps des groupes non structurés, comme la plupart des publics autres que politiques, ou des classes en train de se former. Tel est encore le temps des sociétés globales en transition, comme l'est si souvent la nôtre.[77]

That is why Hamm is impatient at Clov when the latter tells him that he has done something "yesterday:" "Yesterday! What does that mean? Yesterday!" (p. 43) Retrospective time, present, and prospective time--blurred as they are here by slowness and stagnation, have lost their distinctive significance, for they are not functionally related. This temporal irregularity of the character that is present but not situated, of the character whose presence is described as gratuitous, is shown as tending to zero at the end of the play: "Moments for nothing, now as always, time was never and time is over." (p. 83) Time in Endgame ceases to exist because time is connected with experience, and here, experience is abstracted. That is why moments are "for

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[77] Georges Gurvitch, "La Multiplicité des temps sociaux" in La Vocation actuelle de la sociologie II (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), p. 342.

nothing," empty. The removal of objective consciousness is also a removal of temporal awareness.

Symbolic kinship in the suppliant story

As opposed to the arbitrary and disconnected fragmentariness of Hamm's chronicle is the continuity of the story that he tells about a suppliant, a man who "came crawling towards me, on his belly," (p. 50) to beg for bread for his son. Hamm takes the "narrative tone" (p. 50) to tell it. In this story, there is a possibility of a narration, in other words of a meaningful continuity, because it encloses the rationality of a symbolic significance: that of the emotional bond between father, the bread-winner, and his son. The story has continuity because it deals with relative involvement. What the suppliant is emphasizing is a desperate symbiosis, based on a cry of the blood in an environment that denies it utterly. The suppliant's face is "black with mingled dirt and tears . . . (p. 51) It's my little one, he said . . . My little boy, he said." (p. 52) This parental emotionality is met with violent impatience from Hamm: "Corn, yes, I have corn, it's true, in my granaries. But use your head. I give you some corn, a pound, a pound and a half, you bring it back to your child and you make him--if he's still alive--a nice pot of porridge, . . . I lost patience. (Violently.) Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that! . . . But what in God's name do you imagine? That the

earth will awake in spring? That the rivers and seas will run with fish again? That there's manna still in heaven for imbeciles like you?" (pp. 52-53)

The comforting idea of rebirth in spring, the biblical image of the miraculous heavenly manna, of abundance and fertility, all those archetypal significances which were perpetuated in history from ancestor to descendant and generation to generation, which elicited strong responses in human consciousness and constituted an inherited socio-psychological wealth, have disappeared. This was already made clear in the discussion of Lucky's speech in Waiting for Godot. The moving distress of the suppliant is minimized by the stylistic devices used in the telling of the story, mainly by the use of a conventional device commonly found in romantic literature: pathetic fallacy. As the suppliant cried for bread, "It was an extraordinarily bitter day, . . . zero by the thermometer. But considering it was Christmas Eve there was nothing...extraordinary about that." (p. 51) The setting of this story of poverty and hunger of a father begging for his son on a bitter day, and during the Christmas season, emphasizes the melodrama, and at the same time, by the use of this cliché, minimizes the pathos of the situation.

The suppliant, in the context of the play, clearly belongs to an old order of cultural reference. He does not fit in Hamm's world. This is explicit in what seems as a Voltairian allusion made by Hamm. The suppliant is "offered a job as gardener." (p. 60)

The mention of "gardener" brings to mind the old Turkish gardener of Voltaire's Candide, who taught Candide and his companions, Pangloss and Martin, that work was a source of joy and wealth, and that it was a practical remedy: "le travail éloigne de nous trois grands maux, l'ennui, le vice et le besoin,"[78] affirming thus that man was born for action. Voltaire's "il faut cultiver notre jardin," the exhortation to work and personal satisfaction in an age of enlightenment, proves to be an anachronism in Beckett. The Turkish man's garden that yielded great abundance--"ses deux filles et ses deux fils leur présentèrent plusieurs sortes de sorbets qu'ils faisaient eux-mêmes, du kaimak piqué d'écorces de cédrat confit, des oranges, des citrons, des limons, des ananas, des pistaches, du café de Moka qui n'était point mêlé avec le mauvais café de Batavia et des îles . . . Vous devez avoir, dit Candide au Turc, une vaste et magnifique terre?--Je n'ai que vingt arpents, répondit le Turc; je les cultive avec mes enfants."[79] --has become the wasteland of Endgame.

Voltaire himself was a skeptic, and he attacked what he considered to be the gratuitous affirmations of such optimistic philosophers as Rousseau, Leibniz and his disciple Wolff. Yet, although he demonstrated that all was not for the best in the

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[78]Voltaire, Candide in Romans et contes (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), p. 258.

[79]Ibid.

best of all possible worlds, and that the world is ruled by contingency and providence (Zadig), Voltaire still conceived of a deistic philosophy--"Quoi! le monde est visible, et Dieu serait caché?" he exclaims in his Poème sur la loi naturelle--[80] and of a world meaningful as a clock. This allowed his characters to overcome defeatism--a Zadig or a Candide never faltered even in the face of innumerable vicissitudes. The garden (the earth) could still be conceived in terms of work and progress in Voltaire. In Endgame the garden is not irrigable. That is why Clov bursts out laughing (p. 60) when Hamm tells him that the suppliant was offered a job as gardener.

It is within the framework of this story that the grimness of cosmic deterioration is introduced by Hamm: "It was a glorious bright day, I remember, fifty by the heliometer, but already the sun was sinking down into the...down among the dead." (p. 51) And "It was a howling wild day, I remember, a hundred by the anemometer. The wind was tearing up the dead pines and sweeping them...away." (p. 52) And Hamm is gradually moving to the Endgame zero point: "It was an exceedingly dry day, I remember, zero by the hygrometer." (p. 53) This meteorological chaos running parallel to a story about symbolic bonds is but the reflection of their reduction to the dry barrenness of their lost significance. That is precisely why Clov's seeds will never sprout.

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[80] Voltaire, Poème sur la loi naturelle (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1938), p. 248.

The story is abandoned, unfinished, and with its dropping, the breakdown of the old values is indicated.

Dead symbolic kinship

As a contrast to the apparently anachronistic kinship order of the suppliant story, Beckett exposes the kinship disorder among Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell in a structure where these exist as absolutes, solipsistically (though reservations about Nagg and Nell will be discussed in the following section of this chapter). The relationships between Hamm and his parents, between Hamm and Clov, and between Clov and Nagg and Nell, have nothing of the unconditional solidarity and biological co-agency that are present in the suppliant story. Hamm curses his father Nagg: "Accursed progenitor." (p. 9) "Accursed fornicator!" (p. 10) and insults him for begetting him: "Scoundrel! Why did you engender me?" (p. 49) Nagg and Nell themselves are not in their right situation: they act like children asking for sugar plums and pap. The roles are reversed. They are treated with indifferent carelessness. Clov's services to them have deteriorated: where he used to provide them with proper litter--sawdust--now he gives them sand. When Nagg and Nell seem to be dead, nobody cares.

Clov is supposed to be Hamm's adopted son, but adoption is perverted to slavery: Clov is made to be Hamm's fag, and he serves him with glum despondency. The relationship between them is at odds. Hamm abuses Clov, calls him "ape," (p. 77) shouts at

him to keep quiet: "(violently): Wait till you're spoken to!" (p. 29) and in the end, Clov, maddened by Hamm's questions and orders, "strikes him violently on the head" with a toy dog. (p. 76) If Hamm keeps Clov, it is because "There's no one else," (p. 6) and if Clov stays, it is because "There's nowhere else." (p. 6) As Charles R. Lyons has remarked, "the play moves towards the final dissolution of contact between Hamm and Clov . . . Hamm . . . is rejecting all contact, physical and mental, between his consciousness and anything else. Consequently, he denies everything which depends upon contact, agreement, such as the commitment to an agreed standard."[81] The chain of relations has collapsed. What is left is disharmony.

Maimed symbolic kinship

The only characters that seem to entertain some kind of symbolic bond are Nagg and Nell. When Nagg asks for a sugar plum for himself, he also asks for one to be given to Nell. (p. 50) They utter the only words of love of the play: Nell calls Nagg "my pet," (p. 14) and asks him if it is time for love. (p. 14) Nagg urges Nell to kiss him. (p. 14) But the quasi lyrical quality of Nagg's and Nell's dialogue is counteracted by their squalid state: they are legless and they are placed in ashbins, sitting on sand in the midst of their excrements. When they try

[81]Charles R. Lyons, "Beckett's Endgame: An Anti-Myth of Creation," Modern Drama, VII (September 1964), p. 206.

to reach each other across their ashbins, they fail: "Their heads strain towards each other, fail to meet, fall apart again." (p. 14) Their love is maimed. Their relation is constantly disturbed and demystified, as is obvious in their recall of the circumstances in which Nagg told Nell a story that illustrated the hopeless state of the world. Nagg reports that on the day after the one on which he and Nell had got engaged, as they were rowing on Lake Como, one April afternoon (p. 21) in spring--the season of rebirth--Nagg told Nell a story about a tailor who was incapable of making a pair of trousers in three months. The tailor answered the furious customer who could not understand why he was not able to make a pair of trousers in three months when God had made the world in six days (p. 22): "But my dear Sir, my dear Sir, look--(disdainful gesture, disgustedly)--at the world--(pause) and look--(loving gesture, proudly)--at my trousers!" (pp. 22-23) The story always made Nell laugh. Because of this, the spring afternoon on Lake Como turns out to be not so enjoyable as it should have: Nell laughed so much, that they capsized and "By rights . . . should have been drowned." (p. 21)

The bitter idea behind the story about the world being a mess, interferes with the romantic quality of the afternoon, and because it causes Nagg and Nell to capsize and therefore run the risk of drowning, it has introduced the possibility of death. The affective framework that implied a bond of contiguousness and convergence is shown as frail and endangered. Telling a

story in Beckett goes beyond the mere fact of telling it: it destroys harmonious coalescence. Moreover, the anecdote achieves another function: that of throwing light on the act of creation as Beckett sees it. By equating the world, the extremely complex structure of God's cosmological design, with trousers, a paltry product, Beckett has neutralized the importance of the act of creation. Then, by making man's creation ill-fitting, he hints at the inadequacy and clumsiness of man's creative powers. Man, for Beckett, has replaced God, but like the tailor, exhibits no dexterity in this. He is no master of his human trade. What he produces is chaos: "I've made a mess of the seat . . . I've made a hash of the crotch . . . I've made a balls of the fly." (p. 22)

It should be pointed out here that the Endgame group of characters very obviously constitute a family of three generations --Nagg and Nell being the grand-parents, Hamm their son and Clov's adoptive father, and Clov being Hamm's adopted son. Only Nagg and Nell have engendered. Hamm merely adopted, and this removes the idea of any sexual coalescence with its affective stages that he might have had, in the same sense as his "fornicating" parents, whom he curses , did. Moreover, this adoption is perverted to slavery. It is clear that the Endgame family interactions represent the decline of the feeling of kinship. The sense of family relations has been depersonalized. Eric and Mary Josephson analyse this problem as being the result of the development of industrialism:

> Of the many effects of industrialism on the family, perhaps most important is the breakdown of the extended kinship group which, . . . had been the primary productive and social unit in the pre-industrial age. As the old crafts declined, and labor became increasingly divided and specialized, the economic and social base of the large family was destroyed. Lost were the customs and skills thatnhad been passed on from one generation to another. Gone were the close bonds between young and old, and especially the respect that youth had previously given to age. Into the new industrial cities poured millions who had been cut off from their traditional family roots. These are the most visible consequences for the family of the industrial revolution.[82]

The final issue: order

It is an orderly structure of organic and harmonious relationships that the characters of Endgame need: "I love order. It's my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place," says Clov. (p. 57) It is Clov, the only character who is endowed with motion that attempts to put "things in order." (p. 57) But this order seems to belong to a time in the past where it was possible, a time where the old questions had answers: "I love the old questions. (With fervour.) Ah the old questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them!" (p. 38) When Nagg and Nell speak of the past, they become elegiac: "Ah yesterday! (They turn painfully towards each other.)" (p. 15)

It seems that Beckett in Endgame refers order and harmony to the old God, for the only instance where the characters cohere in doing collectively the same thing (otherwise they are always

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[82]Eric and Mary Josephson, Man Alone, op. cit., p. 30.

at odds) is when Hamm calls upon them to pray to God. (p. 54) They take "Attitudes of prayer." (p. 55) Nagg clasps his hands, closes his eyes, and in a gabble starts the "Our Father which art--" (p. 55) But soon they abandon their attitudes:

> CLOV: (abandoning his attitude) What a hope! And you?
> HAMM: Sweet damn all! (To Nagg.) And you?
> NAGG: Wait! (Pause. Abandoning his attitude.) Nothing doing!
> HAMM: The bastard! He doesn't exist! (p. 55)

The physical monotony and moribundity of the play are but the reflection of this absence of an orderly and harmonious structure that was once provided by God, in the old conceptions about him as Prime Mover, Preserver of life and the epitome of Hypostatic Union. Possibly, this old God is to be associated also with Hamm's "pain-killer" that does not exist anymore. He is the God of the old questions and the old answers (such as the ones proposed and discussed by Thomas Aquinas, for example?).

The problem of the absolutely unrelated and disparate existence of beings deteriorating in a world that is shorn of its old hierarchical coherence is an old Western problem that dates from the Renaissance. It is of the same kind as the one touched upon in the discussion of Lucky's speech in Waiting for Godot: then the question of uncertainty was analysed, here the breakdown of organic order and deterioration is dealt with. Georges Poulet's comment gives a historical overview of this: "A l'époque de la Renaissance toute la hiérarchie de formes qui, aux yeux des gens du Moyen-Age, constituait la structure permanente du monde, avait disparu. Il ne restait plus, dans un

univers qui tout entier maintenant semblait sujet à la vicissitude, que la double conscience de cette vicissitude et de la force cosmique qui l'engendrait. Dès lors, le caractère de la durée humaine changea profondément."[83] And: "Le XVII^{e} siècle est l'époque où l'être individuel découvre son isolement. L'édifice médiéval du monde où toutes les formes de créatures se trouvaient disposées dans un système de relations permanentes, n'existe plus. Avec la fin de la Renaissance a disparu aussi le sentiment d'intercommunication spontanée de toutes les activités individuelles dans le devenir cosmique."[84]

What has occurred at the same time is a cleavage between the individual being and the principle of conservation that God represented. Medieval man had a bent towards and an ability to respond to this principle of conservation: "la relation des créatures au Créateur . . . Ce n'était pas parce que Dieu ajoutait un moment de plus à leur existence, que leur existence se trouvait ainsi d'un moment prolongée. C'était parce qu'à l'acte conservateur correspondait dans tous les moments de l'existence créée une même aptitude à être conservée.

'La conservation d'une chose n'est pas produite par Dieu comme par une cause totale, mais elle requiert de la part de la créature une aptitude à la conservation et une vertu pour ainsi

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[83]Georges Poulet, Etudes sur le temps humain (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh University Press, 1949), p. 13.

[84]Ibid., p. 19.

conservatrice.' (Bonaventure)."[85]

Poulet goes on to explain thatnthis is the basis for the sense of decay in literature: "Un profond sentiment d'usure caractérise l'oeuvre de ces post-romantiques. 'Je ne vois que des parcelles de mon existence d'autrefois,' écrit Maupassant. Le passé . . . n'est plus pour lui qu' 'un émiettement d'évènements disparus.' Aussi la durée n'apparaît-elle plus comme une genèse de vie, mais comme une genèse de mort."[86]

In Endgame, it is precisely this "genèse de mort" that Beckett focuses upon: the pain-killer that was an effective remedy to human suffering, does not exist anymore, nor does there seem to be another consolation. What is now left for Clov is to say to himself that "the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit," (p. 81) and for Hamm to cover his face with his handkerchief at the end of the play, thus drawing the curtain on himself.

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[85] Ibid., p. 8.

[86] Ibid., p. 43.

IV - HAPPY DAYS: INVOLUTED DEVOLUTION AND INEFFECTUAL DEFENCE MECHANISMS

Running down

Winnie, a woman of about fifty and her husband, Willie, a man of about sixty, are the only two characters of Happy Days. In Act I Winnie is "Imbedded up to above her waist"[87] in the centre of a mound, and she talks with great vivacity all the time as she brings out a number of "shopping variety" (p. 7) from "a capacious black bag," (p. 7) making sure, every now and again, that her husband has heard her. Willie lies "asleep on the ground, hidden" (p. 8) behind the mound, answering with monosyllables --"It," (p. 23) "Yes," (pp. 25-26) "Eggs" (p. 30)--with single words--"Formication" (p. 30)--with snatches from a newspaper he is reading--"Opening for smart youth," (p. 16) "Wanted bright boy" (p. 17)--or otherwise with impatient irritation at Winnie --"(violently). Fear no more!" (p. 26) In Act II, Winnie is imbedded to her neck and she cannot turn, bow nor raise her head anymore. (p. 49) She still talks, with a little less verve though, than in Act I, but since her arms are buried, she cannot use the objects from her bag any longer. Willie comes out from behind the mound for the last few minutes of the play. "He is on all fours, dressed to kill--top hat, morning coat, striped

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[87] Samuel Beckett, Happy Days (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1961); p. 7. All subsequent references to the play will be made to this edition.

trousers, etc., white gloves in hand." (p. 61) He looks at Winnie as she sings a song from The Merry Widow. Curtain.

The setting is typically Beckettian: "Expanse of scorched grass rising centre" to the mound in which Winnie is imbedded. (p. 7) The light effect, as opposed to the greyness of Endgame, is "blazing." (p. 7) The sun shines implacably to dry everything out, as a planetary inertia seems to have taken place. It is clear, on the apparent physical level, that the sun does not determine the movement of the earth. The latter has stopped turning, and thereby exposes itself to dehydration--as Winnie points out: "I used to perspire freely. (Pause.) Now hardly at all. (Pause.) The heat is much greater. (Pause.) The perspiration much less." (p. 35)

Something of universal importance seems to have gone astray. The defect can be analysed into two components. First, a breakdown in harmony is expressed by the cosmic image of the earth having stopped to turn around its axis. The Newtonian gravity remains visible in Winnie's gradual burial, where her body is almost magnetically sucked in. Second, in the universe of the play there is a failure of vital energy without which there can be no organic growth, as seen in the arid inertia of the setting. It should be mentioned that water is metaphorically connected with life, and in the sensibility of most established religions, with faith that is life-giving. Among many other works, T. S. Eliot's The Wasteland has given an eloquent expression of this view in

our time.

In this total lack of cosmic and vital harmony, reason finds everything strange: "all seems strange. (Pause.) Most strange. (Pause.) Never any change. (Pause.) And more and more strange." (p. 45)

Devolution and the womb: the tendency towards nothingness

The result of this breakdown of cosmic harmony and of this removal of vital energy is a process of devolution. By devolution is here meant a process which is opposed to life-unfolding evolution, or growing complexity of life: "What a blessing nothing grows," says Winnie, "imagine if all this stuff were to start growing. (Pause.) Imagine. (Pause.) Ah yes, great mercies." (p. 34) And in an ironically twisted Darwinian fashion she exclaims: "That is what I find so wonderful. (Pause.) The way man adapts himself. (Pause.) To changing conditions." (p. 35)

The concept of evolutionary life Winnie ascribes to a source of all the missing principles of Happy Days--generation, nourishment and security: the womb. And it is when she is almost totally interred in the second act, when she has reached near zero in her devolutionary process, that she recalls it: "There is my story of course, when all else fails. (Pause.) A life. (Smile.) A long life. (Smile off.) Beginning in the womb, where life used to begin, Mildred has memories, she will have memories, of the womb, before she dies, the mother's womb." (pp. 54-55)

Winnie's nostalgia for the womb is nostalgia not only for generation, nourishment (and the need for nourishment in Beckett is the need for spiritual nourishment) and security, as her life becomes more and more precarious, but also for a first cause, a causa causans that determines as well as ensures preservation of life. But these connotations connected with the womb belong to some time in the past when secure evolution could take place. When Winnie uses the past tense in "where life used to begin," she implies thereby that both evolution and the favourable environment in which it developed do not exist anymore. The disappearance of generation, nourishment, security and the motivating power of a first cause leads to a disintegration, an adaptation "to the changing conditions" of devolution towards zero.

The image of Winnie, half-buried in the ground, caught within a magnetic pole of solipsism, stands for the metaphysical condition of modern individualistic man . By modern individualistic is meant that which pertains to the post-medieval individualistic sensibility, or "a conceiving, viewing or feeling the world from the standpoint of the individual."[88] This is accompanied by an irremediable tendency towards nothingness, an "habitudo ad nihil" that is not counterbalanced by an "habitudo ad causam primam," as it was in the medieval organic world-view. In the case of

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[88]Darko Suvin, "On Individualist World-View in Drama," Les Problèmes des genres littéraires, I (1966), p. 5.

Happy Days, the causa prima seems to be theistic regeneration, as is apparent in Winnie's repeated prayers to God. But relying on God is a delusion, for He does not save her from devolution towards zero. Hers are prayers to Hamm's "bastard" who does not exist. Georges Poulet has analysed the problem in these terms:

> L'être de la créature, il est vrai, tendait toujours au néant: mais il n'y tendait que par un côté de lui-même. Par un autre il tendait à continuer d'être ce qu'il était en raison des principes de son existence. Sa tendance au néant (habitudo ad nihil) était compensée par une tendance opposée, une tendance à la cause première (habitudo ad causam primam). Cette habitude, cette manière d'être était au premier chef une manière de durer. Tendre vers Dieu c'était ne pas cesser d'être apte à recevoir de Dieu son existence . . . Dieu conservateur de l'être, était par le fair même conservateur du principe des actions de l'être . . . La création continuée consacrait donc l'efficace durable de la cause seconde. Elle faisait que l'être fut capable de ses actes. Mais cette capacité ne se situait pas dans le temps; elle se situait dans la permanence. Elle était la forme permanente qui fondait la possibilité d'une existence et d'une action temporelles.[89]

That is why Winnie is a laudator temporis acti. That is why she smiles every time she recalls the old style life of the happy days of the past.

Involution

a) Incurable affective involution

The lack of apparent harmony and the subsequent absence of vital energy that cause devolution, have serious effects on the human level: the reciprocal convergence that should be in

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[89] Georges Poulet, Etudes sur le temps humain, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

the Winnie-Willie connubiality is non-existent. Even the symbolic significance, however maimed, that was found in the Nagg and Nell couple, has vanished here. Although Winnie is Willie's wife, her situation regarding him is thwarted by the fact that she is cut off from him topographically, "sexually and intellectually."[90] Being so separated from relationship, she is left to devolute: Willie's non-responsive attitude towards her forces her to curl inwards, and as she does so, disappear. Thus the devolutionary process is accompanied by an involutionary one. Winnie makes this clear as she reports the comments of "this man Shower--or Cooker--no matter--and the woman" he went with (p. 42): "Why doesn't he dig her out? he says--referring to you, my dear--What good is she to him like that? . . . --Dig her out, he says, dig her out, no sense in her like that--Dig her out with what? she says--I'd dig her out with my bare hands, he says--must have been man and--wife." (p. 43) On the ostensive dramatic level, this involutionary devolution is seen in Winnie's sinking deeper and deeper within her hole.

By placing Willie behind the mound and out of Winnie's reach or sight, Beckett has removed the field of affective mutual perception and has set in its place the impossibility of a face to face dialogue: "Do you know what I dream sometimes? (Pause.)

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[90] David Alpaugh, "Negative Definition in Samuel Beckett's Happy Days," Twentieth-Century Literature, XI (1965-66), p. 209.

What I dream sometimes, Willie. (Pause.) That you'll come round and live this side where I could see you. (Pause. Back front.) I'd be a different woman. (Pause.) Unrecognizable. (Turning slightly towards him.) Or just now and then, come round this side just every now and then and let me feast on you. (Back front.) But you can't, I know. (Head down.) I know." (p. 46) Winnie constantly manifests the desire to establish a ground for mutual perception: "Could you see me, Willie, do you think, from where you are, if you were to raise your eyes in my direction? (Turns a little further.) Lift up your eyes to see me, Willie, and tell me can you see me, do that for me, I'll lean back as far as I can. (Does so. Pause.)" (p. 28) But Willie does not respond: "No? (Pause.) Well never mind. (Turns back painfully front.)" (p. 28) Yet Winnie understands this breakdown of a common basis for favourable coalescence: "Well it is very understandable . . . Most understandable." (p. 29)

The reason for this lack of harmony is in the universal lack of coherence. Winnie makes this clear when she extends her domestic problem into the cosmic proportions: "One does not appear to be asking a great deal, indeed at times it would seem hardly possible--(voice breaks, falls to a murmur)--to ask less--of a fellow-creature--to put it mildly--whereas actually--when you think about it--look into your heart--see the other--what he needs --peace--to be left in peace--then perhaps the moon--all this time--asking for the moon." (p. 29) Asking for the moon as an

extended desire for mutual perception is, in the context of a play where the earth that has stopped turning exposes the location of Winnie to the constant glare of the sun (as the moon now exposes one face constantly to the earth), to crave for the restoration of the old harmonious universal set-up. This is as impossible as this mutual relationship with a fellow creature. Even when at some point Winnie's parasol catches fire, and she throws it behind her to where Willie is, (p. 37) he does not react: "Do you know what has occurred, Willie? (Pause.) Have you gone off on me again? (Pause.) I do not ask you if you are alive to all that is going on, I merely ask if you have not gone off on me again." (p. 37)

All that Winnie can do is recall the time when affective communication was possible. Once again she connects it with the general design of things: "Ah well, natural laws, natural laws, I suppose it's like everything else, . . . All I can say is for my part is that for me they are not what they were when I was young and...foolish and...(faltering, head down)...beautiful... possibly...lovely...in a way...to look at." (p. 34) It is at this time when she was "young and foolish" that she knew a "Charlie Hunter," and she remembers how she used to sit on his knees. (p. 15) This passage is significant: Charlie Hunter belongs to the old order. He is "His Grace and Most Reverend Father in God Dr. Carolus Hunter." (p. 15) But he is dead--"in tub" (p. 15)--and buried with the order he represented. With the juxtaposition of Winnie's memory of him as a lover, of the nuances of his name (Hunter:

one who is in pursuit of game or one who is chasing for sport), and of the circumstances of his death (he died "in tub," which, by extension, makes him a tub-thumper, or a bombastic and noisy preacher), Beckett manages to suggest a flattening of the religious order that Charlie Hunter represents and of the affective memory which Winnie recalls.

b) Removal of sexual consummation

Along with the annulment of emotional and intellectual mutualness between Winnie and Willie, Beckett removes sexual consummation. He abolishes the possibility of coition itself by having Winnie's body hidden in the mound. Consequently, and correlative to the lack of vital energy, there can be no generation. He has done away with the secure womb, and by doing so, thwarted at its very source any evolutionary process. Furthermore, the sexual disposition is made negative by Winnie's own squeamish, but rather hypocritical, prudishness, shown when she asks Willie to let her see a postcard he is looking at: "Heavens what are they up to! (She looks for spectacles, puts them on and examines card.) No but this is just genuine pure filth! (Examines card.) Make any nice-minded person want to vomit! (. . . She looks for glass, takes it up and examines card through glass. Long pause.) What does that creature in the background think he's doing? . . . (. . . She lays down glass, takes edge of card between right forefinger and thumb, averts head, takes nose between left forefinger and thumb.)

Pah! (*Drops card.*) Take it away!" (p. 19) It is immediately after this that Winnie asks Willie: "What exactly is a hog?" (p. 19) But she rejects the question: "Oh well what does it matter." (p. 19) The point is that it does matter, because as Willie explains later, a hog is a "Castrated male swine . . . Reared for slaughter," (p. 47) and it becomes more and more apparent that Willie's condition is similar to that of the castrated male swine and parallel to Winnie's sterility. Winnie often castrates Willie verbally: she tells him to "slip on" his "drawers," (p. 14) and at some point she irritably tells him: "Keep your tail down, can't you!" (p. 25)

Yet, the two most illustrative passages in the play as to the removal of sexual consummation within the process of involuted devolution seem to be the one where Winnie sees an emmet, and the one where she mentions being "sucked up . . . like gossamer." (pp. 30-34) Winnie sees an emmet, an ant, that appears to be carrying "a little white ball in its arms." (p. 29) Willie, usually mute and hard to call to a responsive attitude, becomes explicative: "Eggs . . . Formication." (p. 30) He even "laughs quietly" (p. 30) at the thought of it, for the connotations are subtler than the mere play on the word formication versus fornication. An emmet can produce eggs without impregnation, parthenogenetically; therefore "formication" becomes almost the opposite of fornication. On the hymenopterical level, fertilization can take place without coition; on the human level it cannot. Coalescence is imperative for the human species. This passage epitomizes very succinctly

and concisely the relationship between Willie and Winnie. Fornication encloses two important nuances: 1) willful sexual intercourse between a man and an unmarried woman; therefore it involves voluntary desire, and Willie had lost the sense of will itself (his name is an ironic play on the word will) as well as the desire, in his condition of "castrated male swine," and 2) sinful adultery, in the religious sense. So there can be no fornication between Willie and Winnie, for they are lawfully wedded, as Winnie points out: "Bid me put this thing down, Willie, I would obey you instantly as I have always done, honoured and obeyed." (p. 36) The implications of illicit extra-marital relations in the context of the play are thus absurd. Willie, in his impotence, can only relish the idea of obscenity. As for Winnie, she is on another wave-length. She can only see God's design in the matter: "Ah well what a joy in any case to hear you laugh again, Willie, I was convinced I never would . . . How can one better magnify the Almighty than by sniggering with him at his little jokes, . . ." (p. 31)

In the passage where Winnie likens Willie to gossamer, (p. 34) one gets an image of thinness and fragility, and this is in line with the precariousness that surrounds the characters. But the same passage in the French text Oh, les beaux jours manages a sexual connotation that the English one does not:

gossamer is "fil de la vierge"[91] in French. Thus when Winnie evokes the similarity between Willie and "fil de la vierge," she extends the metaphors of lack of intercourse with Willie. So much so that any sexual coalescence they might have had some time is cancelled and their relationship is metaphorically reversed back to a pre-marital stage of virginal intactness. But Willie and Winnie are not virgins. What has happened is that Winnie is as dead sexually for Willie as Willie is for Winnie. They are both in a kind of sexual widowhood. The choice of a tune from The Merry Widow is therefore very suitable: Winnie brings out a music box from her bag, and listens to it playing "the Waltz Duet 'I love you so' " (and this has to be taken ironically of course) "from The Merry Widow. Gradually happy expression. She sways to the rhythm." (p. 39)

When in the end Willie advances towards Winnie "dressed to kill" (p. 61) and stands before her at last, one is tempted to take the idiomatic expression "dressed to kill" literally, especially that Beckett mentions that a revolver is "conspicuous" to Winnie's "right on mound." (p. 49)

c) Involuted devolution and the dematerialization of the body as system of synergies

The gradual amputation of Winnie's body serves other functions

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[91] Samuel Beckett, Oh, les beaux jours (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1963), p. 46.

yet than those of keeping the process of devolution and the impossibility of sexual coition in focus. By presenting a gradual disappearance of the body image, Beckett achieves a number of things:

1) he works towards the dematerialization of presence, and at the same time he reduces the visual impact that the body produces on stage.

2) he abolishes any locomotion that would imply a freedom of orientation, for to be endowed with mobility and not know where to go or simply not be able to move, is a curse. That is why Winnie, watching Willie crawl painfully behind her mound, remarks: "What a curse, mobility!" (p. 46) In the Beckettian system, Winnie's fixedness and gradual paralysis are not only logical, but also a blessing.

3) he blots out the space diagrams wherein the body might move and in which it may create a field of phenomenological experiences. Consequently, he makes it impossible for the body to be a vehicle for establishing relations and communication with what is outside its immediate circumference, thus emphasizing its involutionary features. The body is, after all

> le véhicule de l'être au monde, et avoir un corps c'est pour un vivant se joindre à un milieu défini, se confondre avec certains projets et s'y engager continuellement . . . s'il est vrai que j'ai conscience de mon corps à travers le monde, qu'il est au centre du monde, le terme inaperçu vers lequel tous les objets tournent leur face, il est vrai pour la même raison que mon corps est le pivot du

> monde: je sais que les objets ont plusieurs faces parce que je pourrais en faire le tour, et en ce sens j'ai conscience du monde par le moyen de mon corps.[92]

4) he creates within the body non-responsive areas. If in Act I Winnie could still play with objects and talk about them with volubility, it was because she could still use her hands, move her waist and head. She could touch these objects, twirl an umbrella around, work a music box, comb her hair, etc. When in Act II she is buried to the neck and utterly paralyzed, she cannot respond anymore. The cause and effect process is destroyed. Again, Winnie's abnormal paralyzed condition is connected with, and indeed stems out of, the cosmic incoherence. She points out herself that in order for herbstate to change, the whole world must change: "I cannot move. (Pause.) No, something must happen, in the world, take place, some change, I cannot if I am to move again." (p. 36) What is it that must happen, Beckett does not say. He only points at a helpless situation: "No, something must move , in the world, I can't anymore." (p. 60)

The time of involuted devolution

The gradual burial of Winnie and of her capacity for motion within an inert cosmos, is also a progressive disappearance of time, for motion happens in time. When she is buried to her neck and all she can do is to stare before her motionless, Winnie

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[92] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie de la perception, op. cit., p. 97.

wonders: "May one still speak of time?" (p. 50) Obviously one cannot: "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." (p. 38) Winnie assigns the notion of night and day to the old style of living: "not a day goes by--(smile)--to speak in the old style," (p. 18) and "The day now is well advanced. (Smile.) To speak in the old style." (p. 32) "Day after day . . . The old style!" (p. 42) "It is perhaps a little soon--to make ready--for the night-- . . . the old style!" (p. 44) In Happy Days one cannot speak of time unless one speaks of it in the old style.

The old style of time dimension is that which related temporal experience to God. There is a passage in the French text (that is unfortunately omitted in the English one) in which Winnie mentions that time is hers and God's: "le temps est à Dieu et à moi."[93] But then she wonders if one can really say that: "Drôle de tournure . . . Est-ce que ça peut se dire, Willie, que son temps est à Dieu et à soi?"[94] The temporal association between God and man cannot be made anymore.

The concept of time in Happy Days is that of finite temporality as opposed to the fluidity of the old medieval eternity that vehicled man to the retrieving security of divine immortality

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[93]Samuel Beckett, Oh, les beaux jours, p. 31.

[94]Ibid.

(the womb). It is Georges Poulet once again who explains it: "Soutenue par la continuité de la forme substantielle, se déroulait donc la continuité mouvante du temps: si mouvante et si fluide qu'il était impossible d'y distinguer des moments consécutifs . . . ce temps . . . était mouvement vers une fin . . . Le temps avait une direction. Le temps finalement emportait le chrétien vers Dieu."[95]

Time in the play is the fragmented one of successive serialization, characterized by abrupt rhythms, by the arbitrary ringing of a bell: "Bell rings loudly. She opens her eyes at once. Bell stops, she gazes front. Long pause.

> WINNIE: Hail, holy light. (Long pause. She closes her eyes. Bell rings loudly. She opens her eyes at once. Bell stops. She gazes front . . .)" (p. 49)

The bell which one connects with the call to activity rings for nothing: Winnie is buried to the neck. What is left for her is only to open and to close her eyes. That is why the bell "hurts like a knife" (p. 54) for it is a painful reminder, a call to a spatio-temporal dimension which does not exist in the play.

Delusive defence mechanisms versus precariousness

As defensive measure against the precariousness of existence, Winnie develops three features:

1) a religious answer to annihilation,

2) artificial preservation, often with the ready-made products

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[95] Georges Poulet, Etudes sur le temps humain, p. 10.

of commercial consumption,

3) loquacious use of language.

1) Religious answer to annihilation

Winnie convinces herself that if she does not feel any physical pain, it is because she prays: "mustn't complain-- . . . --so much to be thankful for-- . . . --no pain-- . . . --hardly any-- . . . wonderful thing that-- . . .--nothing like it-- . . . --slight headache sometimes-- . . . --occasional mild migraine-- . . . --it comes-- . . . --then goes-- . . . --ah yes-- . . . --many mercies-- . . . --great mercies-- . . . --prayers perhaps not for nought." (pp. 11-12) Her first words are to God: "Another heavenly day," and she prays: "For Jesus Christ sake Amen." (p. 8) The last sentence of her prayer "World without end Amen," is drastically incongruous with Winnie's obvious finitude. But along with her exhilaration--"Another heavenly day"--is an idiom which is fatalistically negative: "can't be helped-- . . . --just can't be cured-- . . . --cannot be cured--" (p. 9) And the familiar Beckettian stagnation is emphasized: "ah well-- . . . --no worse-- . . . --no better, no worse-- . . . --no change-- . . . --no pain-- . . . --no zest-- . . . --for anything-- . . . --no interest-- . . . --in life." (pp. 9-10)

When the second act opens, and Winnie is almost completely interred, it is then that she realizes that praying was a delusion, and she cannot do it anymore: "I used to pray. (Pause.)

I say I used to pray. (Pause.) Yes I must confess I did. (Smile.) Not now. (Smile broader.) No no." (p. 50) Prayer is obsolete. It represents a healing quality that belongs to the old order of things.

2) Artificial preservation

Winnie, Beckett points out, is "well-preserved" and "plump." (p. 7) She follows the laws of hygiene. She brushes her teeth. (p. 9) She takes interest in filing her nails: "Keep yourself nice, Winnie, that's what I always say, come what may, keep yourself nice." (p. 41) She is anxious about the state of her hair: "My hair! (Pause.) Did I brush and comb my hair? (Pause.) I may have done. (Pause.) Normally I do." (p. 22) She also has a bottle of red medicine, (p. 13) a remedy for "Loss of spirits... lack of keenness...want of appetite." (p. 13) There is an obvious need to restore the affective disposition towards the world, the disposition that Winnie assigns to the old style. But the remedy for the lack of favourable disposition here, is an artificial and mechanical therapy that provides "instantaneous"--but unnatural and unreal--"improvement," (p. 13) where a natural, inherent process of improvement has been stunted. The ready-made quality of the medicine is a delusion. That is why the bottle breaks as Winnie tosses it away behind her. (pp. 13-14)

When Winnie comments on the hopeless state of the world, "cannot be cured," "no better, no worse," (pp. 9-10) she does so as she is performing the gestures of her morning toilette, as she

is "testing upper front teeth with thumb," (p. 9) as she takes up the tooth-brush and examines it, (p. 11) as she is "pulling back upper lip to inspect gum." (p. 9) The superimposition of the apparent awareness of an incurable state and of gestures of physical preservation, and what is more, of words of assurance as to reliability, permanency, and security--the tooth-brush is "guaranteed" and "genuine pure" (p. 11)--is a suitable ironic play on apparent preservation and illusory reliability on one hand, and the defeatistic and unpromising predicament of Winnie's own irretrievable condition on the other.

3) Loquacious use of language

Winnie talks. She talks all the time. The quality of her talk is that of redundant verbiage: it remains without any substantial sense except for the one whereby it indicates to the audience that the condition in which Winnie is situated is one of emptiness and estrangement. Verbiage, first of all, gives her the illusion of a rapport with Willie, an escape from absolute solipsism, her "wilderness." (p. 21) "Ah yes, if only I could bear to be alone, I mean prattle away without a soul to hear. (Pause.) So that I may say at all times, even when you do not answer and perhaps hear nothing, something of this is being heard, I am not merely talking to myself, that is in the wilderness." (pp. 20-21) It is this talking that enables Winnie to go on. Willie is there, but he is dead in his consciousness: "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." (p. 50) Relations boil down to mere presence, attested mainly by words. Second, words also provide a kind of concreteness in space. But, in Winnie's case, it is a verbal corporality that has the substantiality of bubbles. There is too much idle talk: "I have my-(raises hands to hat)--yes on, my hat on--(lowers hands)--I cannot take it off now. (Pause.) To think there are times one cannot take off one's hat, not if one's life were at stake. Times one cannot put it on, times one cannot take it off. (Pause.) How often I have said, Put on your hat now, Winnie, there is nothing else for it, take off your hat now, Winnie, like a good girl, it will do you good, and did not." (pp. 23-24) Language alone is no cure for emptiness. In the final analysis, even Winnie realizes that words fail when experience itself has disappeared: "Words fail, there are times when even they fail." (p. 24)

In Happy Days Beckett has exposed the inevitable fallibility of involution within an abstracted system, and the vanity of defence mechanisms that are obsolete (praying), inefficient because artificial (objects and medicine), and empty (verbiage). The result remains persistently Beckettian--progressive disintegration, and the obliteration of the unbearable presence: Winnie is disappearing from view.

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to demonstrate that Beckett's characters are not situated relatively and functionally in a system of correspondences. Therefore, they cannot locate themselves spatially as well as temporally. Consequently, their presence on the stage appears as irrational, but only on the ostensive level: they are there to prove, in a complex ideological and aesthetic manner that they are there for nothing.

It was argued, in chapter I, that the Beckettian scene and characters were removed from social reality, as was made clear in the comparison drawn between Brecht and Genet on one hand, and Beckett on the other. This regression from social reality meant superfluous and irrational existence, solipsism, decomposition and power vacuum for the characters. Beckett's ideological sensibility was shown as expressing a twentieth century philosophical and social climate that was particularly marked by a series of alienating events and processes in politics, science, capitalist economy and day to day social relations.

In chapter II, in the discussion of Waiting for Godot, it was shown that the characters' inability to locate themselves within a pattern of correspondences, was mainly due to the absence of any coherent system, because of the disintegration of reliable cultural truths. This inability was translated by Estragon's and Vladimir's giving up "the struggle" and becoming impotent socially,

historically, as well as affectively, and by Pozzo's and Lucky's turning utterly helpless and inoperative. It was also pointed out that any progress Estragon and Vladimir might have conceivably wished to undertake was stunted by the fixation "we are waiting for Godot." Godot is a minor kind of God, the semblance of a Messiah, conceived in the image of the old medieval God. That is precisely why he never appears, nor can be a solution to the characters' twentieth century problems. A-functional presence for Estragon and Vladimir meant boredom, long silences, improvisation, and for Estragon, sleep; in one word: inconsequential mechanisms.

Chapter III, dealing with Endgame, analysed the problem of a-functional situation of the characters within a system that was almost nullified. Nullification assumed two forms: it was given--the setting was abstracted, everything was zero, and everyone was slowly dying; and it was intentionally promoted by the characters themselves--Clov exterminated the last "potential procreator," the flea. No superstructure of correspondences could continue, although the characters' need for order was pressing. Cultural, as well as biological, co-agency was destroyed, as was made clear in the discussion of the dead and maimed symbolic kinship. The characters themselves made it clear that there is nothing to be done. Any creative prospect was stunted at its very basis: man--the tailor--was shown to be useless as a creator, and no possible alternative was left for him, since the idea of

choice itself was removed.

In chapter IV, in the discussion of Happy Days, it was shown that degradation was universal, seen in the lack of harmony in the macrocosmic set-up. This degradation had an irremediably isolating effect on microcosmic units. It resulted in involution tending towards annihilation for Winnie. It was argued that the situation of the characters within a structure of correspondences was thwarted by the fact that vital energy was abolished on both the macrocosmic and the microcosmic levels. It was made clear in the play, that in order for the situation of the characters to change, the whole world must change. Meanwhile, Beckett removed alternative solutions: he abolished freedom of orientation, space diagrams, fields of possible phenomenological experiences, and the response element in the characters by burying Winnie and thus paralysing her, and by making Willie utterly impotent. Winnie's own defence mechanisms versus annihilation failed because they were inefficiently obsolete, artificial and empty. There was nothing else that one could do.

The thesis also made explicit how Beckett sought to obliterate the "unbearable presence" more and more from one play to the other. Estragon and Vladimir in Waiting for Godot were just there, and their situation was unbearable. That is why Estragon removed the awareness of the world by sleeping--when he was awakened, it will be remembered, he was "restored to the horror of his situation." Forgetfulness also helped the characters in

this process of obliteration: what happened in time and space was cancelled immediately. In Endgame, Hamm's face was covered at the beginning and at the end of the play with a handkerchief. His parents, Nagg and Nell, were hidden in ashcans, from which their heads occasionally stuck out. They seem to have died in the course of the play, for soon they were neither seen nor heard anymore. Likewise, the three living creatures which Clov discovers --the flea, the rat and the small boy--either perished or were bound to perish. In Happy Days, Willie was hidden for most of the duration of the play, and Winnie was visibly disappearing. Beckett has then clearly been working towards abstraction. His characters represent men who are nothing, and who cannot become anything. They seemed to be crushed by overwhelming pressures that paralysed them and prevented them from creating a system outside themselves. This was further complicated by the fact that they could not conceive of common values and norms to help them create such a system. The disintegration among the characters was total: solipsism was intensified from one play to the other, until a character like Winnie literally disappears within her own pole of solipsism. Indeed, in Beckett, "all is absolute." Hamm has summed it up tersely.

From the analysis of Samuel Beckett's three major plays, certain conclusions can be drawn. The inability to situate the characters within a system of correspondences is coterminous

with two main factors: 1) the abstraction of a social superstructure, seen in the bareness of the stage setting, and 2) alienation, or a process whereby the characters are estranged and removed from functional situations. These two factors must be succinctly defined in their implicit characteristics.

The abstraction of the Beckettian stage setting is the reflection of a distinctive point of view, and it fulfils various tasks, which can be summarized in three points:

a) it is a retreat from the pressures of capitalist industrial society, from the world that invalidates Pozzo and Lucky, and the world of job opportunities--of openings for smart youths and bright boys, as Willie would say--within such a society. Estragon and Vladimir mention at some point in Waiting for Godot, that they would not be admitted into the Eiffel Tower, (p. 10) which stands as the symbol of the beginning of modern industrial civilization, and of bourgeois prosperity--the Eiffel Tower was built in 1889, at the height of the Belle Epoque, and it has been ever since a commercial tourist attraction. Winnie herself cannot respond to the call to activity set by the bell that keeps ringing--the symbol of temporal regularity in modern machine civilization. The abstraction of the stage setting is also a reaction against the abundance of goods in modern industrial society. Consumptive economy is stripped down to essentials, especially in Waiting for Godot and Endgame: Pozzo loses his vaporizer, his pipe and his watch, and the Endgame characters run out of paps, of sugar-plums,

of rugs, of pain-killers, etc. The situation is reversed in Happy Days, for Winnie possesses a "shopping variety." However, these objects help as agents in the destruction of the relationship between Winnie and Willie, as will be argued shortly. Moreover, their supreme presence in Act I emphasizes the abstraction of the background against which they stick out singularly, and this very presence is itself counterbalanced in Act II by its disappearance: the objects have vanished except for the revolver which is the only item that should logically survive in a play that works towards annihilation.

b) it sets the ground clear by removing the prevailing values of Western bourgeois culture.

c) it is also the reflection of a lack of sociological perspective, an incapability of providing a prospective view in the re-ordering of the social set-up. There is no possibility for development in Beckett. His land is unirrigated. The question is: is it irrigable, in the sense that even T.S. Eliot's Wasteland is irrigable if the lessons of "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata."[96] are applied? It does not seem so, for, as was shown in the analysis of the three plays, defeatism is general. Seen in this perspective, abstraction yields a feeling of desocialized and desolate poverty.

Alienation in Beckett is marked by:

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[96] T.S. Eliot, Collected Poems (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1963), p. 79.

a) lack of knowledge. This is obvious in Waiting for Godot: Lucky emphasizes the fact that reasons are unknown, in his speech. Pozzo cannot understand what has happened to him in Act II. The Boy(s) who is supposedly in direct contact with the salvational absent figure of the play, Godot, is as has been shown ignorant: he does not know why Godot treats him differently from his brother. The rationale of Godot's attitude towards the Boy(s) remains thus enigmatically unjust. Winnie, on the other hand, finds all strange. Beckett is reported to insist on the fact that "the 'mess' of our world cannot be explained or understood."[97]

b) exclusion and isolation. In the midst of strangeness, in the context of an unwelcoming environment, the characters forcibly fall back on themselves.

c) boredom. A-functional alienation means vacuity and idleness. Estragon and Vladimir are bored, so are the characters of Endgame and Happy Days.

d) helplessness. Being cut off from collective creative forces, the characters are weakened. Helplessness is also the result of the overwhelming pressures of Western society, seen in Lucky who is made helpless and in Pozzo who promotes his own self-helplessness, because of their direct association with such a society.

e) indulgence (ironically meant or ironically presented) in memories of the happy days of old, as a short romantic relief

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[97] Quoted in Darko Suvin, "Beckett's Purgatory of the Individual," op. cit., p. 35.

from the present alienating state of being, as Winnie does. Nagg and Nell are also elegiac about the past, and Hamm loves "the old questions" and "the old answers."

f) reification, whereby "Everything becomes a commodity. All objects and people turn into goods for sale. Relationships between people are reduced to their exchange value, while the circulation of commodities becomes an independent force behind the backs and above the heads of human beings."[98] This reification process is what drives Pozzo to sell Lucky. On the other hand, Winnie's constant emphasis on commodities--her toothbrush, her lipstick, her nailfile, her mirror, etc.--is one of the alienating factors which lead to her involuted devolution. Characteristically, the end-result is the gradual burial of the human being and the survival of objects: Winnie goes down into the mound but her bag of shopping variety remains, though the objects themselves are hidden, as was mentioned earlier. Furthermore, it should be noted that Willie's castration is, among other things, subtly associated with a consumptive item: the toothbrush. It is after reading on the toothbrush that it was made of "hog's setae" (p. 18) that Winnie asks Willie: "what is a hog?"

g) antagonism. All affective states have been abolished in Beckett. Hamm, Pozzo and Winnie in her own way, antagonize the other

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[98] Erika Munk, ed., Brecht (New York: Bantam Books Inc., 1972), p. 6. The quotation is taken from Ernst Bloch's essay "Entfremdung, Verfremdung: Alienation, Estrangement," in which Bloch analyses the origin and the various modalities of the terms.

characters.

h) lack of identification with a structure that can elicit significant responses within the characters.

The problem presented in Beckett is, in its elaboration, and as we have seen, incurable. The characters' condition is irremediable. This ideology strikes one as singularly and quite morbidly pessimistic. However, this lack of any alternative solution can be explained easily. It resides in the fact that although the problem presented in the three plays--the impossibility of situating the characters within a structure of correspondences--is largely of social character, Beckett persists in dealing with it on the metaphysical or on the religious level. His dramas are, recognizably, accurate and probing descriptions of certain alienated social situations of the twentieth century, as was pointed out in the thesis. Yet, these alienated situations are not dealt with on their own terms. They are, instead, always connected with the old medieval God. The breakdown of cultural certainties expressed in Lucky's speech is directly related to, and seems to stem out of the lost belief in that "personal God quaquaquaqua" whom he reproaches for his indifference and insensibility. The salvational figure of Waiting for Godot, Godot, is conceived in the image of a traditional Messiah, and one cannot avoid making a connection between the names of God and Godot. In Endgame, God is cursed for not being there to provide

a solution. Order belongs to a time when it was still possible to believe in this God. The religious issue is still there in Happy Days.

Being so associated with the religious dimension, the alienated social problems presented by the characters cannot produce a solution. Helpless deploring of a diseased situation and mere nostalgia for an old religious hierarchical order of being, where everything was "in its last place," as Clov would put it, and which Beckett obviously does not believe in, can only fail utterly when confronted with the social problems of the twentieth century. Darko Suvin was right when he wrote that, in Beckett, "Time, as well as Space," are "made diffuse by an Individualist absence of world-view, or by a presence of a wholly Nihilistic world-view."[99] It was pointed out earlier in this conclusion that this absence of world-view was reflected in the abstraction of the stage setting. Beckett's ideology belongs to a strictly individualistic kind of Western sensibility that has developed with the secular consciousness, after the breakdown of the medieval world picture. Therefore, to state that Beckett presents a view of the modern human condition in general, would be a passionate exaggeration. It would be absurd to maintain that his plays mirror the condition of the Maoist Chinese, for example.

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[99] Darko Suvin, "On Individualist World-View in Drama," op. cit., p. 10.

In the final analysis, it remains an undeniable fact that Beckett is still, at this point in history , a literary phenomenon. Waiting for Godot is probably one of the greatest dramatic works of the first sixty years of the twentieth century, for the perfection of its artistic balance, its aesthetic logic, its ideological wealth, and the importance of the problem it poses: that of the need for existential justification in the chaos of uncertain values. The play has been translated into over twelve languages, "has been performed in little theaters and large theaters, by amateurs and professionals, on radio and television. Less than two decades after the play was written," it "has sold nearly 50,000 copies in the original French, and nearly 350,000 copies in Beckett's own English translation . . . Paradoxically for our time, Waiting for Godot is a classic that sells well."[100] Furthermore, Happy Days is another artistic masterpiece: this point was made clear in the chapter devoted to it. On the other hand, though Endgame is an uncontested tour de force, one can detect in it serious flaws: the episode of the small boy as it appears in the final draft of the play is an obvious indication of these. No sooner is it evoked than it is dropped. Yet, the weakness is not in its being dropped as soon as it is evoked, for this is not only acceptable but imperative where it fulfils a function. The weakness is in discarding, immediately after evoking it,

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[100]Ruby Cohn, ed., Casebook on Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 7.

so important an issue--that of a possible human solution within the context of the Endgame absolute moribundity. Although the choice of a boy rather than of a girl is suitable and plausible in the Beckettian design, still the fact of bringing about such a momentous alternative and of dissipating it quite arbitrarily, seems irrational. The argument that what Beckett wanted to indicate by the introduction of this episode was that he rejected any easy solution, remains unconvincing. If the boy exists, then the solution also exists, and if the boy does not exist, then the solution does not exist either. It appears therefore singularly arbitrary to evoke a solution, i.e., to recognize and acknowledge the possibility of its existence, and then to discard it immediately. Does Beckett mean that any solution has to be discarded? The point is not clear, nor is there an integral function for this episode as it is presented in the play. It neither adds nor subtracts from the theme.

Yet, and in spite of his totally negative world-view, Beckett is paramountly relevant as a warning. The need for meaningful existential justification in the chaos of uncertain values and powerlessness before a debilitating system (Waiting for Godot); the reduction to zero of a world devoid of solidaristic order (Endgame), and cosmic degradation and devolution in an unfavourable environment (Happy Days), remain issues of primordial importance at this particular time in history in the West.

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