Cumhuriyet University Graduate School of Social Sciences
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POSTMODERN ABSURDITY: METAFICTION IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S *WAITING FOR GODOT*, *HAPPY DAYS* AND *ENDGAME*

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Under the Supervision of
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ÖZET

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Bu tezde Samuel Beckett'in *Godot'yu beklerken, Mutlu Günler* ve *Son Oyun* adlı oyunları, kurgu ve gerçeklik arasındaki ilişkiyi sorgulayan ve kurgusal yapılarını öne çıkartan ve genelde ironi ve özdüşünümden yararlanan üst-kurmacasal metinler olarak incelenecektir. Absürd tiyatro geleneğinin merkezinde yer alan Beckett oyunları, etrafındaki kaosta hayat için mücadele veren insanın acınacak halini anlatmaktadır. Beckett oyunlarının karakteristiği olan bu durum, Beckett'in yaşadığı kültürel, sosyal, politik ve postmodernitenin ortaya çıktığı bağlam beraberinde, geleneksel kurgunun esas olduğu naturalist dramanın sınırlarının yıkıldığı yeni bir yazın tarzını karşımıza çıkarmaktadır. Beckett'in oyunları ve özellikle de burada ele alınacak olanlar belli bir kurgudan uzaktır ve aksiyon neredeyse yok denecek düzeydedir. Yani, bir ilerleme gerçekleşmemektedir. Oyunlar çoğu zaman oyun içinde oyundur ve insanın hali gülünç bir şekilde oyunlara yansımaktadır. Üst kurmaca ya da bilinçli kurgu adı verilen bu tarz üç oyunda da vardır ve artık bir şey ifade etme yeteneğini yitirmiş ve anlamsız olan dilin geçerliliğini ve iletişim gücünü sorgulamaktadır. Nasıl ki bir ressam hayallerini renklere döküyorsa, Beckett da imgesel durumları sembolik dile dönüştürmektedir. İzleyici ya da okuyucu, yazarın dünyasına bir gözlemci olarak girer. Beckett'in oyunları da edebi sanatı görsellikle oyun formatında birleştiren ve yazarın kendi deneyimlerinin de içeren çok boyutlu tiyatral resimler gibidir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Absürd tiyatro, Samuel Beckett, üst kurmaca, postmodernite, kurgu

ABSTRACT

This thesis will analyze Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot, Happy Days* and *Endgame* as metafictional plays which draw attention to their status as artifacts in posing questions about the relationship between fiction and reality, usually using irony and self-reflection. Placed in the center of the Theatre of the Absurd, Beckett's plays mainly indicate the poor situation of man who struggles for a living amidst the chaos surrounding him. This being the outstanding characteristic of Beckettian plays and considering the cultural, social and political context in which Beckett lived and the postmodernity arose, we encounter a writing style that has torn the boundaries of naturalist drama in which the conventional plot is the essence. Instead Beckettian plays and particularly the ones that will be handled here are far from a certain plot and imply paralyzed action. That is, there is no clear progress. They are most of the time plays within plays, parodying the human situation. This style, named as metafiction or self-conscious fiction pervades in all three plays here and is used as a device to investigate the validity and communicative power of human language which has lost the ability to signify and is void. In the same way a painter transforms his visions into colorful spots, he transforms his mind into the symbolic language of an imaginary life situation. The reader or the on-looker gets directly into the center of the author's world as an observer. Beckett's plays are like multidimensional theatrical pictures connecting literary art with visual ones giving us, through the form of play, evidence about the author's personal experience.

Key Words: The Theatre of the Absurd, Samuel Beckett, metafiction, postmodernity, fiction

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INTRODUCTION

> Since I've started thinking about this story, I've gotten boils, piles, eye strain, stomach spasms, anxiety attacks. Finally I am consumed by the thought that at a certain point we all become nothing more than dying animals. (Ronald Sukenick, *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories*, 49)

Though a generation has passed after his death, Beckett still remains one of the biggest writers of twentieth century prose and drama. Having a reputation for obscurity and difficulty, he is also one of the last century's most potent dramatists. For those who know Beckett even a little, the word "Beckettian" evokes a bleak vision of life subtly mixed with black humor as in the case of two people on a bare stage waiting desperately for nothing and a legless old couple looking out of dustbins. Actually, part of the reason as to why images created by Beckett have survived also in the popular culture is surely on account of his unique influence on post-war drama. Maybe, what makes him unique in this sense is the simple visual dimension of Beckettian drama. All his plays simply mean what they say. Moreover, Beckett's silence feeds the mystery and aura that surrounds him, rigidifying his image as the saintly artist and unspoiled by the business of self-explication.

Unquestionably, there are a number of specific problems handling Beckett's fiction and particularly his dramas for the first time. Though it is generally easy to understand his vision, it is sometimes hard to difficult to catch the tone of voice and bring vision and tone together. This case is particularly true if we perceive his works as wholes rather than fragmentary pieces. The plots and patterns of speech in his writings, in novels and dramas, are not easy to paraphrase, though they seem to be simple and from daily life.

> It is customary to think of 'difficulty' or 'obscurity' as being all about what we do not know. But Beckett proves that the experience of difficulty can come from simplicity as well as from complexity. He thwarts expectations not by bombarding us with new information, but by dispensing with familiarity, shattering assumptions and abandoning theatrical conventions. If the plays are, in general, more accessible than much of the prose, it is not just because of their concrete presence, their stark images that communicate viscerally, before the intellect has time to gauge their significance or

> meaning. It is also because of this radical and alienating simplicity. (McDonald 4)

Therefore, in order to get through the world of Beckett, we need a method that combines the story and the meaning. But before all, as fiction is built upon language above all, reading Beckett generally becomes a task of assessing the very dynamics of the language he uses, rather than simply analyzing the plots, characters or seeking biographical allusions. As Martin Esslin points out, the plays in the *Theater of the Absurd* often have no story to tell, no plot but instead present a series of linked images that depict humanity standing still in a hostile universe (403). His characters often lack adequate development, and their "motives and actions remain largely incomprehensible" to the audience (404, 411). With attention to plot and character devalued, Esslin claims, "the poetical element" or the emphasis that the plays are just fiction moves to the foreground (404).

By his use of a number of puzzling devices, Beckett has gradually accustomed the audience to a new kind of relationship between theme and presentation. In these seemingly weird and fantastic plays, the external world is full of threats and is largely unknown; the settings and situations often make us vaguely restless. The world is incoherent and frightening, but at the same time, it seems amazingly poetic and familiar just as the language itself is.

The German philosopher Cassirer writes that "language 'harbours the curse of mediacy, and is bound to conceal what it seeks to reveal (163). Another philosopher, Mauthner from whose work Beckett read aloud to the blind Joyce before the 1930s touched upon the epistemological implications of the curse of language.

> If the 'I' -- consciousness, if individuality, is seen to be but deception, then the very ground whereon we stand trembles and our last hope for even a trace of world knowledge collapses. . . . The subject disappears behind an object and we no longer detect any difference between the philosophic endeavour of eons of humanity and the dream existence of an amoeba. Even the concept of individuality has become verbal abstraction without representational content. . . . Then there is nothing but words in the 'I'. (qtd. in Cassirer 163)

Actually, in today's modern world we do not even need a learned authority to confirm the peculiar obsession with the inaccuracy of language as an instrument; it is designed and exists to express things and ideas, however refutes to do so. The deepest sentences cannot be communicated. Here is the point of realization where Beckett's all work sprang up. Pilling argues that this realization has two prongs: rage that things should be so, and resigned acceptance that things must be so. Between these two poles, passing through a number of intermediate zones, the narrator, Beckett's alter ego, his representative in the work, oscillates (25).

> One cannot speak anymore of being, one must speak only of the mess. When Heidegger and Sartre speak of a contrast between being and existence, they may be right. I don't know, but their language is too philosophical for me. I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that now is simply the mess. . . . [It] invades our experience at every moment. It is there and it must be allowed [into art]. . . .What I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be a new form and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else. The form and the chaos remain separate. . . . That is why the form itself becomes a preoccupation, because it exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates. To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now. (qtd in Graver and Federman 219)

According to Beckett, silence is somehow the main substance of the universe; it is so much embedded into it. Even, silence is eternal, with no beginning and end and independent from the human being. Every word that is said or uttered is impertinence, a needless and futile attempt in a state in which nothing is understood. Now that language is a system doomed to failure, it is quite expected that the human need for order is a matter of despair.

When nothing is stable and things make no sense, the answer to the problem must be what the mind and senses repeatedly think and feel. Let's perceive the universe as a kind of vacuum in which incidents occasionally happen. However, these are so rare that it is almost impossible to relate one to another in a satisfying way. The sense we have is that as if time has been lengthened and events we accept as important happen rather infrequently, and this throws emphasis on events of lesser importance. And, when one unfolds his defiantly held opinions, a relief somehow occurs. In this context, repetition provides us with a consolation.

Beckettian fiction actually does this. Each one starts as new, constructs its rules as it proceeds. A language of repeated words and silence are created by the narrating voice. So, how come can language and silence come together and express things? Beckett is preoccupied with this dilemma in almost all of his writings. As an avant-garde writer, Beckett was vexed due to the fact that there is a signification accompanying the words which he in fact wanted to use abstractly. How can the artist then express the meaninglessness with words which somehow have a meaning in a world where meaning does not exist and which may mean something else each time. In all his life, Beckett battled with words that led him to amazing innovations in form and language. Nothing seemed to satisfy him as the words continued to signify a meaning. Therefore, his fictions are accounts of his fight to subvert language so that silence could make its presence felt.

> The only possible spiritual development is in the sense of depth. The artistic tendency is not expansive, but a contraction. And art is the apotheosis of solitude. There is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication. . . . The only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent. The artist is active, but negatively, shrinking from the nullity of extracircumferential phenomena, drawn into the core of the eddy (Esslin 34).

Above all, Beckett abstains from putting his action into a historical setting. In traditional context, drama founds a world in which there is huge reference to objective reality. An important aspect of dramatic performance is that it provides the spectators with some event they can recognize and identify in connection with the practical aspects of life. Whenever they see a performance, they find themselves thrown into a new world which is a mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar and unknown.

The familiar is like a threshold through which they look into the strange and unknown. In the drama of mimetic objective realism, the ratio of the familiar is the highest. However, this ratio is minimum in the drama portraying the abstract phenomena occurring in the unconscious. Trying to abstain from the simple signification the words and the actions have, Beckett depicts life as strange, mysterious, and beyond rational explanation.

In the performance of Beckett's work, it is hard for the spectators to enjoy themselves because of the strangeness of the performance on the stage. In Beckett's work, the familiar is so much reduced that the strange dominates the action and this seriously modifies the function of the familiar in the process of signification. Drama is concerned with life and death to be represented in such artistic genres as tragedy and comedy. In other words, drama is the ritualized form of 'life' and 'death' with a view to familiarizing the fearful reality of existence. The spectators enjoy the spirit of 'game' or 'play' from the stage performance which imitates the action of man.

In Beckett's drama it is not hard for us to experience the spirit of 'play' or 'game'. Beckett tears off the veil of familiarized ritual from dramatic art and he reduces the familiar to a minimum in his work, implying that the performance is not dependent on the so called reality. In traditional drama there is stylized action, which makes it difficult for the spectators confront bare existence. It induces them to ignore it. In order to deal with the question of bare existence as such, Beckett depicts man in the state of being nothing and doing nothing without superimposing conventional narrative structure on the action.

There is a collection of disjointed, disjunctive images in the Beckettian scene which do not make up a coherent picture of life. This collection is like a sparse mosaic with unfilled gaps between the pieces drifting around like islands in the ocean. The characters, their world, and the objects do not hang together to form a homogeneous whole but act each independently in his/her/its own way. In the Beckettian world nothing remains in a fixed position. Everything is in constant flux in a constantly shifting field. It is impossible to escape from the fluctuations in time which prevent one from perceiving a stable self and establish awareness of one's self. One has to change the viewpoint constantly, which makes it impossible to stay still long enough to keep a stable identity from one moment to another. From this moving viewpoint, it becomes difficult for the observer to measure the object which is also constantly moving. The very notions of observer, the observed, and observation become imprecise and unreliable. In Beckett's universe, the principles of conventional theater, such as the illusion of objective reality and the "always the

present" (Szondi 9) internal time implied by the three unities, cannot be sustained as valid. The "movement in Beckett's plays is nearly always a succession of still points or a cyclic recurrence of verbal occasions" (Kennedy 131).

I. GENERAL BACKGROUND

I.I. BECKETT'S LIFE AND THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

Beckett is one of the most innovative and difficult writers of the twentieth century. Thanks to photographs of him in his later years, with his deep wrinkles and bold gaze, he is also one of the most iconic 'The Twentieth Century Artist', someone writing in a bleak era, an age when life driving forces were deemed to have burnt out. Beckett is often considered the supreme embodiment of the 'existentialist' artist, that is, a writer whose plays, such as his most famous work *Waiting for Godot* (1953), and fiction seem to dramatize the concerns deemed central to the philosophies associated with the existentialist tradition in philosophy which tended to face existence without resorting to accepted judgments of right or wrong.

Though we cannot find absolute distinctions between his life and works, his works mean far in excess of their biographical and contextual annotations. He was born on 13 April 1906, being the second son of William Frank Beckett. His wife Maria was a renowned Protestant in the wealthy village of Foxcrock, which was eight miles south of Dublin. But according to Dr Geoffrey Thomson, the key to understanding Beckett at best could be found in his relationship with his mother (Knowlson 178). She both loved Beckett and was dominant on him, besides being attentive and strict. This mixed relationship of love and hatred together caused intense feelings in Beckett such as anxiety and guilt. Actually, his decision to live in France permanently can be evaluated as his escape from both his mother and motherland. Even though Beckett himself asserts that he has no religious feelings and desperate about God, which is the utmost effect of the post-war period, it is known from his acknowledgements that his mother was deeply religious (qtd. in Graver and Federman 220). Therefore, it can be alleged that several biblical allusions in his work partially stem from this influence. When asked to describe his childhood, he said "Uneventful. You might say I had a happy childhood . . . although I had little talent for happiness. My parents did everything that they could to make a child happy. But I was often lonely."(Bair 14). Loneliness, solitude, enstrangement so would become the main themes of his work.

Taking into account that he was a member of the Irish Protestant minority in a Catholic country, Beckett was right in feeling himself an "outsider", which triggered his later emphasis on dislocated conditions. One of the Anglo-Irish critics, Vivian Mercier puts finger on the similarity between his life and that of Beckett by saying:

> The typical Anglo-Irish boy . . . learns that he is not quite Irish almost before he can talk; later he learns that he is far from being English either. The pressure on him to become either wholly English or wholly Irish can erase segments of his individuality for good and all. 'Who am I?' is the question that every Anglo-Irishman must answer, even if it takes him a lifetime as it did Yeats. (26)

From his childhood on, Beckett went through extraordinary times. He witnessed the rise of militant Irish nationalism and then War of Independence and Civil War. During the thirties, he was in Germany when the Nazi power was consolidating there and then in France during the occupation where he became a part of the Resistance. However, until the Second World War, Beckett was somehow displaced from this kind of times. Beckett and his father's image on a hill, which is miles away from Dublin, watching the flames rise during the Easter Rising of 1916 can be regarded as a metaphor of his involvement with Irish politics at that time. Andrew Kennedy claims that the boy and the young man were not 'subjected to the turmoil of war and revolution' and that 'it is the orderliness and the sheltered ''old style'' gentility of a pre-First World War childhood, at the relatively quiet edge of the Western world, that strikes one' (4).

When Beckett became a writer, it was easy for him to conform to the trend of cosmopolitan modernism which seemed to reject politically motivated art or cultural nationalism. His contemptuous stance towards the aims of the Irish Revivalists may be thought to have stemmed from the political immunity of his middle-class family background. Knowing that Beckett was brought up lovingly and comfortably and far from heavy turmoil, it would not be right to seek the causes of his misery and pessimism in his childhood. Rather, the world and the existence itself are the causes which Beckett deems as responsible for his despair. So, if the roots of this despair cannot be traced back to any political or social event in his childhood or teenage years, the solutions cannot also be political or social.

Beckett's fiction is regarded as postmodernist. First of all, his writings are really distinctive by being so different from what preceded them. The way Beckett's fiction deals with the problem of how language and the world we live in interact distinguishes him as a postmodernist writer who is concerned with the process of constructing his texts rather than telling a story or mounting any kind of social critique. This is a clear example for the use of metafiction. However, while Beckett's writing is continually very witty and funny, it is even distinguished in itself and different from the kind of writing usually classified as postmodern metafiction. Actually, his prose writing is dedicated to the idea of upholding the notion that fiction is not 'about' anything, does not 'refer' to anything outside itself.

> Certainly writing for Beckett always 'is itself and not 'about something' in the sense of a subject that can be separated out - as an independent statement, action or narrative – from the way it is expressed in words within a re-created form or genre. On this point Beckett was in tune not only with Joyce, but with the various symbolist theories of poetic language, notably Mallarme's 'Crise de vers' (1886-95). Such a post-symbolist idea of language is opposed not only to the vulgarly materialistic language of commerce, journalism and ape-like chattering, but ultimately to representational language - versions of the view that language mirrors the world (mimesis). The contrary concept holds that in poetic or fictional writing (both words used, across the various genres, to signify imaginative writing), language functions in a self-mirroring and self-authenticating way. The act of writing is then primarily a re-working, a re-creation, of words for images and sounds, as the painter works with shapes and colours and the composer with sounds (It is again possible to object that language is different: resisting full abstraction and not to be severed from the human, personal and social world, the outward pointing connotations that our words, phrases, and even our syntax and punctuation carry.). (Kennedy 27)

Particularly, the reason as to why Beckett dealt so much with existence is that he wanted to reflect the peculiar meaningless of being. However, the very paradox lies in the fact that he must do this through language, which according to him is endlessly meaningful. A sentence uttered at some time at some place may mean something else at other places and times. Language has the capacity to deliver infinite meanings. So, in Beckett's writings we see a writer who has burdened himself with the impossible task of conveying meaninglessness through meaning, of trying to convey nothingness through something, or silence through words.

Towards the close of his life, Beckett gradually started to lose mobility and it started to be difficult and later absolutely impossible for him to walk. In 1989, six months after the death of Suzanne, Samuel Beckett, on December 12, at the age of 83 went off. Beckett expressed his attitude to his literary writing in these words: "All this business of a labor to accomplish before I can end the words to say; "a truth to recover in order to say it before I can handle an imposed task, once known, king, done with listening, I invented it all in a hope that it will console me, long neglected, finally forgotten; to perform, before I can be done, done with me to go on, allow me to think of myself as someone on the road moving between a beginning and an end, gaining ground, losing ground, getting lost, but somehow in the long run making headway, all lies, I've nothing to do, say nothing in particular, I have to speak whatever that means." (qtd. in http://www.samuel-beckett.net/N&B.HTM#0)

I.I.I. CONTEXT FOR THE PLAYS

Because of subverting the notions of classical realist drama, Beckett's plays were once regarded as anti-plays. However, we can still notice the inherently dramatic structure in which popular and dramatic conventions are constantly used and yet transformed. Beckett's plays have vividly concrete theatre images and figures such as the entrance of whip-cracking Pozzo leading Lucky in harness. Starting with *Waiting for Godot* Beckett's plays have become his most accessible works. *Godot* was written in French in 1948 in a relatively short period of creativity. However, it was brought to fame only by the New York and London productions of 1954 and 1955. However, *Happy Days*, the last of the full length plays was first performed in 1961. In all these plays, Beckett was actually creating a new kind of theatre that embraced all the elements of the theatre such as stage metaphors, characters, dialogue and visual and sound effects.

The voices of reclusive/isolated soliloquisers are so vivid and the dynamics of the stage are used differently from what we have become accustomed to. Beckett's drama has indeed changed our very idea of the 'dramatic' and what is possible within the limits of dramatic performance. A timeless or circular structure of action has entered within the spectrum of dramatic forms instead of the generally encountered

plot centered version in which there is unity of time, place and action. A dialogue which veers around itself has made us attentive to the moment-by-moment effect of words (and silences) within the play structure which does not abide by a structure. To sum up, a new type of poetic drama in prose has been presented by Beckett. This is an achievement that the dramatic works of major poets have not been able to reach in several respects. Though they have major influence on Beckett, most of the symbolist and expressionist plays of the first half of the twentieth century remained behind Beckett.

All these radical innovations in dramatic forms did not emerge all at once. There is surely the effect of earlier types of modern drama. Beckett fortunately had the chance to see a wide variety of the key plays of the Irish dramatic movement as well as the music hall, melodrama and the silent cinema.

> In addition, he was familiar with Maeterlinck who was widely admired at the turn of the century in part for his experiments with silence and unspoken dialogue in plays such as *The Intruder*. His play *The Sightless* (*Les Aveugles*, 1890) is one of a number of his works which prefigure many of Beckett's theatrical obsessions. Inaction (or hidden action), a strong sense of the unknown, oppressive silence and a sense of impending extinction, predominate. Maeterlinck also leads the way for those (like Beckett) who would use the stage to bring a tragic attitude to bear on the mysteries of everyday life, in the conviction that "the essential doesn't change". (Ashley 93)

Beckett was also effected partially by the fever of innovation from the avant-garde movements of the interwar period such as the expressionists, surrealists and the dadaists. However, he never became a true advocate of these trends. The matter was a general tendency to artistic experimentation that moved from being photographic towards the radiographic.

> The new Irish drama of Synge and Yeats offered significant images and obsessions - as well as verbal experiments – which are echoed in Beckett's drama. Synge's The Well of the Saints (1905) presents a mutually dependent blind couple awaiting a cure that is to lead to disappointment, to seeing an ugly world (a situational affinity with Godot). Moreover, Synge tried to forge a poetic Anglo-Irish prose dialogue (against the 'pallid' language of Ibsen) - an aim inherited by Beckett, though he avoids Synge's sometimes ostentatiously local Irish English. Yeats's lyric mode is present in Beckett's theatre, partly through quotation (for instance, Winnie quoting in Happy Days, 'I call to the eye of the mind' . . . from Yeats's play At the Hawk's Well), or through the formal and spiritual traces of the Japanese Noh play mediated by Yeats. Beckett may have been haunted by the spirit

> but not by the spiritualism of Yeats, though the voices crying from limbo in Play sound ghostly. (Kennedy 21)

The importance of all these elements lie in a deliberate and conscious effort to return to the theatre as theater. For instance, the stage is without many props and the space is empty most of time. Beckett never strives much to create the illusion of reality. He continuously wants to show the audience that what is staged is nothing more than fiction. The play unfolds is fictionality and the world in it is self-mirroring and self-reflexive. Focusing repeatedly on these patterns in Beckettian drama, I will try to touch upon the cyclic and circular pattern of the plays in which action does not progress much and nothing takes its course. The uncertainties, the non-resolutions, waiting for the end to come, the gaps and impasses accompanied with nonsense, incomprehensible language solidify the metafictional or the metatheatrical aspect of his plays.

I.I.II. THE CULTURAL CONTEXT FOR THE PLAYS

Since Beckett had chosen to live on his own, it is a little bit ironical to talk about his presence as the leading non-realist Western writer of the second half of the twenty first century. The narrators of his novels and the protagonists of his plays are generally soliloquisers, speaking on their own, notwithstanding what the addressee is saying. Beckett's this position as an obscure avant-garde writer transformed him into a world figure with his play *Waiting for Godot.* Gradually more elusive plays and novels came into being and they attracted worldwide attention.

There was an overall unity in Beckett's works. That was exactly the vision of diminishing human faculties which were characterized by a tragicomic falling and failing. The roots of such a style stretch back to the great fertile phase of modernism in the twenties when there was a total commitment to create art. In addition to this commitment, total skepticism about the possibility of communication and expression accompanied Beckett's later work.

In all modernist writing, language is regarded as the central power and both a creative and destructive element that makes up or devastates the world and the self. In this sense, Beckett's deep pessimism and spiritual hopelessness, religious symbols

used unconnected to a structure of belief, the perpetual assertion of nothingness come out of a world of feelings that is so close to that of Joyce, early Eliot and Kafka.

We also need to mention particularly Beckett's relationship with Joyce because it was more than disciple-master relationship. The relationship was in many ways symbiotic. They had almost the same cultural background and both were interested in fictional and verbal patterns as well as drinking. The first time Beckett met Joyce in Paris was while Joyce was working on his experimental novel *Finnegans Wake.* What remained from Joyce to Beckett is the search for new and extreme positions in writing. The impact of revolutionary changes such as expressionism, surrealism in writing, drawing, architecture and other visual arts on Beckett should be mentioned while talking about Beckett's dramas. Beckett was highly affected by non-representational and abstract forms of expression.

> In a way, Beckett's writing is the counterpart of the abstract visual art of the painter Mark Rothko, who exemplifies Susan Sontag's new postmodern sensibility in art (summarized in the previous chapter), and whose paintings defy any viewer to say plausibly what they are 'about' other than what the title tells us. Beckett's prose does something equivalent, though of course language cannot be as abstract as colour and his fiction still features peoples, places, and situations which can be taken as corresponding to those in the outside world. Nevertheless his prose writing is dedicated to the idea of upholding the notion that fiction is not 'about' anything, does not 'refer' to anything outside itself. (Nicol 53)

However, it should be kept in mind that Beckett was not a painter and he was dealing with words, not images. Still, according to Kennedy certain specific images of avant-garde art, the woman buried in sand in Dali's surrealist film *Le Chien Andalou* may be seen behind the dominant stage image of *Happy Days.*(9)

Beckett's awareness of suffering and the feeling of uncertainty suddenly became deeper due to the Second World War. After the devastating effect of the war, language was an instable medium to convey meaning for Beckett. This was a common experience among the survivors of the war. Actually, Beckett was somehow far from the turmoil of war because he stayed in France in the post-war period.

In Beckett's writing there are not direct references to the war but there is the imagery of a corpsed world in which everything is gray and there is no light.

Therefore, we may assume that Beckett's work gains some of its power from the dark experiences of the war.

After the war, Sartre's existentialism, which is a vision of the world that sees itself thrown into life without definition, purpose or essence, dominated the French thought. This philosophy implies the total alienation of each person or the nothingness of the self. Such ideas surely have some relevance to Beckett's style and probably created a cultural aura for the reception of his post-war works. But still, Beckett's background was actually so much ready to lose belief in the world or to understand that it was void to seek for meaning.

> I think the direct influence of existentialist thought on Beckett has been exaggerated. One might as well argue that Beckett did not need the 'French' versions of existentialism, for he had a version of his own already, made up of a deeply felt sense of loss- in a world where God is absent - and of a medley of philosophical ideas domesticated in his youth. From Descartes came the isolated and solitary self-thinking, 'I think, therefore I am', starting from a new, anxiously skeptical probing of rationality; from the Irish bishop Berkeley came the tragicomic notion that if God does not see me, if nobody sees me, I may not exist; and from Schopenhauer came the vision, akin to Buddhism, that the desiring self does not exist in any 'real' sense, except through suffering the painful consequences of wilful self-assertion. These and related ideas, filtered through a questioning yet deeply and obsessive feeling temperament, are quite enough 'philosophy' for a writer who is, in any case, not primarily philosophical. Beckett is not presenting ideas but constantly transmuting his own idiosyncratic versions of received ideas into vision - like Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, above all in Purgatory. But, unlike Dante, Beckett has no system of belief; on the contrary, his novels and plays are written *against* any system. (Kennedy 10)

Besides this philosophical perspective that had a nihilist attitude towards existence, Beckett constantly felt the need to refresh his language. He uttered these sentences in defense of Joyce's experimental and punning language in *Finnegans Wake:*

> Here form *is* content, content *is* form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read - or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself.* (qtd. in Perloff 213)

Reading this quotation, we understand that Beckett implicitly tells us his aim as a writer. Certainly for Beckett, writing is always for itself and not about something such as a subject that can be taken out. Here is the point where Beckett's close affinity to metafictional writing can be overtly seen. On this point, Beckett had

a close similarity to not only Joyce but also the various symbolist theories of poetic language. Such a post-symbolist idea of writing is surely against the materialistic language and representational language which defend that language mirrors the world (mimesis).

However, in metafictional writing the view is that language functions in a self-mirroring and self-authenticating way. Then, the act of writing is essentially a reworking, a recreation of words for images and sounds just as the composer reworks for sounds. A tremendous concern for modes of being and suffering is the force that drives his experiments in writing. In the long essay *Proust* (1931) which argues as strongly against realist or photographic literature as the essay on Joyce, Beckett writes:

> For Proust, as for the painter, style is more a question of vision than of technique. Proust does not share the superstition that form is nothing and content everything, nor that the ideal literary masterpiece could only be communicated in a series of absolute and monosyllabic propositions. For Proust the quality of language is more important than any system of ethics or aesthetics. Indeed he makes no attempt to dissociate form from content. The one is a concretion of the other, the revelation of a world. (qtd. in Rogers 47)

Beckett reminds his readers that fiction does not, even if it pretends to, refer to some outside reality or signify anything at all, but inside to its own imagined world. Perhaps this is the most interesting effect of his work: it focuses the reader's attention on the text as a fictional entity. In other words, that is, specifically how to read the challenging fiction they produce, but also how and why we read all fiction.

II.THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

The theater of the absurd dates from the mid 1950s when Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* was first written and produced. Though Martin Esslin links the beginnings of absurd theatre with the 1957 production of the play at San Quentin, Ruby Cohn notes that 1950 was a more realistic date, on account of the fact that plays by both Adamov and Ionesco opened in Paris that year (1-2). Absurdist playwrights, who were tired of the limitations of the realistic theatre, invented "non-realistic, expressionistic forms" when they saw that the conventions of realism depending on scientific truth could not represent life and meaning (Shank 240). They were surely not the first dramatists to seek alternatives to traditional theatre, their methods were more extreme.

> Writers like Beckett and Ionesco, as different as they are from one another, had come to feel the historic procedures of the stage as restrictions: its need to be immediately 'lifelike', its reliance on narrative, its unfolding through sequential cause and effect, its principles of necessary 'conflict', 'denoument' and the like, and its penchant for moral, psychological or social explanations or solutions (Gilman 6D).

The absurdists tried to get away from conventional notions of plot and character development. Though alienation and disillusionment were among the common themes following World War II, they illustrated then confusion and despair of modern life in their new dramas (Esslin 25). There are minimal plot lines and actions seem to go nowhere. Their goal is to discover how to organize a play without using the timeworn conventions of a previously agreed upon logical system (Brater 294). Language is subverted and there is often difference between the action the audience sees and the language, solidifying the metafictional aspect particularly in Beckett. A pattern of poetic images are presented instead of the straight plot development of the well-made play. While some are full length plays, many can be presented in fewer than thirty minutes, and their themes, the impossibility of communicating with others, loss of identity, and the "incrusting effects of conformity" are often repeated (Kerr 37).

Martin Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd* still remains the most complete discussion of the absurd. His original list of playwrights included Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov and Genet and he added Pinter to this list. He points out that several traditional elements appear in absurd plays but they appear in "new and individually varied combinations"(328):

> "Pure" theatre; i.e. abstract scenic effects as they are familiar in the circus or revue, in the work of jugglers, acrobats bullfighters, or mimes.
>
> Clowning, fooling, and mad scenes
>
> Verbal nonsense
>
> The literature of dream and fantasy, which often has a strong allegorical component. (328)

Many critics assumed that the impact of *The Theatre of the Absurd* would not be long lasting. However, these plays have had a dramatic effect on determining the standards for would-be playwrights. As Enoch Brater explains, " For what the absurdists gave us finally was nothing less than an unhibited attitude concerning how a play might be written as well as how it might be produced (299). It surely opened the boundaries of dramatic style. Benjamin Bennett also affirms this widening of stylistic possibilities:

> Absurd drama unveils a stylistic scene for drama that is virtually unbounded and without internal order, hence not really a scene at all. If style, as the needful mediation between genre and meaning, is in decay, then the absurd explodes style altogether, in order to display the consequences of that state of affairs. (142)

According to Brater, the biggest impact of the absurd may be on those plays that we would normally perceive and place in the "well-made" play tradition, such as those by Pinter, Shepard and Mamet, "works that still pay reluctant tribute to the well made play within the realistic illusion of looking through a fourth wall"(295-296).

The Theater of the Absurd movement has both influenced the dramatic freedom of playwrights and also reassess the work of other dramatists in light of the absurd. Since the fifties, we have become so conditioned to the devices of the absurd

that we have come to expect them in what is written then onwards. Beckett is particularly important in this sense because he has been much effective in creating the devices of absurd writing.

> The plotless play, the use of discontinuous dialogue, the set empty but filled with mysterious suggestion, the denouement that never comes, the effects of silence and the tension that builds in a pause, the sheer theatricality held by the actor's voice in extended monologue, or the dramatic opportunity that lies in standing stock-still, have become so characteristic of our theater that we hardly notice them at all. (Brater 295)

II.I. THE LANGUAGE OF THE ABSURD

There is failed communication in almost all playwrights of the absurd. We live in a world where language is used to give double messages through advertising and political rhetoric, for instance, we are well aware that language can be used both to reveal and conceal (Esslin 409). The failure of communication in the Theater of the Absurd is actually a reflection of our mass communication age. Faith in language and its ability to convey meaning is lost and therefore communication is either impossible or with dramatic deficits. Ever since the book's publication, 'absurd' has become a label to attach to any dramatic work whose characters are not fluent enough or who express dissatisfaction about the communicative efficacy of language.

> That is why communication between human beings is so often shown in a state of breakdown in the Theatre of the Absurd. It is merely a satirical magnification of the existing state of affairs. Language has run riot in an age of mass communication. It must be reduced to its proper function—the expression of authentic content, rather than its concealment. But this will be possible only if possible only man's reverence toward the spoken or written word as a means of communication is restored, and the ossified clichés that dominate thought(as they do in the limericks of Edward Lear or the world of Humpty Dumpty) are replaced by a living language that serves it. (Esslin 409-10).

Most of the time the language of individual dramatists are referred to when critics comment on the language of the absurd, rather than the language used by the dramatists as a group. What the critics suggest is that the language of the absurd moves very close to the language we use in everyday conversations. It foregrounds the small talk of our daily lives. As Dina Sherzer points out:

> The language of the Absurd is not conspicuous for its lyricism or verbal seduction. The characters do not exhibit any dazzling repartees or

> witticism; they use a rather down-to-earth, banal language. In fact, they are involved almost exclusively in speech acts that occur in every day interactions: declarations, commands, greetings, leave-takings, requests, insults, short questions-answer sequences. (271)

When characters talk to each other in absurdist plays, their conversations follow the rules of normal conversation only up to a point. According to Sherzer, in these plays "instead of continuity, there is disjunction, created by sequences of unrelated utterances exchanged between two characters (273), and while the repetitive exchanges between characters can sound very familiar to us, these characters "bounce sounds back and forth, "which "confers to the dialogue a rigidity, a mechanical quality, which is comic and rather uncanny because language makes itself conspicuous in its materiality" (277). In ordinary conversation, the words we use to send a message may give only part of the intended meaning; this gap between what is uttered and what is conveyed is exploited to a much greater extent in the dialogue of absurdist drama. Dramatists of the absurd are adept at manipulating ordinary conversational rules in order to communicate their messages about the dangers of communication.

II.I.II.BECKETT, LANGUAGE AND POSTMODERNITY

Needless to say, metafiction is so much an integral part of postmodernism and it is a mode of writing within the broader movement known as postmodernism. Actually, the two share much in common when the metafictional writer John Barth's feelings about postmodernism are read: 'awkward and faintly epigonic, suggestive less of a vigorous or even interesting new direction in the old art of storytelling than of something anticlimactic, feebly following a very hard act to follow' (Barth 66). There is a sense of crisis and loss of belief in an external authoritative system of order in metafictional writing, which is also common in modernism.

The term "postmodern" is still the subject of heated debate and an elusive one. As the name implies, it refers to that which comes after modernism as an international movement that got separated from the nineteenth century forms of realism. However, we still feel the effects of modernism today. So it sounds paradoxical when postmodernism coexists with that which we think has replaced

modernism. We then cannot explain the phenomenon of postmodernism as limited to temporal terms.

As the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard has suggested, it represents a radical epistemological break with our understanding of what the human sciences have to offer. What characterizes the postmodern in Lyotard's eyes is the abandonment of those grand narratives that began with the Enlightenment, such as the liberation of humanity or the unification of all knowledge (16). No theory can overarch the unstable, heterogeneous and dispersed social reality of the postmodern. Without such metanarratives, Lyotard argues, each work of art, "working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*," becomes a unique event describing its own process of coming into being (81).

> One may agree with Habermas that modernity has not passed or with Giddens(1990) that most of the elements described as postmodern were already existent in the modern. Nevertheless, there have been significant cultural changes in contemporary modern life that have been described in the language of the 'postmodern'. These social and cultural changes are at the leading edge of society and are pointing to its future (or are already the dominant configuration). Consequently, we may refer to living in a postmodern era. This does not necessarily represent a sharp break with the modern. Rather, it is a transitional period of changing economic, social and cultural patterns which are changing the contours of the future…Core to the postmodern structure of feeling is a sense fragmentary, ambiguous, and uncertain nature of living, an awareness of the centrality of contingency; a recognition of cultural difference and an acceleration in the pace of living. (Barker 200)

Beckett's fictions exactly do the same. They are fragmented and ambiguous. The nature of living in them is uncertain. They invent their rules as they go ahead. As metafictional pieces, their subject matter again revolves around themselves and the narrating voice creates a world that is made up of words accompanied by silence. How come can silence be expressed through sound? This is actually the dilemma postmodernist Beckett underwent since the beginning of his career. How to express silence through sound? Beckett is preoccupied with this dilemma from the beginning of his career. An avant-garde writer, Beckett worried excessively from the start of his career about the fact that there is always an inescapable signification that accompanies the words which he did not want to have clear-cut meanings.

> There are two reasons why Beckett's fiction is central to postmodernism. First, it is regarded as being so distinctive, so different from what preceded it, despite or perhaps because of the necessity to follow on from modernism (as Barth's essay suggests), that Beckett himself amounts to a kind of 'existentialist hero', one who stands for what can be done in the face of exhaustion if one tries. This accounts for his appeal to writers such as Robert Coover or B. S. Johnson. The second reason is more precise, and that is the way that Beckett's fiction deals with the problem of how language relates to the real world. His novels are concerned more than anything else – more, that is, than telling a story or mounting any kind of social critique – with their own process of construction. On the face of it this exemplifies the practice of metafiction, and explains why metafictionists like Coover and Johnson are so indebted to Beckett. Yet, while Beckett's writing is continually very witty and funny, reading it is a more alienating experience than the kind of writing usually classified as postmodern metafiction. (Nicol 53)

In a world where meaning does not exist, how can the linguistic artist express this meaninglessness with words that necessarily convey meaning? How can he produce what he called a "literature of the unword?"(qtd. in Weller 59). Throughout his long writing career, Beckett dealt much with words that led him to startling innovations in form and language.

The spectators of the Beckettian drama do not easily enjoy themselves due to the strangeness of the world presented on the stage. There are difficulties with the structure of Beckett's world, incipient internal contradictions, threatened violations of the law of the excluded middle (McHale 12). The familiar is replaced by the unfamiliar, confusing the process of signification.

> Abandoning the processes of assimilation, integration and allusion that Joyce had so resoundingly explored, Beckett strove instead for an art of disassembly, disintegration and ignorance. When the capacity to absorb or represent the external world dissolves, what is left is an immersive and inward-looking process. Beckett's mature style does not bombard us with styles or erudition, but comes to us as a voice from the darkness, a provisional consciousness uttering forth its own perplexity in bafflement and anguish (McDonald 15).

We usually read dramas dealing either with life or death in tragedies or comedies. However, while reading Beckett or viewing him, we feel a sense of "game" or "play" that is imitating the action of man. Beckett avoids the familiarity in dramatic art through minimizing its importance and makes the spectator ignore the bare existence of things. Instead, Beckett depicts man in the state of being nothing

and doing nothing, as the repetitive and cliché language used in the plays also implies. This way, he helps us to question how real our lives are.

Beckett is a poet, dramatist and a novelist but not a philosopher. However, when he thinks about the system of language, he highlights the fact that it is wrong to think complex system of signs can actually convey meaning. In the plays to be analyzed in this study which are *Waiting for Godot* (1954), *Endgame* (1958), *Happy Days* (1961), Beckett sees the nature of reality as an endless stream of signifiers, signifying nothing much at all.

What is ironical in the plays to be analyzed herein is that one can exist only through speech and he/she must adopt a system of language and words, which no clear cut meanings. Beckett's metafictional technique through which he explores the relation between reality and fiction by touching upon the fact that there is no referent the signifier has demonstrates that there is lack of meaning in not only in language but also in life. These plays have some common aspects which veer around the meaninglessness of postmodern life.

> Paradoxically, at the same time as he is vaunted for expressing a 'timeless' human condition, Beckett is celebrated as the truest voice of a ravaged postwar world. The skeletal creatures and pared-down sets of his plays, or the aged, bewildered, agonised narrators of his novels, are regarded as the proper artistic expression of a world bereft of transcendent hope, without God, morality, value or even the solace of a stable selfhood. Notwithstanding Theodor Adorno's declaration on the impossibility of art after Auschwitz, Beckett comes closest to being the laureate of twentieth-century desolation. (McDonald 2)

Moreover, the dialogue, the spoken language, is located in the centre because of Beckett's preference of only a few props. And even, the props are used symbolically: holes and ashbins in which the characters are placed imply the gaps and holes in the language and the inability of language to communicate a standard meaning.

The reader does not go through a text with a decidable meaning in Beckettian drama. Actually, this is not his purpose either. In this sense, it can be claimed that Beckett has been affected by many philosophical ideas of deconstructivist

philosophers of the postmodern era such as Foucault and Derrida who thought that since structure in the language no longer exists, there is a play within itself due to which words constantly may change place and mean something else each time. Foucault implies that language, discourse, and truth are somehow closed off from us. Derrida's deconstruction somehow questions the validity of the underlying structures upon which other "truths" lie; this fundamental concept of 'language in flux' is fundamental to his philosophy. We can read Beckettian drama in this light. Beckett never tends to write in an explanatory way in which there is a clear meaning. Instead, Beckett's dramatic works appeal the reader/viewer to become actively involved in the text with its words and its silences.

The three plays herein can be regarded as Beckett's journey in postmodernism. His portrayal of postmodernist is no doubt hopeless, bleak, gloomy and ironic in which language is bizarre, humans lack foundational assurance and communication is almost impossible. *Waiting for Godot* for instance shows the desire to assert one's existence and make sense of the world. Estragon and Vladimir have such a limited language that they can only rely upon this to prove their existence and try to maintain their sanity in a world of extreme hopelessness.

The next game, *Endgame* implies the futility of relationships based on the fact that language only serves itself and does not convey any meaning. All in all, the reason as to why humans want to stay together is to abstain from solitude and separation. This play examines the irony that is central to all relationships: the examination of existence which according to Beckett has no meaning.

Happy Days looks at the middle age and points out the ironic realization that life is meaningless and mechanical through Winnie and Willie who simply want to enjoy time together with small things. The focus is on Winnie who is sexually and physically alienated. She is somewhat imprisoned and cannot fulfill any of her duties.

In all these three plays language is an absurd and paradoxical element: it provides us with excess of meaning while at the same time there is a lack of

meaning. Language is slippery and we cannot reach to the absolute truth. Perhaps, here is the point where metafiction serves its function. When we read these plays, we know they are works of fiction drawing our attention to our daily lives through posing questions.

In these three plays, Beckett can be said to be challenging the traditional notions such as existence, identity, relationships and language to highlight the absurdity of the modern society. In fact, Beckettian writing tears the barrier between speech and writing and presents an ambivalent language with full of uncertainty. Traditional concepts concerning the relationship between the signifier and the signified are blurred and it is claimed that the word is a representation of the truth, not the truth itself. This is the way Beckett uses language. Kristeva says in *Word, Dialogue and Novel* that carnivalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest and that there is no equivalence, but rather, identity between challenging official linguistic codes and challenging official law" (36). Beckett's technique can also be viewed as protest against conventional notions of language and theater.

> Beckett's drama has changed our very idea of the dramatic, of what is possible within the limits of a dramatic performance. Apart from the constant paring away of the spatial dimensions of drama, a 'timeless' or circular structure of action has entered the spectrum of dramatic forms, against the long dominance of the logic of time in various plot-centred versions. Within a nonsequential play structure, an inward-moving dialogue has made us attentive to the moment-by-moment ripple effect of words (and silences) in the theatre. In sum, a new type of poetic drama in prose has been brought into being, an achievement that surpasses, in several respects, the dramatic work of major modern poets - including Yeats and Eliot - and most of the symbolist and expressionist plays of the first half of this century. (Kennedy 19-20)

For Beckett, symbols and analogy are important means to outline the ambivalence of language, whereas in traditional style character and conventional plot techniques are paid emphasis. Kristeva states that the dialogue is most of the time in the structure of carnivalesque language, where substance-causality connections are subverted by symbolic relationships and analogy. The notion of *ambivalence* pertains

to the permutation of the two spaces observed in novelistic structure: dialogical space and monological space" (43).

In his use of carnivalesque language, Beckett points out the multiplicity of language as a system of interpretation and signification. In other words, he spends effort not to create a single meaning out of the text. Rather, he creates a playable text. Of all modern dramatists Beckett was probably most conscious of the double semiotic modality of drama as language and as translation of language into extra linguistic signs like visual images and not only was Beckett very much aware of this double modality of drama, but he also makes his recipient very much aware of it" (Fischer-Seidel 67).

Michel Foucault's essay, "The Discourse on Language," mirrors and explains the existential dilemmas of Beckett's characters. Foucault begins his essay "with the seeming desire to stand "within the gaps" of discourse -- perhaps where, at least on a theoretical level, real understanding exists: "There would have been no beginnings: instead, speech would proceed from me, while I stood in its path -- a slender gap -- the point of its possible disappearance" (215). "To begin" is frightening because it implies the disengagement between pure thought, some perceived truth, to speech, which is stunted thought. When uttered, our language betrays us and subjects us to a variety of interpretations. However, according to Foucault, social institutions and accepted practices teach us that we have nothing to fear, that discourse maintains the order of things, that it *is* the order of things: "But you have nothing to fear from launching out; we're here to show you discourse is within the established order of things, that we've waited a long time for its arrival, that a place has been set aside for it -- a place which both honours and disarms it; and if it should happen to have a certain power, then it is we, and we alone, who give it that power'" (216). Foucault argues that discourse, throughout our history, has been made to seem "natural," "true," and thus, we are not critical of it: ". . .we are unaware of the prodigious machinery of the will to truth, with its vocation of exclusion" (220).

Foucault argues that we must be critical of discourse and of the power that it holds. But also, we must not hold too tightly to our personal (or institutional)

paradigms; we must be open to new ideas. Foucault's implications remind us of Socratic wisdom: the only thing we can know with any certainty is that we know nothing. The only truth that appears is the universality of free play. Thus, nothing actually binds our paradigms together. Once we understand this and begin to regard traditional notions of truth/language as mere frameworks for organizing reality, and not reality themselves, then we will be open to new ideas, which may contradict traditional frameworks. Foucault's suggestions can be implicitly found in Beckett.

In the Western world, language aims to communicate and the words have been traditionally perceived as direct expressions of thought. However, Foucault argues that there are gaps within these words and meaning is lost within them. Conversely, there is meaning within these gaps. Thus, discourse is constituted by the uncontrollable free play of significations; it is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. It simultaneously limits and orders our world, our thoughts, and our emotions. Beckettian texts provide the reader/viewer with many gaps, both literally and figuratively. They defy traditional literary and dramatic convention and conventional notions of "the text."

Derrida's concept of deconstruction, the practice of reading which rejects assumption that the system of language is adequate in the construction of boundaries providing determinate meanings of a text, implicitly questions the validity of the underlying structures upon which other "truths" lie. This concept is fundamental to his philosophy and can be readily applied to Beckett's works. Beckettian texts do not present a textual reliability. On the contrary, it is up to the reader/viewer to be actively engaged in the text with its words and with its silences.

As Locatelli states: ". . . Beckett's vigilance takes into consideration both the unreliability of 'representational' knowledge, and the actual effect of the unsayable: 'I'm the clerk, I'm the scribe, at the hearings of what cause I know not. . . . Then what a relief, what a relief to know that I am mute forever, if only it didn't distress me'" (20). Another deconstructive and nontraditional technique Beckett uses is the ellipsis. Beckett makes great use of the ellipsis in his writing. Ellipses are realized in action through silence. It may seem contradictory that Beckett makes use of implicit

silences in his texts while simultaneously touching upon the necessity of speech and the need to continue through the voices of his characters. However, the two techniques are not independent from one another. On the contrary, they both illustrate Beckett's deconstructive use of the text. As Locatelli states:

> Fragmentation through silences and pauses works there as more than a suspension of the linguistic or representation continuum: it works as a recontextualizing semiotic device that creates the horizon for systemic signification of both language and silence. In other words, fragmentation in discourse, that is, within the verbal chain, constitutes a way of expressing the limits of language as context, and can allude to silence as another possible context, comparable to language in this respect. (25)

Beckett is not considered a philosopher in most circles and he also maintains the same, although some may argue the contrary. It can be argued that Beckett has done much in terms of changing the dramatic and literary world. His dramatic pieces not only challenge traditional textual and dramatic conventions but also they challenge the system of language as definitive. In other words, he defies the fact that language can reveal truth. Moreover, Beckettian texts challenge us to look at our own lives. The often-absurd situations in which he places his characters provide a metaphorical mirror for various existential dilemmas that we all must face. It could be argued that Beckett is a pessimist, continually focusing on the meaninglessness of existence. However, after having examined the progression of these three plays, it appears that Beckett comes to the conclusion that events somehow take their course and happiness is hidden in minute fractions of life.

III. METAFICTIONAL ASPECTS IN THREE PLAYS

II.I WHAT IS METAFICTION

> Fiction is woven into all . . . I find this new reality (or unreality) more valid. John Fowles, '*The French Lieutenant's Woman,* . 86–7)
>
> For Proust the quality of language is more important than any system of ethics or aesthetics. Indeed he makes no attempt to dissociate form from content. The one is a concretion of the other, the revelation of a world. *(Proust* (1931), London, 1965, 88)

Metafiction is a term that can be applied to fictional works that concern themselves with the nature of fiction itself or the process of writing fiction so as to find answers to questions regarding the relationship between fiction and reality. Those who choose metafiction as style reject the idea that language signifies a coherent and objective world. Rather, language is a complicated, arbitrary system that can create new meanings and forms any time. Thus, metafictional works mainly analyze the relationship between this linguistic system and the world outside it. Here a fundamental dichotomy arises: the artist both creates a work of fiction and tries to eliminate fictional illusions.

The origin of the term seems to have been created in 1970 by the American novelist and critic William H. Gass in his collection of essays *Fiction and the Figures of Life.* With the beginning of the twentieth century, metafiction emerged as a self-conscious experimental form that emphasized the insecurity of the historical period. What is more, as a type of writing it is perceived within the broader movement that is known as postmodernism in which many writers wrote texts that reflected the breakdown of traditional values.

The playwrights of the theatre of the absurd were greatly affected by metafictional trends. Beckett focused on the poverty of language and man as a failure. In his fictions there were mainly characters that were stuck in inescapable situations attempting impotently to communicate whose only recourse is to play, to make the best of what they have because he saw some impossibility in fiction such as identity of characters; reliable consciousness; the reliability of language itself; and the rubrication of literature in genres (Wagner 194). He undermined the ideas of

logical coherence in narration, formal plot, regular time sequence, and psychologically explained characters.

So, the metafictional style is actually a celebration of the power of creative imagination, while at the same time it criticizes the validity of linguistic representations. It implies an extreme self-consciousness about language, literary form and the act of writing itself. It draws attention to its status as an artifact so as to pose some questions about the connection between fiction and reality. This kind of writing not only examines the basic structures of writing but it also explores the possibility of a fictional world outside the text. Hence, a theory of fiction is explored through the practice of writing fiction.

The emergence of words such as 'metapolitics', 'metarhetoric' and 'metatheatre' from the 1960s onwards reminds us of the problem of existence, construction and mediation about how the world is experienced. Through its formal self-exploration, metafiction makes literature acquire a new facet in terms of postmodern philosophical, linguistic or literary theories (Waugh 3). If what we know about the world is mediated and adjusted via language, then literary fiction acquires a significant role for learning about the how reality is constructed.

The current trend of 'meta' discourses are then byproducts an increased social and cultural self-consciousness. In addition to this, it opens up new dimensions about the function of language in our contemporary culture and how it builds and maintains the notion of 'reality'. The common idea that language is a systematic set of linguistic signals used to convey meaning in an objective world is no longer valid.

Language is an independent, fractured and self-contained system that generates its acquired meanings. Its relation with the world outside us is highly complicated and problematic. Therefore, 'meta' terms are strictly required to be able to express the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it refers. It can somehow be alleged that metafiction rests on the uncertainty principle of Heisenberg: for the smallest building blocks of matter, every process of observation causes a major disturbance' (qtd. in Waugh 3), and it is impossible to

talk of an objective world because the observer always changes the observed. The basic dilemma of metafiction arises here too. Even if the metafictionist sets out for representing the world, he or she soon notices that there is no such thing to be represented.

The term 'metalanguage' was first developed by L. Hjelmslec who defined it as kind of a language that refers to another language instead of non-linguistic events, situations or objects in the world (Waugh 3). In simple terms, it is a language about a language. Here, Saussure's distinction about the signifier and the signified can be talked of. The signifier is the word itself whether written or verbal and the signified is the concept that word evokes. A metalanguage therefore signifies another language.

We see that in eighteenth and nineteenth century fiction the individual undergoes all social processes and norms such as birth, death, marriage without seeking personal authority. However, in the modernist fiction there is struggle for personal autonomy and this can only be achieved through opposition to existing social institutions, which involves social alienation and mental dissolution. So, the metafictional writer turns inward in order to analyze the connection between fictional form and social reality. They have thought that everyday language sustains such power structures through which the forms of oppression are constructed in innocent representations.

In metafiction, language and its conventions are paraded and set against the cultural codes because they imply the genuinely felt sense of crisis, alienation and oppression in contemporary society. Therefore, outworn literary values are criticized, constructing kind of a social criticism. Though known to be one of the forms of post modernity, metafiction shows itself nearly in all contemporary writing. Texts that frustrate the readers' conventional expectations of meaning changes the narrative codes and construct artificial realities.

II.I.I *WAITING FOR GODOT*: ACTION GOING ON IN NON-ACTION

> At the time when *Godot* was first done, it liberated something for anybody writing plays. It redefined the minima of theatrical validity. It was as simple as that. He got away. He won by twenty-eight lengths, and he'd done it with so little – and I mean that as an enormous compliment. There we all were, busting a gut with great monologues and pyrotechnics, and this extraordinary genius just put this play together with enormous refinement, and then with two completely unprecedented and uncategorisable bursts of architecture in the middle – terrible metaphor – and there it was, theatre (*The New Review*, Vol. 1, no. 9, December 1974, . 18–19).

One of the iconic images of the twentieth century and the modern drama is the scene that consists of a bare country road with a mound and a tree and two elderly men waiting for their appointment with a man called Godot who never comes. The meaning of the play being uncertain, spectators often ask who or what Godot is and whether he represents God.

> *Waiting for Godot* left the members of its audience who sat it out to the end completely stunned. We knew we had seen things on the stage that could not be related to anything theatrical previously experienced. It was almost beyond discussion or rational appraisal. It had been an entirely new experience: a play (for want of a better word) that had taken its audience into a new extension of imagination. (Shellard 28)

Godot is the god-like figure that gives Estragon and Vladimir a sense of direction and purpose. Then, the play according to McDonald can be perceived as an allegory for post-theistic existence(140). This particular aspect of the play builds up the framework on which Beckett can articulate his loss of belief and hope. The shadow of the Second World War implies that Godot has left a world that is plagued by barbarism, mass destruction and genocide. This absence has created a hole which expectations and hopes vainly try to fill.

Still, it would be reasonable to be open to other explanations concerning the postwar plays of Beckett. Is the disillusionment only because God has left the world or are there any other reasons to clarify why communication has become void? Beckett described it as 'striving all the time to avoid definition' (Graver and

Federman 10). Though the name 'Godot' has a strict resemblance to God, it is even more than that.

Though the existence of biblical allusions makes us think a religious dimension may exist in the play, it is still necessary to abstain from a complete identification. Tying the play to a religious metaphor would surely limit its suggestive power. There are philosophical and psychological dimensions of Godot's non-arrival. This non-arrival also symbolizes lives focused on some prospective attainment. All human beings live in a constant state of yearning and fix onto some hope or desire for the future such as a holiday or a well-paid job. Once that hope is achieved, we move onto another object of desire. As Beckett puts it in his analysis of *Proust*,

> We are disappointed at the nullity of what we are pleased to call attainment. But what is attainment? The identification of the subject with the object of his desire? The subject has died – and perhaps many times – on the way. (qtd. in McDonald 144)

Therefore, the play cannot be limited to a single explanation. Just as Vladimir and Estragon are confused and bewildered about where they are, where they were and will be, the audience also feels uncertain because of the elusive themes of the play and remain at a distance.

In Beckett's pessimistic philosophy which is heavily influenced by the nineteenth century philosopher Schopenhaur, the self is fragmented and distended (Pothast 14). We spend our lives with expectations and that becomes the reason why there is not action in *Waiting for Godot* but non-action.

There are some aspects of the play that rearticulate this pessimistic view of life. Firstly, there is a friendly manner and kindness between Vladimir and Estragon. Secondly, the play is also very funny. As Nell in *Endgame* remarks, 'nothing is funnier than unhappiness'. Thirdly, the writing and the theatrical structure are beautifully crafted. The comic aspect of the play is further strengthened by the uncertainty of the two men.

> ESTRAGON: We came here yesterday.
> VLADIMIR: Ah no, there you're mistaken.
> ESTRAGON: What did we do yesterday?
> VLADIMIR: What did we do yesterday?
> ESTRAGON: Yes.
> VLADIMIR: Why . . . (Angrily) Nothing is certain when you're about. (14)

This is reinforced in Act II as Vladimir and Estragon try to figure out whether they were there the day before: Estragon cannot recognize his boots in the middle of the stage. Vladimir is baffled due to the leaves on the tree. 'What are we doing here, that is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come –' (80).

McDonald argues that In *Waiting for Godot*, the lack of definition and the withholding of a clear meaning direct the reader's attention to the dramatic qualities of the play rather than the significance of its message and its function rather than its meaning (32). Being far away from the conventions of naturalist drama, this is clearly an innovative and experimental play. There is not a clear relationship between cause and effect and the sequence of exposition and resolution is thwarted. But, in naturalistic drama, the withheld knowledge is generally both its method and theme. The second act of the play seems to be a repetition of the first and this directly disrupts the cause-effect cycle, there being no progress.

> A special virtue attaches to plays which remind the drama of how much it can do without and still exist. By all the known criteria, Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' is a dramatic vacuum. Pity the critic who seeks a chink in its armour, for it is all chink. It has no plot, no climax, no *dénouement;* no beginning, no middle, and no end. Unavoidably, it has a situation, and it might be accused of having suspense, since it deals with the impatience of two tramps, waiting beneath a tree for a cryptic Mr. Godot to keep his appointment with them; but the situation is never developed, and a glance at the programme shows that Mr. Godot is not going to arrive. 'Waiting for Godot' frankly jettisons everything by which we recognise theatre. It arrives at the custom-house, as it were, with no luggage, no passport, an nothing to declare; yet it gets through, as might a pilgrim from Mars. It does this, I believe, by appealing to a definition of drama much more fundamental than any in the books. A play, it asserts and proves, is basically a means of spending two hours in the dark without being bored (Tynan 104).

The dynamics of the play are tied in an intricate pattern. The jokes and stories are left unfinished, information is usually withheld and events occur without connection to one another. For instance, the reader never knows by whom and why Estragon gets beaten every night or when the two men decided to make an appointment with Godot. There are many other unresolved questions in the play like this. Is the appointment a creation of their memory? Can their memory be relied on?

Why was one of the thieves saved but not the other? Why is the Godot uncoming man?

> *Waiting for Godot* is full of suggestion, but it is not reducible to exact allegorical correspondence. Beckett described it as 'striving all the time to avoid definition'. The play will not be pinned down or located, a clear meaning will not arrive for us, just as Godot does not arrive for Vladimir and Estragon. They can be confused and uncertain about where they are, where they were and where they will be, and the audience, by extension, can feel bewildered by the elusive themes of a play which, while orbiting around philosophical and religious issues, tends to keep them at a distance, to keep us in a state of interpretative suspension (McDonald 144).

As commonly observed in real life too, Estragon and Vladimir appear to be communicating with one another in the play. However, it is utterly clear that what is encoded by one of them is decoded totally different by the other. According to Kristeva, on the omnified stage of carnival, language parodies and relativizes itself, repudiating its role in representation; in doing so, it provokes laughter but remains incapable of detaching itself from representation" (50). Indeed *Waiting for Godot* parodies both the language and the fact that though language is incapable of representing the truth itself, there is nothing else we have to communicate.

> The dislocation man experiences between his expectations of the world surrounding him and the reality he encounters is a convenient point of departure for a discussion of philosophical absurdity. Man is defeated in advance: he wants unity, yet meets diversity everywhere; he longs for happiness and for reason, but confronts the unreasonable silence of the world; he wants to know, but he cannot know; he yearns to communicate, but there are no avenues of communication; he wants truth, but discovers merely a succession of truths; he wants life, but his fate brings him closer every moment to death and dissolution. "The absurd," says Camus in his own existential handbook for ontological revolutionaries, "is essentially a divorce: It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation. (Brater 197)

It appears to us that the use of words by Estragon and Vladimir is only to assert their existence. As Estragon says: "We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?" (77). It is certain that their only purpose is inaction. The two decides not to act but to wait for the coming of an enigmatic Godot, who never arrives. Estragon and Vladimir are attached to one another in

inaction and fear because they do not know what to do. In one moment of the play Estragon says: "Don't let's do anything. It's safer" (13). Perhaps, the reason as to why Beckett chose such a style is to illustrate the uncertainty we always face in our daily lives. As Estragon states: "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful" (43). Szondi expresses this silent chaos thus:

> Constantly pressing toward the abyss of silence, retrieved from it over and over again but only with great effort, this hollow conversation still manages to reveal the 'anguish of man without God' in this empty metaphysical space – a space that gives importance to whatever fills it. At this level, of course, dramatic form no longer contains any critical contradictions, and conversation is no longer a means of overcoming such contradictions. Everything lies in ruins – dialogue, form as a whole, human existence. Negativity – meaningless, automatic speech and unfulfilled dramatic form is now the only source of statement. What emerges is an expression of the negative condition of a waiting being – one in need of transcendence but unable to achieve it. (54)

Rabinovitz expresses that underlying the misery of human existence is an oscillation or dichotomy between the boredom of satiation and the longing of unfulfilled desire. . . . Both plays [*Waiting for Godot* and *Happy Days*] also reveal how we use clichés to insulate ourselves from the harshness of existence" (211). Even if Estragon and Vladimir know they cannot reach a sound conclusion, they cannot keep silent. They try to spend time through words. Although the two know they are incapable of reaching certain conclusions, they cannot keep silent. In one sense, it is words that fill the void in their lives:

> VLADIMIR: (*sententious*). To every man his little cross. (*He sighs.*) Till he dies. (*Afterthought.*) And is forgotten.
> ESTRAGON: In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.
> VLADIMIR: You're right, we're inexhaustible.
> ESTRAGON: It's so we won't think.(96)

It can even be said that they use the words to find relief. As Kristeva states: ". . . Francis Ponge offers his own variation of 'I think therefore I am': 'I speak and you hear me, therefore we are.' He thus postulates a shift from subjectivism to ambivalence. . . . Consequently, we may consider narration (beyond the signifier/signified relationship) as a dialogue between the *subject* of narration (S) and the *addressee* (A) -the other" (45). In other words, Estragon and Vladimir's goal of language is not to come to an agreement on the nature of objective reality. Actually,

it is not necessary for either of them to be understood by one another. The language they use is only intended to assert their existence. And yet, they are desperately hopeful that Godot will show up and solve the puzzle of existence for them.

The theme of *Waiting for Godot* and of Beckett's style of writing seem to be similar in that they do not try to capture objective reality. Estragon and Vladimir collectively come to no conclusions about their lives; Beckett does not strive for achieving any artistic excellence or transcendence to gain the readers' appreciation in terms of style and content toward a collective transcendence with the reader in either style or content. Instead, he creates an ambivalent dialogue between the reader and the text. As Kristeva states:

> Dialogism replaces these concepts [substance and causality] by absorbing them within the concept of relation. It does not strive toward transcendence but rather toward harmony, all the while implying an idea of rupture (of opposition and analogy) as a modality of transformation. . . . Dialogism situates philosophical problems *within* language; more precisely, within language as a correlation of texts, as a reading-writing that falls in with non-Aristotelian, syntagmatic, correlational, 'carnivalesque' logic. Consequently, one of the fundamental problems facing contemporary semiotics is precisely to describe this 'other logic' without denaturing it (59).

Beckett's being far away from descriptive language and traditional writing not only captures the reader/viewer as a more active participant in the text but also it displays Beckett's view of life as uncertain. As Rabinovitz claims: "Beckett argues that descriptive language sets up superficial models of human events that are ultimately reductive and unsound. In realistic and naturalistic writing, human motivations and interactions are presented as if they were logical, predictable, and comprehensible. Beckett, however, is persuaded that motives are ultimately obscure." (205). This uncertainty and disharmony, so prevalent in Beckett's works remind us of Derridean antifoundationalism that is found in both language and life, illustrated in Beckett's technique and in the experiences of his characters.

The rhythms within the passage and the successful combinations of repetition and silence combine and diminish the dissonance between language and the characters' torment. Vladimir and Estragon are too close: they listen to the dead language while we listen to the poetry among one another. The passage does not express what kind of a tyranny they are undergoing. The exchanges have a mysterious, pre-ordained quality, reinforcing the point that the play has performative, repetitive, self-consciously theatrical dimensions. It is as if when Vladimir says something Estragon's reply has already been decided. Their exchanges are often constituted of one- or two-word utterances, carefully shaped into repetition and variation and this gives them a poetic quality.

The exchanges between the two are almost inadequate to eradicate the terrifying silence. Presumably because of this, Estragon and Vladimir are so desperate to keep the conversation alive and to block out the sound of the silence. Or, the most important of all, they cannot prevent themselves from realizing that their conversations, like the waiting games they play, have no benefit for escaping from the destructiveness of time and the insatiability of their desires. They just repeat a habit that protects them from the awareness of their solitude:

> VLADIMIR: All I know is that the hours are long, under these conditions, and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings which –how shall I say– which may at first sight seem reasonable, until they become a habit. You may say it is to prevent our reason from foundering. No doubt. But has it not long been straying in the night without end of the abyssal depths? That's what I sometimes wonder. You follow my reasoning?
> ESTRAGON:
> (*aphoristic for once*). We are all born mad. Some remain so. (80)

Jacques Derrida, in *Writing and Difference* and *Of Grammatology,* examines language in a philosophical and historical context. This way, Derrida tells us how metaphysics lost its validity resorting to writings by Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger. All these texts created a watershed in the systems of thought because they were all mentioning about the lack of a reliable center or origin. "From then on it was probably necessary to begin to think that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a being-present, that the center had no natural locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play" (280). Thus according to Derrida, neither the signifier

nor the signified exists. The difference between the signifier and the signified and the idea of the sign in general is blurred because they have never existed independently of the historical/philosophical tradition of being as *presence*: "The sign and divinity have the same place and time of birth" (14).

In *Waiting for Godot,* Estragon and Vladimir undergo confusion and their minds are blurred at this "loss of *presence*." There is the lack of meaning in language and thus the failure to communicate with the other at the center of this confusion. There is also the lack of a referent to which they may ground their existences. As Vladimir states: ". . .What we are doing here, *that* is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come" (91). Godot is their reason to exist, without him they are nothing. He gives meaning to their lives. Although he has no reality, the idea of Godot gives a degree of certainty to the uncertainty within their existence. Beckett's technique of using language that does not communicate meaning and signify anything or attempt to "get to" the truth of existence is quite innovative because it forces us to question the truths which we strongly believe.

II.I.II.I.THEATRE AND STRUCTURE

This play continuously makes us feel its own theatrical artifice. We have many self-conscious performances in the play implying that the dialogue between Estragon and Vladimir is a kind of game. 'Come on, Gogo, return the ball, can't you, once in a way?' (12). We can particularly observe this in Act II, when the pair feign to be Pozzo and Lucky to pass time as usual. This metafictional element in the play, the play's awareness of itself as a play, shows us that if Estragon and Vladimir can pretend to be Pozzo and Lucky, then Pozzo and Lucky may do the same thing.

One another factor that solidifies the metafictional aspect is repetition. Every life involves a cycle or a routine. 'Habit' Vladimir declares is a great deadener (91). So the idea of repetition is quite suitable for the play. Actors turn up night after night to utter the lines they have uttered before and will utter again. In this way *Waiting for*

Godot is parallel to the pessimistic view of life as repetition and habit. Contrary to conventional realist drama that mirrors life, life mirrors drama here.

There are other examples of metatheatricality subtly integrated into the action in the play. There is lots of activity in the play that self-reflexively resorts to theatrical language. In one of the cases, Vladimir runs off-stage because of the urgent calls of his defective bladder and the two actors playfully pretend to be fellow spectators of a performance.

> ESTRAGON: End of the corridor, on the left
> VLADIMIR: Keep my seat.
> (Exit Vladimir) (35)

We also have more overt examples of self-reflexive exchanges:

> VLADIMIR: Charming evening we're having.
> ESTRAGON: Unforgettable.
> VLADIMIR: And it's not over.
> ESTRAGON: Apparently not.
> VLADIMIR: It's only beginning.
> ESTRAGON: It's awful.
> VLADIMIR: Worse than the pantomime
> ESTRAGON: The circus
> VLADIMIR: The music-hall.
> ESTRAGON: The circus. (34–5)

This conversation is a comment on the play acting that Vladimir and Estragon make in order to pass time. Furthermore, it also parodies the routine conversation that we might hear at the theatre during the interval. The stage is not a passive setting in which real life is reproduced or reflected. Rather, it shows us what is exhibited within the limits of dramatic performance is reflections of life. This way, *Waiting for Godot* helps us to meditate on the performative, theatrical and repetitive aspects of which we call real life.

The lack of plot and logical movement as stated above makes *Waiting for Godot* an 'antiplay' or a revolutionary one which does not have so many dramatic qualities. The play uses and parodies what we expect from conventional drama and the theatre. It plays with our expectations by changing and counterpointing them. The two act structure, the repetition of two cycles are things that manipulate our expectations.

The reason as to why waiting creates a tension is the audience's expectations of a dramatic pattern. What we have here is a wholly new pattern. The repeated acts also underline the needless action in non-action cycles. The end of the play is vague and the second act may be the beginning of a third act which may be followed by infinite series of acts. But the two act structure fulfills its duty well enough by implying its potential infinity.

Vladimir and Estragon may be thought as turning around a stage that brings them back to the scene where they left. Both time and space are cyclic. They cannot get beyond the author's will.

Pozzo and Lucky's appearing twice is also constructed to signify repetition. There are other units that emphasize this circularity, especially Vladimir's song about the dog at the opening act of II, which could go on forever. What is also noteworthy here is that the characters are moving in a definite direction. That is, they are moving 'onward' or 'on' according to Pozzo's favorite monosyllable. However, 'onward' or 'on' does not make much sense because they deteriorate and are all part of a rundown, towards their eventual end.

Such a sense of time's inexorable movement in which we do routine things and waste it is added to the cyclic structure. Beckett successfully makes the audience feel this through his repetitive and nonsense play. Yet, our consciousness of ordinary time is underlined further by references to time such as the retrospect to the young Estragon and Vladimir fifty years ago when they might have jumped the Eiffel tower with dignity.

As a metatheatrical play, *Waiting for Godot* makes well use of the empty stage to magnify its theatricality or artificiality. Beckett uses the empty stage to make use of the painful conflict between illusion and reality. In *Waiting for Godot*, the objective behind showing the emptiness of the stage to the audience is to underline its emptiness and the fact that it is a space to be filled with words and images. Imagination creates everything out of nothing. Jokes and jocular allusions keep the physical existence of the stage before the audience.

Estragon moves to the centre, halts with his back to auditorium.

> ESTRAGON: Charming spot. *(He turns, advances to front, halts facing auditorium.)* Inspiring prospects. *(He turns to Vladimir.)* Let's go. (13)

In the middle of the first Pozzo and Lucky episode, Vladimir and Estragon as stage audience 'let on' that they are aware of the kind of spectacle they have been exposed to and trapped in:

> VLADIMIR: Charming evening we're having.
> ESTRAGON: Unforgettable.
> VLADIMIR: And it's not over.
> ESTRAGON: Apparently not.
> VLADIMIR: It's only beginning.
> ESTRAGON: It's awful.
> VLADIMIR: Worse than pantomime.
> ESTRAGON: The circus.
> VLADIMIR: The music hall.
> ESTRAGON: The circus.

The audience hereby can question his own "charming evening". The reference to music hall, pantomime and circus are intensified in Act II where the space of the theatre is used as an analogy for a place that has no exit.

In a climactic moment, sounds heard off-stage are perceived as the coming of Godot: Vladimir calls Estragon and drags him but Estragon gets lost through the exit. Vladimir runs to meet him on the left but Estragon reenters on the right. He then cries out 'I am in hell.' implying that all the exits have been blocked.

> VLADIMIR: We're surrounded! *(Estragon makes a rush towards back.)* Imbecile!
> There's no way out there. *(He takes Estragon by the arm and drags him towards front.)* There! Not a soul in sight! Off you go. Quick! *(He pushes Estragon towards auditorium. Estragon recoils in horror.)* You won't? *(He contemplates auditorium.)* Well, I can understand that. Wait till I see. *(He reflects.)* Your only hope left is to disappear. (74).

There is an analogy between the panic stricken person who does not know the exit in a hell and the actor suffering from stage fright. The audience is supposed to be absent but Estragon feels himself in horror when facing the auditorium, which is a theatrical joke.

Tragicomedy is so much pervasive in *Waiting for Godot* that it covers all the scenes of the play. The failed suicide attempts, especially the second one placed

carefully towards the end of the play are memorable examples. Melodramatic and farcical aspects are also seen in the play when Pozzo goes on shouting for help while Estragon and Vladimir ignores the situation.

Concentrating on the play's overall structure and theatricality does not necessarily mean that Beckett's mastership of words is forgotten. *Waiting for Godot* doubtlessly makes more allusions to the play than any other Beckett play does.

The characters mainly interact through speech. This success in using verbal art in such a way springs from an extreme view of language: a denial that language can either represent or express the world out there accompanied with a desire for silence. *Waiting for Godot* is a fully embodied play despite Beckett's view on the failure of language and the total isolation of the speaker. Beckett's dramatic and verbal art embodies a far reaching vision of human existence, which in turn makes his plays endure for all time.

III.I.II. *ENDGAME:* THE ENDLESS GAME

> If all Beckett's characters are ruined philosophers of a kind, they continue to live their ruination philosophically, that it is to say, restlessly asking why things should be this way. And if Beckett's work enacts, as so many have supposed it does, the collapse of the metaphysical certainties that have sustained Western thought over the last two thousand years and before—the belief in God, in the unity of the world, in the knowability of experience, the communicability of reality through language, the idea of 'man,' and the corresponding notion of his historical purpose or destination—then it does so, as it were, from the inside rather than from the outside of these things (Connor 3).

This quotation gives us a smooth summary of the prevalent themes in Beckett studies. The approach within this quotation is common in the critical community: Beckett's work can be read as entirely philosophical pieces in which metaphysical pieces collapse. *Endgame* is a continuation *of Waiting for Godot*, with the implication that a void or nullity exists at the center of human existence.

In the play, there is a sado-masochistic relationship between Hamm and Clov. Hamm bases his existence on the silly orders he gives to Clov and Clov bases his on remaining in the position of servant. The two are attached to one another, despite the

abuse, because both fear being alone. Just as the friendship of Estragon and Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot* is not as one of mutual affection and shared goals but of clinging to another out of fear of being alone, *Endgame* does the same. As with Estragon and Vladimir, the lives of Hamm and Clov are repetitive and mechanical; as Clov states: "All lifelong the same questions, the same answers" (5).

Undoubtedly, Beckett is obsessed with making something to create new things as a modernist writer. His works are not only newer and different from those of other writers but also his previous ones. Though *Endgame* has some traces of *Waiting for Godot*, it may also be seen as a totally new kind of play. It seems that Beckett was dissatisfied with the tragicomedy in *Waiting for Godot* and the effort to make something new made him create a darker vision in one act structure that gradually closes like a traditional tragedy.

Instead of the open road of *Waiting for Godot*, there is a prison cell like room with two small windows that has a view of an almost dead universe. While Estragon and Vladimir are relatively mobile, Hamm is almost motionless within the walls of his small stage kingdom. *Endgame* depicts the tensions between hesitation and severance, retention and relinquishment of control by the self-consciously histrionic monarch of a wasteland ambivalently approaching a ritual of renunciation (Rabey 49). Clov is also restricted in space as he can only run to and fro, from centre to circumference. Nell and Nag on the other hand spend the whole action in dustbins, in extreme immobility.

http://www.wildeirish.org/endgame.htm

The cyclic pattern we see in *Waiting for Godot* is even stronger here. There is a strong belief of nothingness and there are scenes that parody worship, religion, love and quest for meaning. Finally, the dialogue is consciously diminished to a minimal vocabulary.

That the play begins with the word 'finished' is a peculiar opening in world drama. Beckett's obsession with 'ending' at every level of action actually contradicts all the usual elements of traditional drama. Just as *Waiting for Godot* is established upon waiting, ending is the main essence of this play. The play, which consistently enacts this 'ending' metaphor brings into mind the connotations the idea of ending has for us, such as ending of a game, relationship, a story or a performance. The whole play imitates its own metaphor: the ending is an endless process itself.

The opening words of Clov that go as 'nearly finished, it must be nearly finished' drive the audience or the reader somehow to the point of crisis. We become introduced to a gradual and painful process. Hamm sits motionless in his chair and from the start gives the sense of ending. He is also impotent with a sense of self-dramatized melancholic suffering: with his handkerchief, his eyes tearful and clearing his throat. His tone while saying 'Can there be misery (he yawns)

loftier than mine? No doubt. Formerly. But now?' reminds us of high tragedy. He is disabled but at the same time has the mastery that drifts him towards extinction.

The memories of the characters in *Endgame* are bleaker than the characters in *Waiting for Godot*. So their awareness of the situation is like a torment. In addition to this, physical debility is one another thing that upsets the characters. The sense of entrapment and being worn-out is far more felt. All is corpsed: the landscape is desolate, implying the anxieties of the Cold War, with the threat of a nuclear extinction. The play gives us no overt reason as to why the world is at this point of ending and destruction. Besides, we are also unclear about the behavior of the characters. Why does Clov do Hamm's service? Why are Nag and Nell confined to ashbins? What is Hamm's chronicle to do with the play? There was a Riverside Studio production in 1982, directed by Beckett himself. Playing Hamm at the time, Rick Cluchey asked Beckett if the little boy in the story is actually the young Clov and Beckett's response was 'Simply don't know' (Gontarski 61).

But still, *Endgame* has to do a lot with post-war Europe and the attitudes prevalent in that society. The idea was that much of what had been believed in the past was actually absurd and the limitless optimism in the past contradicted the reality of the post-war society. Just as many other twentieth century writers, Beckett used his works as a kind of search for meaning in a society plagued by disillusionment and alienation. His way of expressing these ideas, however, was revolutionary.

Through what was later termed "absurdism," Beckett removed unnecessary words and images and instead captured the human experience not in a "realistic" way but in a way that perhaps even more profoundly captured the truth. "His plays represented a certain extreme, a boundary, for nobody else has attempted to express the nature of human experience on so basic a level" (Elsom 63). One of the most powerful aspects of Beckett's work in general, and *Endgame* in particular, is the way in which he captures rhythms of life, internal rhythms of society.

Endgame has been characterized as a work "about the loss of the past and the death of the future" (Elsom 62). The world created within the play is empty, with a room that seems to be filled with dust. The people get rotten inside, and the world is a place in which there is presumably no longer anything growing, no mountains, no nature and no signs of beauty. Considering the time period, this is almost certainly a world that has been destroyed by the war.

Adorno claims that *Endgame* addresses a crisis in meaning and representation precipitated by the horrors of World War II and the failure of Existentialism. Metaphysical meaning is no longer possible, and so the dramatic form is itself undermined, and, crucially for the present argument, within Beckett all "that appears of history is its result: decline" (88), leaving the human actor as a "non[-]identity" which comprises of two elements: "the historical disintegration of the subject as a unity, and the emergence of that which is not subject" (92). The rupture of the unity of the subject is captured in Hamm's narratives where he switches between the roles of the narrator and the role of himself, thus revealing, according to Adorno, the "very self to be something else, the aping of something non-existent" (107).

The title itself is a chess term used to describe the last part of the game, when there are very few pieces left and the end of the game is coming near. Within the rhythms of this play, Beckett captures this loss and inevitability of death and destruction to come.

There is a cyclical nature of the characters' interactions. They repeat things over and over again or perform a task that is seemingly unimportant. We get the feeling that each day is the same as before; there is no longer surprise, and there is no longer expectation or hope. In this setting, both of the main characters, Hamm and Clov, are paralyzed by inaction. Hamm speaks several times of killing himself or of having Clov kill him and Clov continually talks of leaving the house forever.

However, both are stuck in their pattern, and we get the sense that each day will be the same until the end. As Hamm observes: "This is not much fun. [Pause] But that's always the way at the end of the day, isn't it Clov?" (98) The performers get tired of doing the same routine. Nag and Nell's routine is also getting tired, as Nell observes as they try, and fail, to kiss. "Why this farce, day after day?" (99) This question is repeated later by Clov and answered by Hamm: "Routine. One never

knows" (107). Focusing on the theme of physical deterioration, Beckett makes one of the oldest jokes in the book:

> [Pause. They turn away from each other]
> NAGG: Can you hear me?
> NELL:Yes. And you?
> NAGG: Yes. [Pause] Our hearing hasn't failed.
> NELL:. Our what?
> NAGG:. Our hearing. (99)

Even in the last scene, when Clov has gathered his travel things, he is left standing in the house next to Hamm until the curtain closes, as if paralyzed. This inability to move forward is perhaps a commentary on the feelings immediately following the war.

It can be said that Beckett's absurdism is not being after meaning, but rather an attempt to find meaning in a world that no longer made sense. Being far away from literary and social conventions, he attempted to discover and unfold something deeper. Though *Endgame* is virtually plotless and is full of seemingly insane actions, there is something immensely powerful found within this seeming lack of coherence.

What he achieved in conveying was basic humanity. Though no playwright has followed in the same path as Beckett, he inspired a new idea of how to go about representing the truth of humanity as well as the truth of the times.

The truth of humanity this time is expressed through power relations. The relationship between Hamm and Clov is different from that of Estragon and Vladimir because the element of power is introduced in the play. Hamm is in the position of power. He has his mother and father situated in ashbins and he often commands Clov to place his chair in the center:

> HAMM: Back to my place!
> *(Clov pushes chair back to center.)*
> Is that my place?
> CLOV: Yes, that's your place.
> HAMM: Am I right in the center?
> CLOV: I'll measure it.
> HAMM: More or less! More or less!
> CLOV *(moving chair slightly)*: There!
> HAMM: I'm more or less in the center?
> CLOV: I'd say so.

HAMM: You'd say so! Put me right in the center!(26-7).

Time, the greatest obstacle in the search for meaning, keeps Estragon and Vladimir endlessly waiting and it also restricts Winnie of *Happy Days*. Hamm's case is more hazardous as he is forced to play a game of chess with Time. Beckett presents the existential anguish of a man confronting the absurd, by depicting Hamm's centripetal quest" (Kumar 542). Hamm's desire to remain in the center perhaps represents his compensation for the lack of center or assurance he finds in life in general.

III.I.II.I.THEATRE AND STRUCTURE

The structure of action in *Endgame* may seem totally different when compared to traditional drama, but the whole play is set upon highly theatrical terms. It may be less dramatic compared to the traditional drama but it is more performance based. This is a paradox that stems from the self-conscious or the metatheatrical nature of Beckett's plays. Certain theatrical conventions such as those of tragedy in particular are echoed or parodied.

The cyclic structure of the play embodies the themes of 'playing' and 'ending'. 'The stage and its conditions are 'advertised' along with broad role-playing (Hamm) and play within-the-play devices. Visual and sound effects are woven into the verbal text in every scene. It might be said that *Endgame* stages 'all the world' - as did certain kinds of allegorical drama, like Calderon's *The Great Theatre of the World* (1645), but here all is diminished, the characters in number and scope, the action to a slow cycle of ending, the world itself approaching zero point' (Kennedy 61).

Beckett avoids direct allegory in *Endgame*. Yet, the audience feels the catastrophe of the king and his fool on the stage. Even from the long silence and ritual opening of Hamm's brief day to the closing ritual, the bit of theatre solidifies the total effect of theatricality.

The play's catastrophic aspect causes the audience to perceive the play as kind of a tragedy. The sense of suffering, cruelty and waste, the slow death of people and of the created world is what creates a 'tragic sense of life'. Besides, the tones

and gestures, and the structure and the ideology of the play repeatedly parody traditional tragedy.

Hamm's role as dying king seems quite similar to the kings in Shakespearean plays such as Lear, Richard II and Prospero. Beckett's repeated allusions to lost power and magnificence, the pain of dispossession and of losing can all be found in this play (Berlin 647). The final phase or maybe the tragedic climax, when Hamm one-by-one abandons his grotesque symbols of power the gaff, the dog, the whistle, is a long ceremony of dispossession or losing. Just like the old style of a tragic ending, the player-king moves through losing of power to a rehearsal of proper dying.

Undoubtedly each reader's or spectator's judgment about the final effect of *Endgame* will be personal but most possibly be a mixture of emotions. Yet is it not likely that a certain pity and terror will accompany the ending of *Endgame.* For Adorno, the issue is clear; "Endgame parodies the now obsolescent tragic mode: The dramatic constituents appear after their death. Exposition, intrigue, action, peripeteia and catastrophe return as decomposed participants in a dramatical inquest: the catastrophe is replaced by the announcement that there is no more pain-killer" (100).

> HAMM: Is it not time for my pain-killer?
> CLOV: Yes.
> HAMM: Ah! At last! Give it to me! Quick! (Pause.)
> CLOV: There's no more pain-killer. (Pause.)
> HAMM (appalled): Good...! (Pause.) No more pain-killer!
> CLOV: No more pain-killer. You'll never get any more pain-killer. (Pause.)
> HAMM: But the little round box. It was full!
> CLOV: Yes. But now it's empty. (46)

The catastrophe involves the gestures and tones that remind us of tragic action. Let's look at how the play ends. From a strictly structural point of view, there is nothing inevitable about the timing and the placing of Hamm's kingly announcement 'It's the end, Clov, we've come to the end. I don't need you any more' (50). This statement perhaps cannot be compared to Mark Antony's 'I am dying, Egypt, dying: give me some wine and let me speak a little' *(Antony and Cleopatra,* IV.xiii); after defeat in battle and inevitable death by suicide.

Yet, Hamm's uttering has similarity to a tragic mode of ending; and all the repeated utterances of the end motif in the language of the play build up and point to that final self-denial. It is immediately preceded by the sighting of the 'small boy' by

Clov. And it is succeeded by those outstanding examples of tragic departure, epiphany and self-dispossession, that is Clov's parting speech and Hamm's final soliloquy.

Further meditation on *Endgame* as a kind of modern tragedy will also show us some of the unique aspects of the play in terms of structure. Kennedy states that *Endgame* does not offer the final consolation or synthesis of Greek and Shakespearian tragedy (62). At the end of the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus peace is established between the destructive and the order-seeking forces and at the end of *Macbeth* a measure of political, social and spiritual order is re-established.

The element of 'finishing' on which the play is built upon, seems to be the most important metatheatrical element of the play. Moreover, the characters' self conscious performance makes it quite clear that all is nothing more than a play. Clov's ironic description of the audience when he turns his telescope onto the auditorium and declares, 'I see . . . a multitude . . . in transports . . . of joy. (Pause.) That's what I call a magnifier' is a good example (25). These metatheatrical elements are even more theatrical and self-conscious than in *Waiting for Godot*. Like Estragon and Vladimir, Hamm and Clov sometimes talk on their dialogue. 'This is slow work' or 'We're getting on', and there are also more general allusions to theatrical language.

So, for instance, when Clov threatens to leave and asks Hamm what reason there is for him to stay, Hamm answers 'The dialogue' (39). Hamm's anger with Clov for answering his 'aside', and not respecting the theatrical convention of asides and soliloquies whereby the other characters on stage pretend not to hear them: 'An aside, ape! Did you never hear an aside before? (Pause.) I'm warming up for my last soliloquy' (49).

In this aspect, all the talk about 'finishing' or 'ending' also refers to the roles they are playing. They want to end the dialogue because speech and play-acting become a sort of torture, which is a familiar theme of Beckett. On the one hand it helps characters to pass time. On the other, the whole pretence, entrapment in the sense of having to go through pre-ordained role and the repetition are combined with anger and hatred: 'Why this farce, day after day?' as both Nell and Clov remark.

The complex metatheatrical elements in this play do not only refer to its structure as a play. At the same time, they show us the performative, theatrical and repetitive aspects of our daily lives. Literary grandeur or eloquence, like natural beauty, is no longer available in this world. Hamm's futile attempts to retrieve it simply serve to highlight the absence.

Beckett displays exploitative power relations through a denaturalised fashion by intensifying the performative element. Social roles and political hierarchies loosen when they are shown to be a matter of 'play' or performance. Pozzo might have been in Lucky's shoes, as he himself recognises, if chance had not willed otherwise.

> The loftiness to which Hamm aspires makes the literary tradition seem jaded and derivative. This might account for some of the intertextual allusion in the play, especially to Shakespeare. 'My kingdom for a nightman!' (22) clearly alludes to the famous plea in Shakespeare's Richard III, 'my kingdom for a horse' (V, iv, 7). Clov's violent rebuke to Hamm, 'I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent' (32), echoes that of Caliban to Prospero in Shakespeare's The Tempest, 'You taught me language and my profit on't/Is, I know how to curse: The red plague rid you/For learning language!' (I, ii, 365–7). Hamm's 'Our revels now are ended' (39) directly quotes Prospero in the same play (IV, i, 148). Given Hamm's failure to achieve eloquence and the general refusal of both thematic clarity and philosophical profundity in the play, the allusions to Shakespeare just highlight an absence. When King Lear is stripped and exposed during the storm on the heath, in a moment of elemental and unrelenting extremity sometimes regarded as quasi-Beckettian, he can at least rail against providence with expressiveness and insight. There is no such facility in Endgame, so the Shakespearean quotations floating in this text are like the flotsam and jetsam of a devastated literary tradition. They highlight another loss (McDonald 48).

In *Endgame* the power of human agency is severely deconstructed. A general sense of entrapment prevails. This is shown perhaps most obviously in the physical disabilities of all four of the characters. The characters are not only trapped physically. 'Something is taking its course', is the key refrain and they cannot change the course of events. There is a clockwork feel to the movements on stage. For instance, Hamm's is obsessed with finding the dead center of the room. The action seems beyond human will. The characters here are chess-pieces being moved by forces outside their control.

> CLOV: Do this, do that, and I do it. I never refuse. Why?
> HAMM: You're not able to.
> CLOV: Soon I won't do it anymore.
> HAMM: You won't be able to any more. (31–2)

The fact that the characters' actions are preordained reminds us of the theatricality herein. This is a play and based upon a prewritten script. But it also perhaps derives from a more thematic and even philosophical approach to determinism. Whether we are the product of nature (genes, biological determinism) or nurture (social conditioning, upbringing, ideology), Beckett is under the influence of the idea that human action is preordained. Such a view can be seen in the mechanical, coldly deterministic qualities of *Endgame*.

We can also understand the writer's attitude to nature through this deterministic philosophy. Hamm loves to dream about Nature; he often yearns for a pastoral alternative to the deserted greyness in which he lives. If he could fall asleep, he would 'go into the woods. My eyes would see . . . the sky, the earth. I'd run, run, they wouldn't catch me. (Pause.) Nature!' (19). The only woods left now are in Hamm's dreams. Whereas, the dustbins of Nagg and Nell used to be lined with sawdust, now they have to rely on sand. But Hamm hopes that Nature endures elsewhere. 'Did you ever think of one thing?' he asks Clov. 'That here we're down in a hole. (Pause.) But beyond the hills? Eh? Perhaps it's still green. Eh? (Pause.) Flora! Pomona! (Ecstatically.) Ceres! (Pause.) Perhaps you won't need to go very far' (30). Nature's bounty delights Hamm, its absence is part of his torment.

> HAMM: Nature has forgotten us.
> CLOV: There's no more nature.
> HAMM: No more nature! You exaggerate.
> CLOV: In the vicinity.
> HAMM: But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!
> CLOV: Then she hasn't forgotten us.
> HAMM: But you say there is none.
> CLOV: (sadly) No one that ever lived ever thought so crooked as we. (16)

The blind destruction of natural change and decay still persists. Clov's attempts at sprouting seeds end in failure. This perhaps symbolizes the ineffectuality of human control over the natural world. Nature is random and blind and it is a source of constant struggle with no clear purpose or end.

First, a flea appears in Clov's trousers. Hamm declares, 'But humanity might start from there all over again! Catch him, for the love of God!' (27). He strives to

kill it with insecticide, but realizes that it may simply be ‘laying doggo’. Later, a rat appears in the kitchen, which escapes Clov’s efforts to exterminate it. And finally, near the end, Clov sees a boy through his telescope, ‘a potential procreator’ (50). Clov has seen evolution progressing from flea to rat to boy. It is precisely as Hamm feared. In *Endgame* the feeling of negation, as can be understood from the overthrown conventional values, are deeply felt. The supreme act of transgression is reproduction: ‘Accursed progenitor!’ Hamm shouts at his father (15). This is certainly a play about ‘loss’, but if loss is have to any significance it must concern something that has been valued and prized (McDonald 51).

In *Endgame,* parents are kept in rubbish bins and the death of a mother is hardly mentioned. It is as if ‘value’ itself, along with all the more tangible materials like painkillers and sugar plums, is in the process of running out. There are certainly layers of parody and black comedy in the depiction of Hamm’s attitude to his parents as he is fearful of the prospect of evolution starting all over again. But there is also a strongly subversive refusal of the values of life, the family, ‘progress’ and so on.

Traditional drama celebrates family relationships. Even if these relationships are destroyed or the family ends up grieving, the tragic action makes sense because of their existence. When that value itself is lost alongside everything else, as is the case in *Endgame*, the sense of negation and loss takes us to a realm beyond tragedy. If the conventional tragic idiom to which this play aspires (‘misery loftier than mine’) articulates the values of tragic loss, this play moves to a more radical level in articulating the loss of tragic value.

III.I.III. *HAPPY DAYS:* VOID SELF EXPRESSION

> . . . it will be I, you must go on, I can’t go on, you must go on, I’ll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me, strange pain, strange sin, you must go on, perhaps it’s done already, perhaps they have said me already, perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my story, that would surprise me, if it opens, it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don’t know, I’ll never know, in the silence you don’t know, you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on. (*Molloy)*

Beckett's *Happy Days* also is a play which only has modesty in terms of characters and props. The spectator only thinks about the strange location of the characters. Winnie, is buried up to her waist and then to her neck, and the other one, Willie, often hidden behind a mound, always on all fours, meditates on their strange relationship. There is an omnipresent ringing bell and it makes them sleep and wake. The first voice heard in the play is that of Winnie. While she is busy with the objects in her black bag, we hear words from her in an endless stream. She feels herself in comfort through the basic objects around her and thinking that somebody, Willie is listening to her.

> . . . if only I could bear to be alone, I mean prattle away with not a soul to hear. . . . Not that I flatter myself you hear much, no Willie, God forbid
>
> . . . . Days when you hear nothing. . . . Something of this is being heard, I am not merely talking to myself. . . . That enables me to go on. . . . what *could* I do, all day long, I mean between the bell for waking and the bell for sleep? (20-1)

Winnie is actually trapped in a dull and gloomy situation which offers no joy. All we see is a woman who is trying to keep her breath. Despite the limitations in her movements and sexual attractiveness, she is not fed up with anything. There is nothing problematic with this according to her. Her husband too leads a dead life and marriage because the way he speaks and behaves is limited too. He seems unconcerned with Winnie's speech. Yet, this does not mean that this situation makes Winnie asexual: "And should one day the earth cover my breasts, then I shall never have seen my breasts, no one ever seen my breasts" (38). And later, "What I dream sometimes, Willie. . . . that you'll come round and live this side where I could see you. . . . I'd be a different woman. . . . Or just now and then, come round this side just every now and then and let me feast on you" (46).

The settings in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* may be unfamiliar and weird. However, they are somehow understandable and there are some aspects in those settings connecting the scenarios with the real world. In *Happy Days*, there is hardly any reason. The central theatrical image on which the play is based is not the one we are likely to come across in our daily experience. The scene is a strong theatrical metaphor and provides a counterpoint to the optimistic aura of Winnie's speeches. It

is Winnie's story of the man and woman talking about the oddness of her situation. The reason why Willie does not help herself out once more emphasizes this bizarre situation.

> Despite the cheerfulness that accompanies many of her memories, Winnie is a victim of molestation. Futilely, she attempts to keep the memory of the traumatic incident at bay. However, Winnie is winding down, becoming slower and increasingly trapped by her trauma. Beckett is keenly interested in ways individuals unsuccessfully attempt to disown their past. His explorations into this reflect his awareness of being a survivor of the Second World War. Beckett's involvement in the French Resistance, hiding after his cell of the Resistance was discovered by the Nazis and his work with the Irish Red Cross must have left a mark on his person as well as his work; these wartime experiences are like ghosts haunting Beckett's stage, paralleling the past that haunts Winnie. Beckett's creative output reveals that history leaves marks, inflicts us in ways that change us. (Weiss 37)

As pointed above, Beckett's style of leaving things in darkness also persists in this play. Beckett leaves the cause of Winnie's confinement as ambiguous as the devastation at the beginning of *Endgame* or the reason that brings Vladimir and Estragon for their appointment with Godot. As far as we understand from Winnie's memories, she has not always been confined to the mound of earth. From the implication that she could use her legs before, we understand that her immersion in the earth is ongoing like the life itself, in which there is no escape from devastation. So, there is kind of a trauma that has been symbolized through the mound of earth that inflicts Winnie.

Billie Whitelaw in Beckett's own first Production of the play in London at the Royal Court Theatre in 1979

But still, the irony in Winnie's optimistic tone and the seriousness of her situation goes on throughout the play. Beckett's stage characters commonly like spending time with stories or memories. But most of them have a helpless view of life. For instance, anti-intellectual Estragon's outbursts remind us of the bleak philosophy of Beckett's characters: 'Recognize! What is there to recognize? All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery! (Looking wildly about him.)Look at this muckheap! I've never stirred from it!' (61). They sometimes tend to forget their existence but they cannot deny that they exist.

Winnie, on the other hand, tries to maintain a desperate happiness: 'Another heavenly day' are her first words when the bell awakes her (9). Her speeches still include optimism: 'That is what I find so wonderful', 'great mercies', 'so much to be thankful for', 'this will have been another happy day' and so forth. It is a heavenly day despite the 'blaze of hellish light' (11).

Winnie lives in her mound as if she were leading a normal life and her rituals of brushing her teeth, cleaning her glasses, brushing her hair openly clash with the

rest of the situation. But, this way she keeps herself away from her endless helplessness. Like Estragon and Vladimir, like Hamm and Clov, she too must pass the time; fill in the day from morning to night. Winnie has two means to go on her existence, the same two as Vladimir and Estragon: talking and doing. When talking finishes, she leans to her handbag, which in turn gives her a reason for more talk:

> What now? (Pause.) Words fail, there are times when even they fail. (Turning a little towards WILLIE.) Is that not so, Willie? (Pause. Turning a little further.) Is that not so, Willie, that even words fail, at times? (Pause. Back front.) What is one to do then, until they come again? Brush and comb the hair, if it has not been done, or if there is some doubt, trim the nails if they are in need of trimming, these things tide one over. (20)

Here we see that some of the play's major themes are articulated: Winnie's loneliness, her optimism, her cliche´d tone and her need for communication. When words make no sense, actions and routines fill in the time until she goes to sleep again. The focus on her moving arms and hands in the first act turns to her moving eyes in the second, which is a vivid theatrical image of her run-down. It is quite difficult for any actress to keep the dramatic focus by the use only of her words and her eyes.

In many respects this play is more tragic than the other two plays, as her physical immobility is more extensive than any of the others. In the second act she is almost totally motionless. Second, her need to be cheerful does not make her situation easier, it actually makes it worse. Hamm can at least rebel against his father or his God, but poor Winnie has to maintain her fragile joy no matter how awful the circumstances. 'Can't complain', she cheerfully breathes, as the earth around her sucks her in.

Unlike *Waiting for Godot*, the day here does not end. There are no stage directions to soften the 'hellish' light and the noonday sun, glaring and thus irritating, will not pale.

The concept of day and night has left the characters in this play. We see Winnie waking up at the start of both acts but, we never see her going to sleep. She sees Willie do so, seemingly at will, which she sees as 'a marvellous gift' (11). If she tries too hard to avoid the light, the bell intervenes in. It awakens her when she tends to fall into sleep in the first act, but it stops her from even closing her eyes in

the second. ‘It hurts like a knife. (Pause.) A go (Pause.) One cannot ignore it’ (40). The light here reminds us of one of the key motifs of the play, that of violation and intrusion. Finally, and importantly, what makes life worse for Winnie, unlike the comic pairings in Beckett’s earlier plays, is the frailty of her companionship.

Sadly for her, she has a much less cooperative partner with whom to play verbal and physical games. He answers her only typically in monosyllables. Until he crawls round to the front of the mound near the end of the play, we do not see his face. Yet, despite his inadequacies, her need for him is desperate, though she wishes she did not need a listener for her chatter: ‘Ah yes, if only I could bear to be alone, I mean prattle away with not a soul to hear. (Pause.) Not that I flatter myself you hear much, no Willie, God forbid’ (18). She cannot bear to be alone, to be without a listener, but she knows that her husband hardly listens to her chatter. It is an unexpected and delightful moment if he chooses to actually respond to her.

All dramatic performance is somehow affected by cultural codes, prejudices, ideologies, whether it subverts or reinforces them. Part of the experience of watching a play is the experience of recognition. This often comes from there being a recognizable ‘pattern’ on stage. Beckett’s fame stems from the fact that he is like an innovator that creates something totally new and beyond recognition. However, for the experience of a Beckett play to effectively capture, it has to be mixed with bits of familiarity. So, for instance, for all the oddness of Winnie’s predicament, there is the ordinariness of her routine.

Happy Days is a play that has to do with marriage and it exploits and indeed parodies a stereotype in which a woman talks incessantly while a husband sits apart reading the newspaper and giving one-syllable answers. The play can be accused of a sexist depiction of a constantly-speaking, middle-aged wife, full of fragile optimism.

Nonetheless, we should bear in mind that the play looks into a recognizable discourse of gender that would be lost if Willie was chattering in the mound and Winnie reading the paper. One could argue that it also indicates recognizable discourses of class and nationality. As can be understood from only their costumes, the pair are clearly middle-class. ‘Winnie’s optimism also exploits a certain discourse of resilient Englishness, cheery and good-humoured regardless of the situation. It is a curiously English play’, according to Hugh Kenner: ‘the

unquestioning assumption that the warp and woof of an unfulfilling day consist in maintaining one's cheer is a premise of English gentility as perhaps no other.' (147).

Winnie desperately needs to keep up cheerful, or otherwise she will be overwhelmed with the realization of her condition. 'Begin. Winnie' are amongst her first words, like an actress preparing for a performance (10). This gives the play an effective metatheatrical dimension. The actress playing Winnie needs to perform a woman who is just playing in an act of performance.

This conflict allows the audience to perceive the unbearable tension and burden in Winnie's personality, a burden that often manifests itself in the fragmentation of her language. "Beckett said during the rehearsals of the Royal Court production that he directed starring Billie Whitelaw in 1979, 'One of the clues of the play is interruption. Something begins; something else begins. She begins but doesn't carry through with it. She's constantly being interrupted or interrupting herself. She's an interrupted being. She's a bit mad. Manic is not wrong, but too big. There is the question over her awareness to be sure. Beckett comments that she 'is not stoic, she's unaware'. (qtd.in Jeffers 142)'

Actually, lack of awareness in Beckett's world is a problematic condition. Are Vladimir and Estragon always aware? Are Hamm and Clov aware of what they are doing all the time? Beckett's characters oscillate between different levels of awareness and suffering. There are occasional breakdowns or the threat of breakdowns in Winnie's talk and actions though seeming to be happy. 'Forgive me, Willie, sorrow keeps breaking in' (27).

> If she was so happy and without worry, if her optimism was so strong, she would hardly knock back the tonic with such joy. "For all her 'wifely' fussing and limited cheeriness, Winnie is not an empty chatterbox. She has an intellectual and erudite side. She knows her Aristotle and can quote Shakespeare (repeatedly), Milton, Keats, Browning, Yeats and Gray, though, consistent with the motif of interruption, the quotations are often broken and partial: 'Mustn't complain (Takes up mirror, starts doing lips.) What is that wonderful line? (Lips.) Oh fleeting joys – (lips) oh something lasting woe' (13). The quotation she is striving for here is from Milton's Paradise Lost: 'Oh fleeting joys of Paradise, dear bought with lasting woes'. (McDonald 69)

Her ability to quote is one of the things that makes her relaxed, and that her memory of the 'classics' is failing is one of her worries. At the start of Act II, her power of quotation has gone worse and she asks this question, 'What is that unforgettable line?' (37). It is as if, all what she knows and has learnt is being absorbed into the earth, leaving just a remainder: 'One loses one's classics. (Pause.) Oh not all. (Pause.) A part. (Pause.) A part remains. (Pause.) That is what I find so wonderful, a part remains, of one's classics, to help one through the day. (Pause.) Oh yes, many mercies, many mercies' (43). According to Weiss, Winnie, like an archive, embodies cultural debris, but by doing so, constructs a historical narrative that is always lacking, always fragmented, and as such she is imprisoned. Through Winnie, Beckett reminds us of the impossibility of forgetting (43).

Winnie needs to be cheerful, to be optimistic, to be grateful for what she has and never mention what she has lost. The little part that remains of her memory in Act II she calls a 'mercy'. When she is buried up to her neck in the mound, without even the use of her arms and the tools in her handbag, she still brokenly needs to find reasons to be cheerful and to be grateful.

Thomas maintains that "Winnie's sexual experiences exist as fantasy or memory; the extent of her sensations is intentionally ambiguous" (623). Rather than fulfilling her sexual desires, she busies her mind thinking life's necessities. However, language is insufficient to express things according to her: "Words fail, there are times when even they fail. . . . What is one to do then, until they come again? Brush and comb the hair, if it has not been done, or if there is some doubt, trim the nails, if they are in need of trimming, these things tide one over" (24).

Beckett' combines irony and the absurd in *Happy Days* and indicates the powerlessness and alienation of the modern individual. Here, Thomas states about Winnie's case: "Winnie, part realistically human and part inanimate, incongruously entombed alive and yet somehow totally acceptable to the reader/spectator, exists as a surrealist metaphor for life itself" (625). Despite being physically limited and even mentally limited as we understand from the limited range of speech she uses, she still tries to enjoy life, implying that she only has little pessimism. She eases herself with

the sounds she hears and says “What would I do without them? (*Pause.*) What would I do without them, when words fail?. . . . They are a boon, sounds are a boon, they help me. . . through the day. (*Smile*) The old style! (*Smile off.*) Yes, those are happy days, when there are sounds” (53).

The play ends when Willie finally locates himself in front of Winnie’s mound, looking up at her. The two cannot touch physically, but Winnie sings the song, “I Love You So”. Although Winnie seems happy with this situation, we can get a sense of anger. This is because of the realization that despite the fact that Winnie is capable of using language, this ability does not help her out of her “death-in-life” situation. She uses language only to comfort herself, which is a similar situation to that of Estragon and Vladimir in that words serve only as a comfort from the confrontation with the “truth” of existence, the hopelessness of despair, and inevitability of death.

III.I.III.I.THEATRE AND STRUCTURE

It would be weird to think of a Beckett play which is not bleak. Indeed, Beckett is known for his highly miserable and existential plays. However, *Happy Days* surely tops the list. In two acts we watch a middle-aged woman, Winnie, become slowly submerged in the mound, with only her head visible in the second act. The only other character is her passive and largely silent husband who mysteriously refuses to help her. The only action that takes place is Winnie singing a song and her umbrella, at one point, catching fire. She spends a good section of the play trying to read the label on her toothpaste.

The image that is made up of the half-buried woman in the mound of soil can be regarded as one of the most striking visual metaphors of the modern theatre. It is true that the play is much more dependent on performance than on visual elements. The audience sees Winnie in between death and decay and positive words and thoughts about life, which gives the text its dynamic power. This power is supported by the clash between words and silences and the variety of speech styles within the long monologue.

The only way to understand the complex interconnections in the play is surely to read it with attention to envision the play in the mind. The reason as to why the reader needs attention is that the writer is so much abstract and uses the theatre as its context. No other stage image in drama dominates the play as much as Winnie's half buried, immobile and incessant speaker image does. Winnie in her bondage exists at every episode of the play. However, no explanation is given about this unfamiliar situation.

Winnie gets physically diminished between the two acts. In Act II we see that she has sunk into the earth. When this image is constantly before the eye, the patterns of decay and destruction evoked by words lose their significance. Even though we hear Winnie's repeated claim of 'no change', her meditation on the change in her condition gains much of its power from the context.

> I say I used to pray. *{Pause.)* Yes. I must confess I did. *(Smile.)* Not now. *(Smile broader.)* No no. *(Smile off. Pause.)* Then . . . now . . . what difficulties here, for the mind. To have been always what I am - and so changed from what I was. *(Pause.)* I am the one, I say the one, then the other. *(Pause.)* Now the one, then the other. *(Pause.)* (38)

These words Winnie utters about the nature of human being through comparisons between past and now turn into a stream of consciousness and Winnie then herself admits her shrinking body. My arms. *(Pause.)* My breasts. *(Pause.)* What arms? *(Pause.)* What breasts? *(Pause.)* (38)

Other remarks of Winnie mark the passage of time between the two acts. There is the suggestion that universal heat 'might be the eternal cold . . . Everlasting perishing cold' (39), which is like the cold version of Hell. She supposes Willie dead yet mentions of his continued existence: 'you are there' (38), whether through memory or imagination or theatrical illusion. And there is the strange, dream-like image 'Eyes float up that seem to close in peace . . . to see . . . in peace' (38). These and other images imply some kind of change, perhaps the refinement of the suffering woman's soul.

We may see that lyricism ends in Act II, and the phrases repeated from the first act do not appear so much. If they do, this is just to strengthen the theatricality. The speaker's urge to talk, the loud ringing of the bell and the intense light, which are unchanging, stand against the speaker's bodily condition and words, which have changed.

The power of the second act of *Waiting for Godot* does not exist in Act II in that there is the sense of infinity against the limited time in the former. But it does still have the paradox of changing. The absence of Willie, the lifelong partner and the recipient of Winnie's words, reinforces the pathos of dying, which is even parodied. The pathos is pushed in the final appearance of Willie which is like a once-competent actor attempting a performance but ends in failure.

> The deliberately theatrical get-up, the costumed masquerade enacting Willie's last wish to appear as a dashing matinee idol or as lady killer (as if the senile figure at the end of the 'Seven Ages' speech in *As You Like It* moved back in time to play the role of the young lover) once more underscores the pathos of decrepitude. The whole scene is ironically counterpointed by the singing of Winnie's song (the music-box tune): the once popular and elegant yet now hackneyed and faded hit song from Lehar's *The Merry Widow,* in a climax that is a 'dying fall'. The song itself is simply sentimental, but the total scene is moving as a complex fusion of theatre effects. Willie's last gesture is ambiguous: is he reaching for the revolver or for Winnie? Is he resting or dying? The latter seems more probable in context, but the open-endedness of the ending (the theatrical *tableau)* adds to its impact in performance (Kennedy 84).

Willie provides the play with most of its action and black comedy. Winnie and Willie act out as if they were a real couple and are, like the couples in Beckett's earlier plays, inseparable. However, they are in fact separated and physically totally out of each other's reach. They communicate only through fragments, monosyllables and certain noises: Winnie's initial 'Hoo-oo' and Willie's grunts and groans. Such a poor relationship certainly is full of aspects that mime and parody a marriage.

In portraying such kind of a marriage, Beckett is again making use of farce, which is a form of exaggerate comedy. Winnie and Willie repeatedly suggest certain comic types -despite their extreme situation: the ever-contented, sweetly cooing wife partnered by the grumpy, incommunicative, impotent husband (Kennedy 86).

We most of the time laugh at the couple's exchanges, including some of the more grotesque ones like Willie interrupting one of Winnie's meditations by holding up a pornographic postcard. She examines the card, long and carefully, through her glass in her handicapped state.

> However, Winnie's reaction is once again muddled. Her words express her disgust while her action of examining the card and looking closer suggests that, like Willie, some part of her is turned on by the obscenity in the card . Indeed, her earlier reminiscences of her first ball, her second ball, and her first kiss in a tool shed helps to establish Winnie as a woman with real sexual desires and a sexual past that does not involve her husband. More to the point, the postcard is a pictorial representation of the past, and pornography is a narrative of human sexuality and sexual taboos. It is a history that appears to be hidden. The cameraman makes him/ herself into a peeping tom, recording activities that are constructed to be taking place behind closed doors. In actuality, however, the historical narrative of sex and sexuality is not an exposure of what happens in the bedroom between men and women but rather a fabrication and distillation of sexual taboos in print form. Photography is perhaps one of the most deceptive history-makers as the framing of it always suggests a posing (even in candid shots) and editing out or in; it is a medium constructed in terms of repetition, fixing, or freezing the moment, and fragmentation. Thus, Winnie's reaction, which is tied to her memory of Mildred, is tied to her history and her personal trauma. (Weiss 47)

As has always been in Beckett's drama, this lyrical or romantic moment is disrupted through the stage effects. For instance, Winnie recalls that Willie was praising her 'golden' hair, which is soon followed by her watching Willie's clumsy attempt at crawling back to his hole. The "hearing test" episode is itself a miniature tragicomedy. Winnie's compassionate pleas are each time answered by Willie in increasing irritation and anger. The same short scene also exemplifies Beckett's ability to use one of Winnie's quotations from the classics: 'Fear no more the heat of the sun', from *Cymbeline* IV.ii, in a fully theatrical way.

> WINNIE: *(Now in her normal voice, still turned towards him.)* Can you hear me? *(Pause.)* I beseech you, Willie, just yes or no, can you her me, just yes or nothing.
> *Pause.*
> WILLIE: Yes.
> WINNIE: *(turning front, same voice).* And now?
> WILLIE: *(irritated).* Yes.
> WINNIE: *(less loud).* And now?
> WILLIE: *(more irritated).* Yes.
> WINNIE: *(still less loud).* And now? *(A little louder.)* And now?
> WILLIE: *(violently).* Yes!
> WINNIE: *(same voice).* Fear no more the heat o' the sun.
> *(Pause.)* Did you hear that?
> WILLIE: *(irritated).* Yes.

> WINNIE: *(same voice).* What? *(Pause.)* What?
> WILLIE: *(more irritated).* Fear no more.
> *Pause.*
> WINNIE: *(same voice).* No more what? *(Pause.)* Fear no more what?
> WILLIE: *(violently)* Fear no more!
> WINNIE: *(normal voice, gabbled).* Bless you Willie I do appreciate your goodness I know what an effort it costs you, now you may relax I shall not trouble you again unless I am obliged to, by that I mean unless I come to the end of my own resources which is most unlikely, just to know that in theory you can hear me even though in fact you don't is all I need.(21-2)

All these lines are actually routine marital exchanges, with a mixture of caring and patience. Though Willie's hearing is defective, Winnie celebrates it as better than nothing. She depends on the remnants of dialogue with her lifelong partner, which is stated by her with explicit irony. She tries to sustain the relationship through minimal fragments of conversation with a minimally present partner. In this play the human need to address another person has been shown and parodied much stronger than anywhere else. The 'YOU' is no longer capable of proper answers, only can do inadequate and haphazard gestures.

There is a fragmented but theatrically effective dialogue in *Happy Days*. The minimal exchanges between Willie and Winnie include: Willie's monosyllabic and funny 'It' in answer to Winnie wondering whether *hair* goes with the plural 'them' or the singular 'it'; his crude punning on emmet's eggs as 'formication', an old man's contrived sex-joke paralleled by his relish of merely saying the word 'sucked up' and by defining the word hog, with pedantic precision (which might well refer to his own state) as 'castrated male swine' (Kennedy 88). They are part of the theatrical convention where even a bad joke is better than none to get rid of the monotony.

This limited dialogue also includes Winnie's compulsive calls to her silent and mostly invisible partner. From her first 'Hoo-oo' to her final appeal 'Have you gone off your head, Willie? *(Pause.)* Out of your poor old wits, Willie?', there is hardly a page in the text where Winnie is not *speaking to* the silent partner.

The other theatrical devices in *Happy Days* are Winnie's stream of self-conscious remarks and her stories or impersonations. In addressing herself, Winnie is given a device often found in the traditional soliloquy such as Hamlet where the introspective protagonist 'talks to himself and 'thinks aloud': How often I have said, in evil hours, Sing now, Winnie, sing your song, there is nothing else for it, and did

not [. . .] Something says, Stop talking now, Winnie, for a minute, don't squander all your words for the day, stop talking and do something for a change, will you? (31)

Winnie's stories include elements of violence and moments of horror. The first story, of Mildred and the mouse (41, 44), is very effective because it makes us feel of a tale told in the nursery and a dramatic climax when Winnie enacts Mildred's scream as the mouse rushes up her nightgown. The sense is direct and sensual. Even so, the relation of the story to the overall pattern of the play is not clear.

We may suspect that the Mildred story is related to some childhood sexual experience of Winnie's, but it would not be reasonable to focus on detailed psychological speculations around that. It is enough to have the image of the frightened, screaming child, the experience of trauma, which we can see in the superficial optimism of Winnie's speech-flow.

The story of the Showers or Cookers, last human kind to stray this way' (33), has a high theatrical energy. Winnie's impersonation of that vulgar couple of spectators suddenly forces the audience to see her diminished body through voyeur eyes:

> What's she doing? he says - What's the idea? he says - stuck up to her diddies in the bleeding ground - coarse fellow - What does it mean? he says - What's it meant to mean? - and so on. (32)

> Can't have been a bad bosom, he says, in its day. *{Pause.)* Seen worse shoulders, he says, in my time. *{Pause.)* Does she feel her legs? he says. *{Pause.)* Is there any life in her legs he says. *{Pause.)* Has she anything on underneath? he says. *{Pause.)* Ask her, he says, I'm shy. *{Pause.)* Ask her what? she says. *{Pause.)* Is there any life in her legs. *{Pause.)* Has she anything on underneath. (43)

Winnie's improvisation of this scene again uses a device from the popular theatre. The second scene is presented just as Winnie's classics are about to be exhausted for the day. Mr Shower's crude observations are then brought in to help when other words fail:

> And now? *{Pause.)* And now, Willie? *{Long pause.)* I call to the eye of the mind . . . Mr Shower — or Cooker. *{She closes her eyes. Bell rings loudly. She opens her eyes. Pause.)* Hand in hand, in the other hands bags.(43)

In places like this we witness how memory and endless stream of words tending to soliloquy are being dramatized. Here as elsewhere we see also the *rhythm* of the phrases and pauses, with the omnipresent stage directions as signals to a

continuous performance. We might call that the rhythm in *Happy Days* is highly characteristic. It is like no play-text encountered before. This is also another indication that we are dealing with a markedly performance-based play: the words are asking to be heard.

CONCLUSION

Samuel Beckett's plays are marked by the artist's vision of the world into which his characters are placed. He deals with the position and the situation of man in his surrounding world, which is a major and always recurring theme in the three plays I have chosen as a background for my thesis, as well as in his complete dramatic and prosaic work.

Beckett's hero is a sisyphusean type of man waiting for the fulfillment of his fate, which seems to be eternal through his suffering and hoping. He is alienated from the world, which is unknown, remote, and indifferent, and from which he is isolated by the walls of his self. The conflict between two different substances - the world and the human subject, leads to the feelings of absurdity and to fundamental existential questions about the meaning of human life in a world where he lives as a stranger.

His characters are creatures grounded in absurdity; there is no meaning in their being which is why their lives involve mere waiting for the end, for death. The waiting is a pure experience of time itself, time which disintegrates into smaller and shorter periods, so that their waiting is a never-ending fate having no purpose, but the only aim - the end.

Beckett's characters' tragedy consists in their empty waiting which becomes a long period of suffering; it consists in the power of life which still keeps them breathing and going on, although they are very close to their aim, the end. I see the whole greatness of Beckett's absurd man in his intractability with which he continually fills up his precarious fate, and although his suffering increases as time stops he does not live without hope and joy in life.

Samuel Beckett's plays offer an unsettling commentary not only on the human condition, but also on the very nature of existence-the commentary that not only is life itself meaningless but that our existence in that life is meaningless as

well, and our attempts to find meaning or shape some kind of meaningful existence are completely absurd.

Beckett reveals this absurdity via the conventions of absurdist drama such as bizarre situations, speech, etc., but he also incorporates Biblical allusions and archetypes into his plays, not to offer any hope, but rather to drive home the point that there is no solace to be found in life. Religion, as portrayed by Beckett, is simply another meaningless ritual in which human being participate as a desperate way of coping with life devoid of any value. There is no redemption hidden away, waiting to be discovered.

In three plays staging is crucial to the revelation of the absurdity of the human condition of which powerlessness, paralysis, monotony and endless ritual are the hallmarks, and that life itself is something endured more out of a fear of death rather than a genuine love of life. The state of paralysis is graphically illustrated in *Happy Days* where the protagonist, Winnie, appears on stage literally half-buried. A similar condition exists in *Endgame* where the characters Nagg and Nell are kept in ashbins and where the character Hamm is confined to a chair. As Edith Kern writes in *Beckett's Knight of Infinite Resignation*, what Beckett is attempting to reveal in his staging is "that almost impossible task of transferring to the stage the bodilessness and utter isolation of his novelistic characters" (49). His characters are not simply immobile; they are entrapped in endless monotony, powerless to change their situations.

Even when characters are moving or walking as are Clov, and to some extent, Willie, they are still paralyzed by their inability to leave their situations or to even find meaning in their relationships. This inability to make a real connection is exampled in the interaction between Willie and Winnie. Winnie and Willie do not actually communicate with each other so much as they simply exist with each other. In essence, although they are together in each other's company, they are still living in isolation. Winnie may wish she were alone, but she needs Willie because one of the ways in which Winnie copes with her paralytic situation is through speech. As Edith Kern writes, "Willie's presence, though silent, is crucial. For it is to him that Winnie

speaks, even if she cannot see him. What she expresses is man's need for someone to hear and possibly see him" (21). For Winnie, words are meaningless if there is no one to hear them and words are proof of her own existence and the proof that the words are themselves in existence comes in knowing that they are being spoken to and heard by someone else. The commentary Beckett seems to make on human relationship is that one's interactions with fellow beings are not attempts at forging bonds but desperate attempts at affirming existence.

Endgame offers a similar view of human relationships as little more than speaker and listener. Hamm speaks incessantly but he is not actually conversing with anyone; he is talking at an audience, sometimes figuratively and sometimes literally. For example, near the end of the play, Hamm becomes agitated when Clov interrupts his speech. Again quoting Kern, "As has been pointed out by many critics, their intercourse is, indeed, hardly a dialogue. Hamm's soliloquies-and he himself refers to them as such-are not very different form their conversations, since what is said by each interlocutor frequently adds little to advance either thought or story" (22). Hamm's speeches are not designed for interaction. They are designed to captivate and hold captive an audience whether that audience is found in Clov, or in the one beyond the fourth wall.

Beckett's commentary on the human condition is not only that it is lived out in isolation, but that it is also a state of existence filed with endless monotony and ritual- a condition to endured not out of a love of live, but rather out of a fear of death. The monotony of ritual is graphically illustrated in the plays herein.

Samuel Beckett uses Biblical allusion to underscore the plight and the monotonous life styles of his characters and make the commentary that while the characters may resemble Biblical characters, they are often frustrated by a lack of faith or belief in God, or worse, their faith in God is nothing more than a barren ritual. Winnie's prayers can be viewed through this lens in that they resemble simple words, common words that she repeats out of the comfort of the familiar rather than as a communication of faith. In *Waiting for Godot*, the endless waiting itself has turned to a way of life, without any bless from God. For Winnie, God seems to be a

habit-an entity to which she is addicted but who offers her no solace, no hope, and no comfort. Faith offers no comfort to the characters in *Endgame* either. In fact, the characters of Clov and Hamm are close to parodies or caricatures of the aspects of God.

Beckett's plays initially seem absurd in the literal sense of the word. They seem outlandish, outrageous, silly plays set in ridiculous settings with caricatures rather than characters-humans living in trash cans, a man in a hovel, a woman literally bound in a mound or two men hopelessly waiting for somebody to come. But when one sees past the staging and looks a little closer, one sees that the world Beckett creates is not nearly as outlandish as it initially appears. And when one does look past the staging one discovers a disturbing commentary on life. The commentary that our own lives are filled with repetition, monotony, despair, naiveté and that meaning can be found only in our minds. Meaning is not an ultimate truth waiting to be discovered.

There is no absolute hope, solace, or firm foundation in which to put one's trust and any attempt at seeking some ultimate meaning to life will be rewarded with frustration. Furthermore, Beckett makes the commentary that, like Winnie, we begin our lives trapped in a mound of paralysis and will end our lives under a mound of earth. All we can do during our time spent between the two mounds is find something whether it is a enjoying ourselves in our misery or an attempt to make the best of it that allows us to endure in our absurd condition.

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