

SAMUEL BECKETT: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS
OF THE ABSURD DRAMA

by

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In the beginning, there was universal Nothing.
Then Nothing said No to itself and thereby
 begat Something,
Which called itself Yes.

Then No and Yes, cohabiting, begat Maybe.
Next all three, in a ménage à trois, begat Guilt.

And Guilt was of many names:
Mine, Thine, Yours, Ours, His, Hers, Its, Theirs--
and Order.

In time things so came to pass
That two of its names, Guilt and Order,
Honoring their great Progenitors, Yes, No, and Maybe,
Begat History.

Finally, History fell a-dreaming
And dreamed about Language--

(And that brings us to critics-who-write-critiques of-
critical-criticism.)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Vladimir: When I think of it. All these years where would you be? You'd be nothing more than a little heap of bones at the minute, no doubt about it.

Estragon: And what of it?

Vladimir: It's too much for one man.¹

Thus begins the dialogue to one of the opening scenes of Samuel Beckett's most important play, Waiting for Godot. Since he first published his idea about the existence of the self in 1931, scholars and critics have tried to simplify the Beckett universe. His philosophy has become the victim of over-interpretation by quasi-philosophers of literature, drama, and rhetoric. His philosophy provokes a human relationship in which two beings discover the self or human condition in the face of a meaningless universe. Jean-Paul Sartre summarizes this concept with the following remarks:

In order to get any truth about myself, I must have contact with another. The other is indispensable to my own existence, as well as to any knowledge about myself. This being so, in discovering my inner being I discover the other person at the same time, like a freedom placed in front of me which thinks and wills only for or against me.²

In other words, man can be defined only in relationship with his involvement with humanity. What happens between man and man defines

the essence of the human spirit. Beckett views the world as a type of dialogical exchange between one self and the other. For Beckett, man is the sum total of his actions. Through the existence and exchange of the other, man discovers the human spirit. Thus an individual transcends into a new being creating a rhetorical self. Beckett has set forth a philosophical view of man's creativity and uniqueness as a creature who communicates. It is for this reason that I wish to undertake this study.

Statement of the Problem

It is the purpose of this study to make a critical analysis of several of Beckett's plays, focusing on themes but also showing the relationship between his philosophical inquiry and a concept of rhetoric. The three major plays chosen for this study are Krapp's Last Tape, Endgame, and Waiting for Godot. References will also be made to several of his lesser known works as well as his major novels: Murphy, Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable and Watt.

One of the major problems facing a study of these plays is that the playwright pursues ends quite different from that of the conventional plays. Therefore, there is a need for a different method of evaluation.

Few studies take into consideration that a dramatic situation is understood to be the outcome of rhetorical events and presents in concrete form what the playwright regards as significant contemporary circumstances. Drama is intimately related to the business of living--not in the sense that it deals with events directly in order to influence the handling of them, but in the sense that it formulates

experience symbolically. Drama testifies to an encounter with reality and to one way of coming to terms with it. The relevance of drama consists in formulating and reformulating the human condition in order to supply possible attitudes towards it. There is a great need to view modern plays from a rhetorical point of view.

The Five Consistent Themes in Beckett's Plays

The five most consistent themes in Beckett's plays are alienation, the nature of time and space, the role of habit and memory, the use of the comic mode, and the symbolic act as a means of communication. The first--alienation--may be defined as the existential loneliness of man in a meaningless universe. Beckett implies that in the world there exists a universal human condition which presents man's absurd situation in the cosmos. Throughout history man has existed on an unequal basis, but the frustration of why man exists has remained on an equal plane. Beckett views the quest for identity and ontological security as a continuing dialectic between Sartrean and Freudian notions of self. To Beckett, the essence of all mankind is what happens between the inner and the outer self or between two selves.

The nature of time has been an abiding problem for the historian, the rhetorician, and the dramatist of this century. Beckett, too, is concerned with time. Beckett views time and waiting as one of the most significant communication characteristics of the human self. The flow of time confronts modern man with the basic problem of existence. Since man can only communicate with his personality in a "retrospective hypothesis", it is difficult for him to understand the nature of the self, and the reality of the world at the precise moment in which he

is living it. Thus habit and memory also serve as basic means of relating the human condition of modern man.

The basic genre of Beckett's writing is that of the comic. Beckett supplies another dimension to the comic artist which is the combination of the tragic with the comic or the tragic-comedy. Beckett's humor includes "laughs that strictly speaking are not laughs."

The final theme is the symbolic act as a means of communication. Beckett, through the means of the dramatic medium, tries to show methods of expression beyond language. The element of language still plays an important part in these plays, but what happens on the stage transcends, and often contradicts, the words spoken by the characters. Beckett tries to indicate through symbolic acts, means of encountering reality and coming to terms with it. In this way, he implies that the essence of drama consists of formulating the human condition in order to supply possible attitudes toward it.

Critical Survey of the Pertinent Literature

Only three studies pertinent to this investigation were discovered after a survey of dissertation abstracts and research studies. Abstracts investigated included those listed in Dissertation Abstracts for Humanities and Social Sciences, International Abstracts, and Speech Monographs.

A dissertation completed in 1966 by Lois Gordon, "Dialectic of the Beast: The Dramatic Rhetoric of Samuel Beckett," appears from the title to approach the problem of this research proposal. In viewing the abstract, this study treats Beckett's plays and novels from

strictly a psychological point of view. No interpretation is made in this study toward the rhetorical nature of Beckett's plays.

Charles Christy Hampton, Jr. completed a dissertation in 1966 entitled "The Human Situation in the Plays of Samuel Beckett: A Study in Stratagems of Inaction." This study attempts to show the use of the play's symbols from play to play, and their relationship to the development of the novel. The study further argues that while Waiting for Godot and Endgame continue the novel's quest for meaning, the later plays are unified by a new and common orientation toward the problem of existence. These plays turn from considering attempts to explanation and escape from the human situation to attempts at successful accommodation toward it.

An additional study completed in 1968 by Alexander Theroux entitled, "The Language of Samuel Beckett," adds more knowledge to the understanding of his plays. This study probes the techniques and methods of language in all of Beckett's novels and plays. No mention is made of the strategic uses of language and non-verbal modes of behavior of the major characters. This study is more of a descriptive and linguistic approach to language.

Research studies investigated on Beckett's writing included those by Martin Esslin, Ruby Cohn, Hugh Kenner, Frederick Hoffman, Nathan Scott, William York Tindall, Ihab Hassan, Josephine Jacobsen, William Mueller, Richard Coe, Colin Duckworth, John Fletcher, and John Spurling. None of these studies provide an assessment of Beckett's rhetorical strategies and influence of this inquiry on modern man.

Justification of the Study

Although the pertinent literature lacks any analysis of depth on the problem of this paper, this absence alone does not justify a study. I believe this research proposal is important and justified for the following reasons:

- A. Samuel Beckett's plays and novels continue to command interest and attention today. Countless articles and books are written which include Beckett's name in reference to issues such as ontology, alienation, social consciousness, the self, and existentialism. The reference to the actions and characteristics of the two bums in Waiting for Godot is often found in writings of the contemporary scene.
- B. The issues of the individual and quest for a self-hood appear crucial principles of today's society. It is hoped that this study will provide a fresh look at viewing the rhetoric of Samuel Beckett, a rhetoric which is concerned with the self.
- C. Incorporation of several types of rhetorical strategies into the research design should result in a variety of insights in viewing dramatic works. Since no previous studies have attempted to apply the insights of Kenneth Burke to dramatic works of Samuel Beckett, this should result in a different kind of literary and rhetorical criticism. In the field of speech communication, there have been no studies published on Samuel Beckett or his theory of rhetoric.

For these reasons, it appears that this research proposal should constitute a worthwhile study.

Methodology

Although the basic research tools will be focused toward Beckett's theory of rhetoric, there will be an attempt to apply some of the rhetorical insights of Kenneth Burke in determining the implications of the themes in Beckett's plays. The advantage of using the Burke method is that these insights provide tools for uncovering the essence of the philosophy and rhetorical strategies in Beckett's plays. Burke has a definition of literature which comes in handy at this point. "Poetry," Burke writes, "is the adopting of various strategies for the encompassing of situations."³ Burke gives a comprehensive analysis of this definition in The Philosophy of Literary Form. He writes:

Critical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose. They are not merely answers, they are strategic answers, stylized answers. We think of poetry as the adopting of various strategies for the encompassing of situations. These strategies size up the situations, name their structure and outstanding ingredients, and name them in a way that contains an attitude toward them.⁴

What determines the meaningfulness of a poetic situation is the writer's general view of reality. It is the way in which a writer formulates the relationship between things and events according to his own thoughts and actions. The situations of life are reenacted symbolically in order to gain some truth from it. The moment a writer tries to express or describe a situation--it involves a choice among possible ways of naming the situation. This choice involves a reflection of the poet's attitude toward it, and the course of action implied in the attitude.

The strategy of identification seems the most worthwhile in providing insights to ways of looking at the themes of Beckett's plays and his view of the rhetorical self. The strategy of identification is the process of establishing a common interest, value, or form with others through the usage of symbols. Men are apart from one another, according to Burke, and strive for unity through identifying symbols. The identification process occurs through consubstantiality--having the same substance or interests in common.⁵ Burke's identification process occurs throughout life for identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division.⁶ This implies the search for a rhetorical method in order to attain the simulation of "one substance" or identification. The term used for the fusion process by Burke is "strategy", which is based upon attitudinal identifications with the reader or the audience. This total process may be seen more clearly as Burke suggests:

You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitudes, ideas, identifying your ways with his.⁷

Through this process of uniting the playwright and audience as well as the poet and reader, a "zipper effect" occurs, wherein the teeth of the two sides are brought together by the joiner. Similarly, strategy brings the common or identifying interests of the two together.

In arriving upon the rhetorical themes in Beckett's plays, the main area of focus will be on two forms of identification. Burke points to this type of identification as an "arousing and fulfillment of desire of form."⁸ Burke indicates two major classifications of form:

- A. Qualitative Progression. This places the emphasis upon attitudes, tones, and feelings that a playwright gives the spectator in order for him to move along the plot sequence. It may be seen in a progression such as going from one emotional climax to another in a plot. Since Beckett's plays are not conventional in plot structure, the critic must look at the attitudinal changes and developments rather than the reasoning process from premise to resolution.
- B. Repetitive. This is the usage of restatement, amplification or reiteration of a theme by additional material. One of the major reasons why several of Beckett's plays have been chosen rather than just one for analysis is to consider the themes in terms of repetitive form.

Precis of the Chapters

Chapter II. Beckett's philosophical inquiry is realized in part through the understanding of his plays. If one could summarize the basic theme in Beckett's works, it might be the sensing of man's loss of control. For Beckett, the disappearance of God has left a feeling of helplessness, alienation, and isolation among men. As a result, everything flies apart and the world collapses into "ontological insecurity." Through the vision of the absurd drama, Beckett attempts to legitimize the idea that the irrational and non-objective of human reality are just as important to existence as the rational and objective view. The cornerstone to the understanding of this philosophy is through the reading of Waiting for Godot and Endgame.

Chapter II will attempt to define Beckett's ontology and quest for self-hood.

Chapter III. The basic problem of existence for modern man is through the presence of time, memory, habit, and perception. Beckett views these communication characteristics as the most significant in understanding the human condition of modern man. If man can be understood, according to Beckett, it must come through an understanding of these relationships on the self, on others, and on things. The emphasis of Chapter III will be focused on Beckett's idea of the human condition, the self, and existence.

Chapter IV. Since the Elizabethan Age to the middle of the Twentieth Century, language has served as the focus to dramatic works. The theatre of Samuel Beckett proposes that words be given a less prominent role in the drama. Not that speeches can be suppressed, but Beckett wishes to view words as taking a changing role to that of human acts. In this way, words take on the same character as lights, sound, and costumes while the symbolic acts become the reality. This chapter will attempt to reflect the insights of Kenneth Burke on the strategies of "identification" as found in Beckett's three major plays. The "identification" strategies to be considered include that of "ambiguity," "spiritualization" or "religiousness," and "properties." This chapter will also attempt to discuss the major themes in Beckett's plays, and how he makes the spectator feel the situation through the language of the absurd and symbolic acts.

Chapter V. In order for Beckett to confront his readers and persuade the audience, he uses the basic strategy of the comic artist.

Beckett goes further than the traditional genre of the comic playwright--he adds the dimension of tragicomedy. The main purpose of the chapter will be to demonstrate the basic strategies of Beckett's use of tragicomedy. The insights of Kenneth Burke and Hugh Duncan toward comedy will be used to uncover the implications of this philosophy.

Chapter VI. It is difficult to view Beckett's interpretation of reality and philosophical inquiry of man as being commercially successful and popular in the marketplace. Beckett is more concerned in showing the "otherness" of reality--the nonhuman side which attempts to engulf us each day of our lives. The final chapter will attempt to show the relationship of Beckett's theory of rhetoric and the implications of his philosophy to that of Kenneth Burke, George Herbert Mead, Martin Buber, and Hugh Duncan.

Conclusion

It is believed that a philosophical and critical study of Beckett's rhetorical strategies in three of his plays offers the potential of additional knowledge in the area of speech communication. Furthermore, the vital issues in dealing with the search for the self and modern man's philosophical inquiry of social consciousness appear to be particularly important today. Due to a lack of rhetorical studies on dramatic works of modern playwrights, and no detailed inquiry on Samuel Beckett's philosophy toward speech communication, it is hoped that the following chapters will reflect an exciting and meaningful study.

FOOTNOTES

¹Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove Press, 1954), p. 7.

²Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism and Human Emotions (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), pp. 37-38.

³Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1957), p. 93.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1955), p. 21.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Kenneth Burke, Counter-Statement (Los Altos, California: Hermes Publishing, 1953), pp. 124-128.

CHAPTER II

THE SHAPE OF THE MAN AND HIS IDEAS

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

--Samuel Beckett

It would be easy to write a biographical sketch of Samuel Beckett including the important facts and events of his life. Yet this information would provide us with little knowledge of the person and the development of his essence. If we accept Burke's definition of man as a symbol-using, symbol-making, and symbol-misusing animal, then we must search deeper into the motives of the person rather than just recalling the past events of his life.

Beckett, as well as his major characters, has been developed through a dialogical process of his encounters based on a Protestant background in Southern Ireland, an interest in the philosophy of Dante, Geulincx, and Heidegger, a friendship with James Joyce, an encounter with an assailant and the Resistance forces in Paris, and an influence of Bergson's theory of comedy. The encounter of Beckett with his reality has helped shape him as a person as well as the shape of his philosophical characters. "Man speaks the world," writes Gusdorf, "but he doesn't speak to the world, or if he does it is because the world

has assumed for him the new form of an alter ego. It has been personified in order to become the other, the opposite participant in the dialogue, for example, "Nature as invoked by the poet."¹ For Gusdorf as well as Beckett, this does not mean that language is merely limited to just self and world, but includes the other toward which language is directed. Gusdorf further relates:

I speak because I am not alone. Even in a soliloquy, in speaking to myself, in speaking to myself as an other, I communicate from myself to myself. Language from its most rudimentary form onward, testifies to a movement of personal being outside of itself. Human being is not contained within itself. The contours on one's body outline a line of demarcation, but never an absolute limit. The existence of others doesn't appear as delayed result of experience and reason. Intellectually and materially, the other is for each man a condition for existence.²

Thus the philosophical and rhetorical heroes from Beckett's writings did not happen by chance but have developed from an encounter with his emotional and intellectual historicity.

Although some critics have attempted to interpret the major characters in Beckett's works as being autobiographical, these figures seem to reveal more of a symbolic vision of his reality. None of Beckett's heroes refer to him by name, but they often speak of their experiences in the first person. His works may prove to reveal a kind of "symbolic autobiography." All of Beckett's writings provide us with a concept of the poet's symbolic view toward reality. Consequently, the truth of reality is expressed by encountering the character's elusiveness, voracity, inconsistencies, and their "remembrance of things past." Therefore, the main purpose of this chapter is to identify the significant acts in Beckett's life which relate to his ontological development as a philosopher and rhetorician.

The Other: Ireland

Born in Dublin in 1906, Samuel Barclay Beckett, like Shaw, Wilde, and Yeats, came from a Protestant middle-class background. It has been suggested by some critics that Beckett has suffered anguish throughout his life with an identity problem based on his Protestant background reared from a southern Irish lineage. Martin Esslin points out that "Beckett's writing reveals him as one of the most tormented and sensitive of human beings and of whom it has been reported that ever since his birth suffers a terrible memory."³ Peggy Guggenheim, who was once in love with Beckett, relates this depiction of him:

Ever since his birth, he had retained a terrible memory of life in his mother's womb. He was constantly suffering from this and had awful crisis, when he felt he was suffocating. He always said our life would be all right one day, but if I ever pressed him to make any decision, it was fatal and he took back everything he had previously said.⁴

Beckett's early experiences in Ireland are symbolically depicted in his first book of short stories, More Pricks Than Kicks, published in 1934. This collection of ten stories traces the various aspects of Belacqua Shuah's troubled existence as a Protestant living in Dublin. Belacqua, who is patterned after the same character in Canto IV of the Purgatory, studies Dante, attends parties, suffers through his marriage, and eventually meets an accidental death. In the opening story, "Dante and the Lobster," Beckett entertains his view toward the decadence of the mind and body of a Protestant enduring his Catholic environment. The short story ends with the following lines:

"What are you going to do?" he cried. "Boil the beast" she said, "what else?" "But it's not dead" protested Belacqua "you can't boil it like that." She looked at

him in astonishment. Had he taken leave of his senses? "Have sense" she said sharply, "lobsters are always boiled alive. They must be." She caught up the lobster and laid it on its back. It trembled. "They feel nothing" she said. In the depths of the sea it had crept into the cruel pot. For hours, in the midst of its enemies, it had breathed secretly. It had survived the Frenchwoman's cat and his witless clutch. Now it was going alive into scalding water. It had to. Take into the air my quiet breath. Belacqua looked at the old parchment of her face, grey in the dim kitchen. "You make a fuss" she said angrily" and upset me and then lash into it for your dinner." She lifted the lobster clear of the table. It had about thirty seconds to live. Well, thought Belacqua, it's a quick death, God help us all. It is not.⁵ [My italics]

Although Beckett has been unwilling and refuses to discuss any of his work as related to his own reality, this story appears to reflect his dialogical anguish of a Protestant coming to grips with his Catholic surroundings. It was Beckett's encounter with his own reality that establishes a need to write a "symbolic autobiography." Beckett could accomplish this only as a true rhetorician. Later on, in a story entitled "Yellow," Belacqua or Beckett relates the account of his accidental death:

He bounced up on to the table like a bridegroom. The local doc was in great form, he had just come from standing best man, he was all togged up under his vestments. He recited his exhortation and clapped on the nozzle. "Are you right?" said Belacqua. The mixture was too rich, there could be no question about that. His heart was running away, terrible yellow yerks in his skull. "One of the best," he heard those words that did not refer to him. The expression reassured him. The best man clawed at his tap. By Christ! he did die! They had clean forgotten to auscultate him!⁶ [My italics]

In this entire collection of short stories, Beckett speaks to the other by questioning the social reality of middle class Ireland. Belacqua like Beckett is condemned to live in this world which speaks to him, but he can only respond through embarrassing failures. Even though

Beckett did not suffer the pangs of poverty, as many of his countrymen, he still felt like a vagrant in a foreign land. The character of Belacqua as symbolic personification of Beckett is expressed by Ihab Hassam:

Belacqua is also the first ironic self-image of his creation; for like Beckett he is a Dubliner, descendent of the Huguenots, a Trinity man, poet and linguist, a theoretical sloth, and a solipsist mangue.⁷

The encounter of Belacqua with his surroundings has haunted Beckett all of his life. Even though he left Ireland at an early age, Beckett could never leave the reality of his confrontation with the environment. In his last major novel, The Unnamable, Beckett writes:

The island, I'm on the island, I've never left the island, God help me. I was under the impression I spent my life in spirals round the earth. Wrong, it's on the island I wind my endless ways. The island, that's all the earth I knew. I don't know it either, never having had the stomach to look at it.⁸

The Other: The Philosophers

At the age of fourteen, Beckett was sent to Portora Royal, an Anglo-Irish school in Northern Ireland. Here Beckett proved to be an outstanding scholar and superior athlete. In 1923, he attended Trinity College in Dublin where he was a brilliant student of French and Italian. It was while Beckett studied at Trinity that he became interested in the reasoning of Dante, Heidegger, and Geulincx. Although Beckett was not concerned with the illustration of Geulincx's truth, he was interested with the encounters of the mysteries of the body-mind dualism. The essence of this philosophy is provided by Colin Duckworth:

He [Geulincx] maintained that the mental and physical modes are completely distinct, the only interaction between them being miraculously occasional by the intervention of God who, however, has control only over the body: the mind is free. The man of good sense, realizing that he has power only over his mental processes, gives up all hope of governing any aspect or parts of the world outside his own mind, thus developing a total lack of involvement in any material or emotional stimuli withdrawing to the inner recesses of the mind which alone is autonomous--but only over itself. The body and the mind, according to Geulincx, interacts by the action of God upon the mind.⁹

This kind of encounter appears to haunt all of Beckett's rhetorical heroes from Belacqua to Vladimir. It is the dualism of mind against matter without the presence of God that seems to preoccupy Beckett's thinking. "It is the doctrine of a 'bodytight' mental world," writes Hugh Kenner, "around which, or perhaps attached to which, the body performs its gyrations according to laws the mind need not attempt to fathom."¹⁰ One of Beckett's major characters, Molloy, indicates this obsession for Geulincx's philosophical position:

I who had loved the image of old Geulincx, dead young, who left me free, on the black boat of Ulysses, to crawl towards the East, along the deck. That is a great measure of freedom, for him who has not the pioneering spirit. And from the poop, paving upon the wave, a sadly rejoicing slave, I follow with my eyes the proud and futile wake.¹¹

Another great philosophical association came from the influence of Dante. One book in particular, The Divine Comedy, becomes a common place of reference in the writing of his early novels and the settings for his major plays. As mentioned earlier, Belacqua, the major character in a collection of early short stories, More Pricks than Kicks, takes his name from a person encountered by Dante and Virgil in Purgatory. In one of Beckett's most important novels, The Unnamable, the total mood of the main character is one of torment and damnation. John

Fletcher points out that "with The Unnamable, Beckett constructs a twentieth century vision of the Inferno where the torture chambers are replaced by the endless struggles to find the words that may keep at bay the dreaded silence."¹² The setting of Waiting for Godot on a barren plain where everything is dead but the tree, reflects an attitude of Dante's Purgatory. The enclosed cell of Hamm and Clov in Endgame also projects the feeling of Hell itself. Beckett greatly admires the writings of Dante and is much in debt to him as a point of reference for the settings and motivations of his major characters. Beckett's heroes constantly struggle in the mire, continually face a state of limbo, and are forever suspended in a type of Dantesque surrounding. This leads Fletcher to remark that "although Beckett had reached artistic maturity not only did he not forget The Divine Comedy, he even steeped himself more deeply in its atmosphere, and 'The Inferno' especially became one of his most habitual points of reference."¹³

The final philosopher to influence Beckett's ontology was Martin Heidegger, the German philosopher who is credited with giving existentialism the modern stamp of interpretation. The essence of his philosophy is that man does not see the world from the isolation of his own ego, but he experiences it through a process of total involvement. "My being is not something that takes place inside my skin," says Heidegger, "rather is spread over a field or region which is the world of its care and concern."¹⁴ Heidegger proposes three general traits as categories of human existence: (1) mood or feeling, (2) understanding, and (3) speech. The final trait of existence, speech, proved to have the greatest impact on Beckett. Beckett later reflects in his writing the view of Heidegger that the language of silence is eloquent and provokes

a level of understanding. Beckett agrees with Heidegger that without silence all talk becomes merely chatter and a process of filling the void.¹⁵ The essence of this interpretation is aptly summarized by William Barrett:

Two people are talking together. They understand each other, and fall silent--a long silence. This silence is language; it may speak more eloquently than any words. In their mood they are attuned to each other; they may even reach down into that understanding which as we have seen, is below the level of articulation. The three-mood-understanding-and speech-thus intervene and are one. This significant speaking silence shows us that sounds or marks do not constitute the essence of language. Nor is this silence merely a gap in our chatter; it is, rather, the primordial attunement of one existent to another, out of which all language-as sounds, marks, and counters-comes. It is only because man is capable of such silence that he is capable of authentic speech. If he ceases to be rooted in that silence all his talk becomes chatter.¹⁶

Young Beckett was to wrestle with these questions of silence, words, space, and time in order to complete his own theory of existence. Coupled with the influence of the mind-body dialectic and the nature of language as human essence, it was no wonder that Beckett perfects his major characters as rhetorical heroes. It was the meshing of these ideas with Beckett's environment that led him to use the dialogical process. For it was this questioning of existence, as we will show in a later chapter, that conditioned Beckett to view language as a dead habit when all the forgotten voices refuse to remain silent.

The Other: Henri Bergson's Theory of Comedy

After Beckett's graduation from Trinity College in 1927, he accepted a post as a lecturer in English at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, which included on its faculty roster the names of Bergson, Giraudoux, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and Simone Weil. Of all

the great names associated with the college, Henri Bergson appears to have had the most profound influence on Beckett's thinking. Beckett's encounter with Bergson and his subsequent reading of "Laughter," establishes the root for the physical and mental behavior of his comic characters. Bergson argues that comedy arises from the rigid, mechanical, or eccentric that social life requires. "This rigidity is the comic," says Bergson, "and laughter is its corrective."¹⁷

The basic element of Beckett's comedy is that of the clownish and the absurd. Even the ridiculous clothing of his rhetorical heroes can be traced to a passage in "Laughter":

It might almost be said that every fashion is laughable in some respect. Only, when we are dealing with the fashion of the day, we are so accustomed to it that the garment seems, in our mind, to form one with the individual wearing it. We do not separate them in imagination. The idea no longer occurs to us to contrast the inert rigidity of the covering with the living suppleness of the object covered: consequently, the comic here remains in a latent condition. It will only succeed in emerging when the natural incompatibility is so deep-seated between the covering and the covered that even an immemorial association fails to cement this union: a case in point is our head and top hat. Suppose, however, some eccentric individual dresses himself in the fashion of former times our attention is immediately drawn to the clothes themselves; we absolutely distinguish them from the individual, we say that the latter is disguising himself, -as though every article of clothing were not a disguise!-and the laughable aspect of fashion comes out of the shadow into the light.¹⁸ [My italics]

The shoes, the hats, the baggy pants, the crutches, and the bicycles, which are mechanical and rigid extensions of the human body, speak to us in all of Beckett's plays. Only by throwing away the objects of extension can man transcend from merely existing to that of finding the essence of his whole being. The role of the comic helps in this relationship by indicating the absurdity that we hold for social

objects. For Beckett, it is the comic that allows man to become aware of his own consciousness by noting his own foibles.

The Other: James Joyce

While in Paris lecturing at the Normale Supérieure, Beckett began his long and devoted friendship with James Joyce. At the young age of 23, Beckett composed the opening pages to Our Exagamination round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress, which is a collection of twelve articles by Joyce's apostles in defense of their master. This was indeed a great honor to be chosen by the literary giants of the 20's to write the opening remarks. Beckett points out in the introduction that writing is the thing it describes, and we cannot or should not separate the form from the content. It is unfortunate that few literary critics heeded this warning. Beckett further argues that it is the artist's duty to write about the total experience rather than skimming off the surface to make it easy for a public too lazy to comprehend it.¹⁹ It is this philosophy that callouses him from adverse criticism. This paves the way for the rhetorical posture expressed following a question about the comprehension of Endgame: "If the audience does not understand the play, then they are too decadent."²⁰

Beckett returned to Dublin in 1930 to serve as Professor of Romance Languages at Trinity College. It was at this time that he commissioned a London firm to publish Proust, which is regarded as the foundation for the mature analysis of Beckett's ontological inquiry. This essay is a brilliant analysis of Marcel Proust's writing, but it also reveals the concepts of habit, time and perception, which consistently appear in Beckett's novels and plays. The main concern throughout the book is

Beckett's own preoccupation of existence from the level of habit, time, memory and perception. This establishes what Beckett calls the "otherness of reality." For Beckett, if there is no other, then communication fails to exist. "The attempt to communicate," says Beckett, "where no communication is possible is merely a simian vulgarity, or horribly comic, like the madness that holds a conversation with the furniture."²¹ Beckett suggests that it is impossible for us to escape from the hours and the days since time deforms us or we deform it. Beckett further contends that habit has laid its veto to any form of true perception.²² Beckett's final analysis is an explanation of reality and habit. He points out that "habit is the ballast that chains the dog to the vomit. The creation of the world did not take place once and for all time, but takes place every day of our lives."²³

While teaching in Dublin, Beckett maintained his close friendship and association with James Joyce through periodical visits to Paris. They would meet to discuss each other's ontological inquiry and rhetorical style. Their meetings often took the role of communication as provoked by Heidegger. One such meeting is depicted by Richard Ellman:

Beckett was addicted to silences, and so was Joyce; they engaged in conversation which consisted often in silences directed towards each other. Both suffered with sadness, Beckett mostly for the world, Joyce mostly for himself. Joyce sat in his habitual posture, legs crossed, toe of the upper leg under the instep of the lower; Beckett also tall and slender, fell into the same gesture. Joyce suddenly asked some question as 'How could the idealist Hume, write a History?' Beckett replied, 'A history of representatives.'²⁴

Ellman further relates that Joyce's daughter, Lucia, had fallen madly in love with Beckett. This relationship was eventually broken off when

Beckett told her that he could no longer love and was only interested in visiting with her father.²⁵ Although Joyce enjoyed Beckett's weekly visits, he still maintained a certain social distance. On one occasion he remarked to Beckett, "I don't love anyone except my family." This in translation to Beckett meant "I don't like anyone except myself." Yet Beckett's mind provoked a certain uniqueness and strangeness that attracted Joyce.²⁶ These encounters between Joyce and Beckett have often been described as the kind of relationship between a father and a son. This has prompted some critics to view the characters of Pozzo and Lucky in Waiting for Godot as well as Hamm and Clov in Endgame as symbolic master-student encounters of Joyce with Beckett. No doubt the friendship between the two was a deep, personal, and profound one.

Joyce often made clear to Beckett his dislike for literary jargon. Once when they had listened to a group of intellectuals at a party discussing the merits of Kafka's literary works, Joyce commented to Beckett, "If only they'd talk about turnips."²⁷ It is interesting to note that a scene in Waiting for Godot brings back in a symbolic form this particular encounter.

Estragon: Give me a carrot. (Vladimir rummages in his pockets, takes out a turnip and gives it to Estragon who takes a bit out of it. Angrily.)
It's a turnip!

Vladimir: Oh pardon! I could have sworn it was a carrot. (He rummages again in his pockets, finds nothing but turnips.) All that's turnips. (He rummages.) You must have eaten the last. (He rummages.) Wait, I have it. (He brings out a carrot and gives it to Estragon.) There, dear fellow. (Estragon wipes the carrot on his sleeve and begins to eat it.) Make it last, that's the end of them.²⁸

It might be easy to conclude that Joyce and Beckett were similar in their thinking and writing. They both felt exiled from Ireland, they were both profound and sensitive thinkers, they both composed major works in Paris, and they both enjoyed the symbolic nature of the language. Yet Beckett indicates there were basic differences in their thinking and writing. In an interview with Israel Shenker of the New York Times, he hints at these conflicts:

The kind of work I do is one in which I'm not master of my material. The more Joyce knew the more he could. His tendency toward omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. I'm working with impotence, ignorance. I don't think impotence has been exploited in the past. There seems to be a kind of aesthetic axiom that expression is an achievement--must be an achievement. My little exploration is that whole zone of being that has always set aside by artists something unuseable--as something by definition incompatible with art. I think anyone nowadays who pays the slightest attention to his own experience finds it the experience of a non-knower, a non-caner (somebody who cannot). The other type of artist--the Apollonian--is absolutely foreign to me.²⁹

Although there were major philosophical and intellectual differences between the two, the influence of Joyce on Beckett prompted the nature of his first major novel, Murphy, published in 1938. This work of art came as a result of several critical sessions and urgings from Joyce.

This remarkable novel is a character study of Murphy, an Irishman living in squalor in London. He drifts grotesquely toward annihilation while an assortment of minor characters, each in solemn pursuit, chase after him. For Murphy, who is unaware of the pursuers, the central situation is that his body loves Celia, who wants him to go to work and support the two of them, thereby taking her off the streets. Yet Murphy's mind abhors the implications that she introduces into his life in the quest for anonymity. Murphy passes from one species of despair

to the next and eventually takes a job at an insane asylum. As Murphy grows older, he becomes convinced that his mind was a closed system, subject to no principle of change but its own, self-sufficient, and impermeable to the vicissitudes of the body. When he dies, Celia returns sadly to her old profession.³⁰

Throughout the novel, Murphy searches for a self-hood, but finds himself locked in the darkness of the mind. He can find solace only in dying. The novel represents a quest story for Beckett in trying to throw off the shadow of his literary master, James Joyce. Murphy's quest for self-hood and identity appears as a kind of symbolic relationship of Joyce over Beckett. Celia's encounter with Murphy suggests the guilt complex that Beckett felt toward his relationship with Lucia Joyce. Since she eventually spent several years in an insane asylum, Beckett constantly felt a feeling of remorse in his behavior toward her. As with Celia, Beckett could have saved her, but his lack of humanism and desire for intellectual destiny prevented him from acting. Like Murphy, Beckett suffered from a philosophy of inaction. Consequently, Murphy serves as a quest story for Beckett to prove his literary genius as well as provide a method in coming to grips with his omnipresent and omnipotent reality.

The Other: The Assailant and the Underground

Beckett left his teaching post in 1932 with the attitude that it was absurd to teach others what he did not know himself. He drifted around Europe for several years, spent some time in a mental hospital in London, and eventually settled in Paris. Shortly after arriving in Paris, he experienced an incident which gave him insight into the

otherness of reality and had an indelible effect upon his emotional and intellectual self.

One evening while walking near the Latin Quarter, Beckett was attacked and robbed by a street bum. While recuperating in the hospital of a stab wound and perforated lung, Beckett was haunted by the reality of this experience. After his wound had healed and he was released from the hospital, Beckett visited the assailant in the local jail. When the robber was confronted with the why of the attack, he could only reply, "Je ne sais 'pas, Monseuir." Beckett dismissed the criminal charges against the assailant, but he could not dismiss the incident from his mind.

This incident served as a turning point in Beckett's ontological inquiry and his career as an artist. For the first time, Beckett became aware that it was the other that helped shape his own destiny. Up to this time, Beckett had attempted to stand outside of life and view it as a spectacle. He was, like Joyce, the typical intellectual who could look at things with a degree of detachment. The encounter with the assailant turned his ontological position toward the inquiry that he was no longer a spectator of life, but he was that self in its reality. This incident seems to point up to Beckett that his own existence was no longer a speculation, but a reality which he must personally and passionately confront. It was no coincidence that in Waiting for Godot when Vladimir confronts the messenger about the character and well being of Godot, he responds: "Je ne sais par, Monsieur." The meeting of the assailant became a deeply philosophical and emotional experience for Beckett, one that he could

not easily dismiss from his memory or his rhetorical discourse.

"For the thinker," writes Barrett, "as for the artist, what counts in life is not the number of rare and exciting adventures he encounters, but the inner depths of that life, by which something great may be made out of even the paltriest and most banal of occurrences."³¹

What appears on the surface to be a banal occurrence, the stabbing of Beckett for no apparent reason, was for him a turning point in the essence of his existence. It was the shifting of his attitude from one of detachment to one of involvement with emphasis on the introspection of the self. Consequently, when the war came in 1939, Beckett could not sit idly by and view the cruelties and inhumanities as an objective spectacle; he had to become involved. Beckett actively participated with the Resistance Forces in Belgium and France. His close friend and companion from Trinity, Alfred Peron, who served in the Resistance, was caught and executed by the Gestapo. Beckett later dedicated Watt to the memory of his friend. At the war's end, Beckett received a decoration for his participation in the Resistance and non-combatant services.

The novel, Watt, written in 1942 but not published until 1953, reflects Beckett's attitude toward the regression of thought and life caused by war. This story is infested with little allegorical shapes and tag-names about the grotesque adventures of an Irish servant and his master. At times every statement between the two seems meaningless. Sentences have shape but lack meaning. Thus Watt begins to communicate back to front:

Day of most, night of part, knott with now. Not till
up, little seems so oh, heard so oh. Night till morn-
ing from. Heard I this, saw I this then what, things
quiet, dim. Ears, eyes, failing now also. Hush in,
mist in, moved I so.³²

This passage expresses a kind of futility that Beckett felt in his heroic quest to bring rational thinking to incomprehensible acts. Thought and life seem held in a kind of murky stasis. Beckett envisioned the Resistance as being the source of righteous might, but this also led him to despair and anguish:

This body homeless. This mind ignoring these emptied hands. This emptied heart. To him I bought. To the temple. To the people. To the source. Of nought.³³

The entire novel reveals with futility the quest of Beckett to explain with logic and empiricism the cruelties, which are beyond human rationality.

The Other: The Dialogical Process

Following the war, Beckett began his most productive period, writing a number of significant novels and plays. Molloy, the first of a trilogy, started in 1947 and published in 1951, presents Beckett's attitude toward authentic existence and a unification of the self with the "all self." It is the experience of an exclusive all absorbing unity of one's own self that prompts Molloy to reply:

This time, then one more I think then perhaps a last time, then I think it'll be over, with that world too. All grows dim. A little more and you'll go blind. It doesn't work any more, it says, I don't work any more.³⁴

Strangely, Molloy cannot recall the town in which his mother resides, and equipped with a bicycle and crutches, he pursues a haphazard course. His adventure includes an encounter with the law, a stay with a woman, and an episode at the seashore. Molloy reaches such a state of decrepitude that when he leaves the beach he must crawl on the ground. He sees the spirals of a town but perhaps not the one he seeks.

This novel represents Beckett's attempt to come to grips with the "authentic self." The whole sense of the objective world is reduced to a subjective debate of the inner and outer selves. The object of memory becomes stranger than the object of fact. Molloy is caught between the inner and outer dialogue, and it is difficult for him to understand whether he is alive or dead. This piece of writing indicates Beckett grappling with the dialogical process, and the myth behind the labeling of concepts. Molloy says:

There could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names. I say that now, but after all what do I know now about then, now when the icy words hail down upon me, the icy meanings, and the world dies too, foully named. All I know is the words, and the dead things, and that makes a handsome little sum, with a beginning, a middle, and an end as in the well-built phrase and long sonata of the dead.³⁵

Malone Dies, written in the same year, is a disturbing and memorable work of genius. It is an attempt by Beckett to find the self by coming to the realization of death and nothingness. Malone is locked in a room, and he has only his writing to make him aware of existence. Malone remarks, "You have only to hear nothing but the sounds of things, and you begin to fancy yourself the last of the human kind."³⁶ Malone realizes that he is slowly dying. While dying, Malone tells himself a few stories--the names change, the figures blur--they may be different persons or the same person. At the end, the nightmare becomes more grotesque and hallucinatory. The writing stops. Malone is dead. This volume suggests that Beckett is concerned about the reality that can be grasped only through a mutuality of man to man. When one is alone without the essence of the other, the nightmare becomes a reality. Death soon ends the misery.

The last of the trilogy, The Unnamable, expresses the rhetorical nature of his later plays. In this brilliant piece of writing, Beckett gives up the fictional narrator and concentrates on the first person. The Unnamable tries to explore the resources of the world created by voices. He reflects more than once:

I'm in words, made of words, other's words, what others, the place too, the air, the walls, the floor, the ceiling, all words, the whole world is here with me, I'm the air, the walls, the walled-in one, everything yields, opens, ebbs, flows, like flakes, I'm all these flakes, meeting, mingling, falling asunder.³⁷

Beckett seems to imply by this passage that man is man by virtue of speech, and that all speech is an echoing of sounds. Beckett's hero continually tries to answer the philosophical questions which are the opening words of the book, "Where Now?" "Who Now?" "When Now?" This novel provokes the greatest amount of inquiry about man as a rhetorical agent; that is, for Beckett, man uses speech to add himself to the world and to reach out to join with others. Rhetoric supplies man with the basic concept to awareness and the opportunity to emerge from solitude. The opening passages of The Unnamable unquestionably demonstrate this rhetorical position:

I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak, but also, which is even more interesting, but also that I, which is if possible even more interesting, that I shall have to, I forget no matter. And at the same time I am obliged to speak. I shall never be silent. Never.... And all of these questions I ask myself. It is not in a spirit of curiosity. I cannot be silent. About myself I need know nothing. Here all is clear. No, all is not clear. But the discourse must go on. So one invents obscurities. Rhetoric.... In order to speak. One starts speaking as if it were possible to stop at will. It is better so. The search for the means to put an end to things, an end to speech, is what enables the discourse to continue. No, I must not try to think, simply utter. Method or no method I shall have to banish them in the

end, the beings, things, shapes, sounds, and lights with which my haste to speak has encumbered this place.³⁸

The ending of the trilogy was to prove to be the beginning of Beckett's quest into the dialogical process of the self. The finish of his greatest novel was to be the start of his introspection into language, speech, and authentic communication. As a result, Beckett was to follow this period of his ontological inquiry with his greatest dramatic works: Waiting for Godot, Endgame, and Krapp's Last Tape. All of these plays will be discussed in detail in the following chapters, but it might be helpful to mention the basic themes as the cornerstones of the dialogical process.

The most significant ontological work by Samuel Beckett is Waiting for Godot, published in 1953. This play is considered by many drama critics to be one of the most compelling and challenging pieces of dramatic literature of the 20th century. The plot reveals two bums, Estragon and Vladimir, who try to fill their days with little games as they hopelessly wait for Godot. The bums rely on each other to determine their own existence and find truth of self-hood. The tramps repeatedly discuss what to do next in order to avoid the tedium of time. They feel a need for contact and involvement to arrive upon self-awareness.

Estragon: I've tried everything.

Vladimir: No, I mean the boots.

Estragon: Would that be a good thing?

Vladimir: It'd pass the time. I assure you.

Estragon: A relaxation.

Vladimir: A recreation.

Estragon: A relaxation.

Vladimir: Try.

Estragon: You'll help me?

Vladimir: I will of course.

Estragon: We don't manage too badly, between the two of us.

Vladimir: Yes, yes come on, we'll try the left front.

Estragon: We always find something eh, to give us the impression we exist?³⁹ [*My italics*]

Each day a child appears from Godot and puts his arrival off until tomorrow. The bums wait and pass the time in hopes that Godot will appear to explain their significance or insignificance in the universe. Godot never appears, and the characters at the end of the play are forced to accept the responsibility of making choices without his presence. It is the dialogical exchange of the characters which helps to maintain their reality in a world that is forever collapsing:

Vladimir: We're in no danger of ever thinking anymore.

Estragon: Then what are we complaining about?

Vladimir: Thinking is not the worst.

Estragon: Perhaps not. But at least there's that.

Vladimir: That what?

Estragon: That's the idea, let's ask each other questions.

Vladimir: What do you mean, at least there's that?

Estragon: That much less misery.

Vladimir: True.

Estragon: Well? If we gave thanks for our mercies?

Vladimir: What is terrible is to have thought.

Estragon: But did that ever happen to us?

Vladimir: Where are all these corpses from?
Estragon: These skeletons.
Vladimir: Tell me that.
Estragon: True.
Vladimir: We must have thought a little.
Estragon: At the very beginning.
Vladimir: A Charnel-house. A Charnel-house.
Estragon: You don't have to look.
Vladimir: You can't help looking.
Estragon: True.
Vladimir: Try as one may.
Estragon: I beg your pardon?
Vladimir: Try as one may.
Estragon: We should turn resolutely toward nature.
Vladimir: We've tried that.
Estragon: True.
Vladimir: Oh, it's not the worst, I know.
Estragon: What?
Vladimir: To have thought.
Estragon: Obviously.
Vladimir: But we could have done without it.
Estragon: Que voulez-vous.
Vladimir: Ah, Que voulez-vous. Exactly.
Estragon: That wasn't such a bad little canter.⁴⁰

The freedom to choose provokes a feeling of forlornness, despair, and anguish within the main characters, as they finally realize their choosing may affect all of mankind. It is the effect of this consequence and

the inevitable acceptance of total responsibility for their acts, that the characters slip into a state of "quietism" at the end of the play.

Published in 1958, Endgame presents the theme of the master-slave relationship or the union of the "whole being." The two main characters are Hamm and Clov, who merely exist for each other as master and slave. Each character desires to kill the other, but each one realizes this would bring about self-destruction. The servant (Clov) longs to kill his Master (Hamm) and remove the authority that imposes on him to repeat various tasks, but Clov being a creature of order and habit realizes this would bring about self-annihilation. The master, who is blind and paralyzed and has to be wheeled around by Clov, must have the servant carry out his duties. By killing Clov, the master would also cease to exist. Both of these characters are in desperation to communicate and prove they do exist as individual human beings. If they separated, both would cease to function, as each serves as subject and object for the other. In one of the memorable passages toward the end of the play, Clov asks: "What is there to keep us here?" and Hamm replies, "The dialogue."⁴¹

In Krapp's Last Tape, published in 1960, Beckett completes another significant stage in the development of his philosophical thinking. Krapp's Last Tape is a remarkable dramatic piece with only one actor. The hero, Krapp, is caught in the game between his conscious existence and his past life recorded on tape. Krapp tries to communicate with himself by recreating experiences that happened during his early manhood years, but he finds only the recording on the absurdity of love has any meaning for him. Krapp realizes that his conscious self can no longer

communicate with his previous life and early experiences. As a result, the play ends with a feeling of futility as Krapp sits motionless staring before him as the tape runs on in silence.

And so from this introductory material, we have come to realize that Beckett has willed his life to a search for ontological security amid a meaningless universe, to discover authentic communication in the midst of a dead language, and to make sense out of that which by definition is pointless, incomprehensible, and irrational. It is from this search that Beckett has become more than a poet and a playwright. He stands as one of the foremost philosophers and rhetoricians of our time. It is from this posture that we undertake this study with a focus on the rhetorical nature of his works.

If we could summarize Beckett's life into one word, it would be the sense of "becoming." His life has represented a continuous effort of self-revelation, communion, and perpetual becoming. Beckett continues to serve as a participant in the creative experience since he has learned from the significant encounters which have shaped him that he cannot remain a spectator. Beckett's rhetorical heroes, like himself, have never reached a point of consumation or finality; "it is always the shape that matters."

If we are to understand Samuel Beckett, we must come to grips with his own reality. And the best method to encounter Beckett is through the understanding of his plays. "Virtually the whole of the Beckett canon," says Jacobsen and Mueller, "is the autobiography of one man. This man, a mid-century Everyman, wears many masks, and he would seem to try them on one after the other in an attempt to identify himself."⁴²

Thus we have opened the books on Beckett in hopes of finding a poet, and we have encountered a man. And with these works as with Beckett's life, it is always the sense of "becoming" and "the shape that matters."

FOOTNOTES

¹Georges Gusdorf, Speaking (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p. 47.

²Ibid., p. 48.

³Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1961), p. 6.

⁴Peggy Guggenheim, Confessions of an Art Addict (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 50.

⁵Samuel Beckett, More Pricks Than Kicks (New York: Grove Press, 1972), pp. 21-22.

⁶Ibid., p. 174.

⁷Ihab Hassan, The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, Inc., 1967), p. 126.

⁸Samuel Beckett, The Unnamable (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 54.

⁹Colin Duckworth, En Attendant Godot (George G. Harrep and Co., Ltd., 1952), P. xxxvii.

¹⁰Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 83.

¹¹Samuel Beckett, Molloy (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 28.

¹²John Fletcher, Samuel Beckett's Art (London: Chatto and Windes, 1967), p. 118.

¹³Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁴William Barrett, Irrational Man (New York: Doubleday, 1962), p. 217.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 220-223.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Henri Bergson, "Laughter" in Comedy (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1956), p. 74.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁹Samuel Beckett, "Dante....Bruno....Vico....Joyce," in Our Exagamination for Incumination for Work in Progress (Paris: Shakespeare and Co., 1929), p. 13.

- ²⁰John Calder (ed.), Beckett at 60 (London: Calder and Boyars, 1967), p. 38.
- ²¹Samuel Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove Press, 1931), p. 46.
- ²²Ibid., p. 11.
- ²³Ibid., p. 48.
- ²⁴Richard Ellman, James Joyce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 661.
- ²⁵Ibid.
- ²⁶Ibid.
- ²⁷Ibid., p. 715.
- ²⁸Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 14.
- ²⁹Israel Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters," New York Times, May 6, 1956, Sec. 2, p. 1.
- ³⁰Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study (New York: Grove Press, 1966), p. 51.
- ³¹Barrett, Irrational Man, p. 155.
- ³²Samuel Beckett, Watt (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 40.
- ³³Ibid., p. 166.
- ³⁴Beckett, Molloy, p. 5.
- ³⁵Ibid., p. 37.
- ³⁶Samuel Beckett, Malone Dies (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 38.
- ³⁷Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 139.
- ³⁸Ibid., pp. 4-15.
- ³⁹Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 30.
- ⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 40-42.
- ⁴¹Samuel Beckett, Endgame (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 58.
- ⁴²Josephine Jacobsen and William R. Mueller, The Testament of Samuel Beckett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 113.

CHAPTER III

THE HUMAN CONDITION, THE SELF, AND EXISTENCE

I have always wanted to be free. I don't know why. I don't even know what that means, to be free. You might tear my nails out by the roots and I still couldn't tell you. But far beyond words I know what it is. I still want it. I want nothing else. First I was the prisoner of others. So I left them. Then I was the prisoner of myself. That was worse. So I left myself.

Eleutheria

The true nature and object of all of Beckett's major works is the human condition. He is continually seeking and attempting to discover the basis of his own selfhood. Beckett's inquiry is not a Naturalistic or Romantic version, but a ruthless search with the frightening attitude that at the bottom of the muckheap nothing may exist. The two main questions which seem to haunt Beckett are: "What is man?" and "What do I mean when I say I?" Therefore, the main purpose of this chapter is to discuss Beckett's view of man. Our discussion will emphasize: (1) Beckett's view of the human condition; (2) the nature of time, memory, habit, and perception in the Beckett universe; (3) the role of the Self; and (4) the dialogical process of language and speech in seeking existence.

In Proust and The Unnamable, Beckett provides us with several insights about his view of man, language, and the Self. What Beckett

begins in these works, he brings to consummation in Godot and Endgame. Therefore, it may serve our purposes well to investigate these works in more detail.

The Human Condition

Man begins, for Beckett, in a sad condition with his birth being both tragic and sinful. In Proust, he writes:

Tragedy is not concerned with human justice. Tragedy is the statement of an expiation, but not the miserable expiation of a codified breach of a local arrangement, organized by the knaves for the fools. The tragic figure represents the expiation of original sin, of the original and eternal sin of him and all his 'soci malorum,' the sin of having been born.¹

Once born, man is expelled not into the bright sunlight of a new day, but into a dull grey form of existence. From that moment on, man faces deprivation, sadness, and pain. The violence and the suffering of man remains continuous and without change. "The hell of the Beckett universe," writes William Barrett, "is the unrelenting repetition of the same moment with only the most occasional variation in suffering to raise delusive hopes."² For Beckett, much of life is the same. Yet it is possible to have a change of muck. "And if all muck is the same muck," replies Molloy, "that doesn't matter it's good to have a change of muck, move from one heap to another."³ Beckett views life as having three essential points: beginning, waiting, and ending. "Even death," says Eugene Goodheart, "which all the Beckett characters await, holds no special terror: and there is nothing for it but to wait for the end, nothing but the end to come, and at the end all will be the same as before."⁴ According to Beckett, the main difference between life and death is the voice, which prevents the characters from being

nothing and slipping into the void; "I am obliged to speak. I shall never be silent. Never."⁵ The typical man for Beckett endlessly waits, reminiscences, meditates, but he always has the courage to continue living. "Beckett presents humanity as aimlessly questioning or endlessly waiting," writes Colin Duckworth, "but having the courage to continue living even though it is far from being sure what it is searching or waiting for, and far from being convinced there is anything anyway."⁶

God in the Beckett universe has been withdrawn which has left man in a state of isolation, alienation, and frustration. Man has lost control and can no longer rely on the old myths of the Christian world to give him meaning. With the demise and collapse of the traditional myths, the meaning of reality has been displaced. "Reality reveals itself to the artist," states Barrett, "not as the Great Chain of Being, which the tradition of Western rationalism had declared intelligible down to its smallest link and in its totality, but as much more refactory: as opaque, dense, concrete, and in the end inexplicable."⁷

Beckett views man as floundering in an "Epistemological wasteland" where humanity can no longer maintain any fluid meaning or reality. When the old myths collapse, everything flies apart and the world collapses into "ontological insecurity." Molloy listens and "the voice is of a world endlessly collapsing, a frozen world, under a faint untroubled sky."⁸ This voice is the shape of the Beckett universe.

Beckett does not paint an inspiring picture of man. Existence is eked out in the mire in the pale light of man's miserable condition. Yet it is the courage and the struggle to continue living which is important. Suicide might be a means of alleviating the suffering and

the pain, but this could also confirm the view that man is nothing more than an object or a thing. Molloy provokes this sense of struggle:

But what matters whether I was born or not, have lived or not, am dead or merely dying, I shall go on doing as I have always done, not knowing what it is I do, nor who I am, nor where I am, nor if I am. Yes, a little creature, I shall try and make a little creature, to hold in my arms, a little creature in my image, no matter what I say.⁹ [*My italics*]

The key to Beckett's understanding of man is courage. It is the courage of man to stand in the openness of being, realizing full well there may not be any humanity left. It is the courage to continue living in spite of a world that is forever collapsing, and one that can no longer be explained with rational reasons. It is the courage to stand in confrontation with the Other in hopes of proving the essence of man. This is the key to the Beckett universe. A hint of this courage is provided us by John Killinger:

It is interesting to note that no matter how far Beckett has gone in reducing the vitality of the human being almost to the vanishing point in much of his work--he never leaves one with the feeling that a character is anything other than a human being. Perhaps it is his strong humanistic tradition, enforced, by biblical allusions and theology, but he really does not, for all of his sense of the spiritual void break with the notion of an imago dei in man. Even Nagg and Nell, who exist at the nadir of human life, at the very borderline of extinction resemble persons more than they do animals or reptiles. There is an unmistakable residue in them, something ineffaceable, something recognizable even in the almost terminal half-life of the millet heap.¹⁰

What is the residue in man that gives him the courage to continue? As we plan to discuss later in this chapter, it is his nature as a unique creature who communicates and quests for self-hood. It is man's willingness to risk identity in hopes of integrating himself with humanity that makes the Beckett person continue to exist. And what about the

role of man? Man's role in this world, according to Beckett, is one based on relationship. Man is an object among beings and things. Although he may use and manipulate objects, he feels himself used by others. In short, the essence of man is his relationship from the inner (subjective) to the outer (objective) self, and his attitude toward things as well as other beings. Things for Beckett mean the extensions of the human body or objects that have some relationship in space and time to the human animal. The hats of Vladimir and Estragon, the luggage of Pozzo and Lucky, the wheelchair of Hamm and Clov, the dustbins of Nagg and Nell, the crutches and bicycles of Molloy, and the tapes of Krapp are all extensions of the human body that help shape the role of the individual and in turn the Universe. Hugh Kenner analyzes Beckett's men into two major concepts: "Man as machine and man using machine."¹¹ "The Cartesian Centaur," says Kenner, "is a man riding a bicycle."¹² According to Kenner, this helps to explain the typical man in the Beckett universe who regards with strange detachment the things their hands and feet do: their tendency to analyze their own motions like a man working out why a bicycle does not topple. "I know my eyes are open," replies the Unnamable, "because of the tears that pour from them. I know I am seated, my hands on my knees, because of the pressure against my rump, against the soles of my feet, against the palms of my hands, against my knees."¹³

Beckett views man as being driven to a state in which he becomes alienated or separated from his true self. Man is asked to perform competently like a machine in motion, which separates him from existence. The Unnamable reminds us of this conflict:

Unfortunately I am afraid, as always of going on. For to go on means going from here, means finding me, losing me, vanishing and beginning again, a stranger first, then little by little the same as always, in another place, where I shall say I have always been, of which I shall know nothing, being incapable of seeing, moving, thinking, speaking, but of which little by little, in spite of these handicaps, I shall begin to know something, just enough for it to turn out to be the same place as always, the same which seems made for me and does not want me, which I seem to want and do not want, take your choice, which spews me out or swallows me up.¹⁴

Beckett realizes man gains the reality of his existence through the relationship with objects, but feels that human contact is essential to maintain sanity. Without human relationship, man feels completely alienated from himself and his fellowman. "The worst form of alienation....," writes Barrett, "is man's alienation from himself. In a society that requires of man only that he perform competently by his own particular social function, man becomes identified with this function, and the rest of his being is allowed to subsist as best it can--usually to be dropped below the surface of consciousness and forgotten."¹⁵ The importance of human contact is expressed in all of Beckett's major works. The essence of this philosophy is depicted by Nagg in a scene from Endgame. He confronts Hamm with the importance of human contact:

I was asleep, as happy as a king and you woke me up to have me listen to you. It wasn't indispensable, you didn't really need to have me listen to you. I hope the day will come when you'll really need to have me listen to you, and need to hear my voice, any voice. Yes, I hope I'll live till then, to hear you calling me like when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark, and I was your only hope.¹⁶

One of the methods of understanding the Beckett universe is through the relationship of man to objects, things, and others. Frederick Hoffman indicates that the most significant questions about Beckett

deals with the relationship of the human animal to space and objects.

He asks the following questions:

Is he anyway responsibly situated, with respect to other objects, to space independently considered, to the forms of matter as it exists in space; can he consider himself as projected in space if he assumes to himself the privileged use of other objects (themselves geometrically perfect) and using them--impose his initial situation, if these objects--in his invention and use of them--do enable him to enhance the value of his original properties, can he define himself therefore as an especially endowed creature, communicating with the universal scheme of things; can he therefore establish a relationship to God and be assured that a God may exist with whom a relationship can be established?¹⁷

Time-Habit-Memory-Perception

The Beckett universe is shaped by four major characteristics of human existence: time, habit, memory, and perception. Beckett feels these four major concepts determine our reality and the relationship in which we communicate with others and perceive the world. These four major concepts give us a thematic focus for understanding Beckett's dramatic works as set forth in the next chapter. Therefore, we include them as a means to help understand the Beckett universe as well as for future reference to the plays.

For Beckett, the world perceived is colored by the relationship of that double-headed monster of damnation and salvation--TIME. The nature of time confronts man with the whole essence of his existence.

Beckett writes in Proust:

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

yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday.¹⁸

As a result of the relationship to Time, man's perception of reality is tempered. The element of Time is not a physical or external one, but an attitude based on man's temporal relationship to the world. According to Beckett, this appears to modify the personality so that reality can only be perceived as a "retrospective hypothesis." In other words, a person can only apprehend the reality in terms of the past. "The individual," Beckett says, "is the seat of a constant process of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale, and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time, agitated and multi-colored by the phenomena of its hours."¹⁹ Since language and speaking exist in time through a linear fashion, it is apparent to Beckett that absolute reality can never be explained because it occurs instantaneously. Thus, an individual must always rely on the past and is forever imprisoned by Time. "No longer can man confront reality immediately," states Ernst Cassirer, "he cannot see it, as it were face to face; physical reality seems to recede in proportion as man's symbolic activity advances."²⁰ Beckett does not offer a solution to this problem, but he wishes to make us aware of the reality of the moment. Josephine Jacobsen and William Mueller attempt to point up this conflict:

Most persons assume that their consciousness is a reasonably accurate perceiver of an essentially ordered world and an essentially predictable one. One in which events conform to strict causal laws. Beckett is in revolt against what he envisages as a scientific position in which up to the early decades

of the twentieth century at least, led men to assume that he was moving closer and closer to a knowledge of the world of space and time, that certain causes in the physical world lead to certain effects and that through certain relationships may be unknown to us they do nevertheless exist.²¹

The concepts of memory and habit are for Beckett the most influential in relationship to Time. If Time seems as an affliction to our reality, Beckett views habit as even a more deadly disease. He writes:

Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull enviolability, the lightning-conductor of his existence. Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit. Breathing is habit. Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals; the world being a projection of the individual's consciousness (an objectivation of the individual's will, Schopenhauer would say), the pact must be continually renewed, the letter of safe-conduct brought up to date. The creation of the world did not take place once and for all time, but takes place every day. Habit then is the generic term for the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects.²²

Since all living is habit, Beckett wants us to be aware that this filters our perceptions and distorts our view of reality. "When the object is perceived as particular and unique and not merely the member of a family," Beckett says, "then and only then may it be a source of enchantment."²³ Unfortunately habit destroys this form of perception by hiding the essence of the idea behind "pre-conception." For Beckett, memory becomes conditioned through perception. Rather than having memory serve as a moment of discovery and contemplation of reality, it becomes distorted through perception. Beckett views an individual with a good memory as not really remembering anything because he does not forget anything. Strictly speaking, we can only remember what has been

registered by the unconscious and stored in that ultimate and inaccessible dungeon of our being to which habit does not possess the key. It is in this "dungeon of being"²⁴ that the true essence of man exists. Beckett's view of memory and perception is close to the interpretation of Merleau-Ponty, a friend and colleague at the Ecole Normale Superieure. Ponty, a noted French phenomenologist, points out that to "remember is not to bring into the focus of consciousness of a self-subsistent of the past; it is to thrust deeply into the horizon of the past and take apart step by step the interlocked perspectives until the experiences which it epitomizes are as if relived in their temporal setting."²⁵ In other words, to perceive is not to remember.

What Beckett sets forth as the theory of habit on perception and memory, Kenneth Burke later calls "terministic screens." According to Burke, "even if any given terminology is a reflection of reality; by its very nature as a terminology it must be a selection of reality."²⁶ For both Beckett and Burke, man's observations of reality are explicit in the choice of terms he uses to describe it. The shape of man's perception as well as his memory results from the structure of the language. "Many of the observations," says Burke, "are but implications of the particular terminology in terms of which the observations are made."²⁷ Beckett agrees with Burke that because of language man shapes his own structure and perceptions of events which involves the selection, distortion, and assimilation of all information.

Thus, the relationships of Time, habit, memory, and perception shape the symbol-using capacity of man. It is these relationships which form his conception of existence and attitude toward others.

Language as Essence

Beckett wants to make us aware that a fixed tongue, like a living habit, serves as a source of decay to society as well as to the human essence. Beckett wishes to guard against a determined reality which language imposes upon the individual. "They have nothing to fear," says the Unnamable, "I am walled round with their vociferations, none will ever know what I am, none will ever hear me say it, I won't say it, I can't say it, I have no language but theirs."²⁸

Does this mean that Beckett is against a formalized language? Not at all. His desire is for us to be aware that we may take refuge behind the controlling concept of habit. In this way, we do not have to think or experience the reality of the world. Only a man who is freed from a compelling habit can enter into life as a creative process. Beckett is not degrading language, but the system which imposes a fixed and inflexible tongue. He is interested in a living language and not one that will serve as a facade to hide our reality. The mind of man must be willing to view the essence of an idea with a new impression rather than with an old tired out expression. Beckett wants us to guard against the attitude of language as cliché. This happens when words and phrases become so much a part of the external world that we use them as mere habits of expression.

If language loses its reality, then the self becomes merely an object or a third person. This establishes what Gusdorf calls the struggle between personal creativity and common meaning:

If I speak it is less for myself than for the other; I speak in order to address myself to the other, in order to make myself understood. Here, speaking is like a hyphen. But for the other to understand me my language must be his--it must give precedence to the other over

me. It is all the more intelligible the more it is a common denominator. Others have taught me to speak, have given me speech. But in doing this, they have perhaps suffocated an original voice in me, a voice both weak and slow to free itself. To say that language is other people is tantamount to saying that we are from childhood on reduced to captivity by our forced submission to the ready-made formulas of the established language....On the one hand, we have the expressive function of language: I speak in order to make myself understood, in order to emerge into reality, in order to add myself to nature.²⁹

Beckett also feels that language must serve as a form of self-revelation. It must serve as a link to our fellow man rather than an instrument or tool to be used for manipulative purposes. Beckett's view of language follows that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty: "As soon as man uses language to establish a living relation with himself or with his fellows, language is no longer an instrument, no longer a means; it is a manifestation."³⁰ Language, for Beckett, must begin with human reality which provides an attitude of self-affirmation and identity of the world.

Beckett is also against the Logical Positivists, who wish to make the study of language a scientific and external phenomena. Beckett questions the process that language and thinking are identical. The Unnamable remarks:

But how can you think and speak at the same time, how can you think about what you have said, may say, are saying, and at the same time go on with the last-mentioned, you think about any old thing, you say any old thing, more or less, more or less, in a daze of baseless unanswerable self-approach, that's why they always repeat the same thing, the same old litany, the one they know by heart, to try and think of something different, of how to say something different from the same old thing, always the same wrong thing said always wrong, they can find nothing, nothing else to say but the thing that prevents them from finding, they'd do better to think of what they're saying, in order at least to vary its presentation, that's what matters, but how can you think and speak at the same time.³¹
[My italics]

Thus, Beckett is not against words and language, but only if they are used to ignore human reality. If language is only recognized as a logical system, then it fails to encompass irrational behavior. And silence may be the only means to provide a self-reflection on the event.

Beckett cautions us that words and language cannot give us truth but can only point the way. He feels that only a self that receives absolute identity can remain silent. Since an individual is constantly changing, there is a continual need to look for a living language. Beckett also cautions us that words may serve as a wall to keep us from our identity. This process Gusdorf calls the theory of indirect communication. "The theme of individual communication," says Gusdorf,

is bound up with a conception of man that insists on the secret core of each life. Silence is truer than speech. The poets and often writers have insisted on a wall of inexpressibility which their greatest efforts of expression run up against....Baudelaire, borrowing an image from Poe, expresses under the title, "my heart stripped bare," this desire for an epiphany, for a total self-revelation which would also be the long-sought salvation. But the darkness is not dissipated. The more one speaks the more one says nothing. The more one strives to say something, the more one is buried in an irremediable silence.³²

For Beckett, the power of language is the sense of "becoming." It is the living relationship to reality that makes a true language.

With the classical philosophers and sages of the early tribes, power was contained in the Word. Ernst Cassirer points out that in "almost all great cultural religions, the Word appears in league with the highest lord of creation; either as the tool which he employs or actually as the primary source from which he like all other Being and order of Being is derived."³³ The early tribes had pondered over the mystery of origin, but the Word had a creative power all of its own. The Word had lived before earth, sun, or moon came into existence.

Cassirer indicates that Uitoto opens characteristically enough in this way, "In the beginning, the Word gave origin to the Father." The Word was thought to precede the creator, for the primitive mind could not imagine a creation from nothingness.

Beckett views the nature and power of language in just the opposite position. He feels that language cannot begin with God or society, but it must be a living example to a living reality. Language, for Beckett, cannot be just a collection of words from a dictionary, but a creation of personal existence. In other words, man is different from other creatures in his ability to create and understand symbols. Language supplies the basic concept of man's awareness and the opportunity for him to emerge from the Muck and to reach out to touch his fellow man. Beckett agrees with Burke that "language serves as the symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols."³⁴ As a result, we argue that Beckett's characters are rhetorical heroes since they establish a value or form with others through the use of symbols. In this approach, we see the implication of the search for rhetorical methods in order to attain the assimilation of merging attitudes, beliefs, and values into one substance. This process is not the absorption of one human essence into another, but a merger of symbolic substances to create harmony, unity, and order between individuals.

For Beckett, man uses language in order to add himself to existence and to reach out to his fellow man. To name is to call into existence and to draw out of the Void. If we cannot name an item or substance, how can it exist? For Beckett, it is words that make things and define the relationship to which the world is constituted. Consequently,

Beckett's last major novel is uniquely titled The Unnamable. The main character in this novel is called into existence, and he must strive to find a name as well as an essence. The Unnamable is constantly being watched by his friends and scrutinized by his family. He is continually probing and searching for a name, which might give him the semblance of existence. By finding a name, the character can draw himself from nothingness and add himself to reality. As Hugh Duncan points out, "a thing or a person named exists for itself and for me. Until I name it and it responds it has no existence, because it cannot be addressed, but neither do I have any existence because I cannot be addressed."³⁵ The Unnamable provides us with a hint of this quest:

All these Murphys, Molloys, and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time, suffer for nothing, speak of them when, in order to stop speaking, I should have spoken of me and me alone. But I just said I have spoken of me, am speaking of me. I don't care a curse what I just said. It is now I shall speak of me, for the first time. I thought I was right in enlisting their sufferers of my pains. I was wrong. They never suffered my pains, their pains are nothing, compared to mine, a mere title of mine, the title I thought I could put from me, in order to witness it. Let them be gone now, them and all the others, that I have used and I have not used, give me back the pains I lent them and vanish, from my life, my memory, my terrors, and shames. There, now there is no one here but me, no one wheels about me, no one comes towards me, no one has ever met anyone before my eyes, these creatures have never been, only I and this black Void have ever been.³⁶

In the Unnamable's desire to destroy the presence of Murphy, Molloy, Malone, and Mahood, he discovers that he is without a self. He attempts to throw off the mask of the others which tend to engulf him. The Unnamable probes, peers, and argues in questing to find an honest and authentic self. He argues:

I'll call him Mahood instead. It was he told me stories about me, came back to me, entered back into me, heaped stories on my head....It is his voice which has often, always mingled with mine, and sometimes drowned it completely. Until he left me for good, or refused to leave me anymore, I don't know. Yes, I don't know if he's here now or far away, but I don't think I am far wrong in saying that he has ceased to plague me. When he was away I tried to find myself again, to forget what he had said, about me, about my misfortunes, fatuous misfortunes, idiotic pains, in the light of my true situation, revolting word. But his voice continued to testify for me, as though woven into mine, preventing me from saying who I was, what I was, so as to have done with saying, done with listening. And still today, as he would say, though he plagues me no more his voice is there, in mine but less, and less. And being no longer renewed it will disappear one day, I hope, from mine, completely. But in order for that to happen I must speak and speak.³⁷ [My italics]

The use of this form of inquiry by Beckett receives its basis from the Cartesian legacy. No doubt Beckett admires the Cartesian process, but he expresses doubt on its closed system. In The Meditations, Descartes gives us a picture of the philosopher in quest of true knowledge by turning to the introspection of the self. Paul Zwieg indicates that Descartes provides us with "an image of the philosopher who has closed his eyes, plugged his ears, blocked all his senses, in order to converse with himself in his own mind."³⁸ In this way a self begins to know and become more familiar to his own reality. In the First Meditation, Descartes imagines that all perceptions and feelings about the world are a lie. He writes:

I will suppose, then, not that Deity, who is sovereignly good and the fountain of truth, but that some malignant demon, who is at once exceedingly potent and deceitful, has employed all his artifice to deceive me; I will suppose that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, figures, sounds, and all external things, are nothing better than the illusions of dreams, by means of which this being has laid snares for my credulity; I will consider myself as without hands, eyes, flesh, blood, or any of the senses, and as falsely believing that I am possessed of these.... I shall at least do what is in my power, and guard with settled purpose against giving my assent to what is false,

and being imposed upon by this deceiver, whatever be his power and artifice.³⁹

Descartes argues that if this wicked person exists and tries to destroy me, then "I" exist. Cogito ergo Sum. According to Descartes, the philosopher must look from within in order to find any true knowledge of self. For Beckett as well as Descartes, the intimate "I" is discovered in self-reflection and relationship with others. The "I" is not born but emerges into an existing relationship. Zweig suggests that "the 'I' in The Meditations casts no shadows and because of the inquiry on self becomes a truly rhetorical instrument."⁴⁰ [My italics]

Although Beckett is fascinated by Descartes' theory, he objects to the closed system of a mind which is purely spiritual and a body which is purely mechanical. Beckett asserts that man's existence can only be understood in terms of his "wholeness." Man cannot be partitioned into segments and studied as isotopes, but can only be defined in terms of his entire being. If mind and matter are totally different substances, then, as Beckett asserts, it is impossible for any interaction to take place. The Unnamable suggests the frustration of this inquiry:

I'll have said it inside me, then in the same breath outside me, perhaps that's what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either.⁴¹ [My italics]

Beckett suggests that in order to understand the mind and body we must go to the center of existence. "How all becomes clear and simple when one opens an eye on the within," says the Unnamable, "having of course

previously exposed it to the without in order to benefit by the contrast."⁴² It is a search for the irrational process of human reality and seeing the world through the process of the body as well as the mind. "For if it is true that I am conscious of my body via the world," writes Merleau-Ponty, "it is true for the same reason that my body is the pivot of the world; I know that objects have several facets because I could make a tour of inspection of them, and in that sense I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body."⁴³

Rather than beginning his study with systems, Beckett begins with man himself. The only true study is one concerned with the total man and his symbol-using capacity. It is the study of man in relationship to things, objects, and others. Thus, language serves as the essence of man and symbolic acts as the key to all verbal acts. Yet at the center of this entire process must be the emphasis on the Self. Therefore, this discussion brings us to the nature of the Self and existence.

The Self and Existence

The Self may be interpreted from several different levels. Cases can be made to study the Self from a sociological, psychological, biological, or a philosophical interpretation. For us, the most feasible is to approach the Self from a philosophical point of view.

Although a number of critics express the fallacy of placing Beckett into one philosophical position, nevertheless, his views represent an existential interpretation. Consequently, it might be helpful to interpret briefly two of the leading Existentialists who may shed insight on the Beckett universe and the role of the Self.

The basic attitude of the existential philosophy is one of involvement. This means participating in a situation with the total sense of one's existence--which includes all the temporal, psychological, historical, and biological conditions of man. For the Existentialists, a self which becomes an object for measurement, calculation, and manipulation ceases to exist. It is a thing which is absent of existence or being.⁴⁴ In existential knowledge, the being is changed through the acts of encountering and participating. Man faces two alternatives in this relationship: he may choose to treat the Other as an object and discover nothing, or he may attempt to treat the Other as a person and in turn gain valuable knowledge about the Self. Only by participation in reality and finding a center to his own being, can an individual find a true existence.⁴⁵

We may ask ourselves the question of how discussion about existentialism relates to the Beckett universe? One could speculate without distortion to Beckett that he adopts this form of philosophy in the dialogical process of his rhetorical heroes. As mentioned earlier, Beckett warns us about a dead language that may serve as a facade to hide our authentic behavior. When speech is used to merely pass the time and avoid the discovery of the Self, it serves as an external to hide the authentic Self. Thus silence becomes the only true form of communication. This is illustrated by the Unnamable's desire to find a true Self:

It's of me now I must speak, even I have to do it with their language, it will be a start a step towards silence and end of madness, the madness of having to speak and not being able to, except of things that don't concern me; that don't count, that I don't believe, that they have crammed me full of to prevent me from saying who I

am, where I am and from doing what I have to do in the only way that can put an end to it, from doing what I have to do.⁴⁶

Self, for Beckett is discovered in relationship to others and man can only be comprehended in confronting his own reality. Man, according to Beckett, cannot exist for long without some form of relationship with his fellow man. Man can only be human because others make him human. He in turn makes others human. The discovery of the Self comes in the presence of another, and the Self cannot exist for long without the other. "Man is the creature that cannot come forth from himself," writes Beckett, "who knows others only in himself, and who if he asserts the contrary, lies."⁴⁷ It is the discovery of the Self as others in turn discover who they are that makes the communion important.

The basic attitude for this philosophy comes from the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre. "Man," says Sartre, "is nothing else but what he makes of himself."⁴⁸ Sartre implies in his philosophy that man is the sum total of his actions. He suggests that if we realize ourselves truly by our actions, we must also realize ourselves by our indecisions, inactions, by what we do, as much as by what we fail to do. In applying this concept to Godot and Endgame, the vacillation of the rhetorical heroes is as much a part of the human self as the final scene when the characters are in a state of immobility. The characters' indecisions, their vacillation, and their inactions are unquestionably part of the human self. Toward the end of each play, these characteristics give way to a decisive conscious and acceptance of self-awareness as responsible egos of the "terrible freedom." Perhaps the nature of the "dreadful freedom" helps explain the last few lines of each act in Godot which ends as follows:

Estragon: Well, shall we go?

Vladimir: Yes, let's go.
 (They do not move.)⁴⁹

It is the nature of the choice and the responsibility that it bears which determines individual freedom. In order to be authentic, the individual must choose what is best for him rather than what society expects or demands. Consequently, the responsibility of the choice may lead to dreadful freedom, or what Sartre calls a state of "quietism." For Sartre, the Self is that which raises questions about being, and by these questions man defines himself as being different from a thing or object.

If man attempts to hide from the reality of others, then he will never find the true Self. The undisclosed and undiscovered Self cannot reach out to others. It can only form words and sounds without the presence of genuine communication. As the Unnamable proclaims:

I'm all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their settling, no sky for their dispersing, coming together to say, fleeing one another to say, that I am they, all of them, those that merge, those that part, those that never meet, and nothing else, yes, something else, that I'm something quite different, a quite different thing, a wordless thing in an empty place.⁵⁰

Beckett agrees that a risk is involved, but one that must be undertaken to move from non-being into being. Discovery of self is a risk, but it involves the nature of "becoming."

Beckett indicates that we must be aware of two kinds of behavior in speech communication; "that either we speak and act for ourselves in which case speech and actions are distorted or we speak and act for others in which case we speak and act a lie."⁵¹ Does this mean that Beckett holds a pessimistic view toward speech communication? The

answer must be "No." His concern is that if we are merely depending on outward appearances and objects for communicating, then we are unaware of the true essence of the self. Beckett receives support for this attitude from Soren Kierkegaard, who argues that man must be aware of his own existence before concerning himself with reason. Kierkegaard concedes that his existence is not something he can speculate about, but a reality in which he encounters each day of his life. For Kierkegaard, the individual is higher than the universe, and man is only defined by his capacity to act. According to Kierkegaard, an individual who ties himself to an objective truth without an awareness of his own existence binds himself to a life of detachment. For Kierkegaard, truth serves as the mark of the whole being--not what he has (intelligence), but what he is (existence). With this view of man, the common individual can carry truth much better by living it than the intellectual by thinking it. Kierkegaard feels that as an individual obtains selfhood it becomes increasingly more difficult for him to find relief in speech.⁵² The Unnamable aptly summarizes Beckett's as well as Kierkegaard's feelings: "A parrot, that's what they're up against, a parrot. If they had told me what I have to say, in order to meet with their approval, I'd be bound to say it, sooner or later."⁵³

Beckett feels that man continually strives to have his existence reaffirmed, and this can only be done in relationship to the Other. Thrust into a world where man can no longer depend on the laws of the universe, he needs to have his own being confirmed. Objects, chatter, and things can only lead to more anguish about a selfhood. Man yearns to enter into a dialogical process because he knows that only in dialogue can the anguish of nothingness and the void disappear. Thus, it

is up to another person to reaffirm his sense of existence. The process of being passes from one human essence to another.

Although the theory of this concept is provided in Beckett's novels, we see the consummation of this process in his plays where all the rhetorical heroes exist in pairs or what Duckworth calls "pseudo-couples." Some of these characters are: Pozzo and Lucky, Vladimir and Estragon, Hamm and Clov, Nagg and Nell, and Winnie and Willie. The need to reaffirm the self and find essence forms a bond with each character that is never broken throughout each play. It is the relationship that Beckett views as being important to the discovery of the individual's reality and existence. This is examined in more detail in the following exchange from Godot:

Estragon: We're not tied?

Vladimir: I don't hear a word you're saying.

Estragon: I'm asking you if we're tied.

Vladimir: Tied?

Estragon: Tied.

Vladimir: How do you mean tied?

Estragon: Down.

Vladimir: But to whom? By whom?

Estragon: To your man.

Vladimir: To Godot? Tied to Godot! What an idea!
No question of it for the moment.⁵⁴

The essence of this theory can best be summarized by Hugh Duncan. He states:

Dialogue between the self and the other makes society possible, because in such relationships, expression, communication, naming, and the struggle for consistency

in meaning originate. Meaning is always a social meaning, because men create symbols in dialogue, not to measure or to witness a world, but to act in it. And since all such action is dramatic, the life of dialogue is dramatic life. Like actors on the stage, we address each other to find out what we are. We commit ourselves to each other, and this commitment becomes our social covenant, for, as we address another and he responds to us, we discover that we exist in terms of each other. So long as we are bound, we exist.⁵⁵ [My italics]

Speech and Existence

Beckett views speech communication as the means of discovering reality, but only if it comes from the inner depth of the person. "Man," writes Proust, "is not a building that can receive additions to its superficialities, but a tree whose stem and leafage are an expression of inward sap."⁵⁶ Speech communication is a process of confronting the inner man bringing forth the inner sap. True or genuine speech communication for Beckett is a process of "becoming." "Ah, if I could only find a voice of my own in all this babble," says the Unnamable, "it would be the end of their troubles and mine."⁵⁷ It is the process of one human essence to the Other. True speech consists only when one being tries to bring a true sense of his existence and "wholeness" to the Other. It is a seeking to find the authentic voice.

It might be wise to pause to define the nature of speech communication. Since we earlier discussed language as a form of living reality, confusion may develop toward the differences between language and speech communication. For Beckett, speech communication is man's use of signs and symbols to link one person's essence to the Other. Beckett feels that speech communication is crucial to all beings because it allows for an element of humanness and establishes a communion of

sharing. Beckett contends that speech communication provides the means or the vehicle for man to live in relationship with the Other. In order to share his thoughts and feelings with others, man relies on speech. Man's potentiality, according to Beckett, is only realized through speech communication, and this sets him apart from other creatures. Beckett sees the most obvious and the most distinct form of communication between individuals in the use of language. A study of language serves as the root or focus to all studies on speech communication. Language provides a means of structuring an act, naming the contents, and indicating an attitude toward the situation. For Beckett, language provides the key to all human acts while speaking is the act itself. Language gives us, Beckett feels, the theoretical and potential conditions while speech communication gives us the relationships.

Beckett views the English speaking world as being deceived by speech and language. It is Beckett's feeling that speech is used as a process of manipulation, power, and control. In other words, Beckett sees the attitude of most speaking in the English world as a method of stealing the essence of the Other and language serving as the instrument. "Speak yes," states the Unnamable, "but to me, I have never spoken enough to me, never listened enough to me, never replied enough to me, never had pity enough for me, I have spoken for my master, listened for the words of my master."⁵⁸

A number of critics feel that one of the major reasons why Beckett composes all his works in French is the process of the language serving as a self-revelation and a creative discovery for him. Jean-Jacques Mayoux provides us with the essence of this feeling:

Is not Beckett's use of French at one and the same time an acknowledgment of the fact of solitude and assertion of the right to be free?....At this point an artist, a determined poet, even a rhetorician, arose in Beckett, to seize on this new language, to tame and internalize it, to draw from it a new music that is still Irish, or at least Celtic. I sometimes feel I am listening to a new and darker Chateaubriand.⁵⁹

For Beckett, all authentic speech moves toward the attitude of finding the inner self. In short, Beckett views speech as moving towards the inner regions of the Self and attempting to avoid the solitude of nothingness. Thus, man is compelled to speak in order to find his essence. It is a continued striving for transcendence not in the Buberian relationship to the Almighty, but a basic desire to preserve the Self from the Void. "And if it is the living, existential experience of the individual that matters," writes Esslin, "and has precedence over any abstract concepts it may elicit, then the very act of confronting the void, or continuing to confront it, is an act of affirmation."⁶⁰

At first glance, this appears in contradiction to the previous discussion as we were arguing that only authentic speech can develop from one human essence to the Other. In this particular interpretation, Beckett views the Other as the non-existence of his own being. This attitude finds the basic rationale in the arguments from The Meditations.

I am, however, a real thing, and really existent; but what thing? The answer was, a thinking thing. The question now arises, am I aught besides? I will stimulate my imagination with a view to discover whether I am not still something more than a thinking being. Now it is plain I am not the assemblage of members called the human body; I am not a thin and penetrating air diffused through all these members, or wind, or flame, or vapour, or breath, or any of all the things I can

imagine; for I supposed that all these were not, and, without changing the supposition, I find that I still feel assured of my existence. But it is true, perhaps, that those very things which I suppose to be non-existent, because they are unknown to me, are not in truth different from myself whom I know. This is a point I cannot determine, and do not now enter into any dispute regarding it. I can only judge of things that are known to me: I am conscious that I exist, and I who know that I exist inquire into what I am....But what, then am I?⁶¹

It is surprising how closely this excerpt from Descartes' writing appears to Beckett's thinking. The following passage from The Unnamable uses the same basic argument and strategy in relating that man is a rhetorical animal:

Do they believe I believe it is I who am speaking? That's theirs too. To make me believe I have an ego all my own, and can speak of it, as they of theirs. Another trap to snap me up among the living. It's how to fall into it they can't have explained to me sufficiently. They'll never get the better of my stupidity. Why do they speak to me thus? Is it possible certain things change on their passage through me, in a way they can't prevent? Do they believe I believe it is I who am asking these questions? That's theirs too, a little distorted perhaps. I don't say it's not the right method. I don't say they won't catch me in the end. I wish they would, to be thrown away. It's this hunt that is tiring, this unending being at bay. Images, they imagine that by piling on the images they'll entice me in the end.⁶²

Beckett feels it is the basic motivation of man to find knowledge of the Self and continually confront rather than join the Void. Speech in this instance serves as a means to establish a basic relationship with the Void and come to grips with the truth. "For the only way one can speak of Nothing," says Watt, "is to speak of it as though it were something."⁶³

Thus speech is a means of grasping being if it comes from the inner soul. It is evident that what Beckett considers as important is the

process of "becoming" through speech. It is not speech as most of us conceive it; a process of argumentation and persuasion. It is not rhetoric as some define it; a verbal mode of judgments and choices. It is not a behavior viewed as an operation necessary to the transfer of ideas. True speech for Beckett is the process of becoming so the self is transcended into a discovery of reality and existence. Risk must be taken, but for Beckett these obligations and commitments are worth the efforts. The truth of one's self may be difficult to accept, but in Beckett's mind, we must commit ourselves to this struggle in order to establish authentic communication. Without this commitment and state of risk, then communication is absurd like a conversation with a table or a chair. In short, the whole process of our existence is a phony performance or a total lie. Martin Esslin capsizes the nature of Beckett's thinking with the following remarks:

It is the shape of the thought, the shape of the experience that matters, for the shape is its own significance, the experience its own meaning. It is the quality of the experience that, communicated, can change the quality of another human being's experience. Beckett himself may be skeptical as to the possibility of such communication. The obligation to express is not dictated by any idea of utility to others. But the fact that the obligation is felt leaves open the possibility of genuine human communication.⁶⁴

For Beckett, to know the essence of man's existence, we must also know the nature of speech communication. True speech provides a sense of becoming. And with Beckett, it is the sense of becoming and the shape that matters.

The Quest in the Comic Frame

Beckett's rhetorical heroes always set out on journeys to find the essence of existence, which is the authentic voice. Their pilgrimages

are painful, slow, and often hampered by blindness or lameness. Does this imply that Beckett's heroes are mere figures of motion? However painful and slow moving the Quests may be, the heroes still continue the search to find ontological security. The journey may be reduced to a crawl, but it is, nevertheless, man still in action. And the action involves character, which involves choice, and the choice is perfected in the distinction between the living and the Void.⁶⁵ The action may be a limited one and the distinction between Yes and No a barely audible one, but nonetheless, it is a choice which determines character.

Beckett sets the Quest for man to seek existence in the framework of the comic genre. Beckett's comic frame includes "laughs that strictly speaking are not laughs"--since he emphasizes the bitter and mirthless laughter. The bitter laugh comes when a person views his actions as being noble, serious, and for the good of all mankind. In a sense, Beckett characterizes this kind of person pretentious, tragic, and what Burke calls helping out with the holocaust.

Beckett pokes fun at the self-righteous who constantly look for guilt and a means of gaining catharsis. Beckett feels that the compassion for the human spirit comes through the technique of the comic through an ability to show man in his base and naked self. Beckett sees the serious and self-righteous individual as refusing to come to grips with his own reality.

Although Beckett's comedy may not strike the impulse of the gag-seeker, he believes that man must know his rags and perhaps even exult in them. The means to help make man aware of his own foibles is the technique of the comic. "He [Beckett] directs his laughter," summarizes Jacobsen and Mueller, "against that which is not good, against

that which is not true. That laughter is his testament--his legacy to that which is good, that which is true, that which is compassionate."⁶⁶

In summary, Beckett is interested in man in his totality and his symbol-using capacity. Time, habit, memory, and perception help shape and define the Beckett universe. If man can be understood, according to Beckett, it must come through an understanding of these relationships with the Self and others. The power of language for Beckett serves as the sense of "becoming." Man is different and unique from other creatures because of his ability to create and understand symbols. Language provides man the opportunity to emerge from nothingness and to reach out to join others. For Beckett, language serves as the essence of man and symbolic action as the key to all human acts. Language provides the structure and the attitude toward a situation while speech gives us the vehicle of communion. Man is destined to live in communion with others and speech provides the process of sharing. Speech provides man with the means to live to his fullest potentiality. Beckett feels that all authentic speech must move toward the attitude of finding the inner self. Man, for Beckett, is continually striving to find a voice and avoid a state of nothingness. Beckett views true speech as a process of transcendence into a discovery of reality and existence.

Beckett views man as an actor, acting out his life in trying to understand his reality. While Burke places man in the context of seeking the Ultimate Good, Beckett views the Ultimate as understanding the intellectual and emotional selves. Each of Beckett's rhetorical heroes attempts to find a voice and ontological security. The Quest story is set against the framework of the comic backdrop in hopes that this

technique will help man to transcend to a discovery of reality and existence by noting his own foibles.

We have attempted in this chapter to analyze Proust and The Unnamable in detail to provide a theoretical base to understand the shape of the Beckett universe. We have also attempted to use these works as a basis for understanding Beckett's rhetorical theory and for a criteria to evaluate his plays in the next chapter.

FOOTNOTES

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CHAPTER IV

BECKETT: THE LANGUAGE OF THE ABSURD

I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything anymore, teach me others. Or let me be silent.

--Endgame

The modern writer is faced with the baffling problem of picturing a self that seems to have lost its reality. Dwelling in a universe that seems to him alien and hostile, man today retreats within the fastness of the self, only to discover that he does not know himself; but the curse or the glory of being human is that he must at all costs strive to know. He cannot endure existence without some light, however uncertain, of self-knowledge.¹

This quoted passage from the opening pages of The Self in Modern Literature by Charles Glicksberg, reflects in essence the aesthetic practices of the modern writers' view toward reality. This point of view is often called the "language of the absurd." Although a strong case can be made for the literary quality of Beckett's novels, it is to the plays that he owes his international reputation. Furthermore his reputation as a dramatist largely stems from the drama of the Absurd. It is the nature of the Absurd which serves as the central focus of Beckett's plays. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is: (1) to define and explain the form of the Theatre of the Absurd; (2) to use Kenneth Burke's insights to help explain the language of the Absurd; and (3) to evaluate

the themes of existence, time, habit, and memory as found in Waiting for Godot.

The Form of The Theatre of the Absurd

The Theatre of the Absurd has received a variety of interpretations in recent years. A few critics have denounced it, while others have attempted to praise it as a new form of theatre. A few critics have attempted to analyze and categorize each playwright of the Absurd while others have dismissed the plays as a passing phenomenon. Regardless of whether we accept or reject it, like or dislike the plays, one thing is certain, we must recognize the Theatre of the Absurd as having a profound impact on the form of writing in the past two decades.

The first writer who attempts to explain the philosophy of the Absurd is Albert Camus. In The Myth of Sisyphus, he analyzes the human animal in face of the world crumbling. He writes:

A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.²

Camus contends that the basic assumption of the Absurdist movement is that facts and events do not have meanings until man assigns meanings to them. The feeling of Absurdity comes as a result of the divorce between the basic fact and man's reality:

Likewise we shall deem a verdict absurd when we contrast it with the verdict the facts apparently dictated. And, similarly, a demonstration by the absurd is achieved by comparing the consequences of such a reasoning with the logical reality one wants to set up....I am thus justified in saying that the feeling of absurdity does not spring

from the mere scrutiny of a fact or an impression, but that it bursts from the comparison between a bare fact and a certain reality, between an action and the world that transcends it.³

Another basic assumption of the Absurdist movement is that man's ideals lack a basic foundation. Since there can be no objective truth, each man must find a set of values in which to base his own life. Eugene Ionesco points out the basic understanding of Absurdity "as that which is devoid of purpose....cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost, all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless."⁴ The Absurdist view man as possessing no fixed character or essence. Man's personality is constantly changing and his consciousness is forever plagued with contradictions. Man is adrift in a chaotic universe, constructing whatever reality he needs to help him survive. The Absurdist view man as being homeless, alienated, and meaningless in a universe of things. Man can gain no clue to his identity nor can he appeal to any universal law for justification of existence. This leads Edward Albee to speak of the Theatre of the Absurd as "an absorption-in-art of certain existentialist and post-existentialist philosophical concepts having to do in the main with man's attempt to make for himself out of his senseless position in a world which makes no sense--which makes no sense because the moral, religious, political and social structures man has erected to illusion himself have collapsed."⁵

What these writers mean by the Absurd springs from the perception that human existence is without intrinsic purpose and reason. For most of the writers in The Theatre of the Absurd, there is an absence or at

least a withdrawal of God. When this absence is noticed, the world collapses into anarchy and madness. As a result, the major characters of these plays can embrace no slogans and certainties. They are stripped of ontological truth and are mere forms of existence attempting to justify themselves. In short, they lack ontological security. R. D. Laing proposes an explanation of this phenomenon:

If the individual cannot take the realness, aliveness, autonomy, and identity of himself and others for granted, then he has to become absorbed in contriving ways of trying to be real, of keeping himself or others alive, of preserving his identity, in efforts, as he will often put it, 'to prevent himself losing his self.'⁶

When it is no longer possible to face life with certainties and objective systems, then man must face life in a stark reality. The Theatre of the Absurd reveals man stripped of social and historical significance. Man is faced with the basic choice of existence as found in time between birth and death. Camus indicates the conflict of the choice:

We live on the future: "tomorrow," "later on," "when you have made your way," "you will understand when you are old enough." Such irrelevancies are wonderful, for, after all, it's a matter of dying. Yet a day comes when a man notices or says that he is thirty. Thus he asserts his youth. But simultaneously he situates himself in relation to time. He takes his place in it. He admits that he stands at a certain point on a curve that he acknowledges having to travel to its end. He belongs to time, and by the horror that seizes him, he recognizes his worst enemy. Tomorrow, he was longing for tomorrow, whereas everything in him ought to reject it. That revolt of the flesh is the absurd.⁷

This is one of the reasons why Time serves as the central theme of Beckett's plays. The essential dialectic characteristic of Waiting for Godot is not Godot but the act of waiting. Man faced with waiting must make certain choices to give an awareness of existence.

This change in the philosophical position from the classical philosophers has also brought about the fundamental change in the form of expression. Most of the drama from the Greeks to Ibsen expresses a generally accepted metaphysical system. The Theatre of the Absurd expresses the absence of any generally known system of the cosmos. "The Theatre of the Absurd," says Martin Esslin, "makes no pretense at explaining the ways of God to man; it can merely present, in anxiety or with derision, an individual human being's intuition of the ultimate realities as he experiences them; the fruits of one man's descent into the depths of his personality, his dreams, fantasies, and nightmares."⁸

Since The Theatre of the Absurd is not interested in solving problems or narrating events, the plays take on the characteristic of poetic situations. "The formal structure of such a play is," Esslin says, "merely a device to express a complex total image by unfolding it in a sequence of interacting elements."⁹

In the classical plays, the spectators were aware of the situation and the characters relationship to each other. The plots for Greek audiences brought no surprises or new ideas. The audiences experienced catharsis by the feelings of fear and pity toward the tragic hero who was caught in the forces of fate. The Theatre of the Absurd attempts to show the situation of modern man in his grimness and despair. The attempt is to make the audiences more conscious and aware of their own reality. As a result, the characters and plots are not clear-cut. The audience may not be aware of what is going to happen next, or if anything is going to happen at all. "The Theatre of the Absurd," says Esslin, "which proceeds not by intellectual concepts but by poetic

images, neither poses an intellectual problem in its exposition nor provides any clear-cut solutions." Many of the absurd plays, he continues, "have a circular structure, ending exactly as they began; others progress merely by a growing intensification of the initial situation."¹⁰ Esslin hints at the change in the fundamental form of writing. "The audience can ask," he writes,

"What is going to happen next?" But then anything may happen next, so that the answer to this question cannot be worked out according to the rules of ordinary probability based on motives and characterizations that will remain constant throughout the play. The relevant question here is not so much what is going to happen next but what is happening? "What does the action of the play represent?" This constitutes a different, but by no means less valid, kind of dramatic suspense. Instead of being provided with a solution, the spectator is challenged to formulate the questions that he will have to ask if he wants to approach the meaning of the play.¹¹

Kenneth Burke indicates that the main change in the form of writing from the classical to the modern is one of "expectation." Burke feels that in the old classical formula the audience understood exactly the roles of the characters and what was expected of them. In the modern drama, Burke points out that the audience may only be interested in not knowing what to expect. "In Waiting for Godot the theme of Christian vigil is not thus romanticized," writes Burke, "but deliberately burlesqued."¹² Burke goes on to indicate that "form involves the arousing of expectations and in Godot the audience is quite uncertain what to expect; but in effect the formal principle of expectation is transformed into a problematical theme."¹³

In one of Burke's early writings, The Book of Yul, the story opens on the theme of "expectation as expectation." It is interesting to compare the structure and theme of the opening passages to that of Waiting

for Godot. "While waiting," writes Burke, "two men carried on a conversation that flapped like an old newspaper. And a third was silent. Finally, the conversation gained in intensity, culminating in some disagreeable figure or image....'Do you think she will come?'"¹⁴ The characters, according to the story, remained silent while the sounds from the outside came in dampened by the snow. Finally, the first man turned to the other and said:

"If we're going to wait around here we might as well be comfortable." "Too late now, she'll be along any minute."...Out of the high windows the snow could be seen falling diagonally across a street lamp. "This waiting outside the gates of Heaven is cold business." "Why in the name of God do you call it the gates of Heaven?"¹⁵

Like Waiting for Godot the major figure for whom the men are waiting never appears. The transformation of the story like Godot comes from the actions, games, and sounds they encounter while waiting. "The story [Book of Yul]," writes Burke, "undergoes symbolic transformation; certain sounds that the men had heard while waiting ("scraping" and "thump") enigmatically reveal their unanticipatable implications by turning up again later, in a quite different context."¹⁶

Burke views this fundamental change in form to "expectation as expectation" as one of the basic features with the Absurdist plays. As a result, form is not imposed on the characters and the audience, but it evolves as the play progresses. The "Nothing happens" of Godot and "What can we expect next?" brings about a certain suspense which captures the attention of the spectator. This rhetorical strategy captures the imagination as well as the attention of the audience. "It has been said of Waiting for Godot," writes Alfonso Sastre, "with destructive intent, that it is a drama which absolutely nothing happens. And does that

seem a small accomplishment?" But while many dramas of intrigue may leave us cold, Sastre continues, "this nothing happens of Waiting for Godot keeps us in suspense."¹⁷ Sastre further explains the basic rhetorical strategy of Godot, which provides a sense of revelation for the spectator. He writes:

These men who are bored cast us out of our own boredom; their boredom produces our catharsis, and we follow their adventure breathlessly, for they have suddenly placed us before the "nothing happens" of our lives. The gray and meaningless mass of our everyday existence is suddenly illuminated, disclosing its true structure, naked and desolate. That is the great revelation.... Thus, "nothing happens" can be the form in which the most extraordinary and profound events are presented, just as "many things happen" can be a form of emptiness.¹⁸

The process of "nothing happens" transcends the audience into an awareness of "expectation as expectation." "The modern spectator," writes Jacques Guicharnaud, "is led, more than ever in the history of theatre to consider each play as a possible metaphor, an objectivized hypothesis of man's and the world's condition."¹⁹ In the past, writers simplified the universe and wrote about what was considered a known and closed system. The modern spectator must regard the Absurd writers, one might say, "as makers of metaphors and tangible symbols of a truth that is always transcendent."²⁰

The change of form in modern drama leads Frederick Hoffman to argue that the shift is from a metaphysical center to an epistemological one. Hoffman feels that in the modern plays the author disappears and is replaced by the consciousness of his characters. According to Hoffman, the author gives in to the scene, which is the ground of his art; or he explores the consciousness of his characters, but he remains outside

of them.²¹ This insight supports the view of Burke that the modern play takes on a position of "expectation as expectation." Hoffman argues:

This is what I mean when I say that the philosophical ground of twentieth-century literature has shifted from metaphysics to epistemology. Characters who were formerly maneuvered within an accepted frame of extraliterary reference are now represented as seeking their own definitions and their own languages. This is not to say that metaphysics is abolished; it is always implicit, but the principal course taken by characters is the move toward an awkward and a hesitant initial assumption.²²

The task of the modern artist is an attempt to find a form that will allow his characters freedom but not bore the audience. Although Beckett and other critics from the Theatre of the Absurd are criticized as being against form or plot, their plays still adhere to a form-making structure. The focus is different, but the form or plot still exists. This idea is expressed in the words of Beckett:

What I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be 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. The latter is not reduced to the former. 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.²³

What Beckett implies is that if we are to understand man we must consider the chaos as much as order, we must consider the irrational as much as the rational, and we must understand man's inactions as well as his actions. The job for the artist is attempting to place these concepts into some kind of meaningful pattern. The writers of the Theatre of the Absurd profess to do this.

The major dramatists of the Absurd wish to form a work of art that transports the reader or spectator into a feeling for the absurdity. Rather than talking about absurdity, modern dramatists attempt to get the reader or spectator to experience the absurd situation. This, of course, requires a definite form of writing. "To begin negatively," writes William Mueller and Josephine Jacobsen, "we may say that Beckett's style is not realistic. His characters are marked by the grotesque." It appears that his characters are not taken from realistic situations before we read his plays, continue Mueller and Jacobsen, but "what is remarkable is the degree to which these same real persons come to resemble Beckett's characters after we have read the plays. For his style, not realistic is realer than real."²⁴ It is the basic strategy of Beckett to involve the spectator not from the exterior detail of character, but what he conceives to be the inner life of his heroes. Thus the spectator tends to recognize how closely the characters come to project the inner-most condition of individuals within contemporary society.

Although there have been a number of influences on the form for the Theatre of the Absurd, none seems to have received greater impact than Antonin Artaud and his book The Theatre and Its Double. This is not the place to evaluate Artaud's ideas, but there are some fundamental issues which need mentioning because of their influence on Beckett and the Theatre of the Absurd. It is also interesting to note that Artaud's student and disciple, Roger Blin, directed the first successful production of Waiting for Godot.

Artaud criticized the contemporary theatre as being too psychological and concerned with "art for art's sake." In other words, he viewed art on one side of life and the reality of existence on the other.

Artaud proposed that a cure for this sickness was a "Theatre of cruelty." He writes:

[The] "Theater of cruelty" means a theater difficult and cruel for myself first of all. And, on the level of performance, it is not the cruelty we can exercise upon each other by hacking at each other's bodies, carving up our personal anatomies, or, like Assyrian emperors, sending parcels of human ears, noses, or neatly detached nostrils through the mail, but the much more terrible and necessary cruelty which things can exercise against us. We are not free. And the sky can still fall on our heads. And the theater has been created to teach us that first of all.²⁵

The Theatre of the Absurd is, as John Killinger points out, such a place where the sky does fall on our heads. "The otherness of reality," says Killinger, "the undomesticated, less human side of life, which is naturally far weightier and more extensive than the human side, closes in on us and threatens us with obliteration."²⁶

Artaud, like Beckett, wishes to strip theatre of its Aristotelian concepts and restore it to the magic of the works themselves. They wish to show the interior and the irrational side of man. "The Theater will never find itself again," Artaud says, "except by furnishing the spectator with the truthful precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism, pour out, on a level not counterfeit and illusory, but interior."²⁷

In order to reach his objective, Artaud proposes what he calls a "theatrical language" where the signs or symbols can be as important as the spoken word. In this way, the audience can directly experience gestures, lights, and sound as well as the spoken word. He argues:

It has not been definitively proved that the language of words is the best possible language. And it seems that on the stage, which is above all a space to fill and a place where something happens, the language of signs....The grammar of this new language is still to be found. Gesture is its material and its wits; and, if you will, its alpha and omega. It springs from the NECESSITY of speech more than from speech already formed. But finding an impasse in speech, it returns spontaneously to gesture. In passing, it touches upon some of the physical laws of human expression.²⁸

What Artaud proposes is not that words be abandoned in the theatre, but that we become aware of how words can be used as objects. Like Beckett, he is not interested in suppressing speech, but of understanding how words may cover the internal self or obscure the relationship of man to man. Both Artaud and Beckett are interested in revealing man, his ideas about reality, and his poetic place in reality.

Is this approach not contradictory to what we argued in the last chapter about the essence of language? For Artaud as well as Beckett, it is not a question of suppressing speech, but of making us aware of the "thingness" of words. The so called "communication breakdown" in the plays of Beckett is a satirical magnification to show the existing state of affairs. Both Artaud and Beckett wish to show how words become barriers between persons to whom they should join. Words can stand between persons much the same as a wall or a piece of furniture to the physical relationship of the Self. And the restoration of language to its expressive function can only be accomplished by man's reverence to the written or spoken word. "And this," according to Martin Esslin, "in turn can be achieved only if the limitation of logic and discursive language are recognized and respected, and the uses of poetic language acknowledged."²⁹ The best method to present this

awareness is in the drama and through Artaud's idea of a "theater of cruelty." This is illustrated in a scene from Waiting for Godot:

Estragon: All the dead voices.

Vladimir: They make a noise like wings.

Estragon: Like leaves.

Vladimir: Like sand.

Estragon: Like leaves.

Silence

Vladimir: They all speak at once.

Estragon: Each one to itself.

Silence

Vladimir: Rather they whisper.

Estragon: They rustle.

Vladimir: They murmur.

Estragon: They rustle.

Silence

Vladimir: What do they say?

Estragon: They talk about their lives.

Vladimir: To have lived is not enough for them.

Estragon: They have to talk about it.

Vladimir: To be dead is not enough for them.

Estragon: It is not sufficient.

Silence

Vladimir: They make a noise like feathers.

Estragon: Like leaves.

Vladimir: Like ashes.

Estragon: Like leaves.

Long Silence³⁰

It seems reasonable to assume from this dialogue that Beckett is referring to a dead and fixed language. Only through a restoration of an authentic contact can a living language be restored. The strategic use of silence aims at encompassing a symbolic illusion of the spoken, and by utilizing it makes it speak to us. Silence becomes a kind of symbolic gesture that takes on meaning. Another example of this technique occurs when Pozzo is about to make his first exit in Act I.

Pozzo: I must go.

Estragon: And your half-hunter?

Pozzo: I must have left it at the manor.

Silence

Estragon: Then Adieu.

Pozzo: Adieu.

Vladimir: Adieu.

Pozzo: Adieu.

Silence. No one moves.

Vladimir: Adieu.

Pozzo: Adieu.

Estragon: Adieu.

Silence

Pozzo: And thank you.

Vladimir: Thank you.

Pozzo: Not at all.

Estragon: Yes, yes.

Pozzo: No, no.

Vladimir: Yes, yes.

Estragon: No, no.

Silence³¹

This rhetorical strategy, by Beckett of brevity of line and the frequent use of silence indicates the difficulty of communication with just words. Beckett appears to adopt the philosophy of Martin Heidegger that without silence all speech becomes chatter and a process of filling the Void. By strategically placing the gesture of silence, Beckett emphasizes an important symbolic means of language. Perhaps this strategy supports the idea of Beckett's that the final and inevitable answer may be silence. William Barrett summarizes the essence of Beckett's concept:

In any case, silence can be expressed only through language. Indeed, only through language does silence come to be at all. If there were no language, there might be an absence of sound waves in this universe but there would not be silence. For silence speaks to us only through language. And conversely, without such silence authentic language disappears. The staccato chatter of the loud-speaker neither knows nor invokes silence. Nor is this silence within language a mark of its deficiency. On the contrary, where it is most adequate language brings us into the silent presence of what it has uttered. No further words are needed, "the rest is silence."³²

One of the most significant aspects about Artaud's theory is the language beyond words. He proposes that the theatre needs to adopt a visual language of objects, movements, gestures as well as those of sound and speech. "And what the theater can still take over from speech," says Artaud, "are its possibilities for extension beyond words, for development in space, for dissociative and vibratory action upon the sensibility. This is the hour of intonations, of a word's particular pronunciation."³³ Artaud feels that the theatre must become aware

of the language in space, sounds, cries, and lights. He concludes his theory of the language in theatre with the following remarks:

The question, then, for the theater, is to create a metaphysics of speech, gesture, and expression, in order to rescue it from its servitude to psychology and "human interest." But all this can be of no use unless behind such an effort there is some kind of real metaphysical inclination, an appeal to certain unhabitual ideas, which by their very nature cannot be limited or even formally depicted. These ideas which touch on Creation, Becoming, and Chaos, are all of a cosmic order and furnish a primary notion of a domain from which the theater is now entirely alien.³⁴

The ideas of Artaud may help explain the emphasis on stage movement, gestures, and action in Waiting for Godot. Perhaps there is no other play from the Theatre of the Absurd that includes as much description about the stage action than Godot. The two props which seem to receive the most attention are Estragon's boots and Vladimir's hats. The opening of Act II gives us a sampling of this feeling:

Estragon's boots front center, heels together, toes splayed. Lucky's hat at same place. The tree has four or five leaves. Enter Vladimir agitatedly. He halts and looks long at the tree, then suddenly begins to move feverishly about the stage. He halts before the boots, picks one up, examines it, sniffs it, manifests disgust, puts it back carefully. Comes and goes. Halts extreme right and gazes into distance off, shedding his eyes with his hand. Comes and goes. Halts extreme left, as before. Comes and goes. Halts suddenly and begins to sing loudly.

Vladimir: A dog came in--

Having begun too high he stops, clears his throat, resumes:

A dog came in the kitchen
And stole a crust of bread.
Then cook up with a ladle
And beat him till he was dead....

He remains a moment silent and motionless, then begins to move feverishly about the stage. He halts before the tree, comes and goes, before the boots, comes and goes, halts extreme right, gazes into distance, extreme left, gazes

into distance. Enter Estragon right, barefoot, head bowed. He slowly crosses the stage. Vladimir turns and sees him.³⁵

One of the finest comedy sketches comes later in Act II when the stage action revolves around the exchange of hats. This scene clearly reveals the importance of the language of the visual and the emphasis on the gesture in the Beckett theatre.

Estragon takes Vladimir's hat. Vladimir adjusts Lucky's hat on his head. Estragon puts on Vladimir's hat in place of his own which he hands to Vladimir. Vladimir takes Estragon's hat. Estragon adjusts Vladimir's hat on his head. Vladimir puts on Estragon's hat in place of Lucky's which he hands to Estragon. Estragon takes Lucky's hat. Vladimir adjusts Estragon's hat on his head. Estragon puts on Lucky's hat in place of Vladimir's which he hands to Vladimir. Vladimir takes his hat. Estragon adjusts Lucky's hat on his head. Vladimir puts on his hat in place of Estragon's which he hands to Estragon. Estragon takes his hat. Vladimir adjusts his hat on his head. Estragon puts on his hat in place of Lucky's which he hands to Vladimir. Vladimir takes Lucky's hat. Estragon adjusts his hat on his head. Vladimir puts on Lucky's hat in place of his own which he hands to Estragon. Estragon takes Vladimir's hat. Vladimir adjusts Lucky's hat on his head. Estragon hands Vladimir's hat back to Vladimir who takes it and hands it back to Estragon who takes it and hands it back to Vladimir who takes it and throws it down.³⁶

Although Artaud's dramatic works were never successful, his concepts influence the substance or the form in the writing of the Theatre of the Absurd. A playwright like Beckett attempts to break down the habitual in order to describe a reality that is irrational and non-Aristotelian. Beckett relies principally on the technique of brutal slapstick, distortions of language, incongruities, and man in his misery to bring about a shocking reality. All these methods indicate a close relationship to the basic theory of Antonin Artaud. Jacques Guicharnaud suggests that Beckett's theatre creates a shattering experience which

not only deeply moves the spectator, but distorts his very being. He writes:

Almost all the great playwrights of today try to prevent the spectator from drowsing in a peaceful definition of man. Few of course go as far as Artaud in rejecting Western thought as a whole, but all question the basic values of our world, the conceptions of Good and Evil, the satisfactions of rationalism. Although, except for certain poets, they do not invoke the return to a totally magical and mystical vision of the world, they do use violence, cruelty, derangement, and crime as methods for awakening in the spectator a consciousness of his falsifications of civilization, what is truly man--man being situated at a level that would traditionally be called inhuman.³⁷

It is interesting to note that Kenneth Burke sees modern man's nature as basically a killer. Oftentimes, according to Burke, the victimage of man's resistance is Nature. Burke feels that nothing gives man greater pleasure than to rip through a mountain with a giant bulldozer or to build a bridge over a beautiful river.³⁸ The basic strategy for the writers of the Absurd is to show man in his baseness and naked reality without hiding behind societal masks.

As a result, Beckett turns to playwriting since it is more dramatic than the novel. The nature of this genre also provokes a more direct and influential power on the audience. Therefore, it is easy to see why Beckett uses the Theatre of the Absurd to dramatize his philosophy toward reality and man's symbol-using capacity. "The Theatre of the Absurd has frightened audiences around the globe," says John Killinger, "in proportion as the vision on stage has corresponded with the sense of emptiness and confusion within and has verified to the heart of the spectator the possibility he has already felt that the world is not precisely the way he has seen it."³⁹

The major ideas of Artaud as well as Beckett is to have us face some of the issues which are inhuman and hopefully raise a sense of consciousness and aliveness in the world. "And this is essentially what the drama of the fifties and sixties has managed to do," says Killinger, "its achievement may be a new order of consciousness."⁴⁰

The ideas by Artaud lead us to another assumption about the form of the Theatre of the Absurd. Although the playwright gives a drama a certain meaning and form, the play is ultimately received or interpreted in an auditorium before an audience. The Absurdists realize they must reach and affect a total audience within a given period of time. "The theatre is the only place in the world," says Artaud, "the last general means we still possess of directly affecting the organism and, in periods of neurosis and petty sensuality like the one in which we are immersed, of attacking the sensuality by physical means it cannot withstand."⁴¹ The Theatre of the Absurd must provide an experience whereby the audience can respond to the mood and tone of the play. If the audience fails to respond within the parameters of the length of time, it is quite unlikely they may never respond to the ideas of the playwright. The basic appeal of this theatre is that the audience is in the physical presence of the characters, which involves its total sensuality. The persuasive function of the modern theatre is indicated by William Barrett:

The theater is beginning to discover that it has resources of its own as powerful as those of the cinema. The basis of all its resources is that we are in the same room in the physical presence of the actors, and therefore the action going on there can involve us more directly. Moreover, there is an opportunity for a kind of direct theatrical metaphor that could not be so effective from a moving picture. Thus when Beckett, in Endgame, puts the two aged

parents on stage in ashcans, he gives us the immediate and direct theatrical image of what the life of this old couple has become.⁴²

Another function about the Theatre of the Absurd is that it depends on the collaboration of playwright, actor, scene designer, director as well as the spectator. The playwright provides the potentiality of giving the audience an experience. He provides the form for the character, dialogue, and situation. It is the duty of the actors and the stage technicians to bring the ideas alive and make it a worthwhile living experience for the audience.

Since the success of the theatre depends in part on audience response, the plays must provide some kind of meaningful experience. Theatre provides a sense of feeling for the times and a barometer of contemporary thought. Thus, an audience must be able to identify with the themes and characters that give significant experience to their lives. Without the process of identification, the play is going to fail as theatrical enjoyment. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to look at Beckett's plays from his use of identification strategies.

The Rhetorical Insights of Kenneth Burke in Viewing the Identification Strategies in Beckett's Plays

As we discussed in the opening chapter, we plan to apply some of the insights of Kenneth Burke in determining the implications of themes in Beckett's plays. We further stated that the strategy of identification seemed the most worthwhile in providing insights to these plays.

The process of establishing a common interest, value, or form with others through the usage of symbols, describes the process of identification. Burke writes:

In pure identification there would be no strife. Likewise, there would be no strife in absolute separateness, since opponents can join battle only through mediatory ground that makes their interchange of blows. But put identification and division ambiguously together, so that you cannot know for certain just where one ends and the other begins, and you have the characteristic invitation to rhetoric.⁴³

Burke believes that the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents is the basic role of rhetoric. The identification process occurs through consubstantiality--having the same substance or interests in common. In this approach, we see the implication of the search for rhetorical methods to help merge attitudes and values into one substance. This process is not the absorption of one human essence into another, but a merger of symbolic substances. "In being identified with B," writes Burke, "A is substantially one with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus in motives. Thus he is both joined and separate at once a distant substance and consubstantial with another."⁴⁴

Since man is constantly changing, there is a need to continually look for new methods. Rhetoric provides the means for man to seek new ways of identification of interests to establish a rapport between himself and his fellow man. The basic motivation of rhetoric is the exercise in satisfying the basic needs of man in the search for internal and external order. Thereby, rhetoric is a continual and ongoing process of seeking new ways of unifying the human spirit.

The term used for the fusion process by Burke is strategy, which is based upon attitudinal identification with the participants in a rhetorical activity. By using this concept, we try to view the acts of man as a strategic linguistic attempt to encompass a situation.

Burke points out that imaginative and critical works are strategic answers posed to situations. Thus a play or any work of art, is a strategy inasmuch as it offers an answer or response to assertions current in the situation from which it arises. When a playwright or poet names and identifies, he attributes certain motives to a thing or situation. Motives in this sense are simply "shorthand terms" for situations. The motivations out of which a playwright composes his works of art are synonymous with the structural way in which he puts events and values together.⁴⁵ As a result, a writer develops as many strategies as situations in which he is asked to respond. Although there are many strategies of identification, there are three dominant ones worth noting in our study of Beckett's plays.

The Strategy of Ambiguity

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Beckett is against a dead and fixed language. The vitality and dynamic quality of language creates a certain degree of ambiguity. Beckett views the ambiguity of language similar to the interpretation of Burke, that it is a necessary attribute to keeping language alive and fresh. Language carries with it an element of ambiguity and this allows for the process of identification. It allows the latitude of meaning necessary to share with the Other. Ambiguity becomes a process of resolving differences by transcending them to a higher level of awareness.

The title of Waiting for Godot establishes the most obvious level of ambiguity. Estragon and Vladimir wait for the ultimate meaning in hopes that when Godot arrives he can save them from nothingness. Until

Godot arrives we cannot say with any certainty whether he is God, and by the same token it is impossible to say with any certainty that he is not God because of the constant Christian references to him. The description of Godot carries with it the ambiguity of him being a Savior but living with a family and having friends as well as a checking account. We are never certain as to the exact purpose of Godot, the exact nature for the meeting, and his character traits. Yet he constantly influences the actions and behavior of the two tramps.

Vladimir: Let's wait and see what he says.

Estragon: Who?

Vladimir: Godot.

Estragon: Good idea.

Vladimir: Let's wait till we know exactly how we stand.

Estragon: On the other hand it might be better to strike the iron before it freezes.

Vladimir: I'm curious what he has to offer. Then we'll take it or leave it.

Estragon: What exactly did we ask him for?

Vladimir: Were you not there?

Estragon: I can't have been listening.

Vladimir: Oh...Nothing very definite.

Estragon: A kind of prayer.

Vladimir: Precisely.

Estragon: A vague supplication.

Vladimir: Exactly.

Estragon: And what did he reply?

Vladimir: That he'd see.

Estragon: That he couldn't promise anything.

Vladimir: That he'd have to think it over.

Estragon: In the quiet of his home.

Vladimir: Consult his family.

Estragon: His friends.

Vladimir: His agents.

Estragon: His correspondents.

Vladimir: His books.

Estragon: His bank account.

Vladimir: Before taking a decision.⁴⁶

At the end of the play, we are no more certain about Godot than when the play opens. The only hope is that he might appear tomorrow.

Vladimir: What does he do, Mr. Godot?
Do you hear me?

Boy: Yes Sir.

Vladimir: Well?

Boy: He does nothing, Sir.

Silence

Vladimir: How is your brother?

Boy: He's sick, Sir.

Vladimir: Perhaps it was he came yesterday.

Boy: I don't know, Sir.

Silence

Vladimir: Has he a beard, Mr. Godot?

Boy: Yes Sir.

Vladimir: Fair or...(he hesitates)...or black?

Boy: I think it's white, Sir.

Silence

Vladimir: Christ have mercy on us!

Silence

Boy: What am I to tell Mr. Godot, Sir?

Vladimir: Tell him...(he hesitates)...tell him you saw me and that...(he hesitates)...that you saw me.⁴⁷

Beckett obviously had a good reason to establish the ambiguity of the name Godot. Beckett has remarked on more than one occasion that the name Godot can mean whatever we wish it to mean.

Without the "ot" suffix to Godot, we have the word God, which has spurred debate that the play is a modern religious allegory. It has also been suggested that the name Godot could be linked with the little man in France called Charlot. (He was the predecessor to the Charlie Chaplin character.) It has also been argued that the title Waiting for Godot contains an allusion to Simon Weil's book, Waiting for God.

Although it seems easy to associate the name of Godot with God, Colin Duckworth proposes that Godot can be associated equally as well with several unpleasant words in French: godailleur, 'loafer'; godenot, 'a jugglers puppet'; godiche, 'lout'. The word godet in French means a receptacle, according to Duckworth, hence something that might hold any meaning put into the word.⁴⁸ Duckworth further indicates there might even be some connection between Godot and the rue Godot de Mauroy in Paris, a notorious place for expensive prostitutes. In this street, there is a shop named Godot.⁴⁹ This interpretation might be in keeping with Beckett's sardonic humor that Godot is no more than a keeper of expensive vices.

The name Godot may also come from a character in a play written by Balzac. This play is entitled Mercadet, and the plot revolves around

Godeau, who absconds with the funds from the Stock Exchange. The return of Godeau is a constant hope in order to pay off the creditors and save the town from financial ruin. As the play draws to a close, there is a rumor that Godeau has returned with a huge fortune. The play ends with one of the characters saying, "Allons soir Godeau."

Hugh Kenner points out that Godeau was a champion racing cyclist in France. Therefore, according to Kenner, Godot "typifies Cartesian man in excelsis, the Cartesian Centaur, body and mind in close harmony....Cartesian man deprived of his bicycle is a mere intelligence fastened to a dying animal."⁵⁰

The ambiguity of the use of Godot in the title can serve as an endless debate. It appears that Beckett uses this strategy of identification to provoke transcendence by providing a sharing in the interpretation of Godot in the manner of our own feelings. Duckworth writes:

Godot can be looked upon either as a constant or an indeterminate variable. Considered as a variable, Godot "will be an unspecified thing or state or process waiting to be defined by some constant the interpreter may elect to supply." Any role, any function, can be assigned to Godot--a challenge to self-improvement, an anchor in a sea of doubt an uncertainty, or perhaps the hope of extrahuman help in a world likely to be totally destroyed by humans if they are left to their own devices.⁵¹

The names of Beckett's rhetorical heroes in all his major novels are, like Godot, presented with a degree of ambiguity. Most of his heroes names start off with the capitol M (Man or perhaps a word play of Sam) Murphy, Malone, Mahood, Malloy, Moran, Macmann, and W(M)att. Although each name gives a hypothetical suggestiveness to the behaviors of his characters, the background, purpose, and descriptions are, like Godot, wrapped with ambiguity. The names of the heroes in Waiting for Godot

might suggest the cosmic nature of man. The nationalities for these names are Estragon-French, Vladimir-Russian, Pozzo-Italian, and Lucky-English. Endgame also offers a field day of interpretations with the major characters. Hamm is often associated with Ham-let or ham actor. He sometimes makes references to warming up for his last soliloquy or making a dramatic exit. Hamm may also stand for the hammer as the driving and authoritative force over Clov. Hamm may also serve as an identification with the author, Samm. Oftentimes Hamm refers to himself as a poet and playwright as well as an actor. Clov is associated with clown or the French term of clou, which means "nail." Nagg might refer to the German term of Nagel or nagger while Nell is another variation of the German term for "nail." To know this information may not add any additional insights, except that Beckett is a word-man and enjoys the ambiguity of the language. Beckett, of course, did not invent the ambiguity of language, he merely exploits the strategy to his own advantage. He once said:

The confusion is not my invention. We cannot listen to a conversation for five minutes without being acutely aware of the confusion. It is all around us and our only chance is to let it in. The only chance of renovation is to open our eyes and see the mess.⁵²

In other words, Beckett views ambiguity the same as Burke that it is not our task to "dispose of" ambiguity but to "clarify the resources of ambiguity."⁵³ "Accordingly, what we want," says Burke, "is not terms that avoid ambiguity, but terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise."⁵⁴

One of the most significant aspects of Waiting for Godot deals with the ambiguity of waiting. The nature of waiting is a type of suspended

action in limbo. Estragon and Vladimir's lives are dominated by the suspense of wondering if Godot will arrive. Six different times the following dialogue takes place:

Estragon: Let's go.

Vladimir: We can't.

Estragon: Why not?

Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot.

Godot simply represents the object of their waiting. "It is the act of waiting that we experience the flow of time," says Martin Esslin, "in its purest, most evident form; if we are active, we tend to forget the passage, we pass the time, but if we are merely passingly waiting, we are confronted with the action of time itself."⁵⁵

The word-games, the pantomimes, and the confrontations help pass the time while the tramps wait for Godot. It is the waiting which permeates the tramp's behavior and actions throughout the play.

Vladimir: That passed the time.

Estragon: It would have passed in any case.

Vladimir: Yes, but not so rapidly.

Pause

Estragon: What do we do now?

Vladimir: I don't know.

Estragon: Let's go.

Vladimir: We can't.

Estragon: Why not?

Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot.⁵⁶

In the second act, Estragon and Vladimir even take a hand at role-playing to help pass the time. While playing this game, they hear an offstage noise. Naturally they assume as well as the audience that it must be Godot. Again, the use of the Burkeian strategy "expectation as expectation" to help keep the audience in suspense.

Vladimir: Will you not play?

Estragon: Play at what?

Vladimir: We could play at Pozzo and Lucky.

Estragon: Never heard of it.

Vladimir: I'll do Lucky, you do Pozzo.

Estragon: What am I to do?

Vladimir: Curse me.

Estragon: Naughty!

Vladimir: Stronger!

Estragon: Gonococcus! Spirochete!

Vladimir: Tell me to think.

Estragon: What?

Vladimir: Say, Think, pig!

Estragon: Think, pig!

Silence

Vladimir: I can't!

Estragon: That's enough of that.

Vladimir: Tell me to dance.

Estragon: I'm going.

Vladimir: Dance, hog! I can't! Gogo! There you are again at last!

Estragon: I'm accursed!

Vladimir: Where were you? I thought you were gone forever.

Estragon: They're coming!

Vladimir: Who?

Estragon: I don't know.

Vladimir: How many?

Estragon: I don't know.

Vladimir: It's Godot! At last! Gogo! It's Godot!
We're saved! Let's go and meet him!⁵⁷

"Waiting is the crucial experience of the Beckett character," says Frederick Hoffman, "it involves enduring the world's nonsense, its absurdity, without clear hope of immediate or direct help."⁵⁸ Waiting creates two possible alternatives, either Godot will appear to stop the accursed Time, or he will fail to appear, which means the only salvation to waiting is death. "Waiting is therefore a condition of man," writes Hoffman, "it involves an acceptance both of death and life."⁵⁹

Endgame carries the same type of ambiguity in waiting. In this play, we are never certain if this is the final game or if this drama represents a continual game between Hamm and Clov. We are not certain if we are at the end of the world ("there's nowhere else") or at the end of life ("outside of here it's death"). The opening lines of the play establish the point where the characters are. "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap. I can't be punished anymore."⁶⁰ In this play, rather than having Godot make an entrance, we are waiting for Clov

to make an exit. Although Nagg and Nell, parents of Hamm, pop up from their ashcans from time to time, there are no characters who make any entrances or exits during the course of the play. The play ends as it begins in a tableau with Hamm seated motionless in the center covered with a white sheet. The only change is that Clov stands motionless by the door with his eyes fixed on Hamm. Throughout the play, we wait to see if Clov has the will power to leave his master. When the final curtain closes, we are still waiting and wondering if Clov can make his exit.

Beckett is able to attain consubstantiality through the merger of symbolic substances created by the ambiguity of "Endgame", "Godot" and "waiting." Beckett's language contains much ambiguity and through this we gain identification. "For one thing," says Burke, "if the image employs the full resources of imagination, it will not represent merely one idea, but will contain a whole bundle of principles even ones that would be mutually contradictory if reduced to their purely ideational equivalents."⁶¹ Through the process of identification, the audience, the actors, and the playwright gain merging attitudes of belief and values into one substance. They can share various interpretations of the play's motifs due to their own feelings and experiences. This process is explained by John Fletcher and John Spurling:

In Waiting for Godot, two men, usually dressed as tramps, though they might equally well be dressed as Irish literary types (tramps have no monopoly of stinking feet, bad breath, ill-fitting boots, prostrate trouble), fill in time on successive evenings on a blasted heath while waiting to keep an appointment with somebody called Godot; on the stage actors fill in time on successive evenings while waiting to go home when the curtain falls; in the auditorium an audience fills in the same time on the same successive evenings while waiting for a denouement; in his

study a little previously the author has filled in time day after day while waiting to complete a play. The three real waitings, those of the author, actors and audience, are brought together in the metaphorical waiting for Godot, and the time that is filled in the process is the 'shape' of the theatrical experience.⁶²

Through the process of identification by "ambiguity," Beckett involves the participants in a total theatre experience. The feelings of the actors, playwright, and spectator form an attitude of consubstantiality that begins with the opening remarks of the play and continues until the final curtain.

The Strategy of Spiritualization

The next important strategy is that of spiritualization or religiousness. In this interpretation, religiousness is not equated with any institution but with an attitude of identification. Man can reach out to "transcend upward" or "transcend downward", according to Burke, depending on the choice he makes. Although the word "God" is seldom used in Godot, there is an assumption that certain words spoken by the rhetorical heroes result from the Deity. Kenneth Burke indicates the nature of language to form a negative or positive balance in persuasion. He writes:

Whether or not there is a realm of the supernatural, there are words for it. And in this stage of linguistic affairs there is a paradox. For whereas the words for the supernatural realm are necessarily borrowed from the realm of our everyday experiences out of which our familiarity with language arises, once the terminology has been developed for special theological purposes the order can become reversed.⁶³

Estragon's choice of words in talking about existence without the presence of a supreme being indicates the generic concept of Purgatory. For example, "Nothing to be done"; "certainly they beat me"; "There's

nothing to show"; "What about hanging ourselves"; "We've no rights anymore"; "No use struggling"; "No use wriggling"; "No nothing is certain"; "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, its awful"; and "There's no lack of void." Vladimir uses the antithesis of these words in speaking about the arrival of Godot to explain their significance in the universe; for example, "We're waiting for Godot"; "He said by the tree"; "He said Saturday"; "Let's wait till we know exactly how we stand"; "I'm curious to hear what he has to offer"; "Tied to Godot! No question of it"; "To everyman his little cross"; "Tomorrow everything will be better. He said that Godot was sure to come tomorrow"; "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--"; "Everything's dead but the tree"; and "We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. Unless Godot comes."

The positive and negative qualities emerge as the play progresses, and they constitute a structural pattern of "expectation as expectation." The formal principle of expectation is transferred into a problematical one in wondering whether Godot will arrive to explain the significance of their lives. The main rhetorical heroes, Estragon and Vladimir, also grow in their awareness of Self and the compassion for the Other. This structural pattern constitutes a method of linking the past with the future. The present is experienced by the participation of the roles within the dramatic action of the play, and the immediate response to these acts by the audience. The past-future continuum appears as follows:

<u>Future Time</u>	<u>Past Time</u>
"Godot" or "Salvation"	"Purgatory"
Time will stop (waiting)	Habitual time (endlessly waiting)
Involuntary memory	No memory--
Order or Form	Disorder and chaos
Meditative Silence	Blathering (To ward off silence)
Living language	Fixed and dead voices
Different landscape	The same muckheap
No reliance on objects or things	Reliance on things and objects (hats, boots, carrots)
The tree (knowledge, life)	The bog (Audience--dead)
Tomorrow (Sunday)	Yesterday (Friday)
Essence of Self	Non-Being
Ultimate meaning	No-Meaning

It is interesting to note that the dialectical nature of the heroes provoke a consistency by which Vladimir represents the optimistic and future Self while Estragon presents the pessimistic and past Self. Although each provokes an attitude of presenting the structural pattern of waiting, they seldom vary from their respective dialectical positions.

Endgame provokes a more difficult problem in the analysis of "word clusters." This play is often called a static drama and there is not as much plot development or personality growth as Waiting for Godot. Nevertheless, there are some interesting language and structural patterns.

Clov represents the optimistic self in search of individualized freedom. Yet many of his remarks give the impression of impending doom. Clov may represent the son or Self in search of a new God. His speeches provoke a degree of positive quality for the future; for example:

"Finished, it is finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished." (Words of Christ at the crucifixion) "I can't be punished anymore"; "All life long the same question, the same answers"; "When there were still bicycles I wept to have one. I crawled at your feet. You told me to go to hell. Now there are none"; "There's no more nature"; "Mean

something! You and I mean something! Ah, that's a good one"; "I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything anymore, teach me others. Or let me be silent"; "I love order. It's my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust."

Hamm's choice of words in talking about existence indicates the past and perhaps the dead myths. Hamm might represent the God that is slowly dying. Most of his speeches represent the past; for example: "Can there be misery loftier than mine" (Biblical reference, Old Testament); "outside of here its death"; "Accursed progenitor"; "Nature has forgotten us"; "We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals"; "One day you'll be blind, like me. You'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, forever, like me"; "Get out of here and love one another. Lick your neighbor as yourself"; "Ah, the old questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them"; "It's finished, we're finished"; and "There'll be no more speech." The structural pattern of Endgame placed on a past-future continuum appears as follows:

<u>Future Time</u>	<u>Past Time</u>
"Salvation" or "Death"	Purgatory
Time will stop	Habitual time (The same as usual)
Game will end	Endless game
Involuntary memory	Blindness
Meditative Silence	Soliloquy (Long speeches)
Order and Form	Disorder and chaos
Living Language	Fixed and imposed words
Free from externals	Externals (Bicycle wheels, toy dog, pap, pain-killer)
Our Reality	Our ideals
Potential Procreator (Boy)	Accursed progenitors (Nagg and Nell)
Freedom from Authority (New God or Myth)	Presence of Authority (Old God and Myth)
"I--Thou"	"I--It"

By linking the strategies of language in regard to past and future, the rhetorical heroes indicate a movement toward an ultimate goal. "To expose linguistic strategies of rhetoric," writes Herman Stelzner, "one needs thus to see language as 'moving' as 'linking' and as 'ordering a hierarchy.'"⁶⁴

Although the plays fail to conform to the theatrical ideal of the classical form, the language gives us a sense of linkage and movement. The rhetorical heroes cannot adopt any slogans and certainties, but they can utilize language to provide them with a rebirth. Without language, the characters realize they might slip into a state of nothingness. William H. Rueckert explains:

So just as Christians say that all men suffer from "original sin," Burke in his secularized, dramatic version of the Genesis "myth" says that all men suffer from "categorical guilt"; and just as all Christians begin in a fallen state, needing and yearning for the redemption made possible by the sacrificial Christ, so all men, according to Burke, begin in a fallen state brought on by their distinctive trait--language--needing and yearning for the redemption made possible by the dramatic equivalent of the sacrificial Christ, symbolic action and the rhetoric of rebirth.⁶⁵

In the strategy of religiousity, language takes on a unique double role as "sin" and "redemption." "Language," says Rueckert, "is equivalent of the fortunate fall; it not only makes redemption possible but provides a means for that end."⁶⁶ Burke contends that man feels the need of redeeming himself from his own failures and ineptness to communicate. Language provides Estragon and Vladimir with the means to gain an awareness of their own reality in face of the sky falling down on them.

According to Burke, man establishes a scapegoat (tragic or comic) to explain his failures, which gives him a symbolic rebirth of life. The "rebirth" gives man a new hold on life and new insights for

justifying his own behavior. It seems only fitting that when Lucky finishes his silly little dance, Estragon responds by calling it "The Scapegoat's Agony." Beckett uses the scapegoat strategy as part of his philosophy toward the religiousness of language. He projects most of his characters into the framework of the comic scapegoat. In our next chapter, we plan to discuss in more detail this technique by Beckett.

The Strategy of Properties

The third strategy important to the rhetorical insights of Beckett's plays is that of "properties." As Burke points out, "Metaphysically, a thing is identified by its properties."⁶⁷ In the nature of rhetoric, identification occurs by property in the materialistic sense of the terms. Burke feels that "in surrounding himself with properties that name his number or establish his identity, man is ethical."⁶⁸ As a result, "man's moral growth is organized through properties, properties in goods, in services, in position or status, and in citizenship."⁶⁹ Burke feels that by "acting-together," men have common sensations, concepts, attitudes, and ideas, that make them consubstantial."⁷⁰ Thus the stage properties of the characters (hats, boots, tree, tapes, arm-chair) and the stage settings may be said to be consubstantial. One of the playwright's duties may be to identify these "properties" with that of the characters on stage as well as with the properties of the spectator.

When the curtain opens on Waiting for Godot, we face the setting of an empty road with a leafless tree in the background. Estragon is found sitting on a low mound painfully tugging at his boot. Before a

line is spoken, the "properties" suggest empty space, bareness, and suffering as themes to associate with the character. The property of the tree provides Estragon and Vladimir with a means of escaping their suffering. While the tree seems lifeless when we first view it, this property takes on significance as it becomes a means of reconstructing the past, a means of identifying this as the place to wait for Godot, and even a prop to serve as a game to pantomime while waiting to pass the time. In the second act, the tree sprouts a few leaves and becomes a substance associated with the affirmation of life ("everything's dead but the tree"). Richard Lee Francis provides insight into the use of the tree as a means of symbolic language. He writes:

If, as R. P. Blackmur has suggested, language is gesture, then this seemingly absurd gesture that is the tree constitutes a means of communication--a symbolic language--between Vladimir and Estragon that transcends ordinary cognitive language. In contemplating it as they do in the final scene of the act, they achieve a silent insight into the "either/or" nature of their interdependence. They must either hang together or go on waiting together. As at the end of the first act, their initial attempt to act decisively by committing suicide fails when the rope breaks, and their indecisive alternative of waiting becomes a wholly new, if ironic, affirmation of life. The servitude of their mutual existence is symbolically severed by the broken cord. In their new freedom--beyond death--they find a natural bondage to one another as human beings.⁷¹

While the setting of Godot suggests space and emptiness, the opening of Endgame reveals the inside of a bare room. The only furnishings are two ash cans covered with sheets and Hamm's chair in center stage similarly covered. High up on the back wall are two windows revealing a kind of skull-like appearance of two closed eyes. There is on one side of the room a single door, which leads to the kitchen and the outside. The property of empty space and bare simplicity in Godot is replaced by confinement and enclosure with Endgame.

Hamm's armchair on castors provides the significant property in this play. The armchair gives Hamm the degree of movement as well as the impression of the master of the house or the God on his throne.

Hamm: Take me for a little turn. (Clow goes behind the chair and pushes it forward.) Not too fast! (Clow pushes chair.) Right round the world! (Clow pushes chair.) Hug the walls, then back to the center again. (Clow pushes chair.) I was right in the center wasn't I?

Clow: (Pushing.) Yes.

Hamm: We'd need a proper wheel-chair. With big wheels. Bicycle wheels! (Pause.) Are you hugging?

Clow: (Pushing). Yes.

Hamm: (Groping for wall). It's a lie! Why do you lie to me?

Clow: (Bearing closer to wall.) There! There!

Hamm: Stop! (Clow stops chair close to back wall. Hamm lays his hand against wall.) Old wall! (Pause.) Beyond is the...other hell. (Pause. Violently.) Closer! Closer! Up against!

Clow: Take away your hand. (Hamm withdraws his hand. Clow rams chair against wall.) There! (Hamm leans towards wall, applies his ear to it.)

Hamm: Do you hear? (He strikes the wall with his knuckles.) Do you hear? Hollow bricks! (He strikes again.) All that's hollow! (Pause. He straightens up. Violently.) That's enough. Back!

Clow: We haven't done the round.

Hamm: Back to my place! (Clow pushes chair back to center.) Is that my place?

Clow: Yes, that's your place.⁷²

Krapp's Last Tape is set in Krapp's den with only a table, a tape-recorder, and a chair. The table and a small area around the chair are bathed in a "strong white light" from above. The rest of the stage is in darkness. When Krapp moves away from the light and into the darkness, we hear the sound of him opening a bottle, clinking the glasses,

and drinking. The restrictions of the stage properties make us feel the confineness of space and in turn the limited memory of Krapp. The tape-recorder and tapes serve as a means of communication by recreating experiences that happened during his early manhood years. He finds that the only tape which has any significance for him is a recording of an intimate experience thirty years earlier.

I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on, and she agreed, without opening her eyes. I asked her to look at me and after a few moments--after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened. Let me in. We drifted in among the flags and stuck. The way they went down, sighing, before the stem. I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us gently, up and down, and from side to side.⁷³

Toward the end of the play, Krapp realizes even this recording on love has no meaning for him anymore. Krapp knows that he can no longer communicate with a mere recording of his previous life. As the curtain closes, Krapp sits staring into space as the tape runs on in silence.

Thus, the "properties" of the plays become identified with the actions of the characters and provokes images in the minds of the spectators. The decor of the Beckett theatre is one reduced to a bare essential with strong lighting and simplicity in staging. John Fletcher explains how the "properties" of Beckett's theatre helps create identification and consubstantiality with the audience. He argues:

This extreme simplicity, this deliberate bareness, provokes in the spectator a state of mind appropriate to the theme of the play he is about to see. Similarly, the picture with its face to the wall, the sheets covering the characters and the two small windows set high in the wall announce the tone of Endgame before a single word has been uttered. Moreover, the kitchen that Clov so frequently refers to has no existence as far as we are

concerned, but remains imaginary. In much the same way, the plain, which Vladimir and Estragon would have us believe extends as far as the eye can see, is for the spectator only the wings where the other actors await their cue. We are thereby made to feel the feebleness of the convention that a whole world exists across the footlights.⁷⁴

The stage scenery of the traditional theatre holds no interest for Beckett. He is not interested in a faithful reproduction of the real world on stage, but a symbolic image through the use of "properties" to create the bare starkness in the spectator's mind.

The Themes of Existence, Time, Habit,
and Memory in "Waiting for Godot"

Since the first American production of Waiting for Godot in 1956, Beckett's play has created critical reviews that range from describing it as a "profoundly anti-Christian play" to those who view it "as a modern morality play on permanent Christian themes." Still others have classified it as an "Atheistic existentialist play" and "a dramatic representation of man without God."⁷⁵ When Alan Schneider, the first American to direct Godot, asked Beckett the meaning of the play, he received the answer, "If I knew, I would have said so in the play."⁷⁶ The most eloquent statement was echoed in the editorial of the "San Quentin" after a performance of the play to the prisoners:

It was an expression, symbolic in order to avoid all personal error, by an author who expected each member of his audience to draw his own conclusions, making his own errors. It asked nothing in point, it forced no dramatized moral on the viewer, it held out no specific hope...We're still waiting for Godot, and shall continue to wait. When the scenery gets too drab and the action too slow, we'll call each other names and swear to part forever--but then, there's no place to go!⁷⁷

The Theme of the Self and Existence

With all the ink that has been spilled in writing about this play, what can we say about Waiting for Godot? There is widespread agreement that Godot concerns the search for the Self. The two trampish clowns, Estragon and Vladimir, hope that the quest for meeting with Godot will provide them with some form of ultimate meaning. Godot is their salvation and his arrival might save them from non-existence. In the meantime, Estragon and Vladimir must discover each other in the face of a world that is collapsing. Beckett views man as floundering in an epistemological void where he can no longer maintain any fluid meaning of reality. Therefore, Estragon and Vladimir continually search for the Other, which might give some kind of permanence. Thus, the Self must rely on the creation of stories, actions, and contact to prove existence.

Vladimir: When I think of it...all these years...but for me...where would you be...You'd be nothing more than a little heap of bones at the present minute, no doubt about it.

Estragon: And what of it?

Vladimir: It's too much for one man.⁷⁸

Through the communion and exchange with the Other, the tramps discover the compassion of the human spirit. Without the Other, the Self falls into a state of stasis and no longer continues to exist. The relationship of Vladimir and Estragon with each other as well as with the hats, the boots, the carrots, Pozzo and Lucky, and the tree, shape their roles and their view of the universe. Yet the reciprocal contact of Vladimir with Estragon is important to maintain awareness of Self.

Vladimir: So there you are again?

Estragon: Am I?

Vladimir: I'm glad to see you back. I thought you were gone forever.

Estragon: Me too.

Vladimir: Together again at last! We'll have to celebrate this. But how? Get up till I embrace you.⁷⁹

Vladimir expresses in this quoted passage the need for human contact with Estragon in order to get any truth about himself. As a result, Estragon is indispensable to the existence of Vladimir. Additional proof of this concept is pointed out by Vladimir. He is frustrated by Estragon's failure to speak with him and he remarks: "Come on Didi, return the ball, can't you once in a way?"⁸⁰ A few lines later there is an interesting juxtaposition of their roles as Estragon now needs the human contact of Vladimir.

Estragon: I had a dream.

Vladimir: Don't tell me.

Estragon: I dreamt that--

Vladimir: DON'T TELL ME!

Estragon: It's not nice of you, Didi. Who am I to tell my private nightmares to if I can't tell them to you?

Vladimir: Let them remain private. You know I can't bear that.

Estragon: There are times when I wonder if it wouldn't be better for us to part.

Vladimir: You wouldn't go far.⁸¹

Estragon and Vladimir perceive each other through the dialogical process as the means of uncovering their essence. Language supplies the basic concept for their awareness and the opportunity for both of them

to emerge from their solitude to touch each other. As a result of this dialogical bond, they are both indispensable to each other, and they must remain together in order to discover existence. Through the exchange of the Other, Estragon and Vladimir discover the essence of the human spirit. As the play progresses, they transcend into different beings creating mature and responsible selves. This transcendence is depicted toward the end of the play when Vladimir replies:

Let us not waste our time in idle discourse! Let us do something, while we have the chance! It is not every day that we are needed. Not indeed that we personally are needed. Others would meet the case equally well, if not better. To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us! What do you say? It is true that when with folded arms we weigh the pros and cons we are no less a credit to our species. The tiger bounds to the help of his congeners without the least reflexion, or else he slinks away into the depths of the thickets. But that is not the question. What are we doing here, that is the question.⁸²

A few lines later when Vladimir is asked by Pozzo what they represent, he responds by saying: "We are men."

Beckett proposes in Estragon and Vladimir a move toward the Buberian "I-Thou" relationship. The move is toward the acceptance of the Self, and "perhaps" (the key word according to Beckett about his plays) a world without the presence of God. It is the realization of the relationship with the Self by encountering reality, which is one of both despair and the possibility of salvation. The play moves from a selfish one on the part of the ego of each character to a reality of their relationship to Others. As Martin Buber argues:

The fundamental fact of human existence is man with man. What is peculiarly characteristic of the human world is above all that something takes place between one being and another the like of which can be found nowhere in nature. Language is only a sign and a means for it, all achievement of the spirit has been incited by it. Man is made man by it; but on its way it does not merely unfold, it also decays and withers away. It is rooted in one being turning to another as another, as this particular other being, in order to communicate with it in a sphere which is common to them but which reaches out beyond the special sphere of each. I call this sphere, which is established with the existence of man but which is conceptually still uncomprehended, the sphere of "between."⁸³

The relationship of Estragon and Vladimir develops as the play progresses. This provides Vladimir with courage at the end of the play to say, "We are men." Although they tend to treat each other as equals, the dramatic tension is heightened by their differences. As mentioned earlier, Vladimir views the hope of Godot coming to save them while Estragon remains pessimistic. Vladimir is more intellectual in his anguish and more demanding in the selection of his words. Estragon dreams more and reacts emotionally, with passion. Vladimir remembers important events while Estragon tends to have a poor memory. Vladimir seems to be more responsible and practical while Estragon is victimized. Although they argue and disagree on many things, they refuse to part because of their complimentary natures. Discovery of Self is provoked through acts of encountering and participating. Buber gives us an insight to this:

Human life touches an absolute in virtue of its dialogical character, for in spite of his uniqueness man can never find, when he plunges to the depths of his life, a being that is whole in itself and as such touches on the Absolute. Man can become whole not in virtue of a relation to himself but only in virtue of relation to another self. This other self may be just as limited and conditioned as he is, but in being together the unlimited and the unconditioned is experienced.⁸⁴

Vladimir and Estragon's mutual compassion is offered through the dialogue. Without the dialogue, the characters might slip into the Void and a state of nothingness.

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.

Vladimir: We have that excuse....

Long Silence

Vladimir: Say something!

Estragon: I'm trying.

Long Silence

Vladimir: (In anguish) Say anything at all!

Estragon: What do we do now?

Vladimir: Wait for Godot.⁸⁵

The affection of Estragon and Vladimir's relationship is also expressed in their word-games and slapstick quality of their actions. Not only does this develop a relationship between the characters, but it helps to pass the time while waiting for Godot.

Vladimir: Moron!

Estragon: That's the idea, let's abuse each other.

Vladimir: Moron!

Estragon: Vermin!

Vladimir: Abortion!

Estragon: Morpion!

Vladimir: Sewer-rat!

Estragon: Curate!

Vladimir: Cretin!

Estragon: Critic!

Vladimir: Oh!

Estragon: Now let's make it up.

Vladimir: Gogo!

Estragon: Didi!

Vladimir: Your hand!

Estragon: Take it!

Vladimir: Come to my arms!

Estragon: Your arms?

Vladimir: My breast!

Estragon: Off we go!
They embrace. They separate. Silence

Vladimir: How time flies when one has fun!

Silence

Estragon: What do we do now?

Vladimir: While waiting.

Estragon: While waiting.

Vladimir: We could do our exercises.

Estragon: Our movements.

Vladimir: Our elevations.

Estragon: Our relaxations.

Vladimir: To warm us up.

Estragon: To calm us down.

Vladimir: Off we go.⁸⁶

The nature of the dialogical process grows between the two characters as the play progresses. It provides them with the courage at the end

to face the fact that "perhaps" Godot has been withdrawn, but they plan to return and wait for him tomorrow. This relationship is suggested by Richard Lee Francis:

What we encounter in Godot is a repetitive ritual drama of words in which we may discover what Phillip Wheelright calls the "tensive" quality of language--that language reflects, no matter how trivial it seems, the tensions of the individual self as it attempts to define itself and its relation with other selves and with the world around itself.⁸⁷

Pozzo and Lucky represent a different kind of relationship. Pozzo (master) and Lucky (slave) are inextricably tied to each other. This symbolism is made even more apparent with a long rope tied around Lucky's neck and attached to Pozzo's belt. In the first act, Pozzo appears powerful, demanding, and boastful, while Lucky is the meek, quiet, and obedient servant. Lucky's needs are satisfied by the authority of duties dictated to him by Pozzo. He relieves his state of tension by fulfilling menial tasks for Pozzo, which includes carrying his whip and luggage as well as entertaining him with silly dances.

Pozzo: (To Lucky) Coat! (Lucky puts down the bag, advances, gives the coat, goes back to his place, takes up the bag.) Hold that! (Pozzo holds on the whip. Lucky advances and, both his hands being occupied, takes the whip in his mouth, then goes back to his place. Pozzo begins to put on his coat, stops.) Coat! (Lucky puts down bag, basket and stool, advances, helps Pozzo on with his coat, goes back to his place and takes up bag, basket and stool.) Touch of autumn in the air this evening. (Pozzo finishes buttoning his coat, stoops, inspects himself, straightens up.) Whip! (Lucky advances, stoops, Pozzo snatches the whip from his mouth, Lucky goes back to his place.) Yes, gentlemen, I cannot go for long without the society of my likes (he puts on his glasses and looks at the two likes) even when the likeness is an imperfect one. (He takes off his glasses.) Stool! (Lucky puts down bag and basket, advances, opens stool, puts it down, goes back to his place, takes up bag and basket.)⁸⁸

Estragon and Vladimir attempt to treat Lucky with compassion, but they are repulsed. Lucky is vicious to anyone who treats him with sympathy. He reacts with violence to human acts of compassion and care.

Estragon: He's crying!

Pozzo: Old dogs have more dignity. (He proffers his handkerchief to Estragon.) Comfort him, since you pity him. (Estragon hesitates.) Come on. (Estragon takes the handkerchief.) Wipe away his tears, he'll feel less forsaken. (Estragon hesitates.)

Vladimir: Here, give it to me, I'll do it.
Estragon refuses to give the handkerchief.
Childish gestures.

Pozzo: Make haste, before he stops. (Estragon approaches Lucky and makes to wipe his eyes.
Lucky kicks him violently in the shins.
Estragon drops the handkerchief, recoils,
staggers about the stage howling with pain.)⁸⁹

This type of human relationship is the opposite of the compassion that Estragon and Vladimir feel toward each other. This kind of relationship moves toward the Buberian concept of the "I-It." As Vladimir responds: "To treat a man...like that...I think that...no...a human being...no... it's a scandal!" With Lucky and Pozzo, each is treated as a subject and object for the other. Consequently, there is no Thou. Buber provides us with the basis of analyzing this relationship:

The I of the primary word I-It, that is, the I faced by no Thou, but surrounded by a multitude of "contents," has no present, only the past. Put in another way, insofar as man rests satisfied with the things that he experiences and uses, he lives in the past, and his moment has no present content. He has nothing but objects. But objects subsist in time that has been. The present is not fugitive and transient, but continually present and enduring. The object is not duration, but cessation, suspension, a breaking off and cutting clear and hardening, absence of relation and of present being. True beings are lived in the present, the life of objects is in the past.⁹⁰

The meeting of Pozzo with other beings only adds to his collection of objects. He is not interested in authentic communication or finding the essence of the Self, but in treating beings as things. Thus, he can only respond to an "I-It" relationship:

I too would be happy to meet him [Godot]. The more people I meet the happier I become. From the meanest creature one departs wiser, richer, more conscious of one's blessings. Even you...even you, who know, will have added to my store.⁹¹

The reference to the richer and more conscious of one's blessings does not mean a human relationship, but one built on materialistic growth and possessions. In a sense, Pozzo represents the sociological myth, which relies on the acquisition of objects and materialistic goods. Pozzo is not interested in forming a different kind of relationship with Estragon and Vladimir. As a result, the sociological myth of the Pozzo-Lucky relationship rests upon history because the life of objects is in the past. The myth of Pozzo's authority is preserved by his need to maintain his possessions. His salvation, as opposed to Estragon and Vladimir, is finding ways of acquiring more godly goods. Pozzo's seeking of God is through the terms of a sociological myth and social illusion. Burke provides us with a valuable insight in this quest:

To the extent that dignity is attested by monetary advantage, there seems to be a "magical" need for the higher officials in the typical business corporation to receive an income "awesomely" greater than that of any ordinary worker. It comes to seem dubious whether "authority" could be preserved by any other means. The "pursuit of happiness" is thus transformed into the search for "more magic", a condition of endless persecution besetting the successes and the failures, and the underlings who do not figure greatly in the race, but are prodded by its goading...To seek for God in godly ways might be striving enough; all the more must the striving be endless, when men are "seeking for God" in terms of a social illusion, a "reverence" that attains its sympathetic, doctrinal counterpart in a cult of the "Absurd."⁹²

Beckett picks up this theme to poke fun at modern man's reverence for social success and status based on monetary values. Not only does Beckett make Pozzo and Lucky the comic scapegoats, but he projects his own ideas toward modern man's sociological progress and scientific thinking. Lucky's long oration presents a theological-scientific mish-mash which he spurts out with little understanding.

Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell and suffers like the divine Miranda with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment plunged in fire whose fire flames if that continues and who can doubt it will fire the firmament that is to say blast hell to heaven so blue still and calm so calm with a calm which even though intermittent is better than nothing but not so fast and considering what is more that as a result of the labors left unfinished crowned by the Acacacademy of Anthropopometry of Essy-in-Possy of Testew and Cunnard it is established beyond all doubt.⁹³

This speech of Lucky's, which is nothing more than scientific jargon, expresses a view of words as things. The thingness of language tends to deny the human contact. Beckett shares with Burke the view that we need to break the sinister identification of scientific thinking as being false and dehumanizing. Beckett is criticizing the Logical Positivists who wish to relegate language to a scientific process. Lucky can only speak the language which is imposed upon him, a scientific and theological jargon. As mentioned earlier, Beckett is interested in a dynamic and living language.

During the first act, Pozzo contemplates selling Lucky at the fair, as his creative powers are becoming decadent. Although Lucky

causes Pozzo to suffer and Pozzo seems inhuman toward Lucky, they cannot break their bond of master-slave relationship.

In the second act, Pozzo who appeared powerful and boastful in the first act is now blind, and the submissive Lucky is now dumb. They are firmly bound to each other by a short rope, and they cannot move without tumbling and falling to the ground. The blindness of Pozzo and the muteness of Lucky suggest the degradation of the master-slave relationship or the decadence of just using only the "I-It" way of life. The symbolic manifestation of blindness and muteness indicates their inability to meet others and provoke a sense of "becoming." "And in all the seriousness of truth hear this"; says Buber, "without It man cannot live. But he who lives with It alone is not a man."⁹⁴

While Pozzo and Lucky can only meet their reality without any form of vision, Estragon and Vladimir have the courage to encounter their situation. They continue to await Godot without knowing whether his arrival will bring salvation or disappointment. Thus, Estragon and Vladimir develop into responsible selves with the desire for the human spirit. They represent a unique metaphoric expression of the relationship of man to man in the sense of "becoming."

The Theme of Time

If waiting serves as the focus of the play's action in Godot, Time is associated with one of the major themes. The games and activities provide the tramps a means of passing the Time while waiting. Estragon and Vladimir wish to fill in Time in hopes that Godot will come to stop this "double-headed monster."

Estragon: I've tried everything.

Vladimir: No, I mean the boots.

Estragon: Would that be a good thing?

Vladimir: It'd pass the time.

.

Vladimir: Shall I tell it to you?

Estragon: No.

Vladimir: It'll pass the time.⁹⁵

When there is "nothing to be done" or no stories to tell, the tramps are confronted with the damnation of Time. This moment of consciousness is painful and one they wish to avoid. Yet this encounter is necessary to their awareness of existence. The tramps are like the absurd hero, Sisyphus, who continually strains to roll a huge rock up the side of a hill. At the end of his long effort, measured by a skyless space and time without depth, he watches with grimness and despair as the rock rolls back to the plain. It is in the moments when Sisyphus returns to the plain to begin the toil all over again, that he faces the hour of consciousness. At this point in time, he is stronger and greater than the force of the rock. "Likewise," says Camus, "the absurd man, when he contemplates his torment, silences all the idols."⁹⁶

When there are no more games or stories to show, the tramps are like Sisyphus confronted with the consciousness of their existence. Richard Scheckner points out "that the tramps attempt to shield themselves from a direct consciousness that they are at the appointed place at the prescribed time. If the center of the play is Time, dozens of activities fling Estragon and Vladimir away from this center. Yet events at the outside force them back to the center so they are not

able to forget."⁹⁷ The consciousness of waiting makes the tramps experience the action of Time in its purest and most evident form.

In the words of Samuel Beckett:

Waiting is to experience the action of time, which is constant change. And yet, as nothing real ever happens, that change in itself is an illusion. The ceaseless activity of time is self-defeating, purposeless, and therefore null and void. The more things change, the more they are the same. That is the terrible stability of the world.⁹⁸

The past is difficult for Estragon and Vladimir to remember since "there is no escape from the hours and the days neither from tomorrow nor from today because yesterday has deformed us."

Estragon: What did we do yesterday?

Vladimir: What did we do yesterday?

Estragon: Yes.

Vladimir: Why...(Angrily) Nothing is certain when you're about.⁹⁹

"They are hoping to be saved from the evanescence and instability of time," according to Esslin, "and to find peace and permanence outside it. Then they will no longer be tramps, homeless wanderers, but they will have arrived at home."¹⁰⁰

If Estragon and Vladimir attempt to step outside of Time, Pozzo and Lucky become the victims of the decadence in Time. At the beginning of Pozzo's journey, he is in full control of his mental and physical powers. He constantly consults his watch and often refers to the time of day.

Pozzo: No doubt you are right. (He sits down.) Done it again! (Pause.) Thank you dear fellow. (He consults his watch.) But I must really be getting along, if I am to observe my schedule.

Vladimir: Time has stopped.

Pozzo: (Cuddling his watch to his ear.) Don't you believe it, Sir, don't you believe it. (He puts his watch back in his pocket.) What you like, but not that.¹⁰¹

A few moments later Pozzo loses his watch which creates terror for him. Not only does this scene provide an element of the burlesque and the slapstick comic, but it provokes a symbolic means of indicating that Pozzo no longer has any control over the memory of time.

Pozzo: What have I done with my watch? (Fumbles.) A genuine half-hunter, gentlemen, with deadbeat escapement! (Sobbing.) Twas my granpa gave it to me! (He searches on the ground, Vladimir and Estragon likewise. Pozzo turns over with his foot the remains of Lucky's hat.) Well now isn't that just--

Vladimir: Perhaps it's in your fob.

Pozzo: Wait! (He doubles up in an attempt to apply his ear to his stomach, listens. Silence.) I hear nothing. (He beckons them to approach. Vladimir and Estragon go over to him, bend over his stomach.) Surely one should hear the tick-tick.

Vladimir: Silence!
All listen bent double.

Estragon: I hear something.

Pozzo: Where?

Vladimir: It's the heart.

Pozzo: (Disappointed). Damnation!¹⁰²

When we see Pozzo and Lucky in the second act, Time has overwhelmed them and their senses have become decayed. As Beckett has cautioned, "Yesterday has deformed or been deformed by us." Pozzo bursts forth his anguish on man in Time:

Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time!
It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one

day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? They give birth astride of a grave the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more.¹⁰³

If Waiting for Godot provides us with the confrontation of Time while waiting for Salvation, Endgame presents what happens when Time is at an end. "In line with the elemental character of Beckett's vision," says Barrett, "time does not present itself in a contemplative luxury of various temporal perspectives 'a la Virginia Woolf'. The plainest and elementary way in which time shows itself is in all those withered and decaying bodies of his tramps."¹⁰⁴ Shortly after Endgame opens, Hamm confronts Clov with the time of day.

Hamm: What time is it?

Clov: The same as usual.

Hamm: Have you looked?

Clov: Yes.

Hamm: Well?

Clov: Zero.¹⁰⁵

The moments between the opening and the closing of the play is one of passing the Time. As we mentioned earlier, Beckett views the human animal passing through three stages: being born, waiting, and dying. The process of being born and dying may even come within the same day. Hamm says, "Moment upon moment patterning down, like the millet, grain...of that old Greek, and all life long you wait for that to mount up to a life."¹⁰⁶ Toward the end of the play Hamm closes his long oration with these words: "Moments for nothing, now as always, Time was never and Time is over, reckoning closed and story ended."¹⁰⁷ Time becomes a kind of stalemate at the end where the millet grain has been

added moment upon moment but still adds up to a little heap at the most. "On the one hand," says Barrett, "man is helpless before the destroying rush of time; on the other hand, in his impotence to act he cannot bind time together, and it falls apart into tiny bits, like Zeno's grains of sand that can never add up to a heap."¹⁰⁸

The Themes of Habit and Memory

Habit and memory serve as the major themes in how man functions within the framework of Time. Since life is a succession of habits, Time functions to make man's actions habitual and routine. Even living from one hour to the next creates an element of routine. As Vladimir remarks:

All I know is that the hours are long under these conditions, and constrains us to beguile them with proceedings which--how shall I say--which may at first sight seem reasonable until they become a habit.¹⁰⁹

Habit is the great deadner and forces all actions to become routine. The act of waiting can become a deadly habit, and the tramps are pulled between leaving and staying knowing full well by remaining they may become the victims of habitual behavior. As Vladimir says, "We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. But habit is a great deadner."¹¹⁰ The really important moments happen between habits, or when the routine is broken to give way to consciousness. It is to experience the same awareness of Sisyphus, one of joy and despair. "The periods of despair," writes Beckett, "represent the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious, and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being."¹¹¹ [My italics] For Beckett, the suffering of

being is to allow an individual to experience his own reality without being paralyzed by habit. Memory is subdued by habit, according to Beckett, and man falls into a form of mental alienation of waking madness. Beckett feels that "habit paralyzes our attention and drugs the handmaidens of perception."¹¹² Thus, Beckett's rhetorical heroes tend to have defective memories, which provokes a certain limitation of their minds. Estragon laments, "That's the way I am. Either I forget immediately or I never forget." Vladimir earlier remarks, "Extraordinary the tricks that memory plays."

It is even difficult for Estragon and Vladimir to agree upon what should be common moments of memory. Vladimir indicates they have spent part of their lives in the "Macon Country," but Estragon replies:

No, I was never in the Macon country! I've puked by puke of a life away here, I tell you! Here! In the Cackon country!¹¹³

In the second act, Vladimir is talking about their encounter the previous day with Lucky and Pozzo, but Estragon indicates that he does not remember. Even though Estragon's leg is festering from the blow given him by Lucky, he says that he cannot recall their encounter.

As mentioned earlier, Beckett views habit as paralyzing our attention and perception. Thus, when Estragon is asked if he recognizes the place in the second act, he becomes suddenly furious: "Recognize! What is there to recognize? All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery! Look at this muckheap! I've never stirred from it!" Later when confronted with where he thinks they spent the night, he responds: "How would I know? In another compartment. There's no lack of void."¹¹⁴

Beckett seems to imply that forgetting may be good since the person who observes everything and records may become too clinical and scientific. As Beckett points out in Proust, the man with a good memory does not really remember anything because he does not forget anything. Memory, for Beckett, serves to reconfirm habit by merely recalling what has been experienced without any new insights of the present consciousness. Beckett calls for "involuntary memory," which is not subjected to habit, but a primary experience in the present reality. Thus Beckett views Proust as having a bad memory since he could think and perceive significant insights into the present. "Thinking is learning all over again to see," says Camus, "to be attentive, to focus consciousness; it is turning every idea and every image in the manner of Proust into a privileged moment."¹¹⁵

Endgame carries this theme to its final conclusion. Clov, whose life is the fulfilling of tasks imposed upon him by Hamm, exists only through his habitual movements of obeying his master's commands. Clov says:

I'll go now to my kitchen, ten feet by ten feet by ten feet, and wait for him to whistle me. Nice dimensions, nice proportions, I'll lean on the table, and look at the wall, and wait for him to whistle me.¹¹⁶

Hamm, realizing that Clov lives only through the fulfilling of various habitual duties, predicts that individual perception no longer prevails, and hence the failure of individual existence. He remarks:

One day you'll be blind, like me. You'll be sitting there, speck in the void, in the dark, forever, like me. You'll look at the wall a while, then you'll say, I'll close my eyes perhaps have a little sleep, after that I'll feel better, and you'll close them. And when you open them again there'll be no wall any more. Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of all the ages

wouldn't fill it, and there you'll be like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe.¹¹⁷

Although Clov is free to leave at the end of the play, it is impossible since he is a "creature of habit." He remains in a hopeless state of futility and immobility as a result of the responsibility of his "dreadful freedom."

It is an understatement to say that for Samuel Beckett language and the Theatre of the Absurd is a way of life. Beckett views theatre as the only means to shock man into a reality of his presence and serve as a form of salvation. If there is anything close to a purpose in Beckett's plays, it is the view that the playwright must bring "metaphysical ideas" onto the stage and create some type of consubstantiality with the spectator. Beckett wishes to disorient the audience and shake them loose from a dead language as well as values based on materialistic myths. Beckett attempts to show, rather than merely talk about, how words can be used as things and also change humans into things or objects. Beckett wishes for us to be tormented and pushed to the point where we become aware of our habitual patterns of behavior and existence. In short, Beckett is interested in modern man's precarious position in the universe.

Although his plays deal with nihilistic tendencies, Beckett feels man must view his naked reality and not hide behind societal masks. In this sense, his plays are more optimistic than all the slick and frothy comedies written in this decade. It is difficult to find a clear-cut interpretation of Beckett's language since he tends to develop concepts rather than descriptions. Thus, Kenneth Burke provides us with several good insights in attempting to understand the strategic motives of

Beckett's writing. With the help of Burke, we have attempted to establish an interpretation based on rhetorical insights. Beckett, like all great philosophers, formulates questions rather than answers. In our study we attempt to analyze some of these questions, and in the process, perhaps we too, have formulated some philosophical problems.

FOOTNOTES

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¹¹Ibid.

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¹⁵Ibid.

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¹⁷Alfonso Sastre, "Seven Notes on Waiting for Godot," Casebook on Waiting for Godot, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1967), pp. 106-107.

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²⁰Ibid.

- ²¹Frederick J. Hoffman, Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), p. 58.
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- ²⁴William R. Mueller and Josephine Jacobsen, "Samuel Beckett's Long Saturday: To Wait or Not to Wait," Man in the Modern Theatre, ed. Nathan A. Scott, Jr. (Virginia: John Knox-Press, 1965), p. 79.
- ²⁵Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double (New York: Grove Press, 1958), pp. 79-80.
- ²⁶John Killinger, World in Collapse: The Vision of Absurd Drama (New York: Delta, 1971), p. 9.
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- ²⁸Ibid., pp. 107-110.
- ²⁹Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, pp. 299-300.
- ³⁰Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove Press, 1954), p. 40.
- ³¹Ibid., p. 31.
- ³²William Barrett, Time of Need (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1973), pp. 260-261.
- ³³Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, pp. 89-90.
- ³⁴Ibid.
- ³⁵Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 37.
- ³⁶Ibid., pp. 46-47.
- ³⁷Guicharnaud, Modern French Theatre, pp. 227-228.
- ³⁸Seminar discussion given at the University of Kansas (Summer, 1973).
- ³⁹Killinger, World in Collapse: the Vision of Absurd Drama, p. 49.
- ⁴⁰Ibid.
- ⁴¹Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, p. 81.
- ⁴²Barrett, Time of Need, p. 263.

- ⁴³Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), p. 3.
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- ⁵³Burke, A Grammar of Motives, p. xix.
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- ⁵⁸Hoffman, The Language of Self, p. 151.
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- ⁶¹Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, pp. 86-87.
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⁶⁷Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, p. 23.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 24.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 21.

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⁷⁵Duckworth, En Attendant Godot, p. xcvi.

⁷⁶Alan Schneider, "Waiting for Godot: A Personal Chronicle," Casebook, p. 55.

⁷⁷Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, p. xvi.

⁷⁸Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 7.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 9.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 11.

⁸²Ibid., p. 51.

⁸³Martin Buber, Between Man and Man (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1947), pp. 202-203.

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⁸⁵Beckett, Waiting for Godot, pp. 40-41.

⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 48-49.

⁸⁷Francis, "Beckett's Metaphysical Tragicomedy," p. 260.

- ⁸⁸Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 16.
- ⁸⁹Ibid., pp. 21-22.
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- ⁹²Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, p. 260.
- ⁹³Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 28.
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- ⁹⁶Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 91.
- ⁹⁷Richard Schechner, "There's Lots of Time in Godot," Casebook, p. 185.
- ⁹⁸Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine," p. 22.
- ⁹⁹Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 10.
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- ¹⁰¹Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 24.
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- ¹⁰⁴Barrett, Time of Need, p. 267.
- ¹⁰⁵Beckett, Endgame, p. 4.
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117 Ibid., p. 36.

CHAPTER V

THE DIALOGUE OF THE COMIC

The bitter, the hollow and--Haw! Haw!--the mirthless. The bitter laugh laughs at that which is not good, it is the ethical laugh. The hollow laugh laughs at that which is not true, it is the intellectual laugh. Not good! Not true! Well well. But the mirthless laugh is the dianoetic laugh, down the snout--Haw!--so. It is the laugh of laughs, the risus purus, the laugh laughing at the laugh, the beholding, the saluting of the highest joke, in a word the laugh that laughs--silence please--at that which is unhappy.

--Watt

Since the Greeks, tragedy has been regarded as a high art of drama. Yet comedy has never been considered by the critics to have reached the same artistic value. Only in this century have essays emerged surveying in a critical and comprehensive manner the elements of the comic genre. The most notable of these was "Laughter" written by Henri Bergson. This essay may have had some influence on Beckett's choice of the comic technique.

It is to the comic strategy that Beckett turns in his plays to provide his view of man and society. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is: (1) to explore the nature of comedy and the comic frame; (2) to analyze the method of the comic scapegoat; and (3) to view the various modes of comic strategies in his plays.

The Philosophy and Nature of Comedy

If we can describe man as a symbol-using and symbol-making animal, then we can also depict him as an animal who laughs. Man is the only animal conscious of his miseries, and the only one given the privilege to laugh at these miseries. The comic spirit is man's ability and desire to keep going no matter how many times he may get knocked down. Perhaps comedy is man's capacity to endure and become aware of his difficulty in "being." While tragedy presents a noble being in conflict against insurmountable odds, the comic spirit allows man to laugh at his short-comings and pretensions. Sometimes the laughter may be tongue-in-cheek while other times it may be serious, abusive--even brutal and violent. Yet comedy always remains a strong force in revealing social injustices and confronting individuals with an awareness of personal behavior. Hugh Duncan wisely states:

We submit to the discipline of comedy because we believe it is necessary to social solidarity and group survival. Communication is kept open and free through laughter because laughter clarifies where tragedy mystifies. Tragic art and religious ritual lead to victimage and mystification because the ultimate audience of ritual is supernatural power. When the tragic artist and his audience are in complete accord, the most terrible violence and death may, indeed, must be, visited upon victims who symbolize threats to social order. But comedy opens to reason the mystifications of social hierarchy, whose pomp and wonder is so often enhanced by secular variations of priestly art....As we laugh together, loneliness and alienation vanish. Such laughter is a moment of reaffirmation. We recreate our social bonds even as we recognize our differences.¹

In order to have laughter and the comic spirit, it must be placed into a social environment. "Above all we must determine the utility of its function," says Bergson, "which is a social one....Laughter must answer to certain requirements of life in common. It must have a social

signification."² Much of comedy is founded on issues which we can readily identify. Yet if these same incidents happen to us, the feeling might not be quite as pleasant. As a result, comedy requires an element of perspective and detachment. "Here I would point out," remarks Bergson, "as a symptom equally worthy of notice, the absence of feeling which usually accompanies laughter; it seems as though the comic could not produce its disturbing effect unless it fell, so to say, on the surface of a soul that is thoroughly calm and unruffled."³ This does not mean that the comic strategy fails to encompass a process of identification, but rather that the spectator views the situation with a greater degree of detachment and sympathy than in tragedy. Comedy may be as Christopher Fry asserts a "narrow escape into faith." He argues:

If I had to draw a picture of the person of Comedy it is so I should like to draw it: the tears of laughter running down the face, one hand still lying on the tragic page which so nearly contained the answer, the lips about to frame the great revelation, only to find it had gone as disconcertingly as a chair twitched away when we went to sit down. Comedy is an escape, not from truth but from despair: a narrow escape into faith. It believes in a universal cause for delight, even though knowledge of the cause is always twitched away from under us, which leaves us to rest on our own buoyancy. In tragedy every moment is eternity; in comedy eternity is a moment. In tragedy we suffer pain: in comedy pain is a fool, suffered gladly.⁴

We laugh at the seriousness of the attack on the issues or the devoted quests of the major characters. Yet in all great comedy there is a cross-current of the tragic, which underlines the laughter. Oftentimes the line which separates the comic and the tragic art is a narrow and precarious one. We may even find in the modern theatre a difficulty

in noticing where the comic ends and the tragic begins. Christopher Fry illustrates this conflict:

Laughter did not come by chance, but how or why it came is beyond comprehension, unless we think of it as a kind of perception. The human animal, beginning to feel his spiritual inches, broke in on to an unfamiliar tension of life, where laughter became inevitable. But how? Could he, in his first unlaughing condition, have contrived a comic view of life and then developed the strange rib-shaking response? Or is it not more likely that when he was able to grasp the tragic nature of time he was of a stature to sense its comic nature also; and, by the experience of tragedy and the intuition of comedy, to make his difficult way? The difference between tragedy and comedy is the difference between experience and intuition....The bridge by which we cross from tragedy to comedy and back again is precarious and narrow.⁵

Beckett views the nature of man as a combination of the tragic and the comic. Yet his plays lean more toward the comic spirit than to the tragic. This is one of the reasons it is difficult to categorize his plays into Comedy of Manners, High Comedy, Romantic, or Intellectual Comedy. Perhaps a better label might be Painful Comedy, or what Beckett calls "the bitter, the hollow, and the mirthless laughter, which strictly speaking are not laughs."

"The comic," writes Robert Corrigan, "has become a transparency through which we see to the serious. Comedy is unquestionably the proper mirror of our times; but it is also true that it reveals our life to us as 'through a glass darkly.'"⁶ This may serve as one of the major reasons why Beckett labels all his major plays as tragic-comedies. And is the perfection of this genre a small accomplishment? For it is in the two extremes, man weeping and laughing, that Beckett sees the capabilities of the self-revelation of men united. Karl Guthke argues for the method of the tragicomedy:

Man is the only being that can laugh and weep. Laughing and weeping can both be reactions to the perception of the human condition in extremis. They are, among many other things, the emotions aroused by comedy and tragedy, respectively. Comedy and tragedy, however, confront man with the most extreme situations that he can experience. If, now, the comic and the tragic visions are such distinctly human phenomena and consequently of prime importance for our understanding of the nature of man, are we not justified in assuming that the union of the two is likely to throw a light on the human condition that promises to be particularly illuminating? Again, we have no intention of elevating tragicomedy at the expense of other literary genres which may seem to originate in a less comprehensive, less "total" vision of life and the world. We simply ask: what does it mean for the image of man that he is capable of viewing himself and his world as comic and tragic at the same time?⁷

While we laugh at Estragon's and Vladimir's vaudeville antics, we sympathize with their endless waiting. As we laugh at the slapstick comedy of Pozzo and Lucky falling to the floor, we have pity for the decadence of their senses. The union of the two feelings is lyrically expressed by Pozzo:

He's stopped crying. (To Estragon.) You have replaced him as it were. (Lyrically.) The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep somewhere else another stops. The same is true of the laugh. Let us not then speak ill of our generation, it is not any unhappier than its predecessors. Let us not speak well of it either. Let us not speak of it at all. (Pause. Judiciously.) It is true the population has increased.⁸

The nature of the hollow, the bitter, and the mirthless laugh is expressed throughout Beckett's plays and novels. Nell in Endgame provides us with the essence of that feeling. She says:

Nothing is funnier than unhappiness, I grant you that. But--....Yes, yes, it's the most comical thing in the world. And we laugh, we laugh, with a will, in the beginning. But it's always the same thing. Yes, it's like the funny story we have heard too often, we still find it funny, but we don't laugh any more.⁹

The tension which develops between a social norm and an individual's reality lends itself to both tragic and comic elements. If an individual fails to recognize the norms as well as the reality, he can become both tragic and comic. This disparity is cited by Cyrus Hoy:

What our argument comes to, then, is this: that in serious drama, comic or tragic, we are confronted with what is, at bottom, a single truth about the human condition. Man is possessed of an ideal of human conduct, but circumstances together with his own inherent failings conspire to make the belief that the ideal can be fulfilled a finally illusory one. But man persists in despite of all the odds, and in his persistence he may appear as nobly enduring, stubbornly unyielding, foolishly blind, or a combination of all three. The more forcibly and apparently these diverse qualities are linked in combination, the more surely sounds the note of tragicomedy.¹⁰

The dualistic nature of man is expressed throughout Beckett's works. As we mentioned earlier, the "psuedocouples" of the plays serve to provoke a nature composed of dialectical yet complementary elements. Yet Beckett does not stop here. He fixes at the center of this nature the tragic-comic reality of man. The opening scene of Godot indicates the dualistic feature of the play:

Vladimir: Ah yes, the two thieves. Do you remember the story?

Estragon: No.

Vladimir: Shall I tell it to you?

Estragon: No.

Vladimir: It'll pass the time. Two thieves, crucified at the same time as our Savior. One--

Estragon: Our what?

Vladimir: Our Savior. Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other...(he searches for the contrary of saved) damned.¹¹

The dualistic nature is later expressed when Estragon complains of one boot fitting while the other pinches his toes. He later complains of being beaten while spending the night in a ditch. Although Vladimir is accused of having stinking breath (the same charge leveled at the groundlings at the Globe Theatre), he seems to be spared the miseries of Estragon. As we discussed earlier, Vladimir represents the intellectual and practical thinker who understands their situation while waiting for Godot. Estragon is more emotional, pities himself, and lives for individualized habits. Beckett might even imply that the character of Vladimir stands for the thoughtful, intellectual, and dialogical comic spirit of man while Estragon represents the ego-centered, emotional, and tragic-comic element.

Perhaps one of the important discoveries of Beckett is that the tragic and comic views of reality cannot exclude each other. Beckett proves that tragedy and comedy are akin, and they touch each other at the extreme ends of human experience. "Perhaps today there is something to be called the 'black mask of comedy,'" writes Richard Duprey. "It may be that in our times we can find a certain new dramatic dimension which can serve as a social corrective--a leaven to bring forth this reasoned disgust of which we speak so as to precipitate meaningful and effective action."¹²

This new appreciation for the combined genre of the comic and the tragic lends itself to the Theatre of the Absurd. Wylie Sypher suggests how this genre serves as the important strategic design for the Absurdist movement. He writes:

Wherever man has been able to think about his present plight he has felt "the suction of the absurd." He has been forced to see himself in unheroic positions. In his sanest moments the modern hero is aware that he is J. Alfred Prufrock, or Osric, an attendant Lord-- "Almost, at times, the Fool." Or else Sweeney, the apeneck, seeking low pleasures while death and the raven drift above. We have, in short, been forced to admit that the absurd is more than ever inherent in human existence: that is, the irrational, the inexplicable, the surprising, the nonsensical--in other words, the comic.¹³

Beckett's plays deal with the miseries of the human condition but proposed to the point that we can laugh at the absurd situation. Comedy opens the path for us to look at the situation of the Absurd, and we may even end up laughing at ourselves. "Men must live in reason," says Duncan, "for only so long as we confront the miseries of life and keep staring them hard in the face is there any hope of controlling them."¹⁴ Perhaps the nature of the comic spirit in the Beckett theatre is best expressed by Ruby Cohn. She writes:

With consummate verbal skill, Beckett involves us more deeply in his heroes, as they become more obsessively involved with themselves. And at the same time, we are more involved with ourselves. Beckett's fellow playwright Ionesco speaks for Beckett's heroes too when he writes: "By expressing my deepest obsessions, I express my deepest humanity." Instead of laughing in a civilized and detached way at comic figures whom we do not resemble, instead of reforming after laughing at our own weakness as seen in another, we come in Beckett's work, to doubt ourselves through our laughter. But through the obsessions of Beckett's heroes, we understand our own deepest humanity.¹⁵

Beckett, then, utilizes comedy to confront man with the reality of living. For Beckett, it is a method of the comic to help each man realize his own humanity.

The Comic Frame

All history, Kenneth Bruke contends, can be viewed through categories or frames of "acceptance" or "rejection." Man defines through these frames the human condition and decides which relationships are friendly or unfriendly. Burke argues that man approaches the events of history through the framework of acceptance or rejection. As a result, if we are to understand man's charting of motives, it is through the literary forms that the approach is revealed. He writes:

Our way of approaching the structures of symbolism might be profitably tested by the examination of various literary categories, as each of the great poetic forms stresses its own peculiar way of building the mental equipment (meanings, attitudes, character) by which one handles the significant factors of his time.¹⁶

For Burke, these forms of literary types are divided into two categories of "positive" and "negative," which he equates with the frames of acceptance and rejection. Frames of acceptance, Burke feels, include the three literary forms of the epic, the tragedy, and the comedy. The epic frame Burke views as being designed under primitive conditions. It is primarily designed to make the humble man accept war and conflict by the process of identification with the representative hero. According to Burke, it accepts the rigors of war by magnifying the role of the warlike hero. "The hero, real or legendary," says Burke, "thus risks himself and dies that others may be vicariously heroic....The social value of such a pattern resides in its ability to make humility and self-glorification work together."¹⁷

The tragic frame is based on the same sense of personal limits, but it is a product of a more sophisticated, urban, and complex society. The tragic writers make pride the basic sin and surround it with the connotations of crime.

Burke agrees with Meredith that comedy is the most civilized form. For Burke, the comic frame provides the necessary perspective to observe human behavior. Yet Burke warns that "a frame becomes deceptive when it provides too great plausibility for the writer who would condemn symptoms without being able to gauge the causal pressure behind the symptoms."¹⁸ Burke explains that like tragedy, comedy warns against the dangers of pride, but its emphasis shifts from crime to stupidity. "Comedy deals with man in society," says Burke, "tragedy with cosmic man."¹⁹ Burke feels that "comedy is essentially humane, leading in periods of comparative stability to the comedy of manners, the dramatization of quirks and foibles."²⁰ Burke argues that the Comic frame avoids saying that man is good or bad as long as he retains some element of perspective. The Comic frame encompasses man's capacity for both evil and good traits, and--we might add--it encompasses his emotional and intellectual capabilities. Burke sees the Comic frame as the ambivalent side, which presents a realistic element of human motivation. Thus, the nature of the Comic frame can provide an overall backdrop for the strategy of the tragic-comic genre. Karl Guthke hints at this interaction:

The tragic and the comic are here not only simultaneous and identical, but also that they heighten each other. That is: on the one hand, the tragic implication adds poignancy to the comic in giving it more depth or more obstacles to be "overcome" by laughter, making the comic incongruity all the more appreciable for its increased crassness. On the other hand, the undeniably comic constellation gives acumen to the bitterness of tragedy. And both kinds of interaction happen at once, depend on each other, and progressively and mutually increase each other.²¹

Burke warns that we cannot confront the dual nature of the comic with only humor. He indicates that this dwarfs the situation and thereby

dwarfs the human experience. Yet humor still provides a double perspective in which the characters see themselves and the spectator views reality. Burke writes:

We might, however, note an important distinction between comedy and humor, that is disclosed when we approach art forms as "frames of acceptance," as "strategies" for living. Humor is the opposite of the heroic. The heroic promotes acceptance by magnification, making the hero's character as great as the situation he confronts, and fortifying the nonheroic individual vicariously, by identification with the hero; but humor reverses the process: it takes up the slack between the momentousness of the situation and the feebleness of those in the situation by dwarfing the situation. It converts downwards, as the heroic converts upwards. Hence it does not make for so completely well-rounded a frame of acceptance as comedy, since it tends to gauge the situation falsely.²²

The "ambivalence" of the Comic frame, as suggested by Burke, is obviously portrayed by the Beckett characters. At times in Waiting for Godot, it appears that Vladimir breaks out of his role entirely to comment on the action of the play. In one passage he comments about the play, "This is really becoming insignificant." At another point he hastens toward the wings and is momentarily stopped by Estragon, who shouts, "End of the corridor, on the left." Vladimir replies: "Keep my seat." Later in the play Vladimir takes Estragon by the arm and drags him toward the front of the stage. He gestures toward the audience and says, "There! Not a soul in sight. Off you go." Vladimir pushes Estragon toward the audience, but he recoils in fear. Vladimir contemplates the auditorium and remarks, "Well I can understand that."

Although Vladimir and Estragon comment on their own feelings and behavior, they often look objectively at the play and discuss the audience. In the opening passages, Estragon faces the audience and reports, "Inspiring prospects." A few lines later Vladimir turns to the

auditorium and says, "That bog." At another point in the same act, Estragon comments on the play from a spectator's perspective in saying, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, its awful." Finally, when the boy appears in the last scene to talk with the tramps about Godot, Vladimir turns to the audience and says, "Off we go again."

Endgame carries the same type of comic ambivalence with the major characters. Hamm is aware of his own theatrical ambition and he continually ends his speeches with such comments as, "No, I've done that bit;" or "Nicely put that"; and "A bit feeble that." At one point, Hamm comments about his own narrative and the inspiration needed for his own style of performance. He states:

I'll soon have finished with this story. Unless I bring in other characters. But where would I find them? Where would I look for them?...Oh not very far, not very far. There are days like that, one isn't inspired. Nothing you can do about it, just wait for it to come. No forcing, no forcing, it's fatal. I've got on with it a little all the same. Technique, you know. I say I've got on with it a little all the same.²³

Hamm and Clov appear, as Beckett's other characters, to break away from their roles and view themselves from a distance. Following one exchange of dialogue, Hamm replies to the audience: "This is deadly." At this point of action in the play, Clov goes toward the ladder with a telescope. He gets up on the ladder, raises the telescope, and lets it fall. He replies to the audience, "I did it on purpose." Clov gets down from the ladder, picks up the telescope, and turns it toward the audience. He shouts: "I see...A multitude...in transports...of joy. That's what I call a magnifier. Well? Don't we laugh?" Toward the end of the play, we find the following exchange with the same situation of Clov on the ladder with the telescope:

Hamm: And me? Did anyone ever have pity on me?

Clov: (Lowering the telescope, turning towards Hamm):
What? (Pause.) Is it me you're referring to?

Hamm: (Angrily): An aside, ape! Did you never hear an aside before? I'm warming up for my last soliloquy.²⁴

Just before Hamm's final oration, Clov dresses in an overcoat and hat with the intention of leaving. He turns to the audience and replies: "This is what we call making an exit." The comic ambivalence persists throughout Beckett's plays. His characters appear to stand at a certain distance from their roles to provide an element of perspective. The strategy of this technique is summarized by Nathan Scott:

This same double consciousness of themselves as actors and as spectators of their own performances persistently figures in all the major characters in Beckett's theatre. They strike us as standing at a certain distance from what they say and do on the stage, at a distance great enough indeed to view their stage-presence with such a quizzical bemusement as prevents their taking their roles with any large measure of seriousness. They are in fact all the time seeming to be about to break out of their roles altogether.²⁵

The nature of the Comic frame, as a type of double consciousness, is a realistic view of man's motivation. Burke feels that the Comic frame provides a psychological device whereby the mind equips itself to name and confront its situation. Burke contends that true comedy avoids the antithetical dangers of cynical debunking that paralyze social relationships by constantly discovering the materialistic ingredients of human affairs. Thereby, the Comic frame is charitable and shrewd, but not gullible. For Burke, the Comic frame requires the awareness of the forensic material accumulated in social structures. It allows man to poke fun at himself and view his acts with a degree of detachment. For

Burke and Beckett, great comedy is born with an affection of man attempting to make sense out of his world. As a result, the Comic frame appears the most servicable for objectifying the moral values of human relationships in these troubled times. "There are times in the state of man," says Christopher Fry, "when comedy has a special worth, and, the present is one of them: a time when the loudest faith has been faith in a trampling materialism."²⁶ Comedy leads to a love of man and the philosophy that reason leads to good social relationships. Hugh Duncan summarizes the importance of the Comic frame within society:

Thus all comedy is highly moral, but it is the morality of reason in society. It seeks to unmask vices by confronting ends or ideals with means or practice. The final transcendence in comedy is society itself, people who in hate and love try to resolve differences. Laughter is the scourge of vice, just as tears are the purge of evil. Vice is ridiculous, for its pleasures turn into pain and suffering. Great comic artists distrust tragedy, not because they do not suffer or take a melancholy view of life, but because they think tragedy alone is not enough to purge men of folly.²⁷

Burke agrees with Duncan in the nature of comedy, and he views himself as well as other great comic writers as moving toward the concept of satire. Although Burke characterizes the strategy of satire in the framework of rejection in his earlier works, he appears to be moving toward the satirical attitude with his later writings. Burke points out that the satirist attacks in others the weaknesses and temptations that really are within himself. He writes:

The satiric projection could be charted roughly as follows: A and B have a private vice in common (both are kleptomaniacs, homosexuals, sadists, social climbers, or the like, in varying degrees of latency or patency). At the same time, on some platform of the public arena they are opponents (they belong to clashing forensic factions). A is a satirist. In excoriating B for his political views, A draws upon the imagery of the secret vice shared by both. A thereby gratifies and punishes the vice within himself.

Is he whipped with his own lash? He is....To which we should agree, if we are permitted to add the reservation, "an approach from without to something from within."²⁸

Burke feels that what most writers label as satire is a form of burlesque. "The writer of Burlesque," says Burke, "makes no attempt to get inside the psyche of his victim. Instead, he is content to select the externals of behavior, driving them to a 'logical conclusion' that becomes their reduction to absurdity."²⁹

Thus, we must conclude that most of Beckett's rhetorical heroes fall into the category of the burlesque. The vaudeville antics with the hats, the boots, the tapes, the telescope, and the wheelchair finds the comic in the burlesque and even at times seems reduced to absurdity. Yet their consciousness of Time, waiting, and existence appears to formulate their behavior into a form of satire. Thus, Beckett may be taking an approach from without to something from within but adding the externals to drive his characters to a state of absurdity. This brings us to one of the most important elements of the Comic frame, which is the strategy of the comic scapegoat.

The Strategy of the Comic Scapegoat

In the last chapter, we discussed the strategy of "religiosity" or "spiritualization" in Beckett's usage of "God" and "devil" terms. Part of that strategy can be classified according to how a writer or speaker views the nature of scapegoating. Beckett attempts this method not from the tragic perspective but the comic one. Thus, his plays tend to lean more toward the comic method.

One of the major processes of identification for Beckett is the strategic use of the scapegoat method of the comic victimage. According

to Burke, this process of scapegoating or victimization serves as one of the seven interlocking moments to the grand design of all human motivation. The great moments of the interlocking drama are the Negative, Hierarchy, Guilt, Mortification, Victimage, Catharsis, and Redemption. Rueckert explains how each of these relate to the overall design of human motivation:

Briefly, the seven moments are related to each other in the following way: the whole drama is made possible--or inevitable--by language, which introduces the negative into human experience; with language and the negative man creates various kinds of hierarchic orders, all of which have hundreds of "thou-shalt-nots" in them; every hierarchy is experienced by a man as a kind of covenant, but no man is capable of meeting all the terms of the agreement and in some way he will fail or disobey. Failure and disobedience--the "fall"--cause guilt, which in turn makes necessary the whole machinery of catharsis. The two principle means of purification are mortification and victimage; and the end result of both is redemption, or the alleviation of guilt.³⁰

Man consistently establishes his own hierarchies and then he vows to live within them. While searching for the covenants, man falls and experiences guilt. The experience of guilt leads to the purgation of it through mortification and victimage. This action provokes a state of catharsis, which alleviates guilt and redeems man to a state of peace. Since man can be characterized as "goaded by the spirit of hierarchy," he continually breaks covenants and forms new ones to take the place of the old system. The cycle constantly repeats itself and the task of purging and catharsis is always with man. The hierarchy each man formulates determines in part his motivation and social needs.

Without going into great detail on the explanation of hierarchy, we mention it as the backdrop for the comic victimage and social redemption. "Comic and tragic art," says Duncan, "offers formal

dramatic expression of the problem of hierarchy."³¹ The difference between comic and tragic art is the method of purging and atonement.

Duncan clearly reasons for the comic catharsis:

Tragedy purges through sacrifice of victims whose suffering and death serves as a vicarious atonement for our guilt. The sacrifice of such victims wards off threats to our group. Comedy purges through victims who assume our degradation and suffering so we can confront it together in rational discourse. Both depict struggle between good and bad social principles. Tragedy begins with a firm statement of belief in some social principle and dooms those who threaten it. Comedy begins with exploration of a social principle and ridicules those who place it beyond reason. Tragic heroes and villains cannot be saved, nor can they save themselves. The villain is beyond hope, he is an enemy who must be destroyed, for if he is not he will destroy us. The comic villain can be saved once he allows laughter to be turned against him. He can be laughed at but he is also being laughed with. We are laughing at him to purge him--and ourselves--of folly, not to torture and kill him.³²

Duncan also considers that the counterpart of the scapegoat is the mortification within the individual self. When there are social acts or burdens we cannot understand, we are led to a sacrificial attitude. Yet the frustration must come from within the Self. Duncan argues this point in understanding the motive of the scapegoat:

When we accept commandments of authority as our duty, we kill within us motives we think unruly or impious. In highly stylized acts of mortification we systemize ways of saying "no" to disorder as we obediently say "yes" to its opposite, order, and "maybe" to express doubt over either. We seek to overcome the deep pain of inner contention by projecting it upon a scapegoat (tragic or comic as the case may be), who becomes the sacrificial vessel upon which we vent, as if from without, a turmoil that is actually within. When we cannot do this, the body itself may be victimized, as in psychogenic illness: our socially goaded entanglements literally tear us to pieces as we suffer from "stress" diseases.³³

Where there is no means for individuals or a community to relieve its

frustrations on a symbolic scapegoat, they turn to violence, crime, and war. Burke points out the strategy of this motive in the pious overtone of war. He writes:

The ultimate sacrifice does involve a dying. And a dying may involve a killing, by another or by the self. Whereupon, one may come to displace the emphasis, until the element of sacrifice retreats behind the element of murder (or its recent Existentialist variant, suicide). By that time, things have become quite reversed; and whereas sacrifice is the very essence of peace, it becomes instead the essence of war, with men piously persuading themselves that they are never so comforted as when contemplating a blood-bath.³⁴

Thus, the importance of good drama to serve as a symbolic scapegoat to help relieve hostility. And we argue for the nature of the comic scapegoat as the basis to tell us what the guilt means through open and free communication. "The social distance we create in comedy," says Duncan, "is not to prepare the victim for sacrifice, but for dialogue."³⁵ The comic scapegoat can mend his way and return to the group while the tragic hero must suffer and die. Duncan continues:

The tragic villain, the "bad guy," seeks to destroy the group. He must suffer and die, or we suffer and die. He does not, like the clown, live in error, but in sin. If he is killed, the sin is killed. But it is not necessary to kill the clown, for he can mend his ways. He can return to the group, even though he has suffered every kind of indignity. His return may only be a promise, and his acceptance far off in a distant future, but he can return because atonement in comedy is atonement for the group as the final principle of life. Comic atonement knows no principle of purgation beyond the social principles which bind the group together.³⁶

Rather than banishing a victim loaded down with sins, we laugh at our own vices which we attempt to hide. Rather than attempting to purge a victim through sacrifice and death, we can unmask our own corruption and hypocrisy. "The morality of the comic hero," writes Duncan, "lies

in the clarity of reason. Self-love becomes more horrible as it is more clearly seen."³⁷ The important point is that comedy enables us to relieve frustrations without resorting to crime and war. We can liberate ourselves through a rational discourse with others. If we can laugh at ourselves, the sense of fear and anxiety can be lifted. Wylie Sypher, like Duncan and Burke, notes the palliative as well as the corrective nature of the comic scapegoat:

At its most triumphant moments comic art frees us from peril without destroying our ideals and without mustering the heavy artillery of the puritan. Comedy can be a means of mastering our disillusionments when we are caught in a dishonest or stupid society. After we recognize the misdoings, the blunders, we can liberate ourselves by a confident, wise laughter that brings a catharsis of our discontent. We see the flaws in things, but we do not always need to concede the victory, even if we live in a human world. If we laugh wisely enough at ourselves and others, the sense of guilt, dismay, anxiety, or fear can be lifted. Unflinching and undaunted we see where we are.³⁸

Beckett's plays are largely described as tragic-comedies, yet he resorts to the method of the comic scapegoat. When Waiting for Godot opens, we are told that Estragon is beaten while spending the night in a ditch. Later in the same act, he is kicked violently in the shins by Lucky. Again, when the second act opens, we are told that he is victimized the previous night. Estragon suffers the indignities of the comic victim. The physical cruelties are visited upon him, as far as Estragon can tell, with no apparent reason or motive. Perhaps the beatings serve as a catharsis and redemption for Estragon.

Vladimir: I wouldn't have let them beat you.

Estragon: You couldn't have stopped them.

Vladimir: Why not?

Estragon: There was ten of them.

Vladimir: No, I mean before they beat you. I would have stopped you from doing whatever it was you were doing.

Estragon: I wasn't doing anything.

Vladimir: Then why did they beat you?

Estragon: I don't know.

Vladimir: Ah no, Gogo, the truth is there are things escape you that don't escape me, you must feel it yourself.

Estragon: I tell you I wasn't doing anything.

Vladimir: Perhaps you weren't. But it's the way of doing it that counts, the way of doing it, if you want to go on living.

Estragon: I wasn't doing anything.

Vladimir: You must be happy too, deep down, if you only knew it.

Estragon: Happy about what?

Vladimir: To be back with me again.³⁹

Although Estragon receives beatings from unknown assailants and a painful kicking from Lucky, he does not represent the significant comic scapegoat in Godot. The character who qualifies as the typical scapegoat is Lucky. He is beaten, kicked, ridiculed, and cursed by his master, Pozzo. Lucky appears more like a beast of burden than a human being in having to carry all of his master's possessions, which include sacks filled with sand. From a rope attached around his neck, Lucky is commanded to sit, act, dance, and even speak for his master. Lucky never questions or defies Pozzo's commands. And the only sympathy and pity that Lucky receives comes from the two tramps. Supposedly Lucky has taught Pozzo all the finer things in life, yet Pozzo is going to sell him at the local market.

Vladimir: And now you turn him away? Such an old and faithful servant.

Estragon: Swine.

Vladimir: After having sucked all the good out of him you chuck him away like...like a banana skin.⁴⁰

Lucky's grotesque dance is named the "Scapegoat's Agony" by Estragon, and "The Hard Stool" by Vladimir. Pozzo refers to the dance as "The Net," since Lucky thinks of himself as being entangled in a large fish net. Lucky's speech, which is a series of metaphors attached without any logical pattern, never reaches a climax or conclusion. The speech sounds as absurd as his dance appears. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, Beckett seems to imply that we need to become aware of scientific thinking and intellectual jargon. He also makes a strong argument for the use of words as chatter and blathering.

When we see Lucky in the second act, he is burdened as before with the heavy luggage. He is dumb, but his agonies are still met with abuse and ridicule.

Vladimir: What exactly should he [Estragon] do?

Pozzo: Well to begin with he should pull on the rope, as hard as he likes so long as he doesn't strangle him [Lucky]. He usually responds to that. If not he should give him a taste of his boot, in the face and the privates as far as possible.

Vladimir: (To Estragon). You see, you've nothing to be afraid of. It's even an opportunity to revenge yourself.

Estragon: And if he defends himself?

Pozzo: No no, he never defends himself.

Vladimir: I'll come flying to the rescue.

Estragon: Don't take your eyes off me.
He goes towards Lucky.

Vladimir: Make sure he's alive before you start.
No point in exerting yourself if he's dead.

Estragon: (Bending over Lucky). He's breathing.

Vladimir: Then let him have it.
With sudden fury Estragon starts kicking Lucky, hurling abuse at him as he does so. But he hurts his foot and moves away, limping and groaning. Lucky stirs.

Estragon: Oh the brute!⁴¹

Lucky represents the comic scapegoat who accepts the beatings and the punishment in order to be accepted by his master. "For, so long as he [comic scapegoat] tries to command," writes Duncan, "(however ridiculous) or gives commands (however impossible to fulfill), he upholds the spirit, if not the truth, of the principles which sustain order within the group."⁴² As we mentioned earlier, Pozzo represents the old socialized myth or hierarchy, which Beckett is placing before us as being absurd and comical. Yet the punishment and the abuse of Lucky continue since Pozzo is not willing to come to grips with a broken and scattered myth. Duncan indicates the treatment of the comic victim:

The comic victim--the clown who is being beaten--like the tragic victim, suffers indignity, torture, and death. He is beaten, kicked, cuffed, cursed, drenched with garbage of offal. All kinds of cruelties are visited upon him. He dies terrible deaths. His lingering agonies are met with indifference, sometimes even ridicule. Even when dead he is treated with contempt. The dead clown is simply thrown away, like a broken doll. These terrible symbolic sufferings at which we laugh so readily are possible only because we have created great social distance between ourselves and the clown. We create social distance in comedy by making the clown a caricature or a complete negation of our virtues.⁴³

The comic scapegoat for Endgame comes in the personage of Clov. From the beginning of the play to the final curtain, he is ridiculed

and the victim of Hamm's tyrannical orders. Clov serves for Beckett as the comic victim of the old social order that is slowly crumbling.

Hamm: You loved me once.

Clov: Once.

Hamm: I've made you suffer too much. Haven't I?

Clov: It's not that.

Hamm: I haven't made you suffer too much?

Clov: Yes.

Hamm: (Relieved). Ah you gave me a fright! (Coldly).
Forgive me. (Loudly). I said, forgive me.

Clov: I heard you. Have you bled?

Hamm: Less. Is it not time for my pain-killer?

Clov: No.

Hamm: How are your eyes?

Clov: Bad.

Hamm: How are your legs?

Clov: Bad.

Hamm: But you can move.

Clov: Yes.

Hamm: (Violently). Then move!

.

Hamm: All right, be off. I thought I told you to
be off.

Clov: I'm trying. (He goes to door, halts.) Ever
since I was whelped.⁴⁴

Later on, Clov is asked to fulfill one of Hamm's demanding tasks. Clov's response indicates a moment of consciousness.

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 anymore. Ah the creatures, the creatures, everything has to be explained to them.

.

Clov: There's one thing I'll never understand. Why I always obey you. Can you explain that to me?

Hamm: No...Perhaps it's compassion. A kind of great compassion. Oh you won't find it easy. You won't find it easy.⁴⁵

The nature of the relationship in terms of comedy can be a method of examining society's goals. Duncan provides us with an insight to this incongruity:

We learn in comedy that the virtues of superiors are not so great after all, the humility and loyalty of inferiors are not without limits, and that friends and peers sometimes deceive us. But guilt lightens in laughter as I admit that if they are rascals, so too am I. We begin by laughing at ourselves. The strain of rigid conventions, of majestic ideals, of deep loyalties, is lessened, for now they are open to examination. They can be questioned, their absurdities can be made plain. Now that we can openly express our vices, there is hope for correction. At least we now have company in misery; we are no longer alone and can take heart for another try. For when all is said and done, what do we have but each other? So long as we can act together we have all the good there is in life.⁴⁶

The expression of this theory is found with Endgame. Since Clov is a creature of order and habit, he consistently takes abuse from Hamm. Beckett is making a mockery of the old mythical father-son order as well as the master-slave relationship. Beckett is poking fun at Clov who spends his time in performing tasks in the right way or manner. Yet

Clov finds moments of consciousness and questions Hamm on why he continues to carry out the demanding tasks. Like the great figure of Sisyphus, Clov must continue the absurd and endless process. Clov's final speech is a moving piece that indicates how he is caught between the tragedy of knowing and the absurdity of continuing:

How easy it is. They said to me, That's friendship, yes, yes, no question, you've found it. They said to me, Here's the place, stop, raise your head and look at all that beauty. That order! They said to me, Come now, you're not a brute beast, think upon these things and you'll see how all becomes clear. And simple! They said to me, What skilled attention they get, all these dying of their wounds....I say to myself--sometimes, Clov, you must learn to suffer better than that if you want them to weary of punishing you--one day. I say to myself--sometimes, Clov, you must be there better than that if you want them to let you go--one day. But I feel too old, and too far, to form new habits. Good, it'll never end, I'll never go. Then one day, suddenly, it ends, it changes, I don't understand, it dies, or it's me, I don't understand, that either. I ask the words that remain--sleeping, I open the door of the cell and go. I am so bowed I only see my feet, if I open my eyes, and between my legs a little trail of black dust. I say to myself that the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit. It's easy going. When I fall I'll weep for happiness.⁴⁷

Beckett implies through this speech that the hard pride of the self is broken, which opens the way to human relationships. The speech becomes a form of confession for Clov in which he addresses the inner as well as the outer self. Beckett, like Duncan, is attempting to resolve the incongruities by a form of exposure. Duncan writes:

The difference between tragedy and comedy is not so much in tragedy's "seriousness" concerning evil, for comedy is equally serious; it is rather in the form of exposure and the principles invoked to resolve incongruities. Address in tragedy is to some supernatural power beyond question, and thus beyond reason. The tragic actor must keep alive belief in the mysterious and dread power of the principle he invokes. The paradox he must explain is why an all-powerful being can be threatened at all. He resolves this

by letting man sin (as an indication of his dignity and freedom), but at the same time he rescues man from sin by making a scapegoat out of the villain whose punishment and death purge him of sin. Comedy teaches us that men can endure much if they can endure it in rational discourse with each other. When we cannot communicate in reason we are ready for the tortured image of tragedy.⁴⁸

What Duncan suggests, then, is that we may have two levels of scapegoating evident in Beckett's plays. The first level is more compassionate and does not involve as much brutality and violence. This process involves the kind of comic victimage visited upon Estragon as well as Nagg and Nell. The second method of the comic victim as found in Clov and Lucky appears to involve more cruelties. Perhaps with these relationships Beckett is making a strong argument against the master-slave philosophy. It also appears that Beckett is poking fun at the strict order and habit of life, the sacrifice and suffering to authority, and the myth of the close family relationships. "As we laugh at our own follies," says Duncan, "we begin to understand ourselves because we take the attitude of others toward us."⁴⁹

It might even be assumed that through the strategy of using two levels of scapegoating Beckett is attempting to pull mankind down to a level of comic victimage rather than lift him up to tragic proportion. The analysis of this device is depicted by Burke in the method by which Swift turns a tragic scapegoat into a satiric one. It appears to be worth our discussion:

The operations of this salvation device in the investment field has its counterpart in the "curative" doctrine of "original sin" whereby a man "socializes" his personal loss by holding that all men are guilty. It suggests, for instance, the ingredient of twisted tragedy behind Swift's satire, whereby he uses such thinking, not to lift himself up, but to pull all mankind down (the author himself being caught in the general deflation). "I have

even hated all nations, professions, and communities; and all my love is towards individuals....Swift, being essentially religious, was essentially tragic; but over-individualistic emphasis turned the tragic scapegoat into a satiric scapegoat, thereby turning a device for solace into a device for indictment.⁵⁰

Beckett perfects this strategic device of the comic scapegoat with his rhetorical heroes. Yet he adds another dimension of the comic suggested by Henri Bergson, which is the emphasis on the laughable element of the "mechanical inelasticity." This brings our discussion to several of the comic strategies that Beckett utilizes in his plays.

The Modes of Comic Strategies in Beckett's Plays

Beckett utilizes three basic comic strategies in his plays: the circus or vaudeville clown, the music-hall dialogue, and the action of the slapstick. The clownery of Beckett's characters is a dramatic form that is easily recognizable and widely popular. The various actions of Estragon and Vladimir follow a theatrical quality borrowed from the art of the circus clown. Beckett also borrows from Charlie Chaplin the identification of his characters with the mythical "little man." "All the characters wear bowler hats," writes Jacques Guicharnaud, "as a sign of their participation in the myth; for Chaplin's Tramp is the myth of man who despite everything, plays at being a man."⁵¹ The clown character also provides a means of laughter through mechanical rigidity. "The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body," says Bergson, "are laughable in exact proportions as that body reminds us of a mere machine."⁵² The more a person and a machine fit into each other the more striking is the comic effect. Bergson continues:

I find that a certain movement of head or arm, a movement always the same, seems to return at regular

intervals. If I notice it and it succeeds in diverting my attention, if I wait for it to occur and it occurs when I expect it, then involuntarily I laugh. Why? Because I now have before me a machine that works automatically. This is no longer life, it is automatism established in life and imitating it. It belongs to the comic.⁵³

To illustrate this technique, the following stage business occurs in

Waiting for Godot:

Vladimir: Look at me. (Estragon does not raise his head.) (Violently.) Will you look at me! Estragon raises his head. They look at each other, then suddenly embrace clapping each other on the back. End of embrace. Estragon no longer supported, almost falls.⁵⁴

The two actors go through a mechanical type of movement which includes rejection, mutual embrace, and the near falling when the embrace ends. The comedy of the situation ensues because of the "mechanical inelasticity" that creates the action between the characters. The same type of mechanical movement is expressed with Endgame. The opening of the play finds Clov moving around the stage like a machine that works automatically. Even his brief laughs appear to return at regular intervals.

His actions and body remind us of a machine:

Clov goes and stands under window left. Stiff, staggering walk. He looks up at window left. He turns and looks at window right. He goes and stands under window right. He looks up at window right. He turns and looks at window left. He goes out, comes back immediately with a small step-ladder, carries it over and sets it down under window left, gets up on it, draws back curtain. He gets down, takes six steps (for example) towards window right, goes back for ladder, carries it over and sets it down under window right, gets up on it, draws back curtain. He gets down, takes three steps towards window left, goes back for ladder, carries it over and sets it down under window left, gets up on it, looks out of window. Brief laugh. He gets down, takes one step towards window right, goes back for ladder, carries it over and sets it down under window right, gets up on it, looks out of window. Brief laugh. He gets down, goes

with ladder towards ashbins, halts, turns, carries back ladder and sets it down under window right, goes to ashbins, removes sheet covering them, folds it over his arm. He raises one lid, stoops and looks into bin. Brief laugh. He closes lid. Same with other bin. He goes to Hamm, removes sheet covering, folds it over his arm. In a dressing-gown, a stiff toque on his head, a large blood-stained handkerchief over his face, a whistle hanging from his neck, a rug over his knees, thick socks on his feet, Hamm seems to be asleep. Clov looks him over. Brief laugh. He goes to door, halts, turns towards auditorium.⁵⁶

The laughter from these two scenes results because of a transformation of a person into a thing. As Bergson points out, we laugh every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing.

The dialogue between Estragon and Vladimir often gives us the impression of two vaudeville characters or clowns. This kind of dialogical exchange is often referred to as cross-talk or music-hall laughter. The following type of exchange occurs often in Godot:

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.

.

Estragon: Oh I say.

Vladimir: A running sore!

Estragon: It's the rope.
 Vladimir: It's the rubbing.
 Estragon: It's inevitable.
 Vladimir: It's the knot.
 Estragon: It's the chafing.⁵⁶

The same technique of music-hall dialogue is exploited with the characters in Endgame. The following is a typical example:

Clov: So you all want me to leave you.
 Hamm: Naturally.
 Clov: Then I'll leave you.
 Hamm: You can't leave us.
 Clov: Then I won't leave you.
 Hamm: Why don't you finish us? I'll tell you the combination of the cupboard if you promise to finish me.
 Clov: I couldn't finish you.
 Hamm: Then you won't finish me.
 Clov: I'll leave you, I have things to do.⁵⁷

Another one of the methods of the music-hall dialogue is the use of the gag-line. The following examples from the two plays provide us with an obvious use of this comic strategy:

Pozzo: I used to have wonderful sight--but are you friends?
 Estragon: (Laughing noisily.) He wants to know if we are friends.
 Vladimir: No, he means friends of his.

 Nagg: Can you hear me?

Nell: Yes. And you?

Nagg: Yes. Our hearing hasn't failed.

Nell: Our what?⁵⁸

Not only does Beckett enjoy the vaudeville use of the gag line, he concentrates much of his comic dialogue on the method of repetition. Bergson suggests this strategy as being one of the usual processes and practices of comedy. He writes:

The repetition of a word is never laughable in itself. It makes us laugh only because it symbolizes a special play of moral elements, this play itself being the symbol of an altogether material diversion. It is the diversion of the cat with the mouse, the diversion of the child pushing back the Jack-in-the-box, time after time, to the bottom of his box--but in a refined and spiritualized form, transferred to the realm of feelings and ideas. Let us then state the law which we think defines the main comic varieties of word-repetition on the stage: In a comic repetition of words we generally find two terms: a repressed feeling which goes off like a spring, and an idea that delights in repressing the feeling anew.⁵⁹

Beckett uses a certain word or phrase in successive sentences to give a special tempo as well as a comic flavor. This technique occurs often with dialogical exchanges between Vladimir and Estragon:

Vladimir: Say you are, even if it's not true.

Estragon: What am I to say?

Vladimir: Say, I am happy.

Estragon: I am happy.

Vladimir: So am I.

Estragon: So am I.

Vladimir: We are happy.

Estragon: We are happy. (Silence.) What do we do now, now that we are happy?⁶⁰

Beckett provides an extended version of the word-repetition in a scene from Endgame. Hamm demands that Clov get the telescope or glass to look out the window, and the following comic repetition ensues:

Clov: I've looked.

Hamm: With the glass?

Clov: No need of the glass.

Hamm: Look at it with the glass.

Clov: I'll go and get the glass. (Exit Clov.)

Hamm: No need of the glass! (Enter Clov with telescope.)

Clov: I'm back again, with the glass. (He goes to window right, looks up at it.) I need the steps.

Hamm: Why? Have you shrunk? (Exit Clov with telescope.) I don't like that, I don't like that. (Enter Clov with ladder, but without telescope.)

Clov: I'm back again with the steps. (He sets down ladder under window right, gets up on it, realizes he has not the telescope, gets down.) I need the glass. (He goes towards door.)

Hamm: (Violently.) But you have the glass!

Clov: (Halting, violently.) No, I haven't the glass. (Exit Clov.)

Hamm: This is deadly.⁶¹

The constant repetition of the word "glass" builds the scene to one of humor in terms of expectation as well as toward Hamm's final punch line, "This is deadly." The repetition of the mechanical movement on the part of Clov also creates laughter.

Beckett enjoys playing with the sounds of words, and the comedy which results from this juxtaposition of word repetition. This is noticed in the first meeting of the tramps with Pozzo as well as the argument which develops between Hamm and Clov.

Estragon: You're not Mr. Godot, Sir?

Pozzo: (Terrifying voice.) I am Pozzo! Pozzo. Does that name mean nothing to you? (Silence.) I say does that name mean nothing to you?

Estragon: (Pretending to search.) Bozzo...Bozzo...

Vladimir: (Ditto.) Pozzo...Pozzo...

Pozzo: PPPOZZZO!

Estragon: Ah! Pozzo...let me see...Pozzo...

Vladimir: Is it Pozzo or Bozzo?

Estragon: Pozzo...no...I'm afraid I...no...I don't seem to...

Vladimir: I once knew a family called Gozzo. The mother had the clap.

.

Hamm: Let him have it! (Clov loosens the top of his trousers, pulls it forward and shakes powder into the aperture.)

Clov: The bastard.

Hamm: Did you get him?

Clov: Looks like it. (He drops the tin and adjusts his trousers.) Unless he's laying doggo.

Hamm: Laying! Lying you mean. Unless he's lying doggo.

Clov: Ah? One says lying? One doesn't say laying?

Hamm: Use your head, can't you. If he was laying we'd be bitched.⁶²

The third method of Beckett's comic strategy is the pratfall or the slapstick device. It is designed to express unexpected or unwarranted pain. Beckett has his characters falling over each other, pulling on and off ill-fitting boots, and exchanging each others bowler hats. Two examples of the slapstick business occurs between Estragon and Vladimir:

Vladimir: (Impatiently.) Yes yes, we're magicians. But let us persevere in what we have resolved, before we forget. (He picks up a boot.) Come on, give me your foot. (Estragon raises his foot.) The other, hog! (Estragon raises the other foot.) Higher! (Wreathed together they stagger about the stage. Vladimir succeeds finally in getting on the boot.) Try and walk. (Estragon walks.) Well?

Estragon: It fits.

.

Vladimir: Show all the same. (Estragon loosens the cord that holds up his trousers which, much too big for him, fall about his ankles. They look at the cord.) It might do at a pinch. But is it strong enough?

Estragon: We'll soon see. Here. (They each take an end of the cord and pull. It breaks. They almost fall.)

Vladimir: Not worth a curse.⁶³

In another scene in Act II, Pozzo falls to the ground and begs the tramp for help. Estragon and Vladimir debate whether they should help him while he moans and groans for assistance. Finally the tramps agree to help Pozzo, but they in turn stumble and fall to the ground. There follows a scene where all the characters fall into each other with cries of pity and sympathy. "The comic routines," writes Frederick Hoffman, "are involved crucially in the play's development. Occasionally concerned with the larger questions of time and the prospects of eternity, they are otherwise devoted to the task of collapsing pretensions of any and all kinds."⁶⁴

When the rigidity of the human soul takes on the image of a machine, the association evokes laughter in the spectator. Repetitious activities and mechanical gestures hide the inner essence of the soul and

distort its true nature. Even the physical movements and the clothes a man wears may mask the true essence of his moral self. This disparity evokes the nature of the comic. "Any incident is comic," says Bergson, "that calls our attention to the physical in a person, when it is the moral side that is concerned."⁶⁵ The importance of the comic strategy of slapstick routine is further argued by Frederick Hoffman. He views the nature of the comic and burlesque routines as being significant to the deflation of traditional values. He argues:

This point cannot be stressed enough; for, while Godot does address itself to some ideas and implies a view of many others, it is concerned above all with men without property and without authority. If it has any generalizing function, it is that the faculty for making generalities is invariably defective. For this reason, the dependence upon comic and burlesque routines is important. The circus clown, for example, often comes upon the scene just after a magnificent display of skill and grace; and, in the following routine (as a drunk trying the straight line, as a man who disgracefully fails in an elaborately planned demonstration of strength, or succeeds too easily), the clown brings the entire scene down to earth.⁶⁶

Krapp's Last Tape depicts several of the comic techniques that we have been discussing. Krapp's character is deliberately clownish with a description for his makeup of a white face with a purple nose. Krapp listens with puzzlement to his voice recorded on tape and continually goes off stage to get a drink of wine. Krapp is near-sighted, hard of hearing, and walks laboriously. All these ingredients are strategically included to make Krapp a clownish individual. Beckett even goes so far as using the old vaudeville gag of having Krapp slip on a banana peel. The opening sequence of the play indicates the comic method suggested by Bergson of rigidity, mechanical inelasticity, and repetition:

Krapp remains a moment motionless, heaves a great sigh, looks at his watch, fumbles in his pockets, takes out an envelope, puts it back, fumbles, takes out a small bunch of keys, raises it to his eyes, chooses a key, gets up and moves to front of table. He stoops, unlocks first drawer, peers into it, feels about inside it, takes out a reel of tape, peers at it, locks drawer, puts keys back in his pocket. He turns, advances to edge of stage, halts, strokes banana, peels it, drops skin at his feet, puts end of banana in his mouth and remains motionless, staring vacuously before him. Finally he bites off the end, turns aside and begins pacing to and fro at edge of stage, in the light, i.e., not more than four or five paces either way, meditatively eating banana. He treads on skin, slips, nearly falls, recovers himself, stoops and peers at skin and finally pushes it, still stooping, with his foot over the edge of stage into pit. He resumes his pacing, finishes banana, returns to table, sits down, remains a moment motionless, heaves a great sign.⁶⁷

The genius of Beckett lies in his ability to uncover the human condition through the comic genre. The strategy of characterizing the comic scapegoat as well as utilizing several of Bergson's concepts toward comedy makes Beckett one of the great satirical artists of our time. Beckett provides us with the seriousness of laughter and what he calls the "earnest jest." Yet he firmly believes that through laughter we become essentially and incurably human. The nature of the comic genre as perfected by Beckett can best be summarized in the words of Josephine Jacobsen and William Mueller:

The range of Beckett's comedy is remarkable. His fine sense of language produces a sparkling wittiness. Master of the comedy of situation, he skillfully calls into play the mechanical repetition and the clowning gestures integral to much that is comic. He moves from sheer comedy, from the laugh which is spontaneous laugh, to the bitter, hollow, and mirthless responses, "the laughs that strictly speaking are not laughs." That he occasionally writes in a pathetic vein, as his compassion for humanity overcomes his comic spirit, is a fact, and he can indeed be movingly tender. And that he at times approaches, the tragic, as he notes the grievous waste of man's bold efforts and the frustration that attends

his every motion, is also true. But Beckett's primary genre is comedy, bitter, hollow, and mirthless as it may be.⁶⁸

Beckett combines the bitter, the hollow, and the mirthless laughter to develop his rhetorical heroes into comic as well as tragic figures. For Beckett, the modern artist must understand the dualistic nature of man as being orderly as well as chaotic, unstable, and irrational. Beckett attempts to dramatize that the comic and tragic conditions of man must include rather than exclude each other. It is only through the confrontation of this reality that Beckett feels man can fully understand the miseries of life. Thus, Beckett's range of the comic perspective is broad, deep, and provocative.

FOOTNOTES

¹Hugh Dalziel Duncan, Communication and Social Order (New York: Bedminster Press, 1962), pp. 388-389.

²Henri Bergson, "Laughter," Comedy, ed. Wylie Sypher (New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 65.

³Ibid., p. 63.

⁴Christopher Fry, "Comedy," Comedy: Meaning and Form, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1965), p. 15.

⁵Ibid., p. 16.

⁶Robert W. Corrigan, "Comedy and the Comic Spirit," Comedy: Meaning and Form, p. 11.

⁷Karl S. Guthke, Modern Tragicomedy: An Investigation into the Nature of the Genre (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 166.

⁸Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove Press, 1954), p. 22.

⁹Samuel Beckett, Endgame (New York: Grove Press, 1958), pp. 18-19.

¹⁰Cyrus Hoy, "Comedy, Tragedy, and Tragicomedy," Virginia Quarterly Review, xxxvi (1960), p. 110.

¹¹Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 9.

¹²Richard Duprey, "Whatever Happened to Comedy?" Comedy: Meaning and Form, p. 249.

¹³Wylie Sypher, "The Meanings of Comedy," Comedy, pp. 195-197.

¹⁴Duncan, Communication and Social Order, p. 470.

¹⁵Ruby Cohn, Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1962), pp. 295-296.

¹⁶Kenneth Burke, Terms for Order, ed. Stanley Edgar Hyman (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1964), p. 79.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 86.

²⁰Ibid.

- ²¹Guthke, Modern Tragicomedy: An Investigation into the Nature of the Genre, pp. 47-58.
- ²²Burke, Terms for Order, p. 87.
- ²³Beckett, Endgame, pp. 54-59.
- ²⁴Ibid., pp. 77-78.
- ²⁵Nathan A. Scott, Samuel Beckett (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1961), pp. 110-111.
- ²⁶Fry, "Comedy," p. 17.
- ²⁷Duncan, Communication and Social Order, p. 390.
- ²⁸Burke, Terms for Order, p. 90.
- ²⁹Ibid., p. 92.
- ³⁰William H. Rueckert, Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), p. 131.
- ³¹Duncan, Communication and Social Order, p. 394.
- ³²Ibid., p. 395.
- ³³Ibid., p. 396.
- ³⁴Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), p. 255.
- ³⁵Duncan, Communication and Social Order, p. 399.
- ³⁶Ibid.
- ³⁷Ibid., p. 402.
- ³⁸Sypher, "The Meanings of Comedy," pp. 245-246.
- ³⁹Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 38.
- ⁴⁰Ibid., p. 22.
- ⁴¹Ibid., p. 56.
- ⁴²Duncan, Communication and Social Order, p. 398.
- ⁴³Ibid., p. 401.
- ⁴⁴Beckett, Endgame, pp. 6-14.
- ⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 75-76.

- ⁴⁶Duncan, Communication and Social Order, pp. 402-403.
- ⁴⁷Beckett, Endgame, pp. 80-81.
- ⁴⁸Duncan, Communication and Social Order, pp. 403-404.
- ⁴⁹Ibid.
- ⁵⁰Kenneth Burke, Attitudes Toward History: Volume Two (New York: The New Republic, 1937), pp. 209-210.
- ⁵¹Jacques Guicharnaud, Modern French Theatre From Giraudoux to Beckett (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 216.
- ⁵²Bergson, "Laughter," p. 79.
- ⁵³Ibid., p. 81.
- ⁵⁴Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 38.
- ⁵⁵Beckett, Endgame, p. 1.
- ⁵⁶Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 17.
- ⁵⁷Beckett, Endgame, p. 37.
- ⁵⁸Ibid., p. 15.
- ⁵⁹Bergson, "Laughter," p. 108.
- ⁶⁰Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 39.
- ⁶¹Beckett, Endgame, p. 28.
- ⁶²Ibid., p. 34.
- ⁶³Beckett, Waiting for Godot, p. 44 and 60.
- ⁶⁴Frederick J. Hoffman, Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), p. 144.
- ⁶⁵Bergson, "Laughter," p. 93.
- ⁶⁶Hoffman, Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self, pp. 144-145.
- ⁶⁷Samuel Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape (New York: Grove Press, 1960), pp. 10-11.
- ⁶⁸Josephine Jacobsen and William R. Mueller, The Testament of Samuel Beckett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), pp. 98-99.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We have no elucidations to offer of mysteries that are all of their making. My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin. Hamm as stated, and Clov as stated, together as stated, nectecum nec sine te, in such a place, and in such a world, that's all I can manage, more than I could.

--Samuel Beckett

The main purpose of this study has been to elucidate some of Beckett's ideas toward language and speech communication as well as to evaluate the strategies of his plays through the help of Kenneth Burke's insights. The study has sought to discover in Burke the basis for a different approach to Beckett's writings. Its purpose has been not to explain Burke's rhetorical theory, but to discuss several of his conclusions in relation to Beckett's ideas.

Beckett provides no explanation of his theory except through a study of his plays and novels. These works leave us with no clear-cut understanding of his view of man. Therefore, in addition to examining Beckett's work, we have consulted such contemporary philosophers as Burke, Martin Buber, Hugh Duncan, Henri Bergson, and William Barrett in an effort not only to define Beckett's view of man but also to place it

in an appropriate social and philosophical perspective. If we have distorted Beckett's view of man, we have done so in an honest attempt to understand his nature of the Self, language, and rhetorical theory.

Summary of Beckett's View Toward
Man, Self, and Language

Beckett's primary interest is the basic relationship of man with his reality. His novels and plays attempt to throw some light on the condition of contemporary man. Faced with a meaningless, irrational, and non-Aristotelian universe, Beckett's rhetorical heroes attempt to make sense of this world and to find certain accommodations for the Self. Beckett suggests in Proust that the artist must revolve his works around a fundamental study of the Self. "Allusion," says Beckett, "has been made to his contempt for the literature that 'describes' for the realists and naturalists worshipping the offal of experience....and content to transcribe the surface, the facade, behind which the Idea is prisoner."¹ Beckett attempts to find identity and the essence of the Self through its relationship with the Other. Although the characters constantly rely on objects (hats, boots, and tapes), Beckett feels that knowledge of Self can only come through a relationship with another human being. It is the process of "becoming" which seems important to Beckett, and this can only be accomplished through a relationship with the Other.

Beckett, like Burke, suspects the illusion of language since words can only provide names for experience and reality. Beckett pokes fun at social hierarchies, patterns of habit, and voluntary memory, which tend to cloud the comprehension of reality. He also ridicules the

pattern of scientific thought and the methodology of a fixed language. Beckett attempts to uncover the essence of the Self, which lies beneath societal masks.

In a world where the sky is falling on our heads, there is a fundamental breakdown in the logical use of language. When there is no stability to a cause and effect relationship, it becomes difficult for the Beckett character to find a logic in the traditional language. The Beckett hero is aware that he is not a tree, a boot, or a bowler hat, but he also realizes that it is difficult to comprehend the Absolute with any degree of certainty.

Nonetheless, there is a strong obligation on the part of the Beckett heroes to continue living and speaking. Reaching the Ultimate, Beckett implies, which is the completion of the Self, comes only through silence and death. Thus, man must continue to use speech and language as means to a living relationship. To do otherwise makes him less than human.

Beckett agrees with Burke that we see life through "terminated screens." Beckett's characters find it hopeless to perceive completely anything beyond their own emotional experience. The more each character attempts to seek ontological security, the more things seem to change. It is a constant tension of the dialectical process between permanence and change. The more each character attempts to find values and systems to give his life meaning, the more he becomes aware of the nature of his existence. And with the contemporary writers, man's existence in the cosmos is an absurd one.

Beckett's biting satire probes the identity of modern man as a socialized animal. He makes a point of dramatizing as well as laughing at man's social habits, rituals, and word-games. Beckett feels like Buber that if we employ the "I-Thou" relationship we can gain the essence of man to man as well as valuable knowledge about the Self. The "I-It" philosophy treats language as a tool and the nature of man as an object or thing. It seems only natural that Beckett treats his characters with the "I-It" relationship as comic scapegoats and burlesques the composition of their language.

Beckett's theatre is one of mental anguish and physical pain. But the pain is often treated comically in having the characters beaten, kicked, slapped, and knocked down. The mental anguish comes in the characters becoming aware of the realistic nature of their existence. Thereby, the major plays of Beckett are termed tragic-comedies. The anguish and the comic pain provide us with an artist who is weeping one moment but laughing the next.

Beckett's characters are aware of their dualistic nature as comic and tragic heroes. Although they often contemplate suicide, there is a self-affirmative will to continue living. It is a growing strength that happens in Godot. And toward the end of the play, the characters can truthfully say, "We are men." This growing awareness is no accident on Beckett's part. It is in the interaction of the comic with the tragic that Beckett provides us with a definition of man who is a laughing and weeping animal. The union of the two throw light on Beckett's view of a world that may be both tragic and comic at the same time.

Beckett attempts to use the Burkeian strategies of "identification" through the techniques of "ambiguity," "properties," and "spiritualization" (comic scapegoat) of language to provide a reflection of the audience to modern man's situation. Beckett utilizes the techniques of the Absurdists to call attention to the nature of life. The technique is one of a "theatre of cruelty" to shake the foundations of modern man. Martin Esslin suggests the importance of this strategy to the Beckett theatre:

The Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being--that is, in terms of concrete stage images of the absurdity of existence. This is the difference between the approach of the philosopher and that of the poet; the difference, to take an example from another sphere, between the idea of God in the works of Thomas Aquinas or Spinoza and the intuition of God in those of St. John of the Cross or Meister Eckhart--the difference between theory and experience.²

Rather than having the characters describe the situation in theory, Beckett attempts to involve the spectator through the process of Burke's "identification." This process causes audience confrontation and reaction, which makes each spectator a participant within the event. Beckett utilizes sound, gesture, and silence to provoke a visual as well as aural image of the human condition. He also uses limited space, small number of characters, and burlesque action to make the audience face an awareness of their situation. "Beckett's use of the stage," writes Esslin, "is an attempt to reduce the gap between the limitations of language and the intuition of being, the sense of the human situation he seeks to express in spite of his strong feeling that words are inadequate to formulate it." The nature of the modern

stage, he continues, is that it "can be used to add new resources to language as an instrument of thought and exploration of being."³

As suggested by Burke, one of the significant characteristics of the modern theatre is a theory of "expectation as expectation." The audience waits in hopes of fulfilling their expectations of the outcome of the plot and the characters' actions. The characters on stage wait in hopes that another person will come to relieve them of suffering and explain their meaning in the universe. The success of the "identification" strategy is the method of "consubstantiality" in which the feeling of waiting involves the total psyche of the spectator as well as the characters on the stage. Rather than following the traditional structure of a cause-to-effect pattern, the audience is involved in wondering what to expect next, if anything. It is truly an excellent strategic design of involving the audience through a process of "expectation as expectation."

Beckett's plays individually and his works collectively pose philosophical questions without any definite answers. Beckett does not advocate a point of view or propose a resolution. It is, as we suggested earlier, the shape of the ideas that matter. Beckett is not interested in solving problems through neat classifications and formulations. Beckett's interest is, as J. Mitchell Morse puts it, "not to solve but to contemplate problems."⁴ The basic situation of Beckett's writing is to evoke a sense of awareness. Rather than advocating ready-made solutions, Beckett provokes the attitude that existence remains complex and unpredictable, and that it cannot be reduced to mathematical equations or laboratory experiments.

Beckett, like other contemporary writers, questions all human motives and social institutions. He even questions the values and forms of his own creative efforts. Since the form can be reduced to a statement about the concepts of the writer, Beckett proposes the questions of doubt and uncertainty with his characters. Beckett's heroes can never arrive upon any ontological security since it is impossible for a creative artist to arrive upon a definitive conclusion. It is, as we argued earlier, a process of "becoming" with both Beckett and his rhetorical heroes.

Beckett's prophecy leaves room for hope only if man can create new myths and become aware of the old illusions. Once the underside of both good and evil are exposed, what is there left for man to cling to? Can man live in hope without some form of illusion or myth? We think not. It is a burden of responsibility that Beckett may be asking too much of modern man. Yet, as we suggested earlier, Beckett agrees with Burke that man is characterized by his symbol-making and symbol-using capacity. Without this process, it is impossible for man to survive the jungle and live with any semblance of hope. Are we to conclude, then, that Beckett sees no salvation for modern man? This we most strongly deny. Throughout Beckett's plays there remains a constant argument to substitute new myths or hierarchies for the old worn-out ones. As Beckett suggests, the new form of art must be a type that admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is something else. The task of the artist, according to Beckett, is finding a form to accommodate the mess. Some critics would relegate Beckett to a nihilistic position with the assumption that his characters live without hope or illusions. We argue that Beckett is not interested in man

living without myths, but in being certain that he recognizes the mess for what it is. Thus, the task of contemporary man is finding new hierarchies and myths that may accommodate the changing times.

Since the human animal is "goaded by a spirit of hierarchy," it seems unlikely that man can continue to survive as a social being without some form of myth, and social institutions. Beckett seems to agree. What he wishes is that we recognize the change and establish a new order of social relationship and institutions rather than persistently clinging to the old ritual and social habits. In short, it is Beckett's desire that man come to terms with the reality of the moment and his changing environment. And the theatre appears to Beckett to provide the best medium to get his ideas across to an audience. Esslin urges on acceptance of Beckett and the strategy of the Absurd Theatre:

Ultimately, a phenomenon like the Theatre of the Absurd does not reflect despair or a return to dark irrational forces but expresses modern man's endeavor to come to terms with the world in which he lives. It attempts to make him face up to the human condition as it really is, to free him from illusions that are bound to cause constant maladjustment and disappointment.... Today, when death and old age are increasingly concealed behind euphemisms and comforting baby talk, and life is threatened with being smothered in the mass consumption of hypnotic mechanized vulgarity, the need to confront man with the reality of his situation is greater than ever. For the dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in all its senselessness; to accept it freely, without fear, without illusions--and to laugh at it.⁵

It is to the genre of the comic that Beckett owes his greatness and his dignity as creative artist. The laugh of the Beckett theatre is often times a mirthless, a hollow, and a bitter one. Yet Beckett perfects the strategy of the comic scapegoat, the vaudeville word-games, and the business of slapstick actions. The combination of the joy with the sad gives us Beckett's bifocal view of reality. It is comedy, as we

discussed, that "strictly speaking is not laughter." As Josephine Jacobsen and William R. Mueller wisely observe:

To this sadness, Beckett brings his comedy, that recourse of those in whom the wild beast of earnestness does not cease to pad. Beckett has himself given us the measure of the seriousness of his laughter; he speaks in "earnest jest." Under its frequent hilarity, under its classically grotesque postures, it is in the end this laughter, these kinds of laughter, which attest to his true concerns.⁶

We support the legacy of Beckett's true concern that comedy paves the way for compassion and truth. Comedy provides the means to dialogue which unmask the pretensions and hypocrisies of social relationships. Tragedy mystifies and seeks to hide our transgressions without probing or questioning. We agree with Beckett and Burke that through laughter man can ease his way through the "flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard."

The Implication of Beckett's Theory and Philosophy

Beckett makes his greatest contribution to rhetorical theory in showing rather than describing the attitudes of hierarchies and social relationships. Rather than concentrating on social problems, Beckett is interested in attitudes about the condition of man. It is at the level of dramatic expression of human relationships that Beckett makes his greatest contribution. It is the purpose of this section to discuss the implications of his ideas with those of George H. Mead, Hugh D. Duncan, Martin Buber, and Kenneth Burke.

Mead and Beckett start off on common ground in believing that each man needs to begin his creative living with a fundamental focus on the Self. Mead argues that the Self is a social product and develops

through an interaction with other persons around it. The "I" of Mead is the subjective part of the Self while the "me" serves as the objective side and the attitude of the "generalized other." As a result, Mead feels that the "I" and the "me" are engaged in a constant form of conversation and interaction. The significance of this conversation is to anticipate the reaction of the "generalized other" by having these responses reflected with the "me." In taking the role of the "generalized other," the individual actor symbolizes and manipulates the response of the other, Mead wishes for the communication to create reflective intelligence. This is caused by the individual actor internalizing his audience, testing his propositions on them, and then accepting or rejecting them. Finally, the Self, for Mead, is a process which grows out of the encounter of an individual with the social structures and relationships.

Beckett and Mead differ in their approach to the Other. Mead places emphasis on the chosen goals and the pragmatic approach in reaching these objectives. The action of Mead's character is the attempt to achieve these goals. The "I-me" relationship is a dialogue to find the most productive means in achieving success. Mead views the whole method of socialization as a process of communication in which the individual actor is "known and knowing that one is known."

Beckett rejects the approach of Mead in finding suitable acts to achieve certain goals. The main objective for the Beckett characters is to find some form of ontological security and consideration that they exist as human beings. The goals, for Beckett, are not to attain social status, wealth, position, but to become aware of the essence of Self.

Beckett rejects the concentration that a Self grows by a focus on the rational and intellectual side of being. Even though Beckett agrees with Mead that we find the essence of man in relationship to the Other, he rejects the manipulating of the response through internalizing his audience. In this respect, Beckett opposes Mead's philosophy that the "me" serves as a mirror to the impulse of the "I." Beckett's approach is much broader, and he wishes to show the bifocal traits of men--the emotional as well as the intellectual. In a world where the values are collapsing, Beckett's characters find it difficult to choose a course of action that will lead to social objectives. The objective, then, is to find a true relationship with each other, develop an authentic language and avoid the pit of Nothingness. For Beckett, the strength of the internal dialogue is an attempt for the mind to understand the body. As Hugh Kenner suggests, "the typical Beckett hero is a Cartesian Centaur with the mind set on mastering and contemplating while the body is a reduction of the quintessential machine. He is a man riding a bicycle, mens sana in corpore disposito."⁷ Mead and Beckett start their inquiry together, but they are worlds apart in their final analysis of the Self-Other relationship.

Hugh D. Duncan extends the concept of the "Self-Other" pattern with an emphasis on the Comic structure in an approach to understanding hierarchies. Duncan argues that we find the essence of humanity through shared experiences, which profitably comes through a Comic framework. Duncan argues that it is the cult of the comic that allows man to show his feelings and opens the channel for authentic communication. Beckett agrees thus far with Duncan, but he differs from him over the

restriction of the Comic frame. Duncan posits the view that "comedy is ethical because it is rational and rational because it leads to good social relationships."⁸ Beckett argues that comedy may at times be irrational, brutal, and grotesque. Therefore, he disagrees with Duncan's narrow definition and approach to comedy. Duncan feels that laughter which passes into the tone of derision, mockery, and grotesque no longer serves as comedy. He further argues that when the clown becomes burlesqued and ridiculed, he loses his identity and becomes a nightmare for the spectator.⁹ As we discussed in the previous chapter, Beckett concentrates much of his comedy on the hollow, the bitter, and the mirthless laughter. His characters are beaten, ridiculed, kicked to a point that it may be a chilling world to watch. The weakness of the Duncan method is that he feels comedy must appeal to reason and the rational side of man. Beckett extends the human animal beyond these limits and proposes a shocking reality of comedy that at times is grotesque and violent.

A final point of similarity comes in revealing hierarchies and social relationships through comedy. While Duncan views the social end of comedy as the maintenance of roles that guarantee order, Beckett envisions the Comic frame as a means to show the crumbling and outdated social hierarchies. As one of Beckett's heroes remarks, "Nothing is certain, when you are about." Duncan feels that when we enter a group to begin communication, we enter hierarchical relationships which are determined by the symbols of the group. Since nothing is certain in the Beckett universe, it is difficult for the rhetorical heroes to accept the symbols of a group. Thus, Duncan interprets comedy as a

means to ward off threats to a group and maintain skill in hierarchical address, while Beckett utilizes comedy to provoke a sense of the absurdity in maintaining old hierarchies in the face of ontological insecurity. They both make a point in extending the theory that comedy and drama provides an excellent means of expressing social hierarchies. While Duncan talks about comedy as a means of finding our humanity, Beckett projects these images on the stage. Consequently, the impact is much greater. Rather than merely reading about theory, we can see the ideas of experience in action with the major characters.

While Martin Buber stresses the concept of "meeting" in dialogue, Beckett emphasizes the nature of "becoming." For Buber, language serves as a means to transcend into the world of the Eternal Thou. Buber adds a divine dimension and mission on the part of man. He sees the Self emerging in relationship with other individuals, but with a major emphasis on a relationship with God. It seems difficult for Buber to imagine a self emerging without the presence of God.

Beckett does not view modern man moving toward the Eternal as much as moving away from the thought of nothingness and the Void. Beckett does not debate the issue of whether God is dead, but he implies that the Almighty is merely withdrawn. Beckett suggests that "perhaps" God is dead, let's wait and see. Buber, of course, cannot accept this philosophical position and therefore rejects the emergence of the Self in Beckett's writings.

They both agree that silence is a means of contemplation and an important form of communication. Without the element of silence, all speech may become chatter or, as Beckett calls it, nothing more than

"blathering." When Estragon is asked in Waiting for Godot what he did the previous evening, he responds in this way:

I suppose nothing in particular. Yes, now I remember, yesterday evening we spent blathering about nothing in particular. That's been going on now for half a century.¹⁰

The important harmony of Beckett and Buber is with their human relationships of "I-Thou" and "I-It." Beckett portrays on stage in a sometime comic and oftentimes moving way these two relationships. Obviously Beckett agrees with Buber that self-knowledge and growth can only come from an "I-Thou" relationship. Beckett, with the behavior of his major characters, pushes the "I-It" philosophy to a point of ridicule and burlesque. Since Buber adds a spiritual dimension to his individuals, it is difficult to imagine him accepting the Comic framework of Beckett. Buber views human relationships as being either moral and immoral qualities in man. He appears to take these relationships quite seriously. It might be difficult for him to view the burlesque and comic scapegoating with the idea that this represents an "I-It" philosophy. Thus, Beckett projects a much broader view of human relationships by indicating that man is good and bad, tragic and comic, happy and frustrated, and that these traits may occur simultaneously. Again, Buber describes his theory of philosophical relationships, but it is to the credit of Beckett that we can visualize them in concrete form. Obviously we owe some credit to Buber in helping us understand the comic hierarchies of the Beckett universe, but it is difficult to believe that Buber views man as a laughing animal.

Philosophically, Beckett and Kenneth Burke appear to have the most in common. Both share the basic premise of literature that through the

presentation of human motives we can come to the greatest understanding of human behavior. Beckett and Burke agree that language serves as the essence of the human animal, and that he can be first characterized as a "symbol-making, symbol-using, and symbol-misusing animal." It is through the use of symbolization that man can lift himself above the level of other creatures.

One of the major points of agreement is with the process of "identification." Through a method of establishing "consubstantiality" with the spectator, Beckett's heroes attempt to relate an image of the world. One of the significant strategies of "identification" in the Beckett theatre is through the design of "ambiguity." Both Beckett and Burke agree that ambiguity is a necessary ingredient to keep language alive and fresh. While Burke seems more interested in how a speaker utilizes ambiguity in a public address, Beckett concerns himself with the poetic quality of the language on the stage. They both agree that the task of any artist or critic is not to dispense with ambiguity, but to attempt to clarify its resources.

Beckett agrees with Burke that man "transcends upward" or "transcends downward" depending on the choice of terms or words he uses. Although his characters may only move from one muckheap to the next, Beckett agrees with Burke that man can transcend his situation through language. Thus, language, for both writers, is a process of moving, linking, and creating some form of hierarchy.

The strategy of "properties" plays an important role in the Beckett theatre as it does in the thinking of Burke. The stage scenery and props suggest an image and feeling in the spectator that can only be created through a visual moment of association. Burke agrees that a

character's association with properties or objects may dictate the emotional as well as intellectual behavior.

One of the main features of agreement with Burke and Beckett is the focus on the Comic frame. Burke cannot quite accept the view that burlesque as depicted by Beckett can equal the sophistication of high comedy. Yet they both agree on the strategy of the comic scapegoat's helping to make people aware of society's ills through laughter rather than through crime and war. However, Burke may not be ready to concede that tragic and comic elements can operate simultaneously within a Comic frame; he appears to project the attitude that we have a noticeable difference between the two genres. Obviously Beckett is concerned with the combination of the two although his work leans more toward the comic scapegoat and the bitter laughter.

Both Burke and Beckett feel that man establishes through language "terministic screens," a system which selects and directs the attention of attitudes. Man's attitudes about reality are implicit in the choice of terms he uses. Because of language, man shapes his own perceptions towards events and objects. One of the major reasons why Beckett portrays his major characters with a lack of memory, poor eye sight, and defective hearing is to make the spectator aware of the habitual response to language. Like Burke, he feels that the over-use of certain words or phrases to the point of habit covers the essence of the Idea as well as the reality of the moment.

There is common agreement between Beckett and Burke that man is "goaded by a spirit of hierarchy." Beckett pokes fun at the typical modern man, who expends his energies in establishing and maintaining a

social hierarchy. While Burke describes the motives of man in forming hierarchies, Beckett attempts to operationalize these relationships in a dramatic structure. Clov, in a scene from Endgame, expresses Beckett's sardonic feeling about the preservation of hierarchies:

I'm going to clear everything away. I love order.
It's my dream. A world where all would be silent
and still each thing in its last place, under the
last dust.¹¹

Although Beckett satirizes the myth for preservation of ritual and tradition, he recognizes, like Burke, that man is a creature of order and habit. Thus, it is natural for man to demand that each individual know his place and the role expected of him.

Finally, Burke and Beckett both feel that through language man is motivated to choose the right symbol for expression. Burke feels that the attitude of trying to label something by its "proper" name or speak a language in a distinct way provokes a sense of perfection. Beckett's rhetorical heroes, Hamm, Vladimir, and Krapp, continually search for the right word or phrase to express their thoughts and feelings. It is the impulse for the perfection with these characters which motivates them to define a feeling or thought. The sense of perfection in language permeates the character's behavior throughout Beckett's plays. It is, as Burke suggests, a motive implicit in the nature of our symbol system.

Other implications could be discussed between Beckett and contemporary rhetorical theorists, but these four leading thinkers have seemed the most beneficial for our purposes. This has not been a definitive exploration, but an attempt to draw some similarities between Beckett's thinking and that of rhetorical theorists.

This study has been concerned with Buber, Burke, and Duncan for the insights they may provide on the Beckett universe. A few recommendations for additional study and research seem important for us to consider.

Most obviously, so that understanding of modern plays might be enriched, there needs to be further study on the relationships of the "I-Thou," "I-It," "Self-Other," and "I-me" concepts used by these writers. Finding strategies of "identification" that a playwright employs in provoking his message appears the most profitable method of analysis. Since it appears difficult to analyze modern drama from the vantage point of plot structure, analyzing "identification" strategies appears as an excellent means of finding the basic truths of the writer.

Drama formulates experience symbolically and testifies to an encounter with reality. A dramatic situation presents in concrete form what the playwright regards as significant contemporary issues. Analyzing social relationships in a drama may be a means of understanding attitudes toward language and concepts of symbolic action.

At times this study has been frustrating because Beckett is abstract and tends to deal with universal qualities of man. It might be worthwhile in the future for the researcher to select a playwright who focuses on contemporary social problems. A study of such playwrights as James Baldwin, Leroi Jones, Edward Albee, and Sam Sheppard could provide^a worthwhile contribution^s of symbolic interaction on social theories. It appears important for future research to relate how and why these playwrights use certain symbolic substances to convey their messages.

This perspective suggests a different approach to rhetorical criticism compared to the methods employed in the past. Rather than attempting to impose a structural analysis on a creative piece, the methodology of examination emerges from each researcher and work of art under investigation.

Finally, there is a need to reach out beyond the traditional boundaries of rhetorical theory to view drama, art, poetry, and music as symbolic acts of man. Furthermore, a drama or rhetorical discourse which leads only to rational truth no longer seems appropriate for contemporary men. William Barrett argues that "the kind of knowledge pursued by the Existentialist cannot come through reason, but through living, and perhaps in the end, he cannot even put into words what he knows."¹² Instead of trying to measure creative acts by an ascribed set of formulations and criteria, we need to change it around to measure logic by the concerns of human interaction. Hence, we consider language not as strictly epistemology, but as an individual creation of the human self. This approach requires a closer association with philosophy in order to study the phenomena of human speech and symbolic acts.

Through his literature, Beckett provides us with a significant view of man and language. It is a consideration that we need to ponder in our approach to rhetorical theory. Beckett's ideas and language are not easy to understand, but they seldom are from those who are profound thinkers. Oftentimes his perceptions about man are more detailed and total than most of us wish to understand.

With a good supply of aspirins, we have attempted in this study to view Beckett's plays as more than a "matter of fundamental sounds." We

accept the responsibility for attempting to trace down the themes and overtones, and what these insights might imply. This study, to borrow the words from Samuel Beckett, is "all I can manage, more than I could."¹³

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Samuel Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove Press, 1931), p. 59.
- ²Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. xx.
- ³Ibid., p. 44.
- ⁴Quoted in John Fletcher, Samuel Beckett's Art (London: Chatto and Windus, 1967), p. 17.
- ⁵Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, p. 316.
- ⁶Josephine Jacobsen and William R. Mueller, The Testament of Samuel Beckett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), pp. 173-174.
- ⁷Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 121.
- ⁸Hugh Dalziel Duncan, Communication and Social Order (New York: Bedminster Press, 1962), p. 390.
- ⁹Ibid., pp. 404-405.
- ¹⁰Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove Press, 1954), p. 42.
- ¹¹Samuel Beckett, Endgame (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 57.
- ¹²William Barrett, Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy (New York: Doubleday, 1962), pp. 56-57.
- ¹³Extracts from Letters with Alan Schneider, The Village Voice Reader, ed. Daniel Wolf and Edwin Fancher (New York: Doubleday, 1962), p. 182.

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