CLOWN, EXISTENTIAL MAN AND "THE RES ITSELF": A CONSIDERATION OF CLOWN AS IMAGE OF MAN IN THE WORKS OF SAMUEL BECKETT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE STAGE PLAYS

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APR 7 1978
MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY
OF NEWFOUNDLAND

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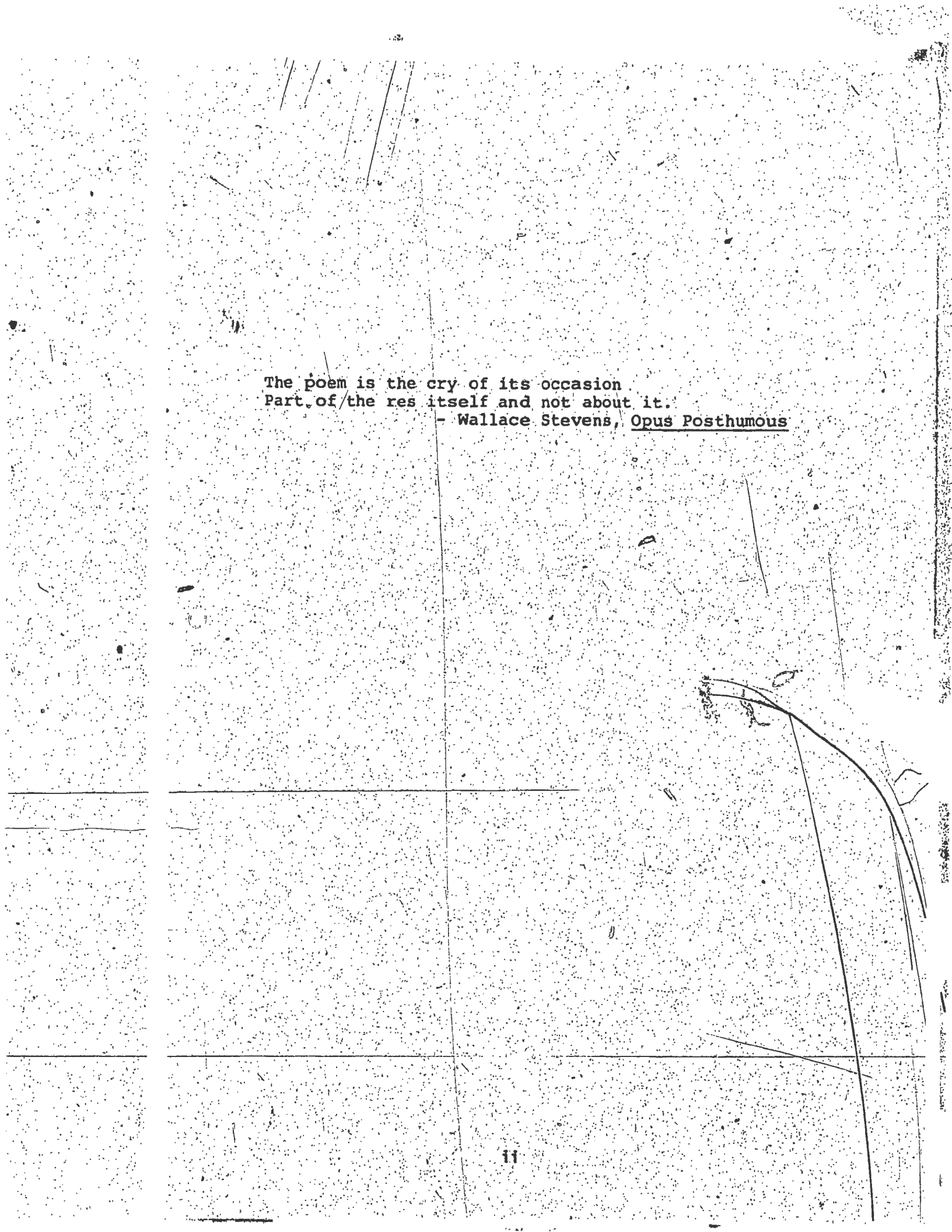
A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English Language and Literature
Memorial University of Newfoundland

August 1975

The poem is the cry of its occasion
Part of the res itself and not about it.
- Wallace Stevens, Opus Posthumous



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the University for facilitating my research by awarding me a Memorial University Fellowship and by providing me with funds to attend the Joyce-Beckett Symposium held at York University, Toronto, in February 1974.

To Dr. F.A. Aldrich, Dean of Graduate Studies, I am especially grateful for co-operation and assistance in many matters.

I owe many thanks to these members of the Department of English Language and Literature:

Mr. A.D. Hall, supervisor or this study,... for advice and encouragement throughout this enterprise;

Dr. D.G. Pitt, Head of the Department,... who has been most generous with his help in his capacity as administrator;

Dr. A.A. Macdonald,... who very kindly permitted me to use his office during the summer.

To Gordon Rowsell, my spouse, who has helped me in a myriad of ways, I am deeply grateful.

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INTRODUCTION

The work of Samuel Beckett, expatriate Anglo-Irish playwright, writer of fiction and erstwhile literary critic and book-reviewer, is steeped in the existentialist ambience of twentieth-century France, his adopted country. A bilingual master of many genres, Beckett has made considerable use of the tradition of clowning in his dramatic and fictional works. While various critics have discussed the influence of "existentialism" and the clown tradition on Beckett's work, the relation between these areas of influence has not been explored in any detail. In this study I propose to make clear the strong nexus between the clown and "existential man" and to show, by means of a discussion of his stage plays in particular, how the image of man as clown is central to Beckett's work, shaping form as well as influencing and providing content.

This study comprises three main sections, the first of which deals with the clown, the second with "existential man" and the third with the art of Samuel Beckett: extended treatments of the clown and "existential man" provide a context in which the consideration of Beckett's art as incorporating and fusing both traditions can be fully appreciated.

Section I, entitled "He Who Gets Slapped: The Clown Down The Ages", consists of a consideration of clown-types throughout history. From the complex of characteristics which is exhibited in clowns from Greek satyrs to Charlie Chaplin and his imitators an image of the clown emerges - an image of one who is an outsider in every sense. The clown is "he who gets slapped"; a physically grotesque figure, he is thwarted by matter in all its forms (not excluding the human world). Rejection, confusion and failure are his lot. Equal to his capacity for failure, however, is his capacity for striving. The possessor of unquenchable vitality, the clown never ceases his struggle in a universe alien to him.

Section II, entitled "The Existentialists: Man as Clown", delineates the links between the clown and "existential man". The bulk of Section II is devoted to an exploration of the situation of "existential man" as set forth in the writings of Pascal, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre and Camus - all important figures in the existentialist tradition. "Existential man" is perceived as being contingent and finite; he exists as an outsider in a universe indifferent or even hostile to him. His existence is one of endless struggle and conflict as he copes with his absurd situation - a finite, material creature in an infinite universe. It becomes apparent that

the concept of "existential man" is but an abstraction of the clown, or, conversely, that the clown is the concrete embodiment of "existential man".

That Samuel Beckett makes use of the clown as a vehicle for realizing in art the experience of "existential man", the experience of the individual adrift in space and time, is the contention of Section III, "The Art of Samuel Beckett: The Res Itself". In this section an examination of some of Beckett's critical pronouncements reveals that his image of himself as artist is linked to his image of man as clown. Just how the image of man as clown operates in his work is illustrated by a discussion in some detail of his stage plays from Waiting for Godot to his latest effort, the 1972 Not I. Some of his fictional works and his plays for other media are considered very briefly, in an attempt to indicate that the image of the clown is a significant force thematically and structurally in them as well. (While a detailed analysis of the function of the clown in the novels and shorter fiction is worth doing, I have chosen to concentrate on the stage plays, since they provide a richer ground for exploration of the clown as image of "existential man".)

Beckett's work is an aesthetic triumph, for, setting himself the most difficult of tasks - that of externalizing the inner experience of the individual - he

has found the perfect vehicle for doing so, the ever-beset, struggling clown, and he has thereby created what is perhaps the greatest oeuvre to grow out of the existentialist anguish of the twentieth century.

SECTION I

HE WHO GETS SLAPPED:

THE CLOWN DOWN THE AGES

I don't know how, for me to say, I don't know, what clowns they are, to keep on saying the same thing, when they know it's not the right one, no; they know nothing either, they forget, they think they change and they never change, they'll be there saying the same thing till they die, then perhaps a little silence, till the next gang arrives on the site....

- Samuel Beckett, The Unnamable

The face on the curate faded away and Grock's appeared in its stead. 'Say that again' said the red gash in the white putty.
Belacqua said it all and much more.
'Nisscht mööööglich' moaned Grock, and was gone.

- Samuel Beckett, More Pricks Than Kicks

It is necessary to establish limits at the outset. I have chosen to use "clown" as the generic term which encompasses buffoons, fools, jesters and modern clowns of the circus and vaudeville. The selection of any one term is somewhat arbitrary, since the words "fool" and "clown" quite early became more or less synonymous and in Shakespeare's time were often used interchangeably. Still, "clown" can be argued for, in the context of this study, on the grounds that it carries connotations of alienation and grotesqueness and lacks those connotations of "inspired wisdom" surrounding the term "fool".

The family tree of clowns cannot be set forth with anything like accuracy. In his study of clownery through the ages M. Willson Disher issues a warning to those "entangled theorists" who piece together rags and patches of evidence in order to trace direct lines of descent from the Roman gods to the clown of the modern circus. He points out that

> Clowns maintain their distinctive characteristics despite, not because of tradition. All Greek and Roman comedies, the mediaeval religious plays, the Commedia dell'arte and the English Harlequinade possess definite types in common. Yet these are the very types that are manifestly not borrowed but spontaneously created afresh. The clowns that can be traced from country to country, from century to century, retain only their names and lose their characteristics. Thus Arlecchino, the butt, changed to Arlequin the knave, then to Arlequin, the parodist in every

> shape imaginable to Arlequin the swain of Marivaux, to Harlequin the magician, adventurer and dancer, and finally to a symbolic character....[1]

Any concise history of clowns, with lines of descent and influence clearly set forth, is perforce impossible. Yet despite such contentions as Enid Welsford's that "there is no such thing as Clown, there are only clowns"[2] it is possible to discern certain attributes which most clowns have in common. By the consideration of the clown as a type drawn from elements reiterated in what countless clowns have said and done, in their dress and bearing and in their clowning routines we can perhaps gain some understanding of the nature of Clown, of the image of man reflected by all clowns. The method of study best suited to this search (hampered as we are by the entangled and complex clown tradition), then, is a thematic one. A thematic treatment allows greater latitude in the discerning of similarities among clowns than would a strictly chronological approach while still providing one with definite guidelines and thereby preventing some of

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[1] M. Willson Disher, Clowns and Pantomimes (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968), pp. 33-34.

[2] Enid Welsford, The Fool: His Social and Literary History (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966), p. 277.

the parallel-finding excesses indulged in by many turn-of-the-century writers on clownery. Certain groups of characteristics that almost all clown figures have in common emerge immediately.

The word "clown" comes from the Old Norse klunni, clumsy, loutish (fellow). The word is cognate with the Danish kluntet, clumsy, maladroit.[3] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, cognate words in related languages (such as Dutch) convey such ideas as clod, log, block, stump, wooden mall. From the linguistic evidence available, William Willeford deduces what seems to be a generally accepted notion of the origins of the word "clown":

> So far as concerns the sense-development, then, it is clear that we have here a word meaning originally 'clod, clot, lump', which, like these words themselves ... has been applied in various languages to a clumsy boor, a lout.[4]

The origin of the word "clown" and its relationship to other words are of particular interest in that they point up what is a complex of characteristics of most clown figures known to us. A certain gross materiality is the hallmark of the clown; his relationship with the clod, the clot and the lump is proclaimed in a number of ways. He is of the earth,

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[3]Walter Parker Bowman and Robert Hamilton Ball, Theatre Language: a dictionary of terms in English of the drama and stage from mediaeval to modern times (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1961), p. 39.

[4]William Willeford, The Fool and his Scepter: A Study in Clowns and Jesters and their Audience (Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 12.

grounded-in-the earth, man as misshapen clod, and this is expressed most immediately and theatrically in his stature and dress - his physical presence. He is a concrete manifestation of what one writer has referred to as "the great primal joke ... of the human body".[5]

The first glimpses we get of clown figures are in the satyr-plays of ancient Greece. (These plays are commonly accepted as having engendered all varieties of clown figures,[6] since we are ignorant of earlier forms which may have existed.) The satyr-plays are believed to have been parodic treatments of themes dealt with seriously in the tragedies preceding them at the festivals. The chorus for these satyr-plays consisted of a group of satyrs with horses' tails and prominent phalluses.[7] Enid Welsford describes one Greek clown figure as "a squat slave with a padded stomach, pelting the spectators with nuts or parodying the wanton orgies of Dionysus".[8] According to the pictorial evidence on a series of Corinthian vases, the

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[5]Welsford, p. 51.

[6]Thelma Niklaus, Harlequin (New York: G. Braziller, 1956), p. 18 and Willeford, p. 11.

[7]John Ferguson, A Companion to Greek Tragedy (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), p. 23.

[8]Welsford, p. 278.

comic figures in ancient Dorian comedy were be-phallused and were heavily padded both on the stomach and in the rear. Tights and short vests emphasized those parts of the body which were not distorted by padding.[9] Some, the ithuphalloi, wore masks of drunken men and some, the phallophoroi, were phallus-bearers and had soot-smeared faces.[10] The clowns of the Roman Empire were also phallephoric - leather phalluses were common in the performances of the mimes.[11] The general appearance of at least one Roman clown figure is known to us: the sannio, who flourished in the early years of the Roman Empire, was a bald-headed, ass-eared, hook-nosed creature who wore a patchwork dress of variegated colours.[12] The stock masks of Atellan comedy had among them Bucco (he with the puffed-out cheeks - probably meant to signify gluttony and loquaciousness) and Dossennus, the hump-backed one. Extant theatre masks portray a corpulent, bald-headed Dossennus with a long hooked nose and a broad grinning mouth filled with protruding teeth; one mask shows

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[9]Allardyce Nicholl, Masks Mimes and Miracles: Studies in the Popular Theatre (London: Harrap, 1931), pp. 20-21.

[10]Nicholl, pp. 26-27.

[11]Nicholl, p. 163.

[12]Welsford, p. 278. It was the sannio's duty, according to St. Chrysostom, to be 'slapped at the public expense'.

a large wart on his brow.[13] The grotesque clown of primitive harvest festivities inevitably had a tail and participants in bacchanalian harvest rituals wore the heads and skins of animals.[14] Similarly, mimic dancers in early Attic times wore horseskins and long black tails and other animal trappings.[15]

Evidence from these ancient times is fragmentary, to say the least, but the details given above do go some way toward indicating the extent to which man's animality and materiality was expressed by prototypes of the clown as far back as the ancient Greek drama and the primitive fertility and harvest rituals. Exaggeration and distortion of physical features, especially those which have to do with bodily functions, emphasis on the sheer physical grossness of man and on his connection with lower forms of life and (implicitly) the inanimate world are all to be found here in most vivid and concrete terms.

After the fall of the Roman Empire the figure of the clown becomes blurred. Entertainers of various sorts - acrobats, minstrels, jongleurs, bear-leaders - wandered the

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[13]Nicholl, pp. 69-70.

[14]Phyllis Hartnoll, ed., The Oxford Companion to the Theatre, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 328-329.

[15]Nicholl, p. 31.

European continent; many among them were cripples, amputees and physical freaks. The components of physical deformity were doubtless present in such clown-figures as there may have been in these "Dark Ages".[16]

In the later Middle Ages the scarcity of records lessens and the figure of the clown again becomes discernible. The mediaeval fool proper (in Christian usage all erring souls were "fools") shaved his head and beard.[17] A cap with horns, ass's ears, or a cockscomb, and sometimes bells, covering in hood-fashion his head and shoulders, a multi-coloured jacket and trousers, usually tight-fitting, and sometimes a tail, were the elements that went to make up his costume. He often carried a bladder filled with dried peas.[18] In the fifteenth-century Fastnacht plays "calf", "monkey", "ass" and "pig" were used as synonyms for fool;[19] clowns in Elizabethan plays were given such names as "John Goose".[20] Both practices seem to

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[16]Willeford, pp. 13-14 and Welsford, p. 278.

[17]Nicholl, p. 161.

[18]Hartnoll, p. 328.

[19]Willeford, p. 81.

[20]Olive M. Busby, Studies in the Development of the Fool in Elizabethan Drama (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), p. 14.

indicate that the clown and animal nature were continuing to be firmly linked.

The Elizabethan clown possessed a grotesque physical appearance. Two of those known to us are Pickle Herring and John Posset, both of whom were similar in appearance. Enid Welsford's description of John Posset captures well the strangeness of these figures:

> [He was] renowned ... for his shoes, which were much too large for him; his waistcoat was a strange and wonderful spectacle; his huge flapping hat was apt to fall off his head in the ardours of courtship; he could so make up and contort his face that it was hardly human....[21]

A 1597 German description of the English clown refers to his "shoes that don't much pinch his toes" and his breeches that "could hold two or more".[22]

The clown figures in the sixteenth century whose physical appearance is most thoroughly documented are the masks of the commedia dell'arte. Harlequin's costume consisted of a tight-fitting jacket and trousers, sewn over with irregularly-shaped patches, flat black shoes, and a small black cap tufted with a rabbit scut. His mask was

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[21] Welsford, p. 289.

[22] Busby, p. 84. Like this sixteenth-century English clown, Beckett's Estragon has ill-fitting boots and trousers.

black, wrinkled and hairy.[23] Pulcinella (who does not appear among the masks until the seventeenth century) was a clod incarnate. He had a huge hooked nose, a humpback, a heavily padded stomach and wore a loose white garment. He often carried a horn or a wooden sword.[24] The Doctor, the tempestuous companion of the old man Pantalone wears black gloves, a black gown heavily padded on the shoulders, and a "penthouse of a hat".[25] The Zanni were clad in over-sized garments - wide trousers, loose cape and slouch hat.[26]

Grimaldi's appearance has been captured for us in Leigh Hunt's description of a gluttonous Clown:

> He the cunning rogue, who has been watching midway, and now sees the coast clear, enters in front, - round faced, goggle-eyed, knock-kneed but agile to a degree of the dislocated, with a great smear for his mouth, and a cap on his head, half fool's and half cook's.[27]

Another observer described him thus:

> ... I had seen [him] come in with two odd eyebrows, a pair of right-and-left eyes, a wry nose, a crooked mouth, two wrong arms, two left legs, and a free and easy body without a bone in it, or apparently any centre of gravity.[28]

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[23]Kathleen M. Lea, Italian Popular Comedy: A Study in the Commedia dell'Arte, 1560-1620 (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), I, p. 86.

[24]Lea, I, p. 95.

[25]Lea, I, p. 26.

[26]Lea, I, p. 86.

[27]Disher, Clowns and Pantomimes, p. 103.

[28]Disher, Clowns and Pantomimes, p. 113.

Apparently Grimaldi's costume changed with his act, but his body remained wonderfully awry.

The most important clown figure of the final decades of the nineteenth century was the auguste, who was created circa 1870. A coat with tails too long, an oversized white waistcoat, undersized black trousers, white spats, and a red nose made up his costume.[29] Many clown figures in the decades following wore some variation of this costume. Coco the clown, who considered himself an auguste, wore either an old cap settled askew, a big and baggy coat, a large dress shirt and collar with an untidy black tie, steel-rimmed spectacles, and a huge walrus moustache or an ill-fitting check suit, huge boots, a big round nose and red hair that stood on end.[30] George Formby, a turn-of-the-century music-hall comedian, sported boots on the wrong feet, a hat somewhat like a bowler but smaller and a jacket several sizes too small.[31] The comedians who worked for Fred Karno often had a pronounced physical defect and they wore ill-fitting clothes.[32] The music-hall comedian known as Little Tich

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[29]Disher, Clowns and Pantomimes, p. 196.

[30]Nicolai Poliakoff, Coco the Clown (London: J.M. Dent, 1962), p. 198.

[31]Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, British Music Hall (London: Studio Vista, 1965), p. 164.

[32]John M. East, "Karno's Folly, or How To Lose A Show Business Fortune," Theatre Quarterly, I, 3, p. 60.

wore enormous trousers which were so ill-fitting that they slipped down whenever a very carefree movement was made.[33] Dan Leno's little figure was always encased in some grotesque costume or other, constant features of which were his thickly arched eyebrows and over-sized boots.[34] Joe Jackson, the famous clown cyclist, wore tattered shoes, pants and coat - all too big for him.[35] Enormous boots, immensely baggy trousers and a shaven head were features of Grock's clown costume.[36]

Clowns of other cultures also wore grotesque costumes and had exceptional body-shapes. For instance, the Jemez Koshare clowns in the American Southwest dressed in rags, as did the Jemez Pinon clowns. The Navajo have decrepit old men and transvestites made up as hideous old women in their Mountain chant ceremonies.[37] The

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[33] M. Willson Disher, Winkles and Champagne: Comedies and Tragedies of the Music Hall (London: B.T. Batsford, 1938), p. 44.

[34] Ernest Henry Short and Arthur Compton-Rickett, Ring Up The Curtain: Being A Pageant Of English Entertainment Covering Half A Century (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1938), pp. 47-48.

[35] Bernard Sobel, A Pictorial History of Vaudeville (New York: Citadel Press, 1961), p. 12.

[36] James Agate, Immoment Toys: A Survey of Light Entertainment on the London Stage, 1920-1943 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1945), p. 215.

[37] Willeford, p. 87.

characteristics under consideration are not confined to Western cultures but rather are to be found in the clown-figures of every civilization.

The most widely known clowns of the twentieth century are the film clowns - Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, the Marx Brothers, W.C. Fields, Buster Keaton and others. The characteristics of costume we have been finding in clowns of other centuries are to be found here as well. Chaplin's outfit consisted of battered oversized shoes and baggy pants, ridiculously small vest and coat, all topped off by the gentlemanly bowler. Buttons were missing and often a rope served as a belt. A thick little blot of a moustache perched on his face.[38] His gait was a flat-footed shuffling walk, as if there were at best only an uneasy truce between the rude house and the spirit dwelling within. Groucho Marx pranced about in oversized pants and shoes, and sported thick eyebrows, round spectacles and a moustache somewhat similar to Chaplin's. The garb of Laurel and Hardy was reminiscent of Chaplin's as well, even to the bowler hats. Since he possessed the makings of a ridiculous figure in his own body, W.C. Fields had no need to don distorting garments. His huge stomach was sufficiently "lumpish" (in the sense in

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[38] For details of Chaplin's dress see the photos in Isabel Quigly's Charlie Chaplin: the early comedies and in Donald W. McCaffrey's Focus on Chaplin.

which the word has been linked with "clot" and "clod" in this study) sans padding, as were his red blob of a nose and his spindly little legs. His spats and top hat added the finishing touches to an already grotesque figure. Other clowns, now rarely seen, are the Three Stooges, the Bowery Boys and Red Skelton; all dressed in ill-fitting, odd clothing which was but a variation on the costumes described above.

What emerges from this parade of clowns grotesque in body and/or dress is this: the clown embodies in his physical appearance (i.e., his stature and dress) the image of man as lump. Man in his physical aspect is just that - a strange recalcitrant lump, of the earth, grounded in the earth, in short, matter itself in all its inertness and solidity.[39] Man's body is unruly, putting forth protuberances where they are not expected, in the form of humphacks, huge noses and bloated stomachs. It refuses to recognize the proper limits of growth; thus, clowns are either bursting out of clothing

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[39]Grock spoke truer than he perhaps could know when he made this statement about his own ancestry. It is in a certain sense true for all clowns:

> A Bernese peasant is the solidest object ever rooted in this earth. He is in it up to the chest. His arms and head are still left free for him to wave, but the rest of him is encased in the good earth. That's the stock I come from.*

*Adrien Wettach, Grock: Life's A Lark (New York, Benjamin Bloom, 1969), p. 21.

inadequate to contain them or waddling about in garments so huge as to threaten to overwhelm their puny frames. The nature of the clown's costume has further implications. The vestments worn by the clown figures are themselves grotesque in their chaotic mixture of styles and sizes. Very often the clown's costume is in tatters; it is as if the clothing that attempted to define and confine the body has, by association, become infected with the lumpishness, the recalcitrance of the matter it sought to subdue. It is no longer proper (i.e., conforming to standards and expectations) clothing just as the body by its very nature is not proper. The primacy of matter is affirmed.

The significance of this can be more fully grasped if we investigate further how man's physicality and materiality are imaged forth in the clown. Through the ages man's enslavement to the appetites and urges of his body has furnished clowns with much of their material. Clowns from the Greek phallophoroi to such film clowns as Charlie Chaplin and Harpo Marx have portrayed this tyranny which the body exercises over the spirit dwelling within. The two predominant concerns of clowns have traditionally been food (along with its companion, drink) and sex. That this is so can be illustrated with no great difficulty, for situations which involve, directly or indirectly, food or sex are quite common in those fragments of recorded clowning which remain.

It has been suggested by many historians concerned with the subject that all types of Clown have been begotten by the Satyr of Greek Old Comedy, which sprang from earlier phallic rituals and ceremonies of Dionysos.[40] From the Greek phallophoroi to the Roman mimes to the Renaissance Arlecchino clowns were be-phallused.[41] In Italy the clown's crude and salacious patter, entirely devoted to matters such as fertility, reproduction and phallephoric humour, came to be known as Fescennine verse, a term derived from the male organ of generation, fascinum.[42] The word from which "fool" (practically a synonym for "clown", except in the Biblical and mediaeval usage) is derived is the Latin word follis which means "bellows" or "windbag" but can be extended, according to lexicographer Ernest Weekly, to mean "scrotum", the sense which is deemed most applicable here.[43] From very early times one type of mimic fool was associated with the cock, characterized by one early writer on physiognomy as "a stupid bird, insatiably libidinous".[44] Thus from the

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[40] Niklaus, p. 11.

[41] Willeford, p. 11.

[42] Niklaus, p. 19.

[43] Quoted by Willeford, p. 11.

[44] Nicoll, p. 32.

beginnings of clowning (at any rate, as far back as we are able to trace it) the clown is the wearer of the phallus, the concrete symbol of man's enslavement to the demands of his body.

What William Willeford refers to as "the exaggerated sexuality" of clowns was an integral part of the clown character throughout history. A bladder formed into a clear representation of a phallus was often affixed to the bauble of the European court-jester.[45] The jests of the Elizabethan fool, in drama and outside it, were coarse and frequently "frankly indecent", as Olive Busby modestly avers.[46] In the fifteenth-century Fastnacht plays the fool was totally preoccupied with the satisfaction of his sexual drives.[47] A 1599 tract on jesters, Wits Miserie, presumably referring to his delight in all matters sexual, maintains that the clown is "in behaviour a very ape and no man".[48] Several of the characters of the commedia dell'arte were phallus-bearers; furthermore, pandering and chasing after the object of desire were the two activities which constituted most of the entertainment.

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[45] Willeford, p. 11.

[46] Busby, p. 49.

[47] Willeford, p. 81.

[48] Irene Mawer, The Art of Mime (London: Methuen, 1942), p. 109.

Clowns of more recent times have not been phallephoric nor have they been so constantly and crudely lecherous as, for example, the fools of the German Fastnacht plays, but sexual desire and its tendency to lead the clown into perilous and ridiculous situations is still very much a part of the clown's repertoire. Harpo Marx is perhaps the most obvious example of the clown as libido run amok, but there are scores of other clown figures, as diverse as Charlie Chaplin and Jerry Lewis, who wink and ogle their way into many an entangled predicament. The erect and prominent phallus has been replaced by the wink, the leer, the pat on the bottom and the chase, but the theme of enslavement to sexual desires as concretized in running willy-nilly after an object of desire remains basically unchanged.

As strong as (if not stronger than) the clown's interest in sex is his absorption in matters involving food and drink. The clowns evince this practically paramount concern from earliest times. One of the earliest glimpses we catch of the clown, that of "Herakles defrauded of his dinner", centres on food. In Euripides' Cyclops Silenus braves extinction to steal a skinful of wine from the giant.[49] Of the extant ancient Dorian vases which depict

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[49] Disher, Clowns and Pantomimes, p. 17.

comic scenes one shows the figures engaged in a drunken orgy.[50] The Vice in the later mediaeval drama seems to have eaten and drunk huge quantities, according to evidence scattered in the plays.[51] Simplicity, a transitional vice-clown figure in Three Ladies of London (1584) and its sequel (1590), babbles constantly of food and drink.[52] Simplicity scorns Hospitality's invitation to eat and later refuses to mourn his death because:

> He had nothing but beef, bread and cheese for me to eat. Now I would have had some pies, or bag-puddings with great lumps of fat.[53]

Lodge, in the tract referred to earlier, remarks of the jester that if you "feed him in his humour, you shall have his heart".[54] Pickle Herring and John Posset, two Elizabethan clowns, were both adept at miming drunkenness, an aptitude which would suggest that it occupied a significant place in their repertoire.[55] Indeed, an inordinate love of food and drink is one of the clown's earliest characteristics and one which persists throughout

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[50] Nicoll, p. 21.

[51] Busby, p. 41.

[52] Busby, p. 53.

[53] Busby, p. 63.

[54] Mawer, p. 109.

[55] Welsford, p. 289.

the clown's history, as Olive Busby asserts.[56]

Some indication of the extent to which food and drink figured in the commedia dell'arte activities is given by the fact that among the most commonly used properties were sacks, flasks, flour, plates of food and kitchenware.[57] We can further ascertain from records available that many of the lazzi consisted of by-play with food, real or imagined. In one scenario, for instance, Harlequin pretends that his hat is full of cherries which he then consumes and the stones of which he pitches at another character; another lazzo often performed by Harlequin was the mimed catching of a fly, clipping off its wings and eating it.[58] Pulcinella in his lengthy tirades of mockery directed at the lovers was given to using extravagant and interminable food imagery.[59] Zanni, the servant, was the possessor of a gluttonous appetite; he could never resist an immediate meal.[60] Grimaldi was another clown-figure much addicted to food and drink. Gluttony and drunkenness were practically his trademark; his

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[56] Busby, p. 63.

[57] Lea, I, p. 329.

[58] Nicoll, p. 219.

[59] Lea, I, p. 97.

[60] Lea, I, p. 62.

already large trousers were further widened by enormous pockets which housed all sorts of stolen edibles.[61] After 1830 the commonest setting for the English Christmas pantomime was a cluster of sausage shops, in and out of which Clown, Harlequin and Columbine kicked and chased one another, presumably because of a stolen string of sausages.[62]

Just as the expression of the clown's interest in sex was toned down in much of the clowning of recent times so too has been the expression of the clown's all-consuming interest in food. Routines of a somewhat more complicated nature are now to be found in the clown's repertoire. Popov describes such a routine, one of his favourites:

> ... I am getting ready to play the flute in front of a music-stand. I am going to play when, all of a sudden, I notice a carrot sticking out of my apron pocket. I pull it out and hesitate for a moment: which would I rather put in my mouth, the flute or the carrot? I make the audience witness my hesitation. Then, in order to resolve the dilemma, I lick the flute. But that titbit is not to my taste. I now become interested in the carrot. I sniff at it, put it in my mouth - ah! that's better. I give the audience the thumbs-up to show that I am content and crunch up the carrot loudly....[63]

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[61] Hartnoll, pp. 184-185.

[62] Welsford, p. 302.

[63] Oleg Popov, Russian Clown, transl. by Marion Koenig (London: MacDonald, 1970), p. 31.

Chaplin is another clown figure who has made poetry out of food and his desire for it. Some of the most hilarious by-play in his films has centred on the strategems a hungry Charlie resorts to to steal a few hotdogs.[64] Straightforward gluttony is to be found in the Marx Brothers movie Duck Soup when Harpo ravages a popcorn stand, stuffing handfuls of popcorn into his mouth before he utterly wrecks the stand. Outright greed is common in W.C. Fields movies. In The Fatal Glass of Beer, for example, Fields and his wife sit down to a dinner which appears most unappetizing: a huge bowl of soup and a three-foot loaf of bread shaped something like a baseball bat. Fields breaks the loaf in two, carefully placing one piece alongside the other to make certain he will get the bigger one.[65]

The basic appetites of food and sex are not the only aspects of bodily tyranny that are imaged forth by clowns. Body functions such as evacuation of wastes and emission of wind also provide material for clowning. One analyst of American comedy supports this notion in his analysis of two particular pieces of clowning:

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[64]The Champion, In The Park and A Dog's Life are three Chaplin films which contain hot-dog stealing scenes.

[65]William K. Everson, The Art of W.C. Fields (New York: Bonanza Books, 1967), p. 87.

> When Ben Turpin hangs out of a window with his breeches hooked over a turned-on tap, until his trousers swell up to a huge size and finally spurt little jets of water from twenty or thirty holes, the overtones of wind and wee aren't too hard to see. The latter are confirmed by a similar scene. Charlie Chase is about to empty his waterlogged plus-fours in the street, until, scowled at by a passing cop, he hurries quickly away, as if he had been about to commit, if not a crime, at least a nuisance.[66]

What emerges from this exploration of food and sex themes in clown routines is a sense of the relentlessness of the body's demands for satisfaction via consumption or evacuation. Man's finer impulses, whether they be to play a flute or to mourn a dead acquaintance, go by the board when confronted with the body's demands. To satisfy the requirements of that material entity is the sine qua non of his existence. The conflict between man's mind and the fettering restrictions of his body is thereby heightened, for the body is not a mere lump of matter which can be appeased once and for all but rather an organic, changing phenomenon with ever-new needs and wants. It is continually clamouring for feeding, copulation and evacuation and man must provide - scurrying, stealing, fleeing, ever at odds with his body

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[66] Raymond Durgnat, The Crazy Mirror: Hollywood Comedy and the American Image (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), p. 72.

and with the many obstacles to satisfying it.[67] Our concept of the clown as the image of man tyrannized by matter is further substantiated.

Thus far we have discussed similarities in the appearance of clowns throughout history and in the routines of clowns which deal directly or indirectly with food and sex. There remains to be examined a large body of routines which have been touched upon only indirectly, namely, routines which involve the clown's struggle with matter distinct from his material body - with objects and with other people.

Before we consider these, there is another group of routines dealing with the body that ought to be examined first. These routines are related to those which deal with the clown's struggle against objects insofar as in them the body is depicted as a set of independent and often rebellious components, legs and arms having a will of their own and refusing to obey their owners' orders. In a music-hall routine by one of the Briant Brothers the notion of the entire body as recalcitrant object is concretized: when stood upon

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[67] And finally the body betrays the provider, by decaying and ultimately dying. This final betrayal is suggested by the tattered, battered aspect of the clown and particularly by the skeleton-like painted mask of the circus clown.

his feet by his partner, the comic collapses in a coil and cannot be picked up until he is unwound.[68] Here the body is ungovernable machine. The Russian clown Popov illustrates the treachery of legs in his Pasha routine; in this skit the splendidly arrayed Pasha is disturbed to find that he cannot move his legs - they are papier mâché ones (attached to the palanquin) which won't obey him.[69] A Fred Karno football sketch featured Harry Weldon as a doleful goal-keeper who kept trying to fold his arms only to have them slip through one another.[70] Bill Hickey was another music-hall comedian whose limbs persistently rebelled. Hickey would attempt to imitate his partner's dance-steps only to fall over his own feet and kick himself in the face; in the course of the same routine two of his legs would always manage to find their way into one pants-leg, where they would cause poor Hickey no end of trouble.[71] Perhaps the greatest of all available routines of this kind is the drill scene in Chaplin's Shoulder Arms. Throughout the scene Chaplin's elbows, arms, legs and feet seem to have a mind of

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[68] Disher, Clowns and Pantomimes, p. 11.

[69] Popov, p. 61.

[70] Disher, Winkles and Champagne, p. 118.

[71] Douglas Gilbert, American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1940), p. 264.

their own, one determined not to follow the sergeant's orders. The following extract from the scenario is typical:

> Order given to about face. All men execute the move correctly except Charlie - he merely walks (in small steps) to achieve the position. The sergeant has him step forward for instructions after another about face is executed with the same results. Charlie tries the action two times; the drill master then shows him how to point his toe behind him to carry out the action. The little fellow points his toe, throws out one arm and smiles broadly as if he were striking a pose before an admiring audience. Then he tries to turn but gets his legs twisted together and can't make the turn. Twisting more violently with each try he almost falls down. He gives up, shrugging his shoulders in a child-like manner. The leader illustrates the move. Charlie puts his pointed toe in front instead of behind him. Finally he gets it right after one more correction by his instructor. He marches back into ranks (with back to camera) and almost falls over as order is given to about face.[72]

When the clown has effected a truce with his seemingly independent body-parts, his difficulties are not over. Indeed they have just begun. The landscape is filled with objects which pose problems for the clown in one way or another. The clown often tries to make use of an object in a manner in which it was never intended to be used and for a purpose for which it is manifestly unsuited - during a 1480 tournament, for example, one of the fools present tried to rest with his head reclining on a tin pot into which, as he

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[72] Donald W. McCaffrey, ed., Focus on Chaplin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 150.

remarked, he had stuffed a sackful of feathers to make his pillow softer.[73] The scenarii of the commedia dell'arte contain many such episodes in which an object because of its very nature fails to fulfil the clown's purpose. Objects prove treacherous for the commedia dell'arte figures in other ways: the luggage that he carries for his master the Captain is forever slipping out of Arlecchino's grasp; ladders are forever tossing him off and causing him to have a nasty fall.[74] Many of the more magical and spectacular scenes involve objects with their own will; in one scene Clown and Pantaloon are cheated by an object (or a group of objects). They

> purchased the same handkerchiefs at least half a dozen times over, the said handkerchiefs each time ... flying from their pockets to the place whence they had been taken, in front of the clothes shop, and when the motley worthies, subsequently in a rage, drag out the Hebrew to wreak their vengeance on him for his double dealing, they find him to their horror come to pieces in the scuffle, literally turning out to be a bundle of old clothes.[75]

A fantastic landscape teeming with objects ready to thwart the clown figure is presented by the Pinauds, musical clowns

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[73] John Doran, The History of Court Fools (London: Richard Bentley, 1858), p. 60.

[74] Lea, I, p. 78.

[75] Disher, Clowns and Pantomimes, p. 144.

in France during the 1870's:

> One would try to play a guitar, only to be interrupted by a musical pig and a musical cannon which was fired at his back. [In another routine] a peasant is attacked by a bull which he drives off with his umbrella. While he revels in the sensation of victory, his partner sets fire to his hat. It explodes. In despair he lifts his hands to heaven. Down comes a rain of hats and caps, all crushed and shabby. None will fit.[76]

The clown-figure known as the auguste has innumerable difficulties with objects; he is constantly besieged, constantly thwarted in his endeavours. Everything trips him, buckets of water tumble down on him, his musical instrument plays the wrong notes for him.[77] Grock, who spoke of "the terrifyingly inanimate nature of objects", was an auguste who was continually plagued by the recalcitrance of objects about him. "Inanimate objects would change both their weight and substance as soon as I approached them;" he said, "they would turn towards me like shavings to a magnet...."[78] A violin bow tossed into the air eludes him on the way down,[79] a piano is somehow never in the right position, a hat placed

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[76]Disher, Clowns and Pantomimes, pp. 195-196.

[77]Poliakoff, p. 199.

[78]Wettach, p. 75.

[79]Disher, Clowns and Pantomimes, p. 22.

on a piano-lid sneakily slides away.[80] Yet sometimes (albeit rarely) the objects co-operate: Grock will catch the violin-bow, he will play the right tune, the hat will return to its proper place. Grock's routines illustrate well the clown's relationship with objects: whether they act with or against the clown they are unpredictable. In a sense the clown-figure is always a victim for, as Jean-Jacques Mayoux asserts, "he is always prey to the mystery of obstacles, to the incomprehensibility of structures."[81]

Emmett Kelly is given a peanut; he uses a sledge-hammer to crack it and the peanut is smashed. Or he prepares a garden for planting but eats every seed before he is ready to sow.[82] Joe Jackson, the clown-cyclist, fusses over his derelict, about-to-collapse bicycle.[83] Little Tich swings his hammer with gusto, until it smashes his foot and must function as a crutch.[84] The knockabout

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[80]Disher, Clowns and Pantomimes, p. 218.

[81]Jean-Jacques Mayoux, "Beckett and Expressionism," Modern Drama, IX (December 1966-67), p. 239.

[82]Mildred Sandison Fenner and Wolcott Fenner, eds., The Circus: Lure and Legend (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 75.

[83]Disher, Clowns and Pantomimes, p. 202.

[84]Disher, Winkles and Champagne, p. 44.

clown Caron is stymied by a seltzer bottle; he tries to open it by unscrewing the bottom, pulling off the top, and sucking the seltzer through the nozzle - still the bottle withholds its contents. Finally Caron tips the bottle to peer into the nozzle, squeezes it to hold it steady, accidentally pulls the trigger and is doused.[85] Charlie Rivel, the Spanish clown, tries for five minutes to seat himself in an old kitchen chair so that he can get on with playing his guitar; gradually he becomes convinced that the chair is purposefully thwarting him and finally he gives it an angry kick - only to stub his toe.[86] Bill Hickey (of the Bill Hickey - Sadie Nelson music-hall act) suffers many trials in the pursuit of an elusive cigarette paper. Hickey spies the paper on the floor. Then:

> [He] paused, eager and curious, then walked over to pick it up, but every time he stooped his big shoes fanned it out of the way. Then he took off his vest to use for a net. Sneaking up on the paper, he threw himself and the vest at it and fanned the damned thing into the orchestra pit. He crawled to the footlights. Leaning over too far, he lost his balance and tumbled headlong into the scrambling musicians, suspending himself from the footlight rail by his feet. Sadie tugged him halfway out, but could hardly pull for laughing and let him slide back again. Finally she got him out, with almost total loss of pants.[87]

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[85] Gilbert, p. 267.

[86] Fenner and Fenner, p. 30.

[87] Gilbert, p. 264.

W. C. Fields was one film comedian who was always coming up against what one historian of his films termed "the terrible machinations of the inanimate". The following scene from Fields' first film, Pool Sharks, is, according to the same historian, typical of such scenes which are to be found in all his films:

> He saunters into a sunny garden, jauntily swinging a cane which promptly connects with his own head.... A well-paced series of pantomimic misfortunes allows him to sit on a pin, which he extracts in close-up and holds out for audience scrutiny; the pin out of the way, he sits down again, this time on a plate of marshmallows, and finally seeks the safety of a hammock which collapses under him.[88]

The intractibility of objects is the subject of an entire Chaplin film, One A.M.. One film historian describes this little film as "a piece of virtuosity involving Chaplin the mime and the inanimate objects that surrounded and maddened him...." Beds, rugs, stuffed animals unite to conspire against Chaplin. The description which follows captures exactly the sense of beleaguerment conveyed by the film:

> Everything in his grotesque house ... combined to challenge his right and longing to get to bed. In fact, the end of the film saw him tucked up in the bath. The bed itself was a folding one that refused to accept him, and every time he thought he had conquered it, it turned round to fling him out again. It was then a case of Chaplin

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[88]Everson, p. 18.

> versus the bed, as if the horrible object had acquired a leering consciousness and must be approached and defeated with guile, crept up to, inveigled into accepting a sleeper. Of course, in the end it was the bed, not Chaplin, that won.[89]

The imperviousness of the world of matter to man's needs, the sheer arbitrariness and unpredictability of all phenomena is most vividly yet simply depicted, I think, in some of the spotlight routines which clowns have performed. A look at one short piece and another rather lengthy one will suffice to illustrate this point. The first is from an American clown:

> With a pantomimic simplicity that would have delighted Constantine Stanislavski, Emmett Kelly enters the ring carrying a broom: He espies a spot of light, tries to sweep it away. The light shifts; he gives chase; always it eludes him.[90]

The second comes from a Russian clown, Popov. This routine is such that it deserves to be described in its entirety:

> The lights go out in the auditorium and a spotlight draws a circle on the carpet in the ring. Oleg appears. He walks with the air of a tired man whose cares are over at last and who can now take a well-earned rest. In his hands he carries a bag and a little bouquet of flowers. He walks toward the light and goes into the illuminated circle. He warms his hands and his face, turning towards the spotlight with an ecstatic smile and at last settles down on the 'grass'. From his big shopping bag he takes out a bottle of milk and, smiling to himself, he slowly raises it to his lips. But at the moment when, free from care,

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[89] Isabel Quigly, Charles Chaplin: early comedies (London: Studio Vista, 1968), p. 101.

[90] Fenner and Fenner, p. 75.

> he gets ready to drink, the circle of light moves away from him to another part of the ring. Oleg is left in the shadows. He puts the bottle back into his bag, gets up and full of alarm heads for the light. Once more Oleg makes his way into the brilliance; forgetting his recent experience, he once more warms his hands and his face sensually; then he sits down, gets out the bottle of milk, brings it up to his mouth ... and once again the light leaves Oleg and goes back to its original place. Uneasily Oleg gets up and, as if hypnotized, he goes towards the light. He no longer dares to enter the circle of light, he merely strokes the place where it shines in a worried way as if afraid to take it. He pushes it in the opposite direction with his hands and the light obeys him. It moves in the direction which [sic] Oleg wants it to go and arrives, at last, at the place where it had started from. Oleg is satisfied. Once more, after much effort, he stretches out his legs and returns to his place in the sun. He warms the palms of his hands and his face; he sits down and yet again gets out his bottle of milk. But just as he is raising it, Oleg suddenly remembers the danger, his face betrays fear and, not daring to drink his milk, he strokes and encourages the circle of light. The circle does not move. At last, reassured, Oleg drinks his milk. It is at this moment that an alarm signal sounds. Oleg jumps. The circle contracts sharply. The alarm signal sounds a second time. Quickly Oleg gathers the circle into a little glowing spot, which he folds up and puts in his bag. Then he gets up and, a little man weighed down with a bag lit from inside, he leaves the ring.[91]

Because of the richness of light-symbolism, these routines are suggestive of more than the arbitrariness of natural phenomena. Among other things the situation of the clown as outsider is implied: he is outside the shining, warm circle and forever trying to get in. That this attempt

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[91] Popov, pp. 102-103.

is, by the very nature of things, impossible or at least highly improbable is also suggested; Clown as he who is frustrated by the world around him is embodied here.

The clown is outside, vainly trying to become a part of things, not only in relation to the material world but also in relation to the human or social world. He is constantly being rejected by the human world (often in the person of the other in the clown pair); this rejection is most vividly and most frequently expressed in the form of slaps or blows. One clown has belaboured the other since clownery as we know it first began. M. Willson Disher calls this clown pair the butt and the knave; he tracks them back to the designs on Greek vases, to the comedies of Greece and Rome, and finds manifestations of the butt-knave relationship in the Devil and Vice of the mediaeval stage and in Brighella and Arlecchino of the comedia dell'arte.[92] In the twelfth century in the Eastern Empire Zonaras describes "the mimes, who imitate now Arabians, now Armenians, and now slaves, stirring up unseemly merriment by their slaps on the face and by their utterances".[93] Blows administered by one of a clown pair to the other were common fare in the commedia dell'arte. Biancolelli, one of the actors, describes a particular lazzo which was repeated

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[92] Disher, Clowns and Pantomimes, pp. 36-37.

[93] Nicoll, p. 159.

several times in the course of an entertainment:

> I arrive on the stage; there I find Trivelin stretched on the ground. I think him dead and try to drag him to his feet; then I let my wooden sword fall down. He takes it and hits me on the buttocks. I turn round without speaking, and he gives me a kick on the back so that I tumble down. Up I get again; I seize and carry him; I lean him against the wings on the right-hand side of the stage. I look round at the footlights, and meanwhile he gets up and leans against the left-hand side-wings.[94]

The delivering of blows in clown routines was so common that one type of clowning characterized chiefly by physical pranks came to be known as "slapstick", after the split paddle that was used to launch a resounding but relatively painless whack. The clowns at the circus in nineteenth-century France had their faces smacked constantly - so much so that Gustave Frejaville in Au Music-Hall reported that the cheeks of the clowns had skin with the texture of wood.[95] Two twentieth-century clowns who depicted the constant abuse of Clown by the other are Weber and Fields. Weber was short and with his stage-padding nearly as wide as he was tall; the wiry Fields pushed, strangled and pummelled this small blob of humanity. Their exit epitomized their relationship: Weber shrieked as he was hustled off-stage, "Don't poosh me, Myer!"[96]

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[94] Nicoll, p. 221.

[95] Disher, Clowns and Pantomimes, p. 13.

[96] Albert F. McLean, Jr., American Vaudeville as Ritual (University of Kentucky Press, 1965), p. 56.

Another aspect of the clown's outsideness is his state of literally being an outcast from society. In Greek and Roman times dwarfs and cripples wandered about from place to place earning what they could by clowning. A similar situation existed in the Middle Ages and in early Renaissance times; the clown had in some way or other been outcast from society. One of the commonest clown figures is the tramp clown or the hobo clown, the impoverished, tattered figure who has no place in respectable drawing rooms. The characters portrayed by Chaplin in his films are often imposters - a waiter posing as a count in order to get into a party, a convict posing as a preacher; often they are beggars, immigrants, unemployed poor - all people "outside" society. A savagely cruel piece enacted by the clowns Foottit and Chocolat crystallizes the nature of the clown's position vis à vis society. It takes place at a railway station:

> Three passengers arrive, an elegant horseman, a stable-boy and Chocolat. Foottit, as the guard, consults a huge watch and announces in a mock-heroic tone and gesture the impending departure of the train. To the horseman, who travels first, he speaks with the most profound respect - cap in hand, he hangs on his words to anticipate every wish, conducts him to his compartment, and fusses over him like a mother. The stable-boy, second-class, is told to hurry up. Chocolat, seeing this, scratches his head and mutters, "I wonder what he'll do to me?" Foottit asks, "What class?" The poor wretch cannot speak. "What?" On confessing "Third,"

> he is treated not with scorn but with slaps and blows, then flung to the ground and bombarded with his luggage. As he hurries to his seat, Foottit mutters something about whether he is expected to keep a train waiting for a negro and third-class at that.[97]

It is always the other or the others who are "in the know", "in the in-group". The clown is outside: he is confused, deceived, beaten, rejected either by his closest associate, the second in the clown pair, or by society as a whole, or, more often, by both. The apartness, the outside-ness of the clown has been a characteristic which has continued through the ages. Indeed, the word "mask", that symbol of strangeness and otherness, comes from the Arabic word for "clown", maskharat.[98]

The clown, then, is a victim of the treachery of humankind as well as of his own body and the material universe; this treachery is reflected in the unreliability and capriciousness of language, the medium of human communication. In his encounters with language the clown is once more prey to "the incomprehensibility of structures". The naming of things seems a mysterious process to him; there is an unbridgeable gap between the agreed-upon name and the thing. Dan Leno (as the Grocer in

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[97] M. Willson Disher, Fairs Circuses and Music Halls (London: William Collins, 1942), p. 41.

[98] Disher, p. 28.

"Our Stores") comments upon the inscrutability of words:

> There is a sort of mystery in the word 'egg'. There are newly-laid eggs, there are fresh eggs and there are eggs. That is the egg I am talking about. It is the egg which causes all the trouble. You dare not kick it. It's got no face.[99]

The notion of the arbitrariness (and the resulting propensity to confuse and deceive its user) of language is present in the earliest of Greek clowning. The fifth century B.C. Epicharmus wrote plays full of puns. One fragment points up the arbitrariness of the naming process:

> A. What's this?
> B. A tripod, of course.
> A. But hasn't it got four legs? That isn't a tripos; it's a tetrapos surely.
> B. Well, it's usually called tripos, though it certainly has four legs.
> A. Then it must have once been an Oedipos - you're thinking of his riddle now.[100]

Down through the ages the double-facedness of language has ensnared the clown. Because of his problems with language he has committed the pun, the malapropism, the distorted echo and the ridiculous coined word. The Elizabethan clown twisted language to make obscure riddles and quibbles;[101] the mock-learned disquisitions of the Elizabethans were a kind of language-stew: odds and ends of exhortations,

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[99] Ernest Short, Fifty Years of Vaudeville (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1946), p. 144.

[100] Nicoll, p. 41.

[101] Busby, pp. 23-24 and p. 14.

dog-Latin and religious tags which rarely, if ever, "deviated into sense".[102] One Elizabethan clown, Turnop in Munday's John a Kent and John a Cumber, was in the habit of repeating a word with slight variations, as in "Chance persuadeth you to remit, or submit, or admit yourselfe to the crye of your brethren".[103] It was as if any of them might do, or none of them might do; he was not certain of how these words acted exactly, so the safest course was to include all of those tricky variations. Here Clown is wandering in a maze of words, no one of which seems to have a greater claim to usage than another.

Many of the commedia dell'arte figures seem to have lacked even Turnop's somewhat shaky proficiency with words; the Doctor went about directing bombastic, malapropism-riddled, pun-filled tirades at all who would listen,[104] Pantaleon addressed strangers in the street in "tirades of bombastic nonsense, utterly meaningless and incomprehensible",[105] the braggart Captain was a declaimer of

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[102] Busby, p. 15.

[103] Busby, pp. 45-46.

[104] Lea, I, pp. 28-31.

[105] Doran, p. 27.

hyperboles in a "windy war of words".[106] Riddles and quibbles dependent on the vagaries of language were also common.[107]

The clowns of music-hall and vaudeville were continually collapsing into pun, malapropism, circumlocution or some other form of verbal mistake. Words slipped out of their grasp and presented a strange, new face to them, a new meaning which changed entirely the substance of their talk and revealed to them that all was fluidity, uncertainty in the realm of language. Only misunderstanding was possible where there was no firm ground of communication but instead a Humpty-Dumpty landscape where words were likely to change their meaning overnight. Consider, for example, the crazy world of logic merged with distorted echo revealed in this common vaudeville pun:

> Customer: How much are your hyacinths?
> Sylvia: Two shillings a bunch, sir.
> Customer: Why, yesterday they were a shilling.
> Sylvia: Yes; but they're higher since.[108]

Such puns were staple ingredients in vaudeville routines. An essential element of the pun was that it thwarted expectation, it confused (momentarily at least) - it was

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[106] Lea, I, pp. 43-44.

[107] Lea, I, p. 69.

[108] Short, p. 20.

the verbal equivalent of the physical trials imposed on the clown by objects. Here is another example of this kind of clowning, a vaudeville turn by Doris and Elsie Waters:

> Elsie: 'E's got lumbago.
> Doris: 'As 'e 'ad it before?
> Elsie: No, 'e always 'as it behind.[109]

The craziness of language was revealed in all its fullness by the Marx Brothers, who became entangled in strands of meaning until a given word was rendered meaningless. In A Night at the Opera they do this with the word "party":

> Groucho: "The party of the first part shall be known in this contract as the party of the first part."
>
> Chico: It sounds a little better this time.
>
> Groucho: Well, it grows on you. Want to hear it once more?
>
> Chico: Only the first part.
>
> Groucho: The party of the first part?
>
> Chico: No. The first part of the party of the first part.
>
> Groucho: Well, it says "The first part of the party of the first part shall be known in this contract" - look! Why should we quarrel about a thing like that? (he tears off the offending clause) We'll take it right out.
>
> Chico: (tearing the same clause out of his contract) Sure, it's too long anyhow. Now what have we got left?

[109] Short and Compton-Rickett, p. 133.

Groucho: Well, I've got about a foot and a half... Now, then: "The party of the second part shall be known in this contract as the party of the second part."

Chico: Well, I don't know. I don't like the second party, either.

Groucho: You should have come to the first party. We didn't get home till around four in the morning. (slight pause) I was blind for three days.

Chico: Look, couldn't the first part of the second party be the second part of the first party? Then we got something.

Groucho: Look! Rather than go through all that again, what do you say? (he indicates a willingness to tear further).

Chico: Fine.

They both tear off another piece.[110]

Their breaking of the rules is signified by the tearing up of the contract, container of legal jargon - language at its most solemn absurd; language in all its arbitrariness has become their plaything, as they refuse to (or cannot, perhaps,) take such jargon seriously.

What emerges from this consideration of the characteristics exhibited by the various manifestations of Clown through the ages is an image of one stymied, one thwarted. Clown is, metaphorically speaking,

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[110] Groucho Marx and Richard J. Anobile, The Marx Bros. Scrapbook (New York: Darien House, 1973), p. 222.

> naked man who has happened not upon his own clothing but upon cast-off garments, in which he masquerades, disguises himself, absurdly and grotesquely....[111]

His situation is that of a stranger in a hostile universe. His lump of a body weighs him down by its grossness and makes not-to-be-denied demands to have its appetites satisfied; he must comply, or the punishment is terrible. The material universe has its own laws, strange and incomprehensible, and often the scheme has no room for him in it. He is an outcast from human society, rejected because of his otherness, his inability to conform to social laws or to the equally arbitrary laws of language. He is essentially de trop. But he is there - in the universe though not of it - and he has nowhere else to go. Since he is an alien he is punished: by his material case, by the world of matter, by man and by men. Blows, rejection, deception, confusion are his lot. Clown is, essentially, he who gets slapped - not once but a million times, not one way but a million ways. Yet he is a small hero. Beaten, confused, rejected, he is still the possessor of unquenchable vitality. He goes on, attempting again and again to accomplish an impossible feat, to overcome "the incomprehensibility of structures". The routine itself - the repeated efforts to achieve this impossible pensum -

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[111] Mayoux, p. 239.

becomes the index of his triumph. His small but very important heroism ultimately lies in this: that, like Beckett's tramps Vladimir and Estragon, he has kept his appointment. In a hostile universe. To be slapped.

SECTION II

THE EXISTENTIALISTS: MAN AS CLOWN

The man we have to do with is the man of flesh and bone - I, you, reader of mine, the other man yonder, all of us who walk solidly on the earth. And this concrete man, this man of flesh and bone, is at once the subject and supreme object of all philosophy....

- Miguel de Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life

... the whole work of man really seems to consist in nothing but proving to himself every minute that he is a man and not a piano-key.

- Fyodor Dostoevsky, Notes from Underground

The mortal microcosm cannot forgive the relative immortality of the macrocosm. The whiskey bears a grudge against the decanter.

- Samuel Beckett, Proust

The foregoing analysis of clowns throughout the ages leads one to perceive some rather striking resemblances between the situation of Clown and that of the individual as it is described by certain writers who have been labelled "existentialists". These parallels, while of interest in themselves, are of particular relevance for a study of Samuel Beckett's art, as they throw light on both the structure of his writings and the image of man embodied therein. In this section I intend to delineate those parallels which appear to exist by means of a discussion of "existential man" - that is, the individual in his situation in the universe as viewed by certain "existentialist" writers. Once some of the main characteristics of "existential man" have been established, both terms to be compared, the situation of Clown and that of "existential man", will have been considered in some detail, and the similarities between them may then emerge in all their significance.

As in the discussion of the clown, I propose to employ a thematic approach in this consideration of "existential man". Before this can be developed, however, certain issues must be dealt with first.

Certain very real difficulties exist for anyone so bold as to attempt a schematic account of those currents of thought and feeling which have been given the collective label "existentialism". That there is an "-ism" has been

seriously questioned; many historians of "existentialism" have doubted that there is any unified system that can be subsumed under the name "existentialism". F.H. Heineman maintains that no single definition of "existentialism" can be found:

> What is existentialism? Can this question be answered at all? If it is meant to imply the demand for a real definition, it cannot, for there is no single entity or essence to which this word corresponds. There is not one philosophy called existentialism, but several philosophies.... There is no set of principles common to them all, nor do they share a well-defined method....[1]

Walter Kaufmann's view is substantially the same:

> Existentialism is not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy. Most of the living "existentialists" have repudiated this label.... [Existentialism] is not a school of thought nor reducible to any set of tenets.[2]

No possible definition, no common set of principles, no common philosophical method: how then can one speak of a philosophy called "existentialism"? That there are grounds of unity is not to be denied - the very persistence of writers on the subject in grouping certain authors attests

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[1] F.H. Heineman, "The Challenge of Existentialism," in Robert N. Beck, ed., Perspectives in Philosophy: A Book of Readings (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), p. 392.

[2] Walter Kaufmann, ed., Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1956), p. 11.

to this. These grounds are at best, however, general ones - ones which permit us to speak of "a tendency" or "a preoccupation" rather than "a philosophy", for the connotations of organized, abstract system which the latter term carries are inapplicable to writings which in differing ways emphasize the individual's subjective experience and are in revolt against philosophical systems. The common focus of writers of "existentialist" tendency is a concern with the immediate subjective experience of the individual. This preoccupation distinguishes them from those (such as rationalists, naturalists) who view the individual as a component of a world-system; in the "existentialist" view human existence - the particular individual and his awareness of his situation in the universe - is of supreme importance.[3] Insofar as they emphasize the subjective consciousness of the unique individual, the writers labelled "existentialist" may be grouped. This is the view

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[3]Such a focussing on the subjective experience of the individual can be found in the writings of almost every century (e.g., in St. Augustine's Confessions, the Anglo-Saxon "The Seafarer", Pascal's Pensées), but it is only in this century that the "existential" tendency has manifested itself to such a degree in theology, literature and philosophy. The exhortation to look inward, one may hypothesize, appealed to a civilization racked by two World Wars, a world-wide depression, a 'Europe of turbulence, despair, collapsing traditions, and disenchantment with "isms" and "dogmas"'.

widely held among whose who have written about "existentialism". Joseph Mihalich points out the central focus:

> ... existentialism is ... philosophy that centers its analysis on the factor of individual human existence - the fact of the individual's own existence in a concrete and often hostile world. Existentialism's frame of reference in analyzing reality is the individual's own frame of reference - his own fears and hopes and encounters and crises.[4]

Mihalich is supported in his statement by the editors of The Fabric of Existentialism:

> Following Kierkegaard, other existentialists have invariably started with the individual, and have made the immediate subjective experience of the individual the primary source of their philosophic data.[5]

Maurice Friedman, another writer on the subject, suggests that "With the existential subject we have reached the heartland of existentialism...."[6] Frederick Patka states that "the individual existent" is the subject of "existentialist" writings and that "the individual existent"

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[4]Joseph Mihalich, "Jean-Paul Sartre," in Frederick Patka, Existentialist Thinkers and Thought (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 127.

[5]Richard Gill and Ernest Sherman, eds., The Fabric of Existentialism: Philosophical and Literary Sources (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 14.

[6]Maurice Friedman, ed., The Worlds of Existentialism: A Critical Reader (New York: Ramdom House, 1964), p. 111.

is of concern as a vital, concrete, being:

> The individual existent is a concrete, singular, unique, original, free and responsible person.... man as a contingent, finite and transient being represents Bios - life in all its concreteness and singularity....[7]

From the statements of these writers, it would seem that the unifying motif in "existentialist" writings is the focus on the particular, unique individual, the man of flesh and bone, and on the situation of the particular individual as he perceives it.

It grows increasingly clear that we are not dealing with an organized philosophical system but rather with a climate of thought and opinion which loosely coalesces around the notion of the primary importance of the individual-in-situation and that, in the words of Messrs. Gill and Sherman,

> ... anyone who attempts to acquire a comprehensive and unified view of existentialism soon discovers that there is no royal road to follow, only a labyrinthine path disconcertingly strewn with paradoxes.[8]

I have chosen to deal with this problem by high-lighting certain facets of that many-faceted prism called

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[7]Frederick Patka, Existentialist Thinkers and Thought, p. 16.

[8]Gill and Sherman, eds., The Fabric of Existentialism, p. 4.

"existentialism"; those themes which are discussed in this study are those which have to do with "existentialist" writers' descriptions of "man's ambivalent and anomalous status in the universe". Furthermore, my treatment of these themes is a literary one; it is neither my intention nor my province to present a philosophical analysis of these notions - I am merely noting recurrences which, I maintain, emerge in a particular manner in the art of Samuel Beckett. Accordingly, I do not deal with the ethical prescriptions advanced by these writers of "existentialist" tendency; the subject of authentic existence versus inauthentic existence is left to the perusal of philosophers.[9] It may perhaps be argued that this is to misrepresent the "existentialist" position; however, I contend that, while one's act of selection and arrangement must also inevitably be an act of interpretation, my account of certain themes dwelt upon by "existentialist" writers is true to and does convey the mood of their writings on man's ontological condition.

Keeping in mind the difficulties involved, let us now return to our consideration of certain themes common to

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[9] Sight is not lost of the fact, however, that these writers "maintain an unwavering focus upon the self as a free and responsible agent standing over against the passivity and fixity of identifiable objects". Its presence can be felt as an implicit force throughout my discussion.

"existentialist" writings. It has become evident that the main focus, insofar as there is one, of "existentialism" is the individual and his experience as he interprets it. All other notions about "existential man" grow out of this seminal one. Maurice Friedman hints at some of these notions in the following statement:

> Man is the creature whose existence is limited in space and time and who knows it; the creature whose life is conditioned by his knowledge of death. He has to face the infinite and know that it is infinite and he is finite.[10]

Frederic Patka's description of the human condition deals with other related themes:

> Man ... is an "insecure" existent, being under the constant tension created by the bio-spiritual conflict immanent in his constitution. Man finds himself in the situation of "suspense"; that is, being torn apart by the polarity of his psycho-somatic nature, each part demanding the satisfaction of related needs and wants without a final equilibrium ever to be achieved. It is a condition of unbalance, unrest, anguish and ambivalence.[11]

In varying degrees, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre and Camus - all of whom figure prominently in "existentialist" philosophy either as

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[10]Maurice Friedman, Problematic Rebel: Melville, Dostoievsky, Kafka, Camus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 462.

[11]Frederick Patka, Existentialist Thinkers and Thought, p. 36.

influences (Pascal and Nietzsche), major writers (Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Heidegger and Sartre), or popularizers (Sartre and Camus) - all treat of the condition of the individual as one of "unbalance, unrest, anguish and ambivalence".[12] Although these writers differ greatly from one another in their methods of philosophizing and in their theories of how "existential man" can lead an "authentic" life, certain themes are to be found in the works of each. These themes are: the primary importance of the concrete individual existing in situations, the contingency of the individual, the finiteness of the individual, and the sense of alienation and estrangement from the universe experienced by the individual. That these concepts are inextricably linked to one another and that any division of them into separate areas is somewhat arbitrary is evident, but it is necessary to have some sort of ordering principle in a discussion of this nature. Accordingly, I have chosen to treat these themes separately in discussing the writings of each philosopher, insofar as it is possible to do this. Overlapping is to be expected, as are differing emphases on various themes by different writers. Nevertheless, the image of man and of the human condition reflected in the themes dealt with is, I maintain,

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[12] It is hoped that the justification for including Pascal and Nietzsche in this company will become apparent as this work develops.

basically a unified one.

Although he can by no means be called an "existentialist" proper, Blaise Pascal, the seventeenth-century mathematician and religious philosopher, must figure in this study because his Pensées constitute a kind of prelude to the "existentialist" ambience of the twentieth century. There could be no better overture to a discussion of the "existentialists'" treatment of the concepts of finiteness, contingency and estrangement than a sampling of Pascal's insights on man and his situation. Pascal's work is permeated with a sense of the concrete man grounded in the world of matter. Man, he points out, is always in a relationship:

> There is a relation between man and everything that he knows. He needs space to contain him, time in which to exist, motion in order to live, warmth and food to nourish [him], air to breathe; he sees light; he feels bodies; in short he has a relationship with everything.[13]

It is man's senses which relate him to the physical world. These same senses weigh him down and limit him:

> The mind of the sovereign judge of the world is not so independent that it is not liable to be disturbed by the first sound that makes itself heard anywhere near it....
> Do not be surprised if it does not reason well at the moment; a fly buzzes in its ears; it is enough to make it incapable of giving sound advice. If you want it to discover the truth,

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[13] Pascal's Pensées, trans. Martin Turnell (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 151.

> drive away the animal which interferes with its thought and upsets its powerful intelligence which rules over towns and kingdoms. What a comic god it is! O ridicolosissime heroe![14]

Man's relationship to the universe as a whole is that of a stranger because of the limitations of his senses. Pascal conveys this idea with great eloquence:

> Limited in every direction, this middle state between two extremes is characteristic of all our faculties. Our senses do not register extremes; too much noise deafens us; too much light dazzles us; too great or too short a distance impedes our view; too long or too short an address makes it obscure; too strong a dose of truth staggers us ...; first principles are too obvious for us; too much pleasure incommodes us.... Qualities which are excessive are inimical to us....
> That is our veritable condition. It is that which makes us incapable either of certain knowledge or of absolute ignorance. We float over a vast expanse, always uncertain and drifting, tossed hither and thither. Whatever the point to which we seek to attach ourselves to consolidate our position, it shifts and leaves us; and if we follow it, it eludes our grasp, slips away and flies from us in unending flight. Nothing stops for us. It is the state which is natural to us, and at the same time the one most contrary to our inclinations; we burn with the desire to find a stable position, a solid base for building a tower which will rise to infinity; but our entire foundations crack; the earth opens like a vast abyss.[15]

As William Barrett has noted, and as this passage illustrates, "No other writer has expressed more powerfully than Pascal

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[14] Pascal's Pensées, p. 64.

[15] Pascal's Pensées, pp. 150-151.

the radical contingency that lies at the heart of human existence...."[16] The felt quality of his descriptions of the individual's bewilderment at the sheer arbitrary fact of his own existence, at what Heidegger calls the fact of our "thrownness" into the world, is indeed uniquely moving. The following passage is typical:

> I do not know who placed me in the world, what the world is, what I myself am; I am in a state of terrible ignorance about everything.... I see the terrifying spaces of the universe which imprison me, and I find myself planted in a tiny corner of this vast space without my knowing why I happen to be here rather than in some other place, or why the brief space of life that is mine has been allocated to me at this point rather than another in all the eternity of time which will come after me. I see only infinities on all sides which enclose me like an atom and like a shadow which only lasts for a second that will not return.[17]

Because of this sense of lostness and bewilderment, the individual is constantly engaged in a search, a quest for certainty and repose. According to Pascal, "Our nature consists in motion" as we rove from the past to the future in search of stability and happiness.[18] Restlessness also characterizes the relationship of the individual to others;

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[16] William Barrett, Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy (New York: Doubleday, 1962), p. 116.

[17] Pascal's Pensées, p. 37.

[18] Pascal's Pensées, p. 348 and p. 64.

"there is always an interest in making others love us," he remarks elsewhere in the Pensées.[19] The desperate nature of the individual's search for ways to cope with his terrible situation is suggested in Pascal's statement that "Men's sole good ... lies in the discovery of some form of distraction which will stop them from thinking about their condition...."[20]

In the Pensées of Pascal the predicament of man alone, man struggling is delineated with a vividness and a sense of anguish previously unparalleled.[21] Against this background we may now proceed to look at what Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre and Camus have thought about the individual and his situation.

Kierkegaard is the philosopher who stands at the fountain-head of "existentialism", for "It is he who sounds the clarion call that is echoed and re-echoed in all existentialism - the evocation of the existential subject".[22]

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[19] Pascal's Pensées, p. 348.

[20] Pascal's Pensées, p. 108.

[21] One might argue that this sense is conveyed just as vividly in the Book of Job; however, union with God makes all come right in that work. Although Pascal advocates turning to God, the sense of man's solitude remains.

[22] Maurice Friedman, To Deny Our Nothingness: Contemporary Images of Man (New York: Dell, 1967), p. 263. It must be noted that while for purposes of this study we must focus on Kierkegaard's emphasis on the individual, the central problem for Kierkegaard is "to become a Christian" - i.e. the individual's relationship with God.

Kierkegaard, in reaction to the Hegelianism of his time,[23] focussed on the individual existence and particularly on his own existence; in its insistence on the primary importance of the individual this excerpt from Concluding Unscientific Postscript is typical:

> Being an individual man is a thing that has been abolished, and every speculative philosopher confuses himself with humanity at large; whereby he becomes something infinitely great, and at the same time nothing at all.... To be a particular individual is world-historically absolutely nothing, infinitely nothing - and yet, this is the only true and highest significance of a human being, so much higher as to make every other significance illusory.[24]

"To be a particular individual" - this is the cry that sounds in Kierkegaard's works again and again.[25] To call attention to the importance of the individual was his mission, as he conceived of it:

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[23]Kaufman, ed., Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, p. 16 and Gill and Sherman, eds., The Fabric of Existentialism, p. 14.

[24]Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 113; p. 134.

[25]He even wrote: "... if I were to desire an inscription for my tombstone, I should desire none other than "That Individual".

> I marked the beginning of the literary production over my own name by the category of "the individual," and that remained as a stereotyped formula, showing that this thing of the individual is not a later invention of mine but my first thought. With the category of the individual is bound up any importance I may have. If that category was right, if that category was in place, if I saw rightly at this point and understood rightly that it was my task ... to call attention to it, if that was the task given me to do, albeit with inward sufferings such as certainly are seldom experienced, and with outward sacrifices such as a man is not every day willing to make - in that case I stand fast and my works with me.[26]

It was Kierkegaard who first used the term "existentialism".[27] He felt that "existence" provided the best technical description of the individual's situation, since the meaning of the root word "existere" is "to stand out from" or "away from" or "apart from", thus carrying a sense of the separation of the individual from the universe in which he must live.[28] The idea of being apart from the world while in it (one stands out from a background) is conveyed by the term "existence" as thus interpreted. The

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[26]Kierkegaard, "That Individual," in Kaufmann, ed., Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, p. 99.

[27]Colin Wilson, Introduction to the New Existentialism (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), p. 20.

[28]Nathan A. Scott Jr., The Unquiet Vision: Mirrors of Man in Existentialism (New York: Excalibur Books, 1969), p. 24.

sense of separation becomes strongest when the individual sees himself as apart from the universe in which he dwells, as somehow an "accident", a superfluity. In an 1843 work Kierkegaard gives expression to this sense of contingency:

> One sticks one's finger into the soil to tell by the smell in what land one is: I stick my finger into existence - it smells of nothing. Where am I? Who am I? How came I here? What is this thing called the world? What does the word mean? Who is it that has lured me into the thing and now leaves me there?... How did I come into the world? Why was I not consulted, why not made acquainted with its manners and customs but thrust into the ranks...? How did I obtain an interest in this big enterprise they call reality? Why should I have an interest in it? Is it not a voluntary concern? And if I am compelled to take part in it, where is the director?[29]

The individual as uncertain questioner in a foreign land appears again in another work. Here the individual is seen as a wanderer in a star-lit forest, longing to make contact with nature. There is no union achieved with nature; the wanderer is excluded, de trop:

> Now the surprise expressed by the trees, if it can be said that the trees looked down in surprise upon the wanderer, explains nothing. And the wood's echo makes very clear indeed that it explains nothing. No, as an impregnable fortress throws back the attack of the enemy, so the echo throws back the voice no matter how loudly the wanderer shouts. ... And what a puzzling arrangement the army of stars presents! ... the stars are so far away that they cannot see the wanderer. It is only the wanderer who can see the stars, hence there may

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[29] Kierkegaard, Repetition, quoted in Nathan Scott, The Unquiet Vision, p. 20.

> come no agreement between him and the stars. So this melancholy of poetical longing is grounded in a deep misunderstanding, because the lonely wanderer is everywhere surrounded in nature by that which does not understand him....[30]

The individual, then, is irrevocably separate, apart, by the very fact of his existing. A sense of uncertainty and flux arises from this condition of separation, and with it a concomitant sense of dread. Kierkegaard devotes two of his works, The Concept of Dread and Fear and Trembling, to a consideration of these feelings of the individual. This passage from The Concept of Dread deals with the terrors of uncertainty:

> He who is educated by dread is educated by possibility, and only the man who is educated by possibility is educated in accordance with his infinity. Possibility is therefore the heaviest of all categories.... When such a person, therefore, goes out from the school of possibility, and knows more thoroughly than a child knows the alphabet he can demand of life absolutely nothing, and that terror, perdition, annihilation, dwell next door to every man, and has learned the profitable lesson that every dread which alarms may the next instant become a fact, he will then interpret reality differently, he will extol reality, and even when it rests upon him heavily he will remember that after all it is far, far lighter than the possibility was.[31]

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[30] Søren Kierkegaard, Purity of Heart Is To Will One Thing, trans. Douglas Steere (London: Fontana Books, 1961), pp. 42-43.

[31] Kierkegaard's The Concept of Dread, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), pp. 139-140.

Elsewhere in the same work he states that "In dread there is the egoistic infinity of possibility, which does not tempt like a definite choice, but alarms and fascinates with its sweet anxiety."[32] One aspect of this "infinity of possibility" is the ever-present possibility of death, the ultimate manifestation of the individual's finiteness. The life of the individual is thus permeated with a sense of uncertainty:

> ... and in the same degree that I become subjective, the uncertainty of death comes more and more to interpenetrate my subjectivity dialectically. It thus becomes more and more important for me to think it in connection with every factor and phase of life; for since the uncertainty is there in every moment, it can be overcome only by overcoming it in every moment.[33]

Separate, excluded from the natural world and the world of "the crowd", "existential man" as portrayed by Kierkegaard must live and choose alone in the face of the awful abyss of possibility. He travels the "solitary path, narrow and steep" of the knight of faith. Life for the individual is one of struggle and decision - his situation is that of Abraham in the story of Abraham and Isaac.[34]

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[32] Kierkegaard's The Concept of Dread, p. 55.

[33] Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 149.

[34] Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling explores this parable at great length and exhaustively inquires into its implications for the individual.

Man existing is for Kierkegaard the solitary man struggling in his particular, unique situation, as Abraham struggles in his situation; as in Pascal's Pensées so in Kierkegaard's writings the sense of the concrete struggle and limitations of the individual are paramount.

Although, as Walter Kaufman points out, "existentialism suggests only a single facet of Nietzsche's multifarious influence", he did have enormous influence on Heidegger and Jaspers, to name only two "existentialist" philosophers,[35] and he, like Kierkegaard, has at the center of his philosophy "the individual human personality ... struggling for self-realization".[36] The thrust of Nietzsche's entire oeuvre is toward the prime importance of the unique experience of the individual. In writing of Schopenhauer's philosophy he condemns all philosophy which is not directly related to the living actualities of individual experience and therefore of immediate relevance to the individual:

> The study of all quarter-philosophers is attractive only insofar as we see how they immediately make for those spots in the edifice of a great philosophy where the scholarly pro and con, and reflection, doubt, and contradiction

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[35] Kaufmann, Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, p. 22; p. 43.

[36] Barrett, Irrational Man, p. 13.

> are permitted; and thus they avoid the challenge of every great philosophy which, when taken as a whole, always says only: this is the image of all life, and from this learn the meaning of your life! And conversely: Read only your own life, and from this understand the hieroglyphs of universal life.[37]

Furthermore, he suggests that Schopenhauer's philosophy ought always to be interpreted "by the single human being alone for himself, to gain some insight into his own misery and need, into his own limitation...."[38]

One of the main themes of Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra is the primary importance of the individual. The single self is exalted:

> Sense and spirit are instruments and toys: behind them lies the Self. The Self seeks with the eyes of the sense, it listens too with the ears of the spirit.... Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage - he is called Self. He lives in your body, he is your body.[39]

No abstract notion of the Self does Nietzsche have in mind; rather he stresses the uniqueness and contingency of each

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[37]Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Challenge of Every Great Philosophy," in Kaufmann, ed., Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, pp. 103-104.

[38]Nietzsche, "The Challenge of Every Great Philosophy," p. 104.

[39]Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1961), p. 62.

individual:

> At bottom, every human being knows very well that he is in this world just once, as something unique, and that no accident, however strange, will throw together a second time into a unity such a curious and diffuse plurality....[40]

The condition of this unique individual is solitude. Nietzsche speaks of himself as a "solitary", one "standing aside, outside"[41] and of Schopenhauer as "an out and out solitary".[42] His creation Zarathustra is one of the most solitary of men.

The unique, solitary individual is of primary importance because of "the death of God"; this is Nietzsche's declaration of man's utter separation from nature and any transcendent order. The individual is alone and must struggle and choose in a world without God, a world of chaos. The madman in The Gay Science eloquently expresses the sense of disorientation and terror which man's separateness in a world without God inspires:

> Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward,

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[40] Nietzsche, "The Challenge of Every Great Philosophy," p. 101.

[41] Nietzsche, "The Will to Power," in Kaufmann, ed., Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, p. 110.

[42] Nietzsche, "The Challenge of Every Great Philosophy," p. 102.

> sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space?[43]

The agonized questioning of the madman conveys vividly that sense of uncertainty and flux which is described in Thus Spoke Zarathustra as the subject of "the best images and parables":

> I call it evil and misanthropic, all this teaching about the one and the perfect and the unmoved and the sufficient and the intransitory.... But the best images and parables should speak of time and becoming....[44]

Nietzsche certainly followed his own dictum, for his work is filled with a sense of the problematic situation of the individual, a sense of the uncertainty and transience of all things in the vast chaos of the universe and, above all, a sense of the "becoming" of the individual - the solitary struggle of the individual to become a self and understand that self.[45] In sum, Nietzsche helped to articulate the situation of "existential man" insofar as the thrust of his writings was towards

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[43]Nietzsche, The Gay Science, in Kaufmann, ed., Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, p. 105.

[44]Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, pp. 110-111.

[45]Nietzsche, The Gay Science, in Kaufmann, ed., Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, p. 107.

> [a] laying bare what it means for man to live in a world in which he is, as it were, utterly alone, and in a world which is therefore without any meaning or purpose except that which man himself manages to confer upon it.[46]

Another philosopher who (in the early stages of his philosophy) focussed on the struggle of the individual existent was Martin Heidegger, a fellow-countryman of Nietzsche. Heidegger, without doubt the most abstruse of "existentialist writers",[47] attempted to show how the particular being of man, existence, is distinguished from other kinds of being; his method of doing this was to analyze human existence and describe its unique characteristics.

Heidegger refers to the individual existent throughout his works as Dasein, "being-there". For him the primary aspect of the individual's existence is that he is spatially located, in-the-world, a unique existent in a context - inextricably connected and related whether he wishes it or not. This fact of being-there Heidegger calls

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[46] Scott, The Unquiet Vision, p. 82. This is a grim freedom but freedom nevertheless, absolute and entire.

[47] It will be noted that I am heavily indebted to secondary sources for my treatment of the existential aspects of Heidegger's philosophy. This is unavoidable, as even these commentators find it very difficult to pierce the denseness of Heidegger's prose in order to grasp the thought expressed therein.

Faktizität or factuality; man is thrown-into-the-world. The Dasein finds itself in a situation; the individual is, in other words, limited by the "givens" of his particular environment.[48] The individual is essentially contingent and finite.

The individual is thrown-into-the-world. His being there is not, however, the being of rocks and trees and other inanimate objects, since he is endowed with consciousness and has an existence which is uniquely his. Heidegger calls the particular being of human individuals "Existenz". Hans Jaeger elaborates on the connotations of this term for Heidegger:

> The word "existence" with its prefix "ex-" implies that we are constantly outside of ourselves; as it were, ahead of ourselves; we project ourselves into the realm of our possibilities. Our existential structure is primarily and essentially possibility of being.[49]

This concept of possibility is central in his consideration of human existence; to exist is to be in flux and as such to be characterized by temporality.[50] William Barrett

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[48]John MacQuarrie, Martin Heidegger (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1968), p. 21.

[49]Hans Jaeger, "Heidegger's Existential Philosophy and Modern German Literature," PMLA, LXVII (1952), p. 657.

[50]Fernando Molina, Existentialism as Philosophy (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 106.

paraphrases Heidegger's convoluted statements on the subject:

> Man ... is a creature of distance: he is perpetually beyond himself, his existence at every moment opening out toward the future. The future is the not-yet, and the past is the no-longer; and these two negatives - the not-yet and the no-longer - penetrate his existence. They *are* his finitude in its temporal manifestation.[51]

Thrown into the world, a creature of time and space, the individual existent lives in flux and uncertainty. One aspect of this flux, or being in motion, is the nature of the *Dasein*'s connection with other existents or *Daseins*. Heidegger deals with this fact of being-with-others, what he calls *Mitsein*, at some length.[52] The relation of one existent to another is termed "solicitude":

> The world of *Dasein* is a with-world. Being-in is *Being-with* others. Their Being-in-themselves within-the-world is *Dasein-with*. ... *Dasein* maintains itself ... in ... modes of solicitude. Being for, against, or without one another, passing one another by, "not mattering" to one another - these are possible ways of solicitude.[53]

The variety of modes of solicitude indicates that the ways in which one *Dasein* relates to another are subject to constant change. Indeed, the very idea of solicitude implies changing

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[51] Barrett, *Irrational Man*, p. 227.

[52] Friedman, ed., *Worlds of Existentialism*, p. 173.

[53] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, in Friedman, ed., *Worlds of Existentialism*, p. 180.

tensions and anxieties. Since they are in-the-world, then, individual existents are inextricably related to one another in a relationship of possibility and change.

Dasein rather than Mitsein, however, is the primary aspect of human existence; each individual is alone in his finiteness - or, as Heidegger puts it in Being and Time, "The non-relational character of death, as understood in anticipation, individualizes Dasein down to itself."[54] This is the most terrifying possibility inherent in human existence and gives rise to fear of the future, fear of possibility because death is the ultimate possibility. This feeling Heidegger calls Angst (anxiety):

> When fear assails us, it does so from what is within-the-world. Anxiety arises out of Being-in-the-world as thrown Being-towards-death....[55]

Angst (Kierkegaard's aegnst) is the characteristic mood of human existence because of the inner contradictions and tensions in the individual's situation. Thrown into the world, into a particular situation, yet not capable of the static being of objects because endowed with consciousness and therefore existing in time, the individual Dasein is

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[54] Heidegger, Being and Time, in Friedman, ed., Worlds of Existentialism, p. 183.

[55] Heidegger, Being and Time, in Friedman, ed., Worlds of Existentialism, p. 133.

forever in motion, forever oriented to a future filled with uncertainty and possibility, especially the final possibility of death. A unique spatial entity subject to the ravages of time, "existential man" lives in Angst. "In anxiety," as William Barrett speaks of it, "this here-and-now of our existence arises before us in all its precarious and porous contingency."[56]

In spite of the almost impenetrable opacity of his prose, one can perceive - albeit "dimly, as through a mist" - Heidegger's "existential man", the Dasein. He is above all particular and unique, "there-in-the-world", related to his situation and to other existents. Yet he is separate from the world in a way in which objects are not, because, the possessor of consciousness, he is aware of his own "radical finitude", his Sein-zum-Tode. As a transcendent, aware being he lives in anxiety, in a state of uncertainty about the future. In the world yet not of it, he is man-in-a-bind and has only the option of embracing his finitude and accepting his terror-filled future. The taking of this option involves choice, decision and struggle. Heidegger's Dasein lives in the "condition of unbalance, unrest, anguish and ambivalence" described earlier.[57] Heidegger himself

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[56] Barrett, Irrational Man, p. 221.

[57] See page 56, footnote 11.

describes individual existence in terms of such a condition:

> What is meant by "existence" in the context of an inquiry that is prompted by, and directed toward, the truth of Being, can be most beautifully designated by the word "instancy [Inständigkeit]." We must think at the same time, however, of standing in the openness of Being, of enduring and outstanding this standing-in (care), and of outbraving the utmost (Being toward death); for it is only together that they constitute the full essence of existence.[58]

Karl Jaspers, a contemporary of Heidegger, has likewise philosophized about the nature of human existence. He writes in the same context of uncertainty as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche whom he quotes in Reason and Existenz[59] and whose significance he describes thus:

> ... through Kierkegaard and Nietzsche a mode of existential experience has become effective, whose consequences on all sides have not yet come to light. They posed a question which is not yet clear but which one can feel; this question is still open. Through them we have become aware that for us there is no longer any self-evident foundation. There is no longer any secure background for our thought.[60]

Like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche Jaspers bases his philosophy on "the single foundation of man's being", for

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[58]Heidegger, "The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics," in Kaufmann, ed., Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, p. 214.

[59]He notes that Kierkegaard saw himself as "a mere perhaps" and that Nietzsche actually called himself a "philosopher of the dangerous perhaps".

[60]Jaspers, Reason and Existenz, in Kaufmann, ed., Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, p. 170.

> In the world man alone is the reality which is accessible to me. Here is presence, nearness, fullness, life. Man is the place at which and through which everything that is real exists for us at all.... What man is and can become is a fundamental question for man.[61]

Jaspers is concerned with human existence not in general or abstract terms, however; he focusses on the particular, unique individual and refers to universal statements as "only a medium and a way", since "generalities and entireties do not become real as Existenz until they have been re-cast as absolutely particular existence...."[62]

It is with the individual existent in all his concreteness that Jaspers in concerned; for him the all-important aspect of the individual's existence is that he is in a situation which limits him in many crucial ways.[63] Jaspers defines "situation" in spatial terms, emphasizing the concreteness of it:

> When I imagine a situation, I see it as the relative location of things, as their topographical arrangement in space. This spatial-perspective conception makes me think of the

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[61]Jaspers, "On My Philosophy," in Kaufmann, ed., Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, p. 141.

[62]Karl Jaspers, Philosophy, trans. E.B. Ashton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), II, p. 192.

[63]Donald A. Gallagher, "Karl Jaspers: Existenz and Transcendence," in Frederick Patka, Existentialist Thinkers and Thought, p. 116.

> situation as a reality for an existing subject who has a stake in it, a subject either confined or given leeway by the situation.... It is the concrete reality which means advantage or detriment, opportunity or obstacle, to my existence.[64]

The implications of situationality for the individual, then, are contingency, uncertainty and limitation, for, as Jaspers goes on to say, although situations change, at any one moment the situation constitutes a given for the individual and yet not a definite given, the consequences of which are foreseeable. There is no way out of this net of uncertainty, as Jaspers points out:

> Since existence means to be in situations, I can never get out of one without entering into another.... There is nothing I can do about my being in situations.[65]

Those situations which confront all individuals and which are the locus of suffering, fear and despair are termed by Jaspers Grenzsituation, or ultimate situations.[66] These ultimate, or boundary situations as they are more commonly called in English, bring home to the individual his inescapable limitedness. Some of these boundary situations,

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[64]Jaspers, Philosophy, II, p. 177.

[65]Jaspers, Philosophy, II, p. 178.

[66]Gallagher, "Karl Jaspers ...," in Frederick Patka, Existentialist Thinkers and Thought, p. 116.

according to Jaspers, are "that I am always in situations; that I cannot live without struggling and suffering; that I cannot avoid guilt; that I must die...."[67] He elaborates on the nature of boundary situations further, revealing their implications for the individual existent:

> [These boundary situations] never change, except in appearance. There is no way to survey them in existence, no way to see anything behind them. They are like a wall we run into, a wall on which we flounder. We cannot modify them; all that we can do is to make them lucid, but without explaining or deducing them from something else. They go with existence itself.[68]

The existence of the individual as characterized by boundary situations is seen to be one of struggle and suffering, uncertainty and fear and, above all, one of limitation and finiteness in that boundary situations cannot be transcended.

The fact of being in a situation at all times constitutes a boundary situation, according to Jaspers. This is so because situationality by its very nature is inimical to the individual. He is in the situation, as in the world, but not of it. Accordingly, there is a struggle:

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[67] Jaspers, Philosophy, II, p. 178.

[68] Jaspers, Philosophy, II, p. 178. The image of the wall is also used by Sartre in his story "The Wall", which deals with a man in the boundary situation of confronting the fact of his own imminent death.

> The real situation confines me by its resistance, limits my freedom, and ties me to restricted possibilities.... Each of [the] definite things I face creates the situation by resisting. The material balks; life develops differently from my expectations ... [and so on].[69]

Physical and mental deterioration are examples of the "balking" of the individual's material case; they cause great suffering and struggle and constitute another boundary situation.[70] As Jaspers points out, "suffering is a restriction of existence, a partial destruction" and therefore is another aspect of the individual's finiteness. The ultimate manifestation of the individual's finiteness is death, whose spectre lurks behind all suffering.[71] The individual experiences the end of things as people he knows perish, as goods he has realized are destroyed, and he becomes filled with fear and despair. There is no avoiding the sense of one's finitude; this existence is permeated with pain and despair:

> Our ambiguous existence, in which real truth does not endure, calls for composure to be constantly regained from pain.... Despair is the font from which we draw the assurance of being. It is the

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[69] Jaspers, Philosophy, II, pp. 185-186.

[70] Jaspers, Philosophy, II, p. 201.

[71] Jaspers, Philosophy, II, p. 201.

> nature of our sense of being that to be means to have looked upon the face of death.[72]

This idea of 'regaining composure from pain' is of central importance in Jasper's analysis of human existence for it suggests the difficult struggle of the individual in situation. There is no permanence, no stability; all is flux and uncertainty:

> In every boundary situation I have the ground pulled out from under my feet, so to speak. There is no solidly extant existence I might grasp as being. There is no perfection in the world.... The fact that all existence is open to question means that we can find no rest in it as such.... The antinomical structure of existence means that solutions can only be finite, can resolve only particular conflicts in existence, while a look at the whole will always show the limiting insolubilities.[73]

Nevertheless, although the individual existent will by the very structure of his existence be thwarted and frustrated, although to exist in situation is a grim battle, Jaspers does point the way to the possibility of a kind of affirmation, in his discussion of boundary situations. It is to live in the bind, bearing what one can and resisting what one cannot bear:

> [In the boundary situation] I take up my cross as the lot that has been cast for me. I complain, suffer truthfully, and do not hide it from myself. I live in the tension of wanting to say Yes and never being capable of a definitive Yes. I fight/

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[72] Jaspers, Philosophy, II, p. 201.

[73] Jaspers, Philosophy, II, p. 218.

> my suffering, trying to limit and postpone it; but however alien it is, I still find it belongs to me. I end up neither in the harmonious tranquillity of passive suffering nor in the rage of dark incomprehension. Everybody must bear and fulfill his burden. No one else can relieve him of it.[74]

As in the works of Heidegger, one comes away from Jaspers's work with a sense of the very precarious equilibrium of the individual existent. Things are out of joint and "existential man" survives, just barely, in a "condition of unbalance, unrest, anguish and ambivalence".

Jean-Paul Sartre follows in the footsteps of Jaspers and Heidegger in his focussing on the individual existent. A basic notion in his philosophy is the primary importance of the individual and the individual consciousness. Like Descartes, he sees the fact of human consciousness as the one certainty we can cling to:

> Subjectivity of the individual is indeed our point of departure, and this for strictly philosophic reasons.... There can be no other truth to take off from than this: I think; therefore I exist.[75]

Sartre gives emphasis to human subjectivity because, as he sees it, it is the fact of consciousness which distinguishes the individual existent from inanimate objects. The

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[74] Jaspers, Philosophy, II, p. 203.

[75] Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism and Human Emotions (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), p. 36.

individual is separate and distinct from matter in his subjectivity.[76] This sense of separation and isolation is felt by Mathieu, the protagonist of Sartre's The Age of Reason, as he muses upon his situation:

> All around him things were gathered in a circle, expectant, impassive, and indicative of nothing. He was alone, enveloped in this monstrous silence....[77]

A circumstance with awesome consequences for this solitary individual, according to Sartre, is the absence of any transcendent authority whatever. There is no God and the individual exists in a non-rational, indifferent universe.[78] If nothing is formally sanctioned, nothing given its function by a transcendent authority, an appalling freedom opens up for the individual. In his essay Existentialism and Humanism Sartre sketches the abysses that yawn:

> Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself. He discovers forthwith, that he is without excuse. For if indeed existence precedes essence, one will never be able to explain one's action by reference to a

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[76] Sartre, Existentialism, in Friedman, ed., Worlds of Existentialism, p. 137.

[77] Sartre, The Age of Reason, in Worlds of Existentialism, p. 138.

[78] Hazel Barnes, Humanistic Existentialism: The Literature of Possibility (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), p. 367.

> given and specific human nature; in other words, there is no determinism - man is free, man is freedom. Nor; on the other hand, if God does not exist, are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimise our behaviour. Thus we have neither behind us, nor before us in a luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse. We are left alone, without excuse.... man is condemned to be free.[79]

There is no overall pattern of meaning imposed upon the world and thereby upon the individual existent. The individual thus seems to exist in a terrifying void in which there are no givens, no necessities.

This, however, is not strictly so, as Sartre makes clear in the course of his philosophizing, for the individual is limited in certain aspects. These givens, or limiting factors, Sartre calls the human condition. The individual "surges up" (or "is thrown", as Heidegger puts it - Sartre puts the emphasis on the active element) in the world and is confronted with certain unalterable facts, such as those of birth and death, the presence of others and the presence of things. These are the "a priori limits which outline man's fundamental situation in the universe".[80] Sartre emphasizes the fact that every individual suffers these limitations, that there is a human condition which is universal:

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[79]Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism and Humanism (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 34.

[80]Sartre, Existentialism and Human Emotions, p. 38.

> Historical situations vary; a man may be born a slave in a pagan society or a feudal lord or a proletarian. What does not vary is the necessity for him to exist in the world, to be at work there, to be there in the midst of other people, and to be mortal there.[81]

Because of the human condition (the fact that the individual exists in situation) "Human-reality everywhere encounters resistances and obstacles which it has not created...."[82]

Birth and death are manifestations of the human condition which confront the individual and reveal to him the contingent nature of existence. Insofar as the facts of birth and death are involved, the individual is in a position of having to accept them as <u>givens</u>. He is powerless before them:

> ... death ... is a contingent fact which as such on principle escapes me and originally belongs to my facticity. I can neither discover my death nor wait for it nor adopt an attitude toward it, for it is that which is revealed as undiscoverable, that which disarms all waiting, that which slips into all attitudes ... so as to transform them into externalized and fixed conducts whose meaning is forever entrusted to others and not to ourselves. Death is a pure fact as is birth; it comes from the outside and it transforms us into the outside. At bottom it is in no way distinguished from birth, and it is the identity of birth and death that we call facticity....[83]

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[81] Sartre, <u>Existentialism and Human Emotions</u>, p. 38. Note the resemblance of Jaspers's "Grenzsituation" to Sartre's "condition humaine".

[82] Sartre, <u>Being and Nothingness</u>, in <u>Worlds of Existentialism</u>, p. 144.

[83] Sartre, <u>Being and Nothingness</u>, in <u>Worlds of Existentialism</u>, pp. 144-145.

The individual is irrevocably bound by the facts of life and death, both of them totally chance happenings and therefore never subject to preparation or choice; the individual is constantly confronted with the possibility of death.

Another aspect of the human condition is the presence of things. The individual is born into a world of matter indifferent to him, unrelated to him. Things have a different kind of being from human being, according to Sartre; he calls the self-contained being of a thing the en-soi.[84] The sheer thereness of things, their self-contained being which is utterly indifferent to other existents, is vividly realized in Sartre's novel Nausea. The protagonist Roquentin perceives that he is unnecessary in the world of matter, somehow de trop; the antagonism between the conscious existent, the pour-soi which plans and projects, and inert matter which is simply there, the en-soi, is the basic conflict of the novel. The presence of things in the environment of the individual is a given, as are birth and death, and as such constitutes a limiting factor, a resistance to the individual human existence - the struggle between the en-soi and the pour-soi is always going on.

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[84] Barrett, Irrational Man, p. 245.

Other individuals are also a presence in the world of the individual; as with things they constitute a limiting factor - they are irrevocably alien to the individual. Each individual is alone and can never gain any true intimacy with another:

> Human-reality at the very heart of its ekstases remains alone.... the Other's existence has the nature of a contingent and irreducible fact....[85]

Sartre calls the relation between one individual and another the relation between the I and the Other, or the relation between subject and object. Nathan Scott gives a concise and accurate summary of the somewhat convoluted processes of such a relationship as conceived by Sartre:

> Sartre conceives the relations between persons to be essentially an affair of disconnection and conflict, and he proposes that its central reality is what he calls the "look" or the "gaze". That is to say, I do not begin to exist for another until he "looks" at me; nor does he come into my field of attention until I "look" at him. But to gaze at another person is immediately to make him "the Other": it is to reduce him to the status of an object, and thus to diminish his freedom; for, when he begins to exist only through another's gaze, he begins to be at the mercy of a freedom which is not his own. Thus no sooner is one looked at than one is by way of becoming a slave; for, when another man through his gaze reduces me to an object, my reality begins to depend not on my own freedom but on his. And similarly, when I gaze at him, his human reality becomes dependent on my freedom, and he begins to be my slave. This is what Sartre takes the

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[85] Sartre, Being and Nothingness, in Worlds of Existentialism, p. 191. Beckett expresses this view in his monograph on Proust: "We are alone. We cannot know and cannot be known." The individual's solitude is irremediable.

> interpersonal situation to be - a situation, that is, in which the chief components are threat and uneasiness and tension and struggle.[86]

The intensity of this struggle is conveyed by Sartre's description of it; he uses such terms as "explosion" in elaborating on the conflict between the I and the Other:

> ... the Other-as-object is an explosive instrument which I handle with care because I foresee around him the permanent possibility that they are going to make it explode and that with this explosion I shall suddenly experience the flight of the world away from me and the alienation of my being. Therefore my constant concern is to contain the Other within his objectivity, and my relations with the Other-as-object are essentially made up of ruses designed to make him remain an object. But one look on the part of the Other is sufficient to make all these schemes collapse....[87]

This struggle of the individual to retain a sense of himself as individual in the face of other subjects who wish to maintain their individuality is a fierce and ever-continuing one. It is furthermore one from which there is no escape, for the presence of others is, as has been stated earlier, one of the "a priori limits which outline man's fundamental situation in the universe". The individual is inextricably bound up with others, who are simply there, as Sartre's play, No Exit, graphically illustrates. And, as one of the

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[86] Scott, The Unquiet Vision, pp. 141-142.

[87] Sartre, Being and Nothingness, in Worlds of Existentialism, p. 193.

trapped characters, Inez, points out, there is no escape:

> To forget about the others? How utterly absurd! I feel you there, in every pore. Your silence clamors in my ears. You can nail up your mouth, cut your tongue out - but you can't prevent your being there. Can you stop your thoughts? I hear them ticking away like a clock, tick-tock, tick-tock, and I'm certain you hear mine. It's all very well skulking on your sofa, but you're everywhere, and every sound comes to me soiled, because you've intercepted it on its way. Why, you've even stolen my face; you know it and I don't![88]

The individual existent, then, insofar as he is subject to the human condition - and all individuals are - is engaged in a solitary, tension-filled struggle with objects and with other human existents to retain his individuality. This struggle takes place in the context of the terrible freedom which the individual has in a world where there is no pattern of meaning and order, no transcendent authority. This freedom, according to Sartre, places a great burden on the individual, for, within the limitations of the human condition, one's life is what one makes it. An individual is his actions; he must choose himself:

> Man is nothing else than his plan; he exists only to the extent that he fulfills himself; he is therefore nothing else than the ensemble of his acts, nothing else than his life.[89]

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[88] Jean-Paul Sartre, No Exit and The Flies, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 29.

[89] Sartre, Existentialism and Human Emotions, p. 32.

Sartre stresses this point in Existentialism as well:

> To say that we invent values means nothing else but this: life has no meaning a priori. Before you come alive, life is nothing: it's up to you to give it a meaning, and value is nothing else but the meaning that you choose.[90]

Thus, as Robert Olson states, "To be free is to be under the necessity of transcending one's past."[91] The individual must choose and there is no avoiding the necessity of choice, for even not to choose is a kind of choice, as Sartre maintains. Uncertainty and flux enter here, for man is bound by time and cannot perceive the consequences of his choice. From this sense of uncertainty arises what for Sartre is an inevitable concomitant of human activity, anguish. Anguish, the awareness that "an abrupt metamorphosis of my initial project is always possible", accompanies all choice and decision. As well, decision is accompanied by despair, for the individual realizes that there is no outside help, no transcendent authority and that his decision, which is all-important, must be made alone. The individual chooses and acts in anguish and without hope.

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[90]Sartre, Existentialism, quoted in Friedman, To Deny Our Nothingness: Contemporary Images of Man (New York: Dell, 1967), p. 251.

[91]Robert G. Olson, An Introduction to Existentialism (New York: Dover, 1967), p. 145.

"Existential man" as seen by Sartre is a creature of division and conflict; struggle goes on constantly between the conscious individual and matter, between the individual and others. Furthermore, choosing and acting in a vacuum of authority are accompanied by anguish and despair. Yet the imperative remains; the individual must choose and must act. He must go on, inventing, creating his life, embracing the grim freedom of being "the origin of his own 'ing' states".[92]

Albert Camus, a younger contemporary of Jean-Paul Sartre, likewise concerned himself with the struggle of the individual existent. Camus's earlier writings in particular have as their main subject the situation of the individual existent and his struggle in an alien universe, and deal with those themes explored by the existentialist writers we have already considered. The starting-point for his work is that one which he describes as the starting-point for Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Jaspers - "that indescribable universe where contradiction, antinomy, anguish or impotence reigns".[93] Like them, Camus is concerned with how the individual survives in such a universe; like Pascal

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[92] Wesley Barnes, The Philosophy and Literature of Existentialism (New York: Barron's, 1968), p. 92.

[93] Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays (New York: Random House, 1955), pp. 17-18.

he has given vivid expression to certain "existentialist" themes. On these grounds he can be spoken of as an "existentialist" writer.

Camus's concept of the Absurd and the Absurd Man grows out of his description of what he calls "the cruel mathematics that command our condition".[94] His most direct statements on the human condition are to be found in the collection of essays, The Myth of Sisyphus, published in 1943. The situation of the individual is there portrayed in all its complexity and conflict. Camus sees the single existent as an outsider in relation to the natural world and to other individuals. In "An Absurd Reasoning" he describes the individual's sense of the "otherness" of the natural world:

> ... the world is "dense," ... a stone is foreign and irreducible to us, ... nature or a landscape can negate us. At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman, and these hills, the softness of the sky, the outline of these trees at this very minute lose the illusory meaning with which we had clothed them, henceforth more remote than a lost paradise. The primitive hostility of the world rises up to face us across millennia.[95]

The human world also reveals itself as strangely alien to the individual who observes as an outsider:

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[94]Camus, quoted in Scott, The Unquiet Vision, pp, 17-18.

[95]Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 11.

> Men, too, secrete the inhuman. At certain moments of lucidity, the mechanical aspect of their gestures, their meaningless pantomime makes silly everything that surrounds them. A man is talking on the telephone behind a glass partition; you cannot hear him, but you see his incomprehensible dumb show: you wonder why he is alive.[96]

The individual is often separated from others in their social aspect as well as in their aspect as objects in a landscape. Camus makes use of the image of silence to describe the relationship between an individual and his oppressors in a political state of tyranny:

> There is, in fact, nothing in common between a master and a slave; it is impossible to speak and communicate with a person who has been reduced to servitude.... servitude gives sway to the most terrible of silences.[97]

Camus sees this condition of alienation from others as the inevitable condition of the individual "in a world of abstractions, of bureaus and machines, of absolute ideas and of crude messianism".[98]

The individual is, furthermore, an outsider in relation to himself and to the entire universe in the sense

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[96]Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 11.

[97]Albert Camus, The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 283.

[98]Camus, The Rebel, p. 283. Meursault, the protagonist of Camus's The Outsider, is but one of his characters who are outsiders in relation to the social set-up, its dogmas and rituals.

that his understanding of himself and the universe is greatly limited; he can never truly know himself or the universe. Only the concrete realities are accessible to one:

> This heart within me I can feel, and I judge that it exists. This world I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is construction. For if I try to seize this self of which I feel sure, if I try to define and to summarize it, it is nothing but water slipping through my fingers. I can sketch one by one all the aspects it is able to assume, all those likewise that have been attributed to it, this upbringing, this origin, this ardor or these silences, this nobility or this vileness. But aspects cannot be added up. This very heart which is mine will forever remain indefinable to me.... Forever I shall be a stranger to myself.[99]

Just as the individual finds it impossible to gain complete familiarity with his own self, so he can never gain understanding of the world as a unity, for all is complexity and diversity. The individual exists in a context of uncertainty which arises from his inability to penetrate to the core of things. Change occurs and his carefully-built patterns shatter:

> ... this world cracks and tumbles: an infinite number of shimmering fragments is offered to the understanding. We must despair of ever reconstructing the familiar, calm surface which would give us peace of heart.[100]

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[99] Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 14.

[100] Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 14.

This perception of the lack of pattern in the universe leads to the individual's seeing himself as an outsider:

> 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 alien, a stranger.[101]

"Understanding the world for a man is reducing it to the human," as Camus states in the same essay, and to be aware of the impossibility of understanding is to perceive the human situation in all its limitedness and contingency.

Another aspect of the individual's limitedness is his finiteness, his existence in time. The man of flesh and bone is doomed to death; life is "that race which daily hastens us toward death" as the body, the material case, wears out.[102] Insofar as he must "[stand] at a certain point on a curve that he acknowledges having to travel to its end" the individual is limited by time, is a prisoner of time and has always before him his ultimate end, death.[103] The flow of time brings many changes and uncertainties and that one all-important certainty of the end, and the individual is powerless before both uncertainty

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[101] Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 5.

[102] Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 7.

[103] Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 10.

and certainty.

It is the individual's longing for unity and stability in an existence of contradiction and conflict which leads to a sense of what is for Camus his "sole datum", the Absurd.[104] Camus defines the Absurd as the "confrontation and unceasing struggle" between the individual and the universe.[105] The Absurd Man as Camus sees him is man-in-a-bind, man in an impossible situation which must yet be lived through:

> ... I hold certain facts from which I cannot separate. What I know, what is certain, what I cannot deny, what I cannot reject - this is what counts. I can negate everything of that part of me that lives on vague nostalgias, except this desire for unity, this longing to solve, this need for clarity and cohesion. I can refute everything in this world surrounding me that offends or enraptures me, except this chaos, this sovereign chance and this divine equivalence which springs from anarchy. I don't know whether this world has a meaning which transcends it. But I do know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it. What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms. What I touch, what resists me - that is what I understand. And these two certainties - my appetite for the absolute and for unity and the impossibility of reducing this world to a rational and reasonable principle - I also know that I cannot reconcile them. What other truth can I admit without lying, without bringing in a hope I lack and which means nothing within the limits of my condition?[106]

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[104] Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 37.

[105] Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 23.

[106] Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 38.

The Absurd, that confrontation of the irrationality of the world and the longing of the individual for clarity, is all that links the individual and the world together, and it links them "as only hatred can weld two creatures together".[107]

The only truth, the only dignity that the individual can wrest from this bind, this cosmic Catch-22, is his defiance; his "day-to-day revolt" which consists of "[draining] everything to the bitter end", of facing the irrationality of the universe unreconciled and unresigned, of "[challenging] the world anew every second".[108] Camus chooses Sisyphus, the mythical figure who was condemned by the gods to roll a rock forever to the top of a mountain from which the rock would roll down of its own weight, as his image of man-in-the-world yet undefeated by it. Sisyphus's victory lies in the fact that he is not defeated by the endless rolling; he is "still on the go":

> Thus, convinced of the wholly human origin of all that is human, a blind man eager to see who knows that the night has no end, he is still on the go. The rock is still rolling.
> I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burdens again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe

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[107] Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 16.

[108] Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, pp. 40-41.

> henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart.[109]

For Camus's Absurd Man (who is really "existential man" by another name) the concrete day-to-day struggle, the necessity of challenging the world anew every second is paramount; he must bear the unbearable in the here-and-now with no support. Like Sisyphus, "He has forgotten how to hope. This hell of the present is his Kingdom at last."[110] He must roll his rock.

This discussion of "existential" writings has perforce been limited both with respect to the number of philosophers considered and with respect to the scope of the treatment of their work; nevertheless, there emerges a unified concept of "existential man" from the works considered. He is a concrete being endowed with a body and a consciousness, who is rooted in a situation, in a particular time and place and in a relationship with other existents and objects. He is a contingent being - his existence in a particular place and time is an arbitrary fact, a given. He is a finite being, limited by his senses and limited in time. Because of his finiteness and

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[109] Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 91.

[110] Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 39.

contingency, "existential man" is in the position of an outsider, an alien in a universe which is in the main incomprehensible to him and indifferent if not outright hostile to him. His existence as outsider is characterized by struggle and conflicts as he attempts to cope with and transcend the antinomies everywhere present; he must exercise his terrible freedom in

> a continual series of engagements and commitments of choosing and acting, the gerundial state.[111]

This account of "existential man" is descriptive in many ways of the clown also. Clown, as has been shown in the preceding section, is man-in-situation, at odds with the landscape in which he finds himself, a landscape filled with objects and persons which pose problems for him in one way or another. His existence is oriented toward the future and filled with uncertainty. Clown is, like existential man, engaged in an endless quest, a never-ending struggle as he pursues the goal, trivial or sublime, which forever eludes him; he is a solitary outsider - outside the shining, warm circle and unable to enter it. Clown, indeed, is "existential man".

This last statement needs qualification, however. Whereas "existential man" is but a concept drawn on the

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[111] Wesley Barnes, The Philosophy and Literature of Existentialism, p. 93.

page (albeit often vividly drawn) by "existentialist" writers, Clown is the concrete embodiment of that concept. Clown truly is "the man of flesh and bone" in all his contradictory fullness, all his concrete uniqueness; his routines of failure and persistent quest embody existential man in all his contingency and limitedness. As such the clown is the perfect image of "existential man", for he is the thing itself, "existential man" concretized - breathing and moving and struggling before us. Clown conveys the living reality of "existential man" as no "existentialist" philosophizing, however vividly written, can ever do.

SECTION III

THE ART OF SAMUEL BECKETT:

THE RES ITSELF

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.
- Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot

Clov: (imploringly) Let's stop playing!
Hamm: Never!
- Samuel Beckett, Endgame

The poem is the cry of its occasion
Part of the res itself and not about it.
- Wallace Stevens, Opus Posthumous

A problem arises for those writers of "existentialist" tendency who attempt to conceptualize such matters as the unique inner experience of the individual and the individual's struggle in the face of the Absurd. Hazel Barnes states the difficulty inherent in such an undertaking:

> ... human traits and human situations, when stated abstractly, have a way of losing their uniqueness. In pleading for the free individual, existentialism can hardly afford to lapse into a vague universalism in its literature.[1]

The French Existentialists themselves are aware of the problems involved and have turned their attention to art, which presents rather than theorizes so that we are confronted with the individual in the fullness and uniqueness of his situation. Simone de Beauvoir, one of the French writers dubbed "existentialist", elaborates on the strengths of fiction: "... only the novel will permit one to evoke in its complete, singular and temporal truth, the original gushing forth of existence."[2] Fictional works permit "the unreduced immediacy of the moment" (this phrase is Martin Buber's) to shine forth in all its luminous ambiguity.

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[1] Hazel E. Barnes, Humanistic Existentialism: The Literature of Possibility (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), pp. 386-387.

[2] Simone de Beauvoir, "Littérature et metaphysique," quoted in F. Temple Kingston, French Existentialism: A Christian Critique (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p. 50.

Following the obvious path, the French Existentialists Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Camus turned out novels, short stories and plays which expressed the situation of the individual as they saw it. The results of their labours, however, are rather disappointing - insights about the contingency, finiteness and alienation of the solitary human being are encased in literary forms which have all the neatness and order of an engineer's diagram; the realization that "style ... is within and a part of the process of self-awareness" seems to have escaped these creators - form is strangely divorced from content. A vision of the solitude, contingency and finiteness of human existence is presented via conventional dramatic and fictional techniques, techniques which grew out of a radically different vision of man and his place in the world. A Giacometti sculpture is truer by far to the "existentialist" spirit than Sartre's No Exit, for example.

What has Samuel Beckett, a writer who has denied any direct influence by "existentialists" on his work,[3] to do with this difficulty that purveyors of "existentialist"

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[3] In a 1961 interview with Gabriel d'Aubarède, the following exchange took place:

'Have contemporary philosophers had any influence on your thought?'

'I never read philosophers.'

'Why not?'

'I never understand anything they write.'

'All the same, people have wondered if the

insights have gotten themselves into? The answer to this is "Quite a lot", for Beckett, despite his statement of inability (a disguise, I believe, for reluctance) to exchange Daseins and Mitseins with Heidegger and company,[4] has produced an oeuvre which is a kind of cross-fertilization of the theatrical tradition of clowning and the "existentialist" tradition, an oeuvre in which the image of man in process, in perpetual quest - man as "existential" clown - is of central importance. Writing in the same milieu as that of the French Existentialists and shaped by similar influences, Beckett has wrested from his vision a body of work dealing with "the issueless predicament of existence"[5] in which form is a concretion of content, "the revelation of a world",[6] and thereby has

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existentialists' problem of being may afford a key to your works.'

'There's no key or problem. I wouldn't have had any reason to write my novels if I could have expressed their subject in philosophic terms.'

[4]In 1961 in conversation with Tom Driver, he makes easy reference to the distinction made by Heidegger and Sartre between being and existence, even while contending that their language is "too philosophical for me".

[5]Samuel Beckett, "MacGreevy on Yeats," Jack B. Yeats: a centennial gathering, ed. Roger McHugh (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1971), p. 73.

[6]Samuel Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove Press, 1931), p. 69.

achieved what proved beyond the ability of "existentialist" conceptualizers. He has heeded the dictum of Archibald MacLeish, "A poem should not mean but be"; this, as Michael Corvin points out, is how he has surpassed the "existentialists":

> Beckett ne révèle rien sur la condition humaine que Pirandello, Salacrou et l'existentialisme n'aient exposé avant lui: En attendant Godot, c'est Le mythe de Sisyphe de l'attente; mais ce n'est pas Le Malentendu, parce que la force de Beckett réside non dans les thèmes mais dans la forme, qui n'est pas du tout celle de la pièce de Camus. Dire que la condition humaine est absurde n'est qu'un mot si on ne parvient pas à en faire sentir l'inconfort permanent.[7]

Accordingly, we do not find works about man and his anguished struggle; instead we find a thwarted yet endlessly struggling artist-clown, performing his routines with the clown's "endlessly resourceful ritual of incapacity", spinning out of the dark depths character-clowns who in turn perform their pensums, their routines. The process of struggling permeates the work and is embodied in the form - the novels, short stories and plays are in themselves as literary constructs routines of a kind, obsessive, repetitive attempts to give verbal form to the ineffable, to "eff the ineffable".[8]

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[7] Michael Corvin, Le Théâtre Nouveau en France (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), pp. 67-68.

[8] One of the artist-figures in the trilogy uses this phrase.

Samuel Beckett's utterances on the nature of art and of the artist's task in general and on his conception of his own task in particular, cryptic as they are, do contain certain recurring motifs. One which occurs in his earliest writings is a rejection of the literary modes of realism and naturalism as a means of conveying anything of worth about human reality. In his 1931 study of Proust he notes the contempt Proust had for

> the realists and naturalists worshipping the offal of experience, prostrate before the epidermis and the swift epilepsy, and content to transcribe the surface, the facade behind which the Idea is prisoner.[9]

This contempt for the transcribers of surface, those who chase after "the vulgarity of a plausible concatenation"[10] and who produce merely "the pictorial transmission of a notion",[11] is shared by Beckett. In his unpublished "Dream of Fair to Middling Women", written in 1932, the narrator speaks of the irrelevance of such fiction as Balzac's to anything human:

> To read Balzac is to receive the impression of a chloroformed world. He is absolute master of his material, he can do what he likes with it, he can foresee and calculate its least vicissitude,

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[9] Proust, p. 59. Beckett uses Idea to mean concrete, living reality as opposed to abstract concept.

[10] Proust, p. 62.

[11] Proust, p. 60.

> he can write the end of his book before he has finished the first paragraph, because he has turned all his creatures into clockwork cabbages and can rely on their staying put wherever needed or staying going at whatever speed in whatever direction he chooses. The whole thing, from beginning to end, takes place in a spell-bound backwash. We all love and lick up Balzac, we lap it up and say it is wonderful, but why call a distillation of Euclid and Perrault Scenes from Life? Why human comedy?[12]

As in Proust, "the penny-a-line vulgarity of a literature of notations" is scorned as a static transcription with no life, no vitality, a mechanical exercise which may be admired as a machine but which gives no hint of the unknown and unknowable in human life, in the individual life - in this case the life of the characters who are "clockwork cabbages". A "miserable statement of line and surface",[13] realistic art does not admit the inner experience of the individual, the flow of time, the sense of chaos in the universe. An artist who works in the conventional manner "assumes omniscience and omnipotence. He raises himself artificially out of Time in order to give relief to his chronology and causality to his development."[14] Such work,

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[12]"Dream of Fair to Middling Women," quoted in Lawrence E. Harvey, Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 341.

[13]Baudelaire, quoted in Proust, p. 57.

[14]Proust, p. 62.

unlike "an imaginative adventure", enjoys the corsets of a reportage.[15]

Opposed to this literature of surfaces, this product of assumed omniscience and omnipotence, is a literature of depth, a literature which grows out of the inner experience of the individual, with all the ambiguities and anomalies implicit therein. A 1932 manifesto, entitled "Poetry is Vertical" and prefaced by "on a été trop horizontal, j'ai envie d'être vertical", proclaims that art comes from within, from the depths of the artist:

> In a world ruled by the hypnosis of positivism, we proclaim the autonomy of the poetic vision, the hegemony of the inner life over the outer life.[16]

Beckett, in affixing his signature along with those of eight others, here confirms a view of art present in his monograph on Proust. There he speaks of "the only world that has reality and significance" as being "the world of our own latent consciousness".[17] Further on in the same work, the implications of this for the artist are touched on:

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[15] "An imaginative adventure does not enjoy the same corsets as a reportage." Thus Beckett, in a review of Jack B. Yeats's The Amaranthers written for The Dublin Magazine in 1936.

[16] "Poetry Is Vertical," transition no. 21 (March, 1932), p. 148.

[17] Proust, p. 3.

> ... the only possible spiritual development is in the sense of depth. The artistic tendency is not expansive but a contraction. And art is the apotheosis of solitude. There is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication. Even on the rare occasions when word and gesture happen to be valid expressions of personality, they lose their significance on their passage through the cataract of the personality that is opposed to them.[18]

The delineation of surfaces is an abomination because

> The only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent. The artist is active, but negatively, shrinking from the nullity of extracircumferential phenomena, drawn into the core of the eddy.[19]

This notion of the artist as one who explores in solitude his inner depths, the "issueless predicament" of his own existence in Time,[20] is cryptically affirmed in a short piece written on Jack B. Yeats in 1954: "The artist who stakes his being comes from nowhere. And he has no brothers."[21]

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[18] Proust, p. 46.

[19] Proust, p. 48.

[20] "The individual is the seat of a constant process of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time, agitated and multicoloured by the phenomena of its hours." The artist as individual undergoes this process.

[21] Samuel Beckett, "Homage to Jack B. Yeats," Jack B. Yeats: a centennial gathering, ed. and introduced by Roger McHugh (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1971), p. 76. Translated by Ruby Cohn. First published in Les Lettres Nouvelles, April 1954.

The artist plumbs his depths in darkness and ignorance, for

> All that is active, all that is enveloped in time and space, is endowed with what might be described as an abstract, ideal and absolute impermeability.[22]

Thus, art from the innards of such a being, the artist enveloped in time and space, partakes of the fluidity, the ambiguity, the inner tensions experienced by its begetter. The artist makes intercessions "With himself on behalf of himself. With his selves on behalf of his selves."[23] The artist is a maker of intercessions, an asker of questions:

> Art has always been this - pure interrogation, rhetorical question less the rhetoric - whatever else it may have been obliged by the "social reality" to appear....[24]

Beckett does not stop here, however. Not only is art viewed as tentative, a kind of "pure interrogation" produced by a solitary, suffering being. Art for him is an impossible pensum since the experience of the artist is, like that of the clown, that of "a non-knower, a non-can-er".[25] As a non-knower the artist is; unlike Balzac, not

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[22] Proust, p. 41.

[23] Samuel Beckett, "Dennis Devlin," transition no. 27 (April-May 1938), p. 289.

[24] "Dennis Devlin," transition, p. 289.

[25] Israel Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters: A Portrait of Samuel Beckett, Author of the Puzzling 'Waiting for Godot'," New York Times (May 6, 1956), p. XI.

master of his material; art from such a source is preordained to fail. It is an impossible task which yet must be undertaken. Beckett, in a series of three brief dialogues with Georges Duthuit, the editor of transition, persists, clown-like,[26] in attempting to articulate a position vis-à-vis art which is logically impossible. He maintains that the painters Matisse and Tal Coat have "never stirred from the field of the possible", disturbing only "a certain order on the plane of the feasible". Then comes the following exchange:

> D. - What other plane can there be for the maker?
> B. - Logically none. Yet I speak of an art turning from it in disgust, weary of its puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road.
> D. - And preferring what?
> B. - The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.[27]

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[26]The parallel is made explicit by Duthuit, who at the end of the third dialogue, refers to Beckett's contribution as "your number".

[27]Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit, "Three Dialogues," in Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 16. First published in transition forty-nine, no. 5 (1949). Compare with this Molloy's advice to writers: "Not to want to say, not to know what you want to say, not to be able to say what you think you want to say, and never to stop saying, or hardly ever, that is the thing to keep in mind, even in the heat of composition."

Duthuit's eminently reasonable, logical rejection of this as "a violently extreme and personal point of view, of no help to us in the matter of Tal Coat" is just as logically responded to by silence on Beckett's part, the only possible response to a condemnation of his point of view as personal. Still trying to communicate his incommunicable vision, in the second dialogue Beckett speaks of his "dream of an art unresentful of its insuperable indigence";[28] Duthuit counters with flowing praise of painting "resplendent with desire and affirmation". When the moment comes for Beckett to reply to this, the text reads: "B. - (Exit weeping.)".[29] With the persistence of Emmett Kelly trying to sweep up a circle of light, Beckett returns to the fray in the third dialogue. He maintains to an increasingly exasperated Duthuit that the Dutch painter Bram van Velde has a unique place in the history of painting:

> B. - ... I think that he is the first to accept a certain situation and to consent to a certain act.
> D. - Would it be too much to ask you to state again, as simply as possible, the situation and act that you conceive to be his?
> B. - The situation is that of him who is helpless, cannot act, in the event cannot paint, since he is obliged to paint. The act is of him who, helpless, unable to act, acts, in the event paints, since he is obliged to paint.[30]

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[28]"Three Dialogues," p. 18.

[29]"Three Dialogues," p. 19.

[30]"Three Dialogues," p. 19.

Van Velde, Beckett asserts, is the first painter to concede that

> to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living.[31]

This is the realm of Beckett's work as he conceives of it as well, the realm of failure, the realm of attempting the impossible. He is very specific, in a 1956 interview, about his conception of himself as an artist. He contrasts his work with that of his friend Joyce:

> 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. He's tending toward omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. I'm working with impotence, ignorance,... My little exploration is that whole zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as something unuseable [sic]- as something by definition incompatible with art.[32]

Moreover, he considers that impotence and ignorance are the salient qualities of his own experience:

> I think anyone nowadays, who pays the slightest attention to his own experience finds it the experience of a non-knower, a non-can-er. The other type of artist - the Apollonian - is absolutely foreign to me.[33]

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[31]"Three Dialogues," p. 21.

[32]Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters," p. X1.

[33]Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters," p. X3.

Fourteen years later, in another interview, he again stresses the idea that his work is a product of ignorance and impotence:

> If my work has any meaning at all, it is due more to ignorance, inability, and an intuitive despair than to any individual strength.[34]

Beckett as artist has donned the mask of the clown whose very continuing is a paradox. Like the clown he is thwarted, stymied in his attempts to "eff the ineffable", for words distort the communication assayed:

> Every time you want words to do the work of a true transference, every time you want to make them express something other than words, they align themselves in such a way as to annul each other mutually.[35]

Yet the artist, solitary, unknowing, enduring the "suffering of being", must go on as the clown must go on. Both have their pensum; in the face of an absurd universe each carries out an "endlessly resourceful ritual of incapacity".

Repetition with variation is a feature of the world of both hardy failures, the artist and the clown. Beckett

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[34] John Gruen, "Samuel Beckett talks about Beckett," Vogue (February 1970), quoted in Brian H. Finney, since how it is: A Study of Samuel Beckett's Later Fiction (London: Convent Garden Press, 1972), p. 43.

[35] Samuel Beckett, La Peinture des van Velde ou Le Monde et le Pantalon," quoted in Jan Hokenson, "A Stuttering Logos: Biblical Paradigms in Beckett's Trilogy," James Joyce Quarterly, VIII, 4 (Summer 1971), p. 294. The translation is Hokenson's.

speaks for both when he says:

> There are many ways in which the thing I am trying in vain to say may be tried in vain to be said. I have experimented, as you know, both in public and in private, under duress, through faintness of heart, through weakness of mind, with two or three hundred.[36]

In his efforts to concretize the "suffering of being" Beckett the artist-clown has performed the routines of poem, short story, novel, stage play, radio play and film. These have constituted various strategies ("ways in which the thing I am trying in vain to say may be tried in vain to be said") for overcoming the treachery and inadequacy of language and traditional forms of literature for illuminating "the inner life".

Before we go on to examine some of these routines of the artist-clown, and the routines of the clowns within these routines, I wish to present some of the evidence which indicates that Beckett is aware of the clown tradition and the characteristics of the clown, namely the direct references in his work to clown figures and clownery. Then we can move from charted territory to unexplored regions. While it is easy enough to show that clown references abound in Beckett's works, we can only attempt to illustrate, by means of analysis of individual pieces, that the clown is an

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[36]"Three Dialogues," pp. 20-21.

all-pervasive image, affecting form as well as content. The danger is indeed in the neatness of identifications, for as Beckett himself is at pains to point out about the work of a fellow-artist:

> There is no allegory, that glorious double-entry, with every credit in the said account a debit in the meant, and inversely; but the single series of imaginative transactions.[37]

Let us begin, then, by merely noting recurrences. In his earliest published work, both fictional and critical, Beckett makes frequent mention of one aspect or another of the clown tradition. The second sentence of his first published critical work, "Dante ... Bruno. Vico .. Joyce", draws upon the clown tradition for an image:

> The conception of Philosophy and Philology as a pair of nigger minstrels out of the Teatro dei Piccolo is soothing, like the contemplation of a carefully folded ham-sandwich.[38]

In Proust, another early critical work, he mentions vaudeville and notes that it "inaugurates the comedy of an exhaustive enumeration".[39] Vaudeville is mentioned, again,

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[37]Samuel Beckett, "An Imaginative Work!" The Dublin Magazine, XI, 3 (July-September 1936), p. 81. A review of Jack B. Yeats's The Amaranthers.

[38]Samuel Beckett, "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce," in Samuel Beckett et al., Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 1. First published by Shakespeare and Company, 1929.

[39]Proust, p. 71.

in passing (one of a flood of images pouring out of the brilliant young intellectual Beckett), in a review of Thomas McGreevy's Poems: "A poem is poetry and not Meistergesang, Vaudeville, Fragrant Minute, or any of the other collects for the day...."[40] A 1934 review of Sean O'Casey's Windfalls alludes to "Chaplin's comic [and] his mièvre"; the same review praises O'Casey as "a master of knockabout [who] discerns the principle of disintegration in the most complacent solidities". Beckett goes on to state that knockabout is of central importance in O'Casey's work:

> This is the energy of his theatre, the triumph of the principle of knockabout in situation, in all its elements and on all its planes, from the furniture to the higher centres. If "Juno and the Paycock", as seems likely, is his best work so far, it is because it communicates most fully this dramatic dehiscence, mind and world come asunder in irreparable dissociation....[41]

The early fiction contains, among the plethora of allusions and images in its repertoire, many references to clown figures. That "sovereign booby" Belacqua,[42] the

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[40] Samuel Beckett, "Humanistic Quietism," The Dublin Magazine, IX, 3 (1934), p. 79.

[41] Samuel Beckett, "The Essential and the Incidental," The Bookman, LXXXVII (Christmas 1934), p. 111. This passage is of special significance because it shows Beckett's awareness that the "irreparable dissociation" of mind and world is at the core of clowning.

[42] Samuel Beckett, "A Wet Night," More Kicks Than Pricks (London: Calder and Boyars, 1970), p. 82. First published 1934.

central figure in the collection of ten stories superbly entitled More Pricks Than Kicks, thinks of chance events as "the agreeable odds and ends of vaudeville that are liable to crop up".[43] Further on in the same story the link between vaudeville and the contingent or unexpected is again made: "This was unforeseen with a vengeance, if not exactly vaudeville."[44] In another story, Belacqua and his "current one and only", Ruby Tough, are related to Punch and Judy, those remnants of the commedia dell'arte:

> Like fantoccini controlled by a single wire they flung themselves down on the western slope of heath. From now on till the end there is something very secco and Punch and Judy about their proceedings, Ruby looking more bawdy Magdalene than ever; Belacqua like a super out of the Harlot's Progress.[45]

Towards the end of his "gress" through life, Belacqua, faced with minor operations on his neck and toe, decides in spite of his fear to present a cheerful face to others. He does this, the narrator informs us, because he desires to make an impression on other people:

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[43]"Ding-Dong," More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 41.

[44]"Ding-Dong," p. 47.

[45]"Love and Lethe," More Pricks Than Kicks, pp. 100-101.

> It was this paramount consideration that made him decide in favour of Bim and Bom, Grock, Democritus, whatever you are pleased to call it, and postpone its dark converse to a less public occasion.[46]

Other stories, "What A Misfortune" and "Draff" respectively, contain references to "a circus wedding" and "a pantomime baby".[47]

Scattered throughout the novels that follow More Pricks Than Kicks are other references to clowns and the clown tradition. In Murphy Celia's idea that a job for Murphy will bring them closer together is described as "the kind of Joe Miller that Murphy simply could not bear to hear revived [as] It had never been a good joke".[48] In the addenda section of Watt an old gardener punningly refers to a shrub as "a hardy laurel".[49] In Mercier and Camier a police constable orders Watt, Mercier and Camier off the sidewalk with "This is the sidewalk, ... not a circus ring" (a remark

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[46]"Yellow," More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 176. Grock appears in "A Wet Night", another story in the same collection. Characters by the name of Bim and Bom appear in Murphy and How It Is; they are mentioned in Waiting for Godot.

[47]More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 133; p. 197.

[48]Samuel Beckett, Murphy (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 65. First published 1938.

[49]Samuel Beckett, Watt (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 252. Originally published by the Olympia Press, Paris, 1953.

that is particularly pointed since all three have been described as grotesque, clown-like figures).[50] Throughout the trilogy references are made to the clown and the circus: Molloy refers to his testicles as "decaying circus clowns";[51] Malone speaks of himself as playing the clown and has a visitor (a figure of Death, possibly) who wears "heavily starched clown's cuffs";[52] the Unnamable speaks of life as a carnival and again as "this circus where it is enough to breathe to qualify for asphyxiation".[53]

These direct references to clowning and clown figures have been catalogued in order to point up Beckett's familiarity with the tradition. Although these are, I believe, sufficient to indicate that the notion of clowns was constantly with Beckett, it is interesting to note that this is further endorsed by two people well-acquainted with Beckett and his work, A. J. Leventhal and Jack MacGowran. In his foreword to a catalogue of Beckett works exhibited at Reading University in 1971 Leventhal states that "Beckett

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[50]Samuel Beckett, Mercier and Camier (London: Calder and Boyars, 1974), p. 112.

[51]Samuel Beckett, Molloy: Malone Dies: The Unnamable (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 36.

[52]Beckett, Malone Dies, p. 195 and p. 269.

[53]Beckett, The Unnamable, p. 325 and p. 323.

admired several of the comic actors of the silent-screen and early 'talkies'.... Beckett has also admitted to 'a strong weakness for Ben Turpin'."[54] Jack MacGowran, in an interview given shortly before his death, is explicit about Beckett's relation to the film clowns:

> One of the things that struck me about Beckett is a similarity between some of Chaplin's early films and Beckett's plays. Has he ever talked about that?
>
> He has. He was one of the greatest enthusiasts of the old silent movies that you could find. Chaplin, Buster Keaton, all those people, they were all part of his youth and he was very influenced by them.[55]

Thus, from the evidence of the works and of statements by those who knew him, we know that Samuel Beckett had knowledge of and was influenced by the clown tradition.

The earliest fiction contains in embryonic form the image of man as clown. Belacqua and Murphy, both "seedy solipsists", are outsiders, grotesque figures engaged in a comic, pitfall-ridden quest for "the life of the mind"; both are hindered in their quest by the demands of the body - in particular, its sexual demands. Both crave the pleasures of the interior world of the mind (Murphy's "little world") and both are ultimately thwarted by an abrupt,

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[54] A. J. Leventhal, Foreword to Samuel Beckett: an exhibition (London: Turret Books, 1971), pp. 70-71. Catalogue compiled by James Knowlson.

[55] Richard Toscan, "MacGowran on Beckett," Theatre Quarterly, III, 11 (July-Sept. 1973), p. 20.

comically unexpected death - the body's final betrayal.

Although they adumbrate certain themes which emerge fully in Watt and the trilogy, More Pricks Than Kicks and Murphy are essentially pieces of virtuosity by a young Beckett who is still concerned as a writer with omnipotence à la Joyce and who has not yet found his own realm of comic impotence, a realm of clowns explored by the artist-clown.[56] It is in Watt and the trilogy that the matter of the impotent, grotesque outsider endlessly engaged in struggles with the world of objects and the world of words, adrift in space and time, begins to be fully realized. In Watt and in the trilogy in particular, language itself becomes the raw material for the clown's routines, as the narrator-clowns relentlessly seek to "eff the ineffable", to fill the time by exploring, as well as the world of objects and words,

> the within, all that inner space one never sees, the brain and heart and other caverns where thought and feeling dance their sabbath.[57]

Language permutated endlessly by the narrator-clown is made to render an eternal present, in which those moribund

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[56]The Beckett of More Pricks Than Kicks will never write "She wore blue stockings" when he can produce instead the convoluted "Wastes of woad worsted advertise the pasterns." (in "A Wet Night").

[57]Beckett, Molloy, p. 10.

grotesques Mercier, Camier, Watt, Molloy, Malone and the Unnamable are eternally seeking - alone and alien in a world in which things and words change their aspect and in which only "the suffering of being" is a constant.

Although the image of man as clown is present in most of Beckett's works[58] and does affect the structure of those works considerably, it is in the stage plays that Beckett has made greatest use of the theatrical forms of the clown tradition as well as of its figures and themes. Accordingly, I have chosen to focus on this section of Beckett's work, dealing with each stage play in some detail and showing how the shape of each as well as the content draws on the clown tradition, the result being a unique oeuvre which concretizes "the issueless predicament of existence".

I have chosen to discuss the plays in the order in which they were first written. This order is maintained whether the plays were first written in French or in English, for I am concerned with the order of germination and initial realization of the works.[59] As it is, all of Beckett's plays since En attendant Godot and Fin de partie, with the

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[58]His poetry is an exception in this respect.

[59]Dates of completion of the plays are based on the Table included in Ruby Cohn's Back to Beckett.

exception of two mimes and the radio play Cascando, have been written in English and later translated into French by Beckett.

In his first published and produced play,[60] Waiting for Godot, Beckett draws upon the clown tradition for the matter and form of his work. I have decided to open my treatment of this play with a discussion of the two main figures, Vladimir and Estragon, the world in which they move and how they exist in that world. Vladimir and Estragon (or Didi and Gogo as they refer to each other) are ragged, tattered figures who appear to be living on the verge of utter destitution. Their clothes are ill-fitting (as with Didi's hat and Gogo's shoes) and in rags; their food seems to be confined to carrots, turnips, and black radishes, with a chicken bone now and then for variety; their place of shelter at night is a ditch or a mound. Their tattered garb has its complement in their battered, decrepit bodies: Gogo suffers agonies with his feet and Didi with some unspecified problem related to the kidneys; both are unsteady on their feet, ever ready to totter and fall; and both seem incapable

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[60] In 1947, just before he wrote En attendant Godot, Beckett turned out a play of "lush profusion", Eleuthéria. From all reports of this elephantine piece, one gathers that it is best left in the obscurity to which Beckett has relegated it.

of energetic physical movement.[61] They are perhaps sexually impotent, as well, since hanging seems to be the only potential source of an erection.

In pain, hungry, destitute, battered in body and garb, Didi and Gogo pass the time in a world where only two certainties exist. One is the certainty of being beaten:

> Vladimir: (hurt, coldly) May one inquire where His Highness spent the night?
> Estragon: In a ditch.
> Vladimir: (admiringly) A ditch! Where?
> Estragon: (without gesture) Over there.
> Vladimir: And they didn't beat you?
> Estragon: Beat me? Certainly they beat me.[62]

The other is the certainty, expressed again and again in the course of their conversation, that they cannot leave this hostile place because they have an appointment that must be kept:

> Estragon: Let's go.
> Vladimir: We can't.
> Estragon: Why not?
> Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot.
> Estragon: (despairingly) Ah![63]

Two certainties, then, which in a sense work against one another. Certain that they will suffer by remaining in the vicinity,

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[61] Their exercise-canter, in Act II, ends almost as soon as it begins.

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

[63] Waiting for Godot, p. 31. Also on pp. 44, 45, 50, 54, 59. Variations of this also occur at several other points in their waiting.

they are certain that they must remain.

These are the only certainties in a world in which all else is subject to doubt. ("Perhaps", "I wonder", and "It's not certain" are some of the refrains which carry this doubt through their discourse.)

In the world of Vladimir and Estragon the flow of time dissolves all into doubt. They cannot cope with the flow of time, have no notion of measuring the flow in which they are immersed. With the inventive ineptness of clowns they attempt to calculate chronological time:

> Pozzo: What time is it?
> Vladimir: (inspecting the sky) Seven o'clock ... eight o'clock ...
> Estragon: That depends what time of year it is.
> Pozzo: Is it evening?
> Silence. Vladimir and Estragon scrutinize the sunset.
> Estragon: It's rising.
> Vladimir: Impossible.
> Estragon: Perhaps it's the dawn.
> Vladimir: Don't be a fool. It's the west over there.
> Estragon: How do you know?
> Pozzo: (anguished) Is it evening?
> Vladimir: Anyway it hasn't moved.
> Estragon: I tell you it's rising.[64]

Chronological time is meaningless in their world, where days do not march with precision to clock-time and where memories retain no clear traces of past events.[65] On the first

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[64] Waiting for Godot, p. 55.

[65] Pozzo's concern with chronological time is comic; by the second day his sense of time, or lack of it, is the same as that of Vladimir and Estragon.

evening of their wait, Vladimir and Estragon are not certain whether they are to meet Godot that day or some other day and are further uncertain what day it is "today"; on the second evening they cannot remember if they have been near the tree on the preceding day. Time past is forever beyond reach: the only time of which they are unbearably conscious is the vast void of <u>now</u> which has to be filled while waiting for Godot.

Just as the world of the waiting pair is a timeless void, so too it is a void of space (as the openness of the setting "A country road" suggests). Uncertainty about the place at which they are to meet Godot is expressed on both days of their waiting. When Estragon fears that an unspecified "they" may be approaching, he dashes from one side of the space to another, uncertain from which direction they are approaching and in which direction to flee. Estragon and Vladimir may or may not have been in the Macon country. Pozzo, the landowner who is possessive over his land upon which the two wait, is ultimately reduced to a blind wanderer journeying aimlessly on, having lost his sense of direction as well as his watch. It is a world, in short, in which the measuring instruments of the rationally-ordered world are of no avail.

Identities are uncertain: Vladimir is addressed by Estragon as Didi and is called Mr. Albert by the boy who comes

with a message from Mr. Godot; Estragon is called Gogo by Vladimir and gives his name as Adam in reply to Pozzo's query. Pozzo is mistaken initially for Godot, and to the end a doubt lingers in the minds of the two who wait as to his identity. The messengers from Godot may have been the same boy or different boys. Lucky may or may not have caused Pozzo suffering - his identity as torturer is, like all other identities in this world, called into question.

Relationships among the inhabitants of this world are uncertain. Vladimir and Estragon exist in a state of oscillation, embracing and recoiling, uncertain whether "It would be better to part"; they arrive at no conclusion - only the uneasy compromise of "It's not certain". They are not clear about the nature of their relation to Godot: whether they are waiting voluntarily or if they are tied, what he will have to say if he comes. The relationship of the other couple that comes along the country road at the spot where Vladimir and Estragon wait is also ambiguous: there may be mutual torture inflicted in this master-slave relationship. Pozzo is the more powerful of the two by far on their first appearance, but Lucky is the less impotent on their second one, the leader now rather than the driven. The relationship that exists between Godot and his messengers (if indeed there are more than one) is inexplicable - he beats one and not the other.

The world of the two companions who are waiting for Godot is a world in which change is gratuitous, unexpected and inexplicable. Objects disappear - Pozzo's briar, vaporizer/pulverizer, and watch vanish.[66] Others appear - Estragon's ill-fitting boots are replaced with larger ones. Night falls suddenly and a moon rises with equal suddenness. The tree near which Vladimir and Estragon wait sprouts leaves suddenly (perhaps overnight); Pozzo becomes blind and Lucky dumb - also perhaps overnight. Change, whether growth or decay, follows no orderly pattern; it is purely contingent, uncertainty as active principle.

This is the world of Vladimir and Estragon,[67] a world in which they are outsiders, threatened by an anonymous "they" who never fail to beat them, a world all aspects of which, time, space, others, objects are subject to change and flux and thereby ungraspable by the solitary waiting ones who wait "alone together". In brief, it is the world of "existential

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[66] In one production of the play Vladimir and Estragon were made to pick Pozzo's pockets, thereby explaining the disappearance of his treasured possessions. While this is not implausible, there is no such action indicated in stage-directions which are remarkable for their fullness and precision. The objects simply vanish; "it's not certain" what has happened. The act of thievery is an unnecessary addition.

[67] And, in Act II, of Pozzo and Lucky who, directionless, journey on.

man" in which everything happens "for reasons unknown".[68]

There is the tentative suggestion conveyed by the refrain "Let's go" that the situation might conceivably be better elsewhere for Vladimir and Estragon. However, as they tell each other and us a score of times, they cannot because they must wait for a Mr. Godot with whom they have an appointment. Vladimir and Estragon are, then, essentially in a bind: longing to go they have taken it upon themselves to stay and wait.

To remain in a situation permeated with uncertainty is a difficult struggle, for the void is constantly threatening to swallow the waiting ones. Vladimir and Estragon, clown-like in appearance and mien, inhabiting a world similar to that of the clown in its hostility and lack of the ordering principle of cause and effect, are above all clowns in this: together they enact routines which enable them to "pass the time" and "give [them] the impression that [they] exist".[69]

These two grotesque figures, similar in their physical decrepitude and utter destitution to the "moribunds"

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[68]This phrase is a recurring one in Lucky's demented monologue.

[69]Episodes as various as the Pozzo-Lucky visit and the trying on of boots are viewed positively by Vladimir in that they help pass the time.

of Beckett's trilogy, show endless ingenuity and inexhaustible vitality in their attempts to "pass the time" while waiting for Godot. Like the clowns of old, Vladimir and Estragon enact "endlessly resourceful rituals of incapacity". Waiting for night to fall and/or Godot to come, they fill the time in a number of ways, all of which have a common characteristic: they prove satisfactory only for a moment, then they fail, and the desperately resourceful clowns must look for another diversion.

Let us consider first how they use words to fill time. On both evenings of their wait Vladimir and Estragon "toss the ball" of language to and fro in stichomythic interchanges of stock-phrases which create the effect of music-hall cross-talk. Consider, for example, the exchange (on the first evening) in which they perform a verbal duet on the subject of their uncertainty about their relationship with Godot:

> 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.
Estragon: It's the normal thing.
Vladimir: Is it not?
Estragon: I think it is.
Vladimir: I think so too.[70]

This "canter" has within it the seeds of its own downfall (a term particularly apt to describe the dying off of this duet). Vladimir and Estragon co-operate to weave cliched phrases (arrangements of words that are worn and commonplace - "In the quiet of his home", "couldn't promise anything", "have to think it over") in a verbal dance which is vital and gay in its rhythm; at the same time the fragmented phrases uttered by two speakers create an effect of two voices talking past one another in solipsistic fashion. The routine, born of their united efforts, reveals their inescapable separateness. And ultimately it falls off into the void as Silence, the stage-direction which follows, indicates. The routine has fallen off into silence, and the two are again aware of their plight:

Estragon: (anxious) And we?
Vladimir: I beg your pardon.
Estragon: I said, And we?
Vladimir: I don't understand.
Estragon: Where do we come in?
Vladimir: Come in?

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[70] Waiting for Godot, p. 13.

Estragon: Take your time.
Vladimir: Come in? On our hands and knees.[71]

Exuberant play with words has given way to the hesitant, tense rhythms and repeated questions of those who feel themselves to be in a bind. Didi and Gogo (fine clown names which are in themselves examples of the repetition that is a cardinal principle of the clown's world) are, however, inexhaustible and repeatedly engage in verbal duets. During the same evening they participate in cross-talk exchanges on the subject of inevitability and on the poor quality of the entertainment Pozzo offers. There is, despite the grim undertones, a basically light-hearted quality to these exchanges of clichés.

Other verbal routines devised to pass the time on the first evening of their wait are Vladimir's attempt at a discussion of the varying Gospel accounts of the fate of the two thieves crucified with Christ and Estragon's attempt to tell an obscene story. Neither are completed and in each case the would-be debater and would-be raconteur pass on to something else. Although they fall off, as do the cross-talk exchanges, the resources of Biblical debate and story-telling provide momentary respite.

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[71] Waiting for Godot, pp. 13-14.

When not engaged in verbal rituals akin to those of the music-hall comedian hired to fill an evening with words and stories, Vladimir and Estragon debate repeatedly the questions of whether they are in the right place, at the right time, and whether Godot will come. These queries run like a thread through their discourse and in their repetition themselves constitute a kind of routine.

The act of waiting performed on evening One begins itself to seem a routine - a turn repeated - when the pair return on evening Two to perform (in Act II) the act of waiting a second time. Again verbal routines are constructed to pass the time, but the canters become more desperate as the silences become more and more frequent and the time weighs heavier as Godot still does not come. Still, indomitable, indefatigable, they go on, more conscious now of the fact that they are improvising and desperately improvising. Throughout the second evening they exhort one another to perform verbally, with beseechings that take the same shape and convey the urgency of their need to invent: "That's the idea, let's contradict each other.... That's the idea, let's ask each other questions.... That's the idea, let's abuse each other...." Desperate as they are, they always retain a sense of wry humour, as evinced in the "Let's abuse each other" routine:

Vladimir: Moron!
Estragon: That's the idea, let's abuse each other.
They turn, move apart, turn again and face each other.
Vladimir: Moron!
Estragon: Vermin!
Vladimir: Abortion!
Estragon: Morpion!
Vladimir: Sewer-rat!
Estragon: Curate!
Vladimir: Cretin!
Estragon: (with finality). Crritic!
Vladimir: Oh!
He wilts, vanquished, and turns away.[72]

This canter leads directly into another, a reconciliation canter:

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.[73]

The silence raises the inevitable question which runs like a desperate chant through the second evening of their waiting: "What do we do now?" And off they are again, this time playing at physical exercise.

In all of their verbal routines Vladimir and Estragon are clown-like in their dogged struggle with a dead language,

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[72] Waiting for Godot, p. 48.

[73] Waiting for Godot, p. 49.

a language of fragmented stock-phrases. They achieve a kind of success insofar as a kind of rhythm is set going[74] and time is filled, "for the moment"; but the words eventually fall into the silence and the question "What do we do now?" looms again before them. Language proves as inadequate as Vladimir's hat and Estragon's boot.

The clown-figures also make use of actions: they fill the space in which they must wait (their playing area, literally and figuratively) with actions which are synchronized with or mirroring each other. Estragon fiddles with his boot; Vladimir fiddles with his hat. Estragon mimes Vladimir's off-stage fighting. Hats in particular provide them with scope for action. At various points on both evenings hats are taken off simultaneously and put on simultaneously. The most elaborate play with hats occurs in a sequence which is an exact parallel of the "three hats for two heads" routine in the Marx Brothers's Duck Soup. The sequence begins:

> 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

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[74] Likewise, in Lucky's monologue where reason and language both seem beyond repair a kind of mad, demented rhythm is nevertheless achieved. Language here appears to be galvanized into life.

> on Estragon's hat in place of Lucky's which he hands to Estragon.[75]

This goes on through three or more such cycles until Estragon ends up where he started (with his own hat on), Vladimir where he started (with Lucky's hat on) and Vladimir's hat is thrown to the ground.

There are some interesting parallels between this action canter (and others: the hanging attempt, for one) and the verbal canters considered previously. Both lead nowhere, but rather end in a "dying fall". To rephrase John Fletcher's remark, "action without conclusion parallels speech without consequence".[76] In a world of uncertainty, purposelessness and impotence are the order of things. Man is a clown whose only means of filling the void is to play. Action and words become the stuff of play, of improvisation engaged in to pass the time while fulfilling an agonizing pensum, the wait for Godot.

Theatrical play lessens the tedium of their waiting. Everything becomes diversion: their own relationship of mutual dependency, ever-threatened yet ever-sustained, becomes the source of rituals of embracing and recoiling; the terrifying master-slave relationship of Pozzo and Lucky yields dance and monologues and is seen by them as a

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[75] Waiting for Godot, p. 46.

[76] John Fletcher and John Spurling, Beckett: A Study of his Plays (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), p. 57.

"diversion". The munching of a carrot, the pulling up of trouser-legs, Pozzo's monologue on the twilight, Lucky's demented speech, Vladimir's soliloquy in the manner of Hamlet - all become part of the process in which "Clown mimes despair, transforming it into an exquisite ceremony"[77] and thereby transcending the "domain of the impossible" in which he finds himself.

Bodily falls, verbal falls (in the sense that their "poor starved arrangements" fall off into silence), trousers-falls, hat-falls are the order of the day, and the play, for Vladimir and Estragon. But they pick themselves, their hats, their trousers and their falling words up and are off again, defiantly striving to remain erect and passing the time in a world where all totters, sags and falls. Their triumph lies in filling the void as best they can, for "it's the way of doing [nothing] that counts, the way of doing it, if you want to go on living".[78]

This, then, is what the play is "about": the strategies of these two comic grotesques, Vladimir and Estragon, for filling the time while waiting for Godot. These make up the matter, or content of the play: routines

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[77] Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 35.

[78] Waiting for Godot, p. 38.

performed to fill the time and space while waiting. Made of routines, the play as a whole takes its shape from the matter it contains. It too is a routine, performed before us the audience, shaped by an artist-clown and performed by actor-clowns.

The play itself is "an endlessly resourceful ritual of incapacity". Equipped with the stale gags and worn turns of the clown tradition, hampered by a language that has been petrified in the "realistic" novels he abhorred, the playwright has ventured into the realm of theatre, of play and action and clown-like has ventured into the domain of the impossible. He has made a play (praxis) out of waiting (stasis);[79] he has, like the figures he creates, wrested from a situation of unutterable poverty a paradoxical triumph. Waiting for Godot is a play where, as it has been said, "Nothing happens, twice."

The organizing principle of the play is that of the world it bodies forth: repetition with variation moving towards a "dying fall". It, like Lucky's speech and Gogo and Didi's canters, is a cyclic rundown.[80] Both acts open

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[79] Hugh Kenner points out that this is against the grain of the theatre, where the basic unit is the event [in his A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 33].

[80] The most frequently occurring stage-directions in the play are "As before" and "Silence".

with an invoking of the idea of circularity: Act I with Vladimir's remark that he's "beginning to come round" to Estragon's opinion ("Nothing to be done") even though he's always "resumed the struggle"; and Act II with Vladimir's macabre cyclical song of the dog who was beaten to death with a ladle. Act II in toto is a repetition of Act I at a more desperate tempo. And each act comes to the same closing tableau, in which word and act work against one another:

> Well, shall we go?
> Yes, let's go.
> They do not move.[81]

The structural principle of the play is that of the routines performed by Vladimir and Estragon; its shape as well as its content comes from the clown tradition. That the total effect of the work is that of an improvised piece is given support by the reaction of one member of an audience in Navan, Ireland, described by Alan Simpson in his book on the Abbey Theatre:

> Two old countrymen were overheard discussing the play as they left the hall. 'What do they be sayin' at all?' asked one. 'I don't know,' said the other, 'I believe they do make it up as they go along.'[82]

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[81] Waiting for Godot, p. 36 and p. 61. The variation principle is at work here as well: in Act I Estragon suggests that they go as they sit on a mound; in Act II as they stand Vladimir suggests leaving. Yet, as is remarked elsewhere in the play, "The essentials don't change."

[82] Alan Simpson, Beckett and Behan and a Theatre in Dublin (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 90.

The play calls attention to itself as a routine (in the manner of music-hall routines, which were usually self-consciously theatrical) at various points throughout the evening. Terms like "diversion", "motif", "repertory" are used in the course of the play. Several comments of a self-reflexive nature are made, of which the following is a notable example:

> 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.[83]

Remarks are made which suggest an awareness (perhaps) of the audience by the actor-clowns. At one point Estragon faces the auditorium and remarks wryly, "Inspiring prospects"; a little later Vladimir turns to the auditorium and says "that bog...." While this is on one level a sly joke by the playwright, it also has the effect of creating an awareness in the audience that they are participants in this self-consciously theatrical ritual which is taking place.

H. Porter Abbot, in discussing Beckett's fiction, makes use of the concept of "imitative form" which he defines in this way:

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[83] Waiting for Godot, p. 24.

> ... when we speak of "imitation" we refer not so much to a notion of reflection or representation as we do to a generation in the reader of experiences that are at the same time the subject of the work. Through imitative form, in other words, the reader is forced into a relationship with the book, which imitates the central figure's relationship with his world.[84]

Waiting for Godot is a masterpiece of imitative form as described by Abbott. The play is conterminous with itself: the playing area of Vladimir and Estragon and the play area are the same; the playing time of the pair and the play time are the same (there is a suggestion that even the chronological time is the same); their mode of filling time and the audience's mode of filling time (participation in and observation of theatrical rituals) are the same.[85] Like Vladimir and Estragon, we the audience engage in two acts of waiting for Godot to come. The time that passes so agonizingly for them passes in the same manner for us, eked out in meagre rituals of word and act. Over two hours are filled for us as for them with song and dance, cross-talk and monologue; and we like them are left uncertain as to whether Godot will come, whether they will go. We are present at and involved in a ritual improvisation of the

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[84] H. Porter Abbott, The Fiction of Samuel Beckett: Form and Effect (Berkeley: University of California, 1973), p. 7.

[85] We and Gogo and Didi provide an audience for Lucky and Pozzo, whose visits are a kind of play within the play within the play.

"issueless predicament of existence".

We are present at it and involved in it by means of this play which totally concretizes the predicament of existence, that of the suffering being who must be there, for, as Alain Robbe-Grillet suggests,

> ... it is the theater, more than any other mode of representing reality which reproduces [the human situation of "being there"] most naturally. The dramatic character is on stage, that is his primary quality: he is there.[86]

Vladimir and Estragon, alone together, exist before us, concrete and tangible images of man as clown, going on, keeping an appointment in a world without order or reason, a world in which they are inexhaustibly impoverished. And that concretized, dramatized image gives us back our own image; we see in them ourselves and in their predicament our own. Form has indeed become "a concretion of content, the revelation of a world".

Endgame, Beckett's next play, was described by him in a letter to Alan Schneider as "an even worse affair" than Waiting for Godot.[87] In another letter he characterized Endgame as "Rather difficult and elliptic, mostly depending upon the power of the text to claw, more inhuman than

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[86]Alain Robbe-Grillet, "Samuel Beckett, or Presence on the Stage," in his For A New Novel: Essays on Fiction (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 111.

[87]Ruby Cohn, "The Beginning of Endgame," Modern Drama, IX (1966-67), p. 319.

Godot."[88] In this second of his published plays, Beckett has indeed created a "worse" and "more inhuman" affair than Waiting for Godot, in the sense that he has narrowed down the field of possibility for himself as playwright and for the inhabitants of the world of his play and has thereby created a grimmer, a more cruelly comic world than the one in his previous play. This is not at all to say that Endgame is a totally negative work: it, like Waiting for Godot, wrests from futility and failure a kind of muted, tentative triumph.

There are four players in the world of Endgame. In their grotesque appearance and in the limitations of their bodies we recognize the clown. Clov, the only mobile character, has a "very red face" and the "stiff, staggering walk" of Chaplin. He, the most robust or, to put it another way, the least decrepit of the four, is bent and lame and has terrible pains in his legs. His eyes are bad and he stinks. Hamm, his master and the central "player", is confined to an armchair mounted on castors. He too has a very red face and wears black glasses. He also wears a whistle about his neck, a rug on his knees and thick socks on his feet. He is blind and possibly going deaf. In the morning he needs a tonic to "brace [him] up" and in the

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[88] Alec Reid, All I Can Manage More Than I Could, p. 71.

evening a pain-killer to "calm [him] down"; he needs a catheter in order to urinate, usually. Hamm's parents, Nagg and Nell, like grotesque jack-in-the-boxes are confined to ash-bins from which their upper bodies emerge occasionally. Both wear nightcaps; both have very white faces and both cannot see or hear very well. All four players are in various stages of bodily decay, suffering in various degrees from the tyranny of their material case.

Their physical situation is paralleled by that of the world in which they find themselves. It is a world which is decaying, winding down - a world in which all appears to be "Corpsed". The four exist in solitude: other characters to whom they refer, Mother Pegg and "that old doctor", are dead. A rat and a flea seem to be the only living beings. All is ending, dying down: at various points Clov announces that "There (is) are no more ... bicycle wheels ... pap ... nature ... sugar-plums ... navigators ... rugs ... pain-killer." The world is ending, why it is not certain, but it is ending nevertheless.

Yet the world, like their bodies, has not ended: there is a rat in Clov's kitchen, a flea in Clov's trousers and possibly a small boy outside their "shelter". The world and all that it contains (including the four within the room) is decaying, but it is a process of decay which is infinite and will never be finally ended, as references made

by Clov and Hamm to the grains of the Eleatic philosophers suggest. Clov alludes to what is to be the crucial problem in his opening monologue:

> Clov (fixed gaze, tonelessly):
> Finished, it's finished, nearly finished,
> it must be nearly finished.
> (Pause.)
> Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day,
> suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap,
> the impossible heap.
> (Pause.)
> ....[89]

Hamm invokes the same image as the play nears its end:

> Hamm: ....
> (Pause.)
> Moment upon moment, pattering down, like
> the millet grains of ...
> (he hesitates)
> ... that old Greek, and all life long you
> wait for that to mount up to a life.[90]

The old Greek, according to Ruby Cohn, is Eubulides of Miletus, one of the Eleatic philosophers who were concerned to "prove" the incommensurability of the finitely measurable with the infinite universe. Eubulides wrote:

> One grain of corn is not a heap. Add a grain and there is yet no heap. When does a heap begin?[91]

Grains of corn cannot make a heap; grains of time cannot make an eternity; and grain upon grain of finite decay can

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[89] Samuel Beckett, Endgame: A Play in One Act (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 1.

[90] Endgame, p. 70.

[91] Ruby Cohn, Back to Beckett (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 144.

never amount to the infinite and total decay towards which the world of Endgame is eternally tending.

This is the crux of Endgame: the characters, each contained in his own unutterable solitude and decay, long to end, attempt to end, but can never bring the ending they desire - the ending of the day, the ending of the play, the ending of their interdependent relationship of master and servant. Time goes on slowly, inexorably and they must go on trying to end. The paradox of the clown is again present: the need to end and the impossibility of ending.

Again, the question arises; what is the nature of the activity engaged in by these clowns as they attempt their impossible task of ending? The title of the piece, Endgame: A Play in One Act, points to the answer. Routines, verbal and physical, are performed by the players who are attempting to play out the game of their lives, their relationships to an ending end.

To "Every man his speciality", as Hamm remarks. The immobile Hamm engages in verbal routines: soliloquies which are parodic versions of tragic soliloquies (a "finishing" of the lofty tragic style), a "chronicle" which is a parodic version of realistic narrative with its excessive attention to detail, twisted Biblical sayings ("Get out of here and love one another! Lick your neighbour as yourself!"), reminiscences couched in archaic language ("She was bonny

once, like a flower of the field"), invocations of the pastoral world ("Flora! Pomona! Ceres!"), malign prophecy (as when he predicts that one day Clov will be like him), little dramas of rejection with his toy dog, and an extended conversation-routine with Clov. In all his verbal play he is working with archaic and decaying forms of expression - those of heroic tragedy, pastoral myth, the Bible, pantomime and music-hall. These worn vehicles he uses to fill the void of his blindness, as he himself suggests:

> Then babble, babble, words, like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper, together, in the dark.[92]

He further uses verbal routines to convey his agonized longing for "it" to end. "The prolonged creative effort" of wrestling with a dying language and a dying life is the substance of his play.

Nagg and Nell, both confined in ash-bins (a literal representation of the immobile and neglected state of many elderly people), also resort to verbal routines. Nell harks back to idyllic days when she and Nagg rowed on Lake Como. Nagg tells a long punning story about a pair of trousers that is never finished, in which God and an inept tailor are implicitly compared. Nagg also engages in reminiscence on Hamm's childhood and makes an ill-willed prophecy of what he

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[92] Endgame, p. 70.

hopes will be Hamm's future solitude and loneliness.

Clov, the only member of the group who can move, performs what are some of the most comic and simultaneously most painful routines in this circumscribed world. The reluctant servant of Hamm, he performs endless acts upon his master's orders. To and fro he limps and staggers, again and again forgetting the object he has laid down for a moment and having to retrace his steps to retrieve it. Some of his actions are pure slapstick, as when he discovers a flea in his trousers and on Hamm's command, "lets him have it" with the insecticide:

> Clov loosens the top of his trousers, pulls it forward and shakes powder into the aperture. He stoops, looks, waits, starts, frenziedly shakes more powder, stoops, looks, waits.[93]

These are some of the routines engaged in by individual players, according to their capacity. Their entire day, however, is a play, a routine of conversation which moves over and over along the same grooves. Repetition, conveying a sense of repeatedly thwarted effort, is the main fact of their existence.[94] The peevish, egocentric master asks the same questions over and over:

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[93] Endgame, p. 34.

[94] Even relationships are repeated - that of Hamm and Clov by Nagg and Nell, Hamm and the dog, the "I" of Hamm's story and the man who came crawling on his belly.

for example, he asks "Is it not time for my pain-killer?" four times in the course of the dialogue. Threats of desertion are made repeatedly by Clov: he says "I'll leave you" to Hamm at least nine times as he tends to Hamm's wants. Entire sequences of conversation are repeated exactly; the following sequences each occur twice:

> Hamm: (coldly)
> Forgive me.
> (Pause. Louder.)
> I said, Forgive me.
> Clov: I heard you.[95]

> Hamm: (anguished)
> What's happening, what's happening?
> Clov: Something is taking its course.[96]

Longer sequences are repeated with minor variations, establishing a sense of "canters" as in Waiting for Godot. Thus, the "How's your health?" sequence which follows,

> Hamm: How are your eyes?
> Clov: Bad.
> Hamm: How are your legs?
> Clov: Bad.
> Hamm: But you can move.
> Clov: Yes.[97]

becomes further on in the course of the play:

> Hamm: Wait.
> (Clov halts.)
> How are your eyes?
> Clov: Bad.

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[95] Endgame, p. 7; p. 12.

[96] Endgame, p. 13; p. 32.

[97] Endgame, p. 7.

Hamm: But you can see.
Clov: All I want.
Hamm: How are your legs?
Clov: Bad.
Hamm: But you can walk.
Clov: I come ... and go.[98]

This relentless repetition which permeates the conversation and the gestures of their day (indeed there is almost no phrase, no image, no gesture which is not at some point repeated) creates a sense of on-going rhythm and conveys the endlessness of their state. Hamm questioning, Clov answering; Hamm ordering, Clov obeying; Hamm story-telling, Nagg listening - each pair is involved in a symbiotic relationship. Their interaction in conversation is a matter of routines repeated with but minor variations, improvisations of the moment. The world is wearing down, but they, like it or not, are inexhaustible players, enacting worn routines. Even these repetitive routines become the subject of a refrain: "All life long the same questions, the same answers.... Ah, the old questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them.... All life long the same inanities".[99]

As well as operating in sequences of words, the principle of repetition governs rhythms of conversation and

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[98] Endgame, pp. 35-36.

[99] Endgame, p. 5; p. 38; p. 45.

physical movement, rhythms which carry a sense of frustrated effort. Consider, for instance, these examples of a pattern of question and response which develops in the conversational routines:

> Hamm: Have you not had enough?
> Clov: Yes!
> (Pause.)
> Of what?[100]
>
> Nagg: Do you want a bit?
> Nell: No.
> (Pause.)
> Of what?[101]
>
> Nagg: Will I tell you the story of the tailor?
> Nell: No.
> (Pause.)
> What for?[102]

This pattern of question, reply and back-track to another question parallels the difficult movements of Clov, who must always retrace his steps for one reason or another. This pattern of "advance two steps and retreat one", present in the dialogue and Clov's movements, vividly images forth the thwarted trying to finish that is the major effort of the play. Dialogue and movement are tortuous (as Clov says, "No one that ever lived ever thought so crooked as we") but nevertheless the characters inch their way on, whether in words or gestures, attempting to end.

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[100] *Endgame*, p. 5.

[101] *Endgame*, p. 17

[102] *Endgame*, p. 20.

A mordant humour sustains all the characters. Clov laughs briefly five times as he mimes the beginning of the day (and the play), thereby suggesting that he finds this world worthy of a brief laugh at least. Nell laughs at the idea of a heart in Hamm's head, maintaining that "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness". Nagg laughs at his story of botched trousers and a botched world. Clov is amused at the notion that they and their situation could possibly have any meaning and he guffaws at Hamm's story of the man crawling on his belly "begging for bread for his brat". Hamm exhibits throughout an almost macabre sense of humour, displayed in such remarks as "The old folks at home! No decency left! Guzzle, guzzle, that's all they think of" (an ironic reference to his ashbin-confined father's pitiful request for his "pap") and "This is perhaps not one of my bright days ..." (bitterest of ironies from a blind man in a grey world).[103] The impossibility of their condition, finite beings unable to finish once and for all, is a cruel joke and they relish it to the full. Despite their desperate condition they display a bitter and tenacious vitality in their jokes and in all their play.

Playing, then, characterizes the world of Endgame. The players play out their relationships, their day,

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[103] Endgame, p. 9; p. 47.

uncertain of the precise situation (as evinced by the repetition of Hamm's anguished "What's happening? What's happening?" and Clov's vague response, "Something is taking its course") and longing to end. Longing to end, they play out a game which only asymptotically approaches an end. Ultimately, it is with them, as with other Beckett characters, words for nothing, acts for nothing, stories for nothing, renunciation for nothing, because, as Ruby Cohn suggests,

> Each word, each event, is another grain, but the grains never mount up to the impossible heap of infinity.[104]

Like the clown, Hamm and Clov are endlessly inventive in the quest of an impossible goal, for as the structure of their play suggests they do not end but merely return to the beginning; their action is circular, their game like their days, their conversation and gestures will repeat itself. They do not finish, as Clov hopes at the opening, but rather "remain" (the final word spoken in the play). Involved in a cycle of futility, tomorrow they will again enact "rituals of resourceful incapacity" in their grey and dying world.

Endgame as a dramatic construct itself internalizes in its form the process undergone by the players. As their play is circular play, so too this play is a circular play,

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[104]Ruby Cohn, Back to Beckett, p. 144.

At its close all the characters are in the positions they held at the beginning. The dialogue opens with monologues by Clov and Hamm and closes with monologues by Clov and Hamm. Hamm begins to speak after unveiling his face and he ends by veiling his face. The play is framed by the words "Finished" at the beginning and "remain" at the end. As the desired ending is not attained by the players, so too the play does not end but returns upon itself, in ceaseless circling. It is built upon what Beckett has called "the echo principle";[105] its organizing principle is that of the world it contains: infinite repetition.

Just as the world which Endgame depicts is at a stage of ending, of winding down, so too is Endgame as a formal construct. Andrew Kennedy has drawn attention to this, calling Endgame a "torso-play":

> The slow-moving apocalypse of Endgame is embodied, tentatively, in the formal catastrophe of an old-style tragedy. It is as if we were given the final sequence of a play whose preceding acts do not survive....[106]

Just as Hamm (like Hamlet making his own "The Mousetrap") plays with fragments of Shakespearean tragedy, so has Beckett made a play out of fragments of tragedy, interwoven with elements of Biblical story and music-hall. In so

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[105] Ruby Cohn, Back to Beckett, p. 142.

[106] Andrew Kennedy, Six dramatists in search of a language (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 144.

doing he has created a play full of resonances of apocalypse.

As with Waiting for Godot, Endgame calls attention to itself as a routine - and, furthermore, a routine which is performed reluctantly by actors who long to end - at various intervals. Terms such as "farce", "audition", "aside", "soliloquy", "dialogue", "exit", and "underplot" crop up in the dialogue; the players drive home to the audience the point that they are performing a routine for them. At one point, this interchange takes place:

> Clov: Why this farce, day after day?
> Hamm: Routine. One never knows.[107]

At another point, Clov asks "What is there to keep me here?" and Hamm replies "The dialogue". The implication is that they are participants in a routine which has to be performed.

The actor-clowns are perhaps aware of the audience. Clov makes an ironic joke about them. He turns his telescope towards them and comments that he sees "a multitude ... in transports ... of joy", going on to say "That's what I call a magnifier".[108] Such remarks invite the audience to laugh at their own unhappiness and boredom, as the clowns performing before them do.

The very structure and rhythm of the play engender in the audience a great sense of tedium, of longing that

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[107] Endgame, p. 32.

[108] Endgame, p. 29.

the play and the Play end. This is further heightened by remarks made by the players, after the fashion of music-hall comedians, on the routine: "This is slow work.... This is not much fun...." Will this never finish?... This is deadly.... Do you not think this has gone on long enough?" and so on and so on. These remarks include the audience in the process of trying to end by giving expression to their reactions to the play itself. The constant stressing of the unbearably slow progress of the play brings to fever-pitch the longing that "it" end - the audience is manoeuvred into the same position as the players. As with Godot, the audience is not only present at but actively involved in the ritual improvisation. The detachment permitted by a "chloroformed world" such as that of the fiction of Balzac or indeed the plays of Sartre is no longer possible. We are embroiled in the confusion and agony of the solitary player-clowns in the grey world; we are participants in a ritual of ending and playing, filling out the time with words and gestures, wondering if Clov will leave, if the world is truly "Corpsed". The play is indeed "in one act": ours and theirs.

Endgame as a many-layered construct of literary allusion and distorted echo has involved the literary critics in its play, luring them, as Bonamy Dobrée has

pointed out,[109] into a game of "hunt the symbol". Hamm comes from "hamus", hook; Hamm is a shortened form of hammer; Hamm is Hamlet; Hamm is a ham actor; Hamm is a ham, the word made flesh; Hamm is Ham, the son of Noah; Hamm is Prospero; Hamm is Richard III; Hamm is a chess king. There is no end to the parallels the ingenious critic can find.[110] Similarly, Clov is a nail (from "clou") or a clove or a cloven-hoofed animal; Nagg and Nell are horse-names or puns on the words "nag" and "knell". And so on. Such is the richness of the allusive texture of this play that significances and "meanings" can be found everywhere, as is slyly suggested in the play itself:

> Hamm: We're not beginning to ... to ... mean something?
> Clov: Mean something! You and I, mean something! (Brief laugh.) Ah that's a good one.
> Hamm: I wonder. (Pause.) Imagine if a rational being came back to earth, wouldn't he be liable to get ideas into his head if he observed us long enough. (Voice of rational being.) Ah, good, now I see what it is, yes, now I understand what they're at![111]
> ....

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[109] Bonamy Dobrée, "The London Theater; 1957: the Melting Pot," Sewanee Review, LXVI (Winter, 1958), p. 149.

[110] Critics were lured into playing "Guess who Godot is" in Waiting for Godot.

[111] Endgame, p. 33.

Clov's response to this is to scratch his belly and exclaim that he has a flea, an ironic counterpoint to notions of "meaning". He brings the play back from questions of "meaning" to the specific, tangible matter at hand, his being tormented by a flea. It is here in the concrete situation acted out before us that the "meaning" of Endgame lies: it is literally "A play in one act". The "meaning" lies in the process of playing, not in patterns of allusion which are certainly present and which serve to enrich the play but which are ultimately subordinate to the play of the actor-clowns. Their agony and their triumph lies in their routines of finishing.

When it came out in 1957 Endgame was viewed as a triumph and yet a kind of nadir for theatre. Moving closer to the unutterable, inexhaustible poverty of the clown, Beckett shaped from dying forms of theatre and language a play blazing with a fierce life. Playing with "starved arrangements" of word and gesture, with silence and immobile figures he created a work beyond which critics of his plays did not think it was possible for him to go. Immobilizing all his actors but one and endowing all four with a desire to end their play, he practically paralyzed the theatre, emptying "the little round box".[112] Impossible to go further, they

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[112] Hamm: But the little round box. It was full!
Clov: Yes. But now it's empty.

said. He, indefatigable clown, did go on and further in his unceasing attempts to concretize "the issueless predicament of existence". Endgame, appropriately enough, was more of a beginning than an ending.

Beckett's next piece was a short mime, originally written (in French) in 1956 for the dancer Deryk Mendel, with accompanying music by John Beckett, cousin of the author.[113] In this slight piece the silence which threatens to engulf the words of the players in Endgame reigns supreme; Beckett calls attention to this in the title, Act Without Words: A Mime for One Player.[114]

This mime is directly in the clown tradition; indeed, it conceivably could have been one of the routines performed by Coco, Popov, Grock or others of the clowns we have considered. This "slapstick comedy at the cosmological level", as Ruby Cohn calls it,[115] shows man to be at the mercy of mysteriously hostile forces which perpetually thwart him in his endeavours. A barren environment, inimical to life, receives "the man" (the only designation the player receives

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[113]Alec Reid, All I Can Manage, p. 74.

[114]This mime is published in the Grove Press edition of Endgame. It was first performed on a double bill with Endgame (in French) in London, April 3, 1957.

[115]Ruby Cohn, Samuel Beckett: the comic gamut (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p. 247.

in the mime as Beckett has written it) as he is flung backwards into it.[116] Attempts to leave, encouraged by a whistle offstage, are repeatedly repulsed: the man must remain and "play". Various objects which promise comfort and sustenance - a tree giving shade from the dazzling desert light, scissors, a carafe of water - emerge as if from nowhere and offer themselves to him. When he reaches out to them, these objects elude him or thwart him in some manner. The attempt to reach a tiny carafe of water dangling beyond his grasp particularly frustrates the player. Two cubes offer themselves and are used as aids in the struggle, only to collapse when he ineptly places the larger one upon the smaller one and climbs upon them. A rope appears alongside the carafe and the man tries to climb it. To no avail. The rope is let out and he is deposited back on the ground. He tries to cut the rope, it rises with him hanging on; he cuts the rope and falls back to the ground. Undaunted, displaying the persistence and inventiveness of the clown, the man makes a lasso and tries to lasso the carafe, only to have the carafe disappear into the flies whence it came. The player then appears to be considering hanging himself, but the wherewithal quickly vanishes. Again he attempts to leave and is flung back on stage. A second consideration of suicide

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[116] A concretization of the Heideggerian concept of man's "thrownness" in the world, it seems to me.

comes to nothing when the putative instrument, a pair of tailor's scissors, disappears into the flies. Even to sit on a cube is impossible: the cube is pulled from under him and he falls, landing on his side. The objects which have tantalized him previously emerge again from the flies, but the man does not respond. He remains motionless, staring before him, looking at his hands.

This mime, with great dramatic economy and effectiveness, renders in stage terms the situation of man-in-the-world. Gesture alone is used to convey the predicament of existence, wherein man (Tantalus as clown) goes on in a hostile world, a victim of the "mysterious machinations of the inanimate". Longing to leave he must stay and play out his role as outsider, displaying both ineptness and inventiveness as he struggles to reach the unattainable goal in the shape of a tiny carafe of water. The close of the mime is, as is the case with most of Beckett's theatre pieces, ambiguous and open-ended. The posture of the man lying and looking at his hands may be seen as a gesture of profound and ultimate despair or as a gesture of stoical resignation, made in the lull, the temporary respite from the "machinations of the inanimate".

That the final position of the clown figure is a gesture of resignation rather than a total collapse seems most likely. The action is built on the repetition principle:

every gesture (falling, dusting off, reflecting) is repeated several times and the looking at the hands is no exception. It therefore does not weigh as a final gesture, but rather as a repeated one, another of a series. The repetitive nature of activity in the mime would seem to indicate that this cycle of attempted attainment and mysterious repulsion by outside forces is an endless one, one which (like the mime in which it is embodied) will be repeated again and again, tomorrow night and the night after, by a clown who, although growing in awareness of the difficulty of his situation, cannot get out of it and whose only triumph is his awareness and stoical resignation.

Paraphrased and abstracted from in this manner, Beckett's Act Without Words I is but a pale shadow of itself. The "meaning" of this piece, as of his other pieces, lies in the playing out of the piece. It is totally theatrical, embodied in the gestures of the player on the stage, in the props and in the stage space and lighting. The comic, tenacious heroism of the player is fully realized only in the playing of the mime, whereby the objects in all their arbitrary "thereness" as well as the "thereness" of the player can be directly experienced. Then, and only then, can this translation of the human condition into the fumbles and tumbles of a determined player in a mime be fully appreciated.

Beckett's next stage play,[117] Krapp's Last Tape: A Play in One Act, draws again on the resources of language and sound as well as of mime; indeed, the juxtaposition of voices (two voices of one man) different in timbre, rhythm and diction, is an essential element of the play. The reduction process that characterizes the development of Beckett's drama as a whole is still going on: from four mobile characters in Waiting for Godot to four of whom only one is mobile in Endgame to one mobile character in Krapp's Last Tape. In the "monodrama" the solitude of the clown is given sharper focus; while the pairs of the previous plays are "alone together", Krapp's solitude is absolute, relieved only by mechanized memories.

The "action" of Beckett's plays is always issueless action: waiting in Waiting for Godot, trying to finish in Endgame and remembering in Krapp's Last Tape. A "moribund buffoon",[118] Krapp fills time by eating bananas, drinking, and "embarking on ... retrospect[s]". Re-playing memories which are "canned", preserved on tape, Krapp through his routines concretizes "the irremediable solitude to which

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[117] Act Without Words I is followed by a radio play, All That Fall, which Beckett wrote for a BBC series of original radio plays.

[118] Beckett uses this phrase in his monograph on Proust.

every human being is condemned".[119] He is alone with his own present misery, and the voices of his past do not serve to lessen his solitude but rather to mock it.

The audience is first confronted by the physical actuality of Krapp at 69, there before us in his "den". The tattered, grotesque aspect of the clown is unmistakable:

> Rusty black narrow trousers too short for him. Rusty black sleeveless waistcoat, four capacious pockets. Heavy silver watch and chain. Grimy white shirt open at neck, no collar. Surprising pair of dirty white boots, size ten at least, very narrow and pointed. White face. Purple nose. Disordered grey hair. Unshaven. Very near-sighted (but unspectacled). Hard of hearing. Cracked voice. Distinctive intonation. Laborious walk.[120]

The opening mime in which Krapp rummages for a banana in his table-drawers, eats it, prepares to eat another, slips on a banana-skin and almost falls, and finally goes off-stage to drink confirms one's impression of Krapp as clown, satisfying basic appetites in comically direct fashion. Actions are repeated in the manner of the clown: the opening mime contains two cycles of action, both of which commence with Krapp sitting at his table. From there he goes to his drawers in search of bananas: the first banana leads to another banana; the second leads to an off-stage drink. His

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[119] Proust, p. 46.

[120] Samuel Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape in Krapp's Last Tape and Embers (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p. 9.

addiction to bananas and drink sated, temporarily at least, Krapp then moves into play with his tapes (one of which, the "virgin reel" possibly, has been linked with the bananas by the fact that it too lies in a drawer of the table), commences his remembering routine, re-invoking past selves and preserving his present self on tape.

That Krapp's "remembering" is precisely that, a routine, is attested to by the careful establishing of his clownishness in appearance and behaviour with regard to food and drink, by the repetitive nature of his activity and furthermore by the automatized, mechanical nature of his remembering. His memory is a tape-recorder and the images of his past are reels of tape collected in boxes. His "memories" never fail; they are infinitely re-playable. Krapp is "the man with a good memory" described by Beckett in his monograph on Proust:

> The man with a good memory does not remember anything because he does not forget anything. His memory is uniform, a creature of routine,... an instrument of reference instead of an instrument of discovery.[121]

Krapp's memory is literally a "creature of routine", of repetitive turns - a tape-recorder which with perfect regularity gives up the sounds of a dead past. And Krapp himself is a creature of routines, a clown who attempts in vain to use "an instrument of reference" as "an instrument of discovery".

Krapp's "first" tape is one which he re-plays after

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[121] Proust, p. 17.

a fumbling search for it among the great number of reels he has amassed over the years. This tape gives forth the voice of Krapp at 39, described in the stage-directions as a "strong voice, rather pompous, clearly Krapp's at a much earlier time".[122] This Krapp proclaims that his life is "at the ... crest of the wave - or thereabouts". He speaks of his addiction to bananas ("Have just eaten I regret to say three bananas and only with difficulty refrained from a fourth.") and resolves to give them up. He mentions a tape he has just been listening to, made when he was 29 or so. This tape contains, according to Krapp at 39, references to a girl named Bianca with whom he was then living, resolutions to drink less and engage in sexual activity less and a mention of "the opus ... magnum" to come. Krapp at 39 finds his former self intolerable and speaks of him in scornful terms:

> Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp! The voice! Jesus! And the aspirations! (Brief laugh in which Krapp joins.) And the resolutions! (Brief laugh in which Krapp joins.)[123]

The pompous voice goes on to tell of memorable events that have occurred in the year just past: the death of his mother after her long "viduity", a vision of great intensity he had at a jetty in March (this is interrupted by Krapp who

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[122] Krapp's Last Tape, p. 11.

[123] Krapp's Last Tape, p. 13.

impatiently winds the tape forward) and the final episode of a love-affair, recalled with great tenderness and in moving detail:

> I said I thought it was hopeless and no good going on and she agreed, without opening her eyes. (Pause.) I asked her to look at me and after a few moments - (pause) - 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. (Pause. Low.) Let me in. (Pause.) We drifted in among the flags and stuck. The way they went down, sighing, before the stem! (Pause.) 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.[124]

For once the thirty-nine year-old Krapp does not appear to be striking a pose, savouring his memories with the detachment of a connoisseur; the simplicity of the language and the subtlety of the rhythms suggest that he has been deeply touched by this incident.

Krapp at 69 finds some of this account amusing (he laughs with the voice of Krapp at 39 at his earlier self), some of it irritating (he winds past the "vision" of his thirty-ninth year, cursing) and some of it worth re-playing (the episode in the boat is given three hearings).

Actions of his which interrupt the flow of the taped voice serve to point up the incongruity between the self-assured Krapp of 39 and the decrepit Krapp of 69. At one

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[124] Krapp's Last Tape, pp. 16-17.

point he goes backstage and guzzles wine, singing in a quavering voice a hymn which terminates in a fit of coughing. At another point Krapp stops the tape to look up the meaning of a word which he once knew and has now forgotten. At the end of the tape he wanders off again, this time to drink whiskey, and comes back staggering, ever more clown-like in ironically comic contrast to the self-contained and pompous voice pouring out of the tape-recorder. The finiteness and inevitable decay of man is rendered concrete in this juxtaposition of past self (created through sound alone) and present self (created on the stage by means of sound and gesture).

The Krapp of the present, after his whiskey, proceeds, after a fumbling search for a "virgin reel", to make a tape of his sixty-ninth year. Certain similarities among Krapp at 29, Krapp at 39 and Krapp at 69 immediately emerge. Like Krapp at 29 who sneers at his youth and Krapp at 39 who finds it "Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp", Krapp calls Krapp at 39 "that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago" and finds it "hard to believe I was ever as bad as that".[125] Krapp at 29 makes a "warm tribute" to the eyes of Bianca, Krapp at 39 remembers the eyes of a nursemaid ("Like... chrysolite!"), Krapp at 69 is linked to both by the remark,

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[125] Krapp's Last Tape, p. 13; p. 17.

"The eyes she had!"[126] Each voice invokes the memory of a girl: Bianca, the nameless girl in the boat, Fanny. Krapp at 29 speaks of "Unattainable laxation"; Krapp at 39 speaks of his "old weakness" and his "condition", for which bananas are "terrible things"; Krapp tersely refers to "the iron stool".[127] Although each voice of Krapp rejects and scorns the past Krapp, each one records similar concerns - relationships with women, bodily problems of addiction to bananas and alcohol and of constipation. Each one records the events of the past year. As Vladimir points out, "The essential doesn't change". Each Krapp is essentially the same Krapp, repeating each year (as the great number of boxes and spools suggest) this routine of committing memories to tape, embalming the years, documenting past resolutions, past loves, past insights.

However, there is a change - as the differences between the tapes made over a space of thirty years reveal. The finely-cadenced rhythms and carefully chosen words (viduity, chrysolite) of the writer at the "crest of the wave" have given way to the terse plainness of the old man's speech:

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[126] Krapp's Last Tape, p. 12; p. 15; p. 18.

[127] Krapp's Last Tape, p. 13; p. 12; p. 18.

> Nothing to say, not a squeak. What's a year now? The sour cud and the iron stool... Crawled out once or twice, before the summer was cold. Sat shivering in the park, drowned in dreams and burning to be gone.[128]

Tenderly lyrical descriptions of lovers are replaced by the bitter account of his present sex-life:

> Fanny came in a couple of times. Bony old ghost of a whore. Couldn't do much, but I suppose better than a kick in the crutch. The last time wasn't so bad. How do you manage it, she said, at your age? I told her I'd been saving up for her all my life.[129]

There are no more mystical visions. Krapp is now reduced to falling asleep at religious services and drunkenly singing hymns which trail off in coughing:

> Went to Vespers once, like when I was in short trousers. (Pause. Sings.) Now the day is over, Night is drawing nigh-igh, Shadows - (coughing, then almost inaudible) - of the evening Steal across the sky. (Gasping.) Went to sleep and fell off the pew.[130]

Krapp, who is the same man as his past selves, drawn to and repulsed by memories of his past life, is yet a different Krapp. With the passing of time, his body has slowly

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[128] Krapp's Last Tape, p. 18.

[129] Krapp's Last Tape, p. 18.

[130] Krapp's Last Tape, pp. 18-19.

decayed and with it his creative and sexual powers.[131] All that remains is the desire; he is, like Eliot's Gerontion, an old man in a dry season, mixing memory and desire.

As a life-time slowly dwindles into decay (Night is drawing nigh), Krapp stores up his years on tapes, ready for "remembering" at the flick of a switch. Bitter reminders of a youth forever inaccessible except through the machine, the tapes nevertheless serve as a source, however unsatisfactory, of solace for Krapp in his declining years. He plays the memory of the girl in the boat three times; the third playing is prefaced by his bitter remark:

> Be again, be again. (Pause.) All that old misery. (Pause.) Once wasn't enough for you. (Pause.) Lie down across her.[132]

Searching among the stored-up memories of the past, Krapp tries, in defiance of the bodily decay resulting from the inexorable progression of time, to "Be again, be again".

The presence of a large number of tapes, the infinite progression suggested by the tape within the tape in the case of each of the two tapes we hear, and the ambiguity of the title, Krapp's Last Tape, all suggest that this is an

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[131] The writer of the "opus ... magnum" now wallows sensually in the sound of words, as with "Spoooool!"

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

unending search, this search of Krapp in time past, one that is infinitely re-playable.[133] Krapp's Last Tape: A Play in One Act is an act of re-play, repeated again and again by an aging clown in search of past vitality and virility entombed forever in memories. Player with, and re-player of, memories, the aged Krapp conducts his impossible search, a clown faced with the need to remember and the impossibility of remembering (in the Proustian sense - the "being again" that is the result of involuntary memory and never of voluntary memory). Solitary and decaying among voices of a past when things were somewhat different, Krapp goes on enacting the rituals of the clown.

A radio-play, Embers, in which voices from the past haunt another figure, followed Krapp's Last Tape. In the same year which saw the completion of Embers (1959) Beckett wrote the second of his two mimes, Act Without Words II: A mime for two players.[134] This brief pantomime through gesture depicts the getting through a day (and a life) as a

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[133] As Bernard Dukore points out in his article, "Krapp's Last Tape as Tragicomedy," the word "Last" may mean "final" or it may mean "the most recent". Also, "tape" is a slang term for an alcoholic beverage. It is no more likely that it is Krapp's final tape than that it is his final drink.

[134] This mime is included in Krapp's Last Tape and Other Dramatic Pieces, published by Grove Press in 1960. A film version, entitled The Goad, exists.

routine. The players may perform their routine eagerly or begrudgingly, it comes ultimately to the same thing. Goaded to play, they perform the gestures that make up a life which moving imperceptibly, inexorably, across the stage of life, their span of time, to the final exit of death. Act Without Words II translates into pantomime Jacques's image:

> All the world's a stage
> And all the men and women merely players:
> They have their exits and their entrances....[135]

The mime is played on a low, narrow platform at the back of the stage, which is "violently lit in its entire length, the rest of the stage being in darkness". A frieze effect, as the author notes, is thus created, and the audience sees the two players A and B performing their routine while moving across a narrow band of light, surrounded by the darkness all about. Near the extreme right end of this band of light are two sacks, those of A and B. A's is nearer the right wing as viewed from the auditorium and on B's right is a bundle of clothes.

The mime progresses as follows: a goad from the right wing prods A's sack twice; A, "slow, awkward and absent", emerges from his sack (a concrete stage-image of the world of sleep, the world of the womb - every day is a new birth,

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[135] As You Like It, II, vii, 138-141. Globe edition.

a new journey in time) and mimes the activities of a day, slowly and reluctantly. His routine commences thus:

> A, wearing shirt, crawls out of sack, halts, broods, prays, broods, gets to his feet, broods, takes a little bottle of pills from his shirt pocket, broods, swallows a pill, puts bottle back, broods, goes to clothes, broods, puts on clothes, broods, takes a large partly eaten carrot from coat pocket, bites off a piece, chews an instant, spits it out with disgust, puts carrot back....[136]

A completes his daily round by carrying, "bowed and staggering", the two sacks half-way across the stage, undressing, letting his clothes fall in an untidy heap, taking another pill (each of these actions being punctuated by brooding), kneeling, praying, crawling into his sack and lying still.

The sacks are now in the middle with sack B closest to the right wing and the clothes nearest to the left wing. The goad again emerges from the right and this time prods B a single time. Out from his sack comes B who is "brisk, rapid, precise" in his movements, the very antithesis of A. B is a man of schedules, of measurement, of action; his "business" is truly busy. His routine begins in brisk eagerness:

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[136] Samuel Beckett, Act Without Words II, in Krapp's Last Tape and Other Dramatic Pieces (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 138.

> B, wearing shirt, crawls out of his sack, gets to his feet, takes from shirt pocket and consults a large watch, puts watch back, does exercises, consults watch, takes a toothbrush from his shirt pocket and brushes teeth vigorously, puts brush back, rubs scalp vigorously, takes a comb from shirt pocket and combs hair, puts comb back, consults watch, goes to clothes, puts them on, consults watch....[137]

More vigorous brushing follows - of clothes and hair (a comic touch: both are groomed with the same brush). B inspects his appearance with a mirror, eats a piece of carrot with relish, consults his map, watch, compass (his watch several times) and carries, "bowed and staggering", the two sacks to the left end of the stage, positioning them so that A is again nearer to the right wing. He then takes off his clothes, sets them in a neat pile, attends to his body's needs as at the beginning (consulting his watch at intervals), crawls into his sack and lies still.

The goad enters from the right and prods A twice. The action is beginning again. We have seen a cycle which is about to recur, but change has taken place. In performing the routines that are shorthand versions of the daily activities which make up a life (each routine has the same basic structure: rising, eating, working, retiring), A and B have moved across the stage, the band of light - and have

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[137] Act Without Words II, p. 139.

moved across a life. Although the two are contrasting types and perform their routines in different ways, the progress of both across the stage is the same. Whether a creature of thought (as the brooding, praying, body-despising A) or a creature of action (as the methodical, measuring, body-pampering B), the player must ultimately "come to dust" - the fate of chimney-sweepers and "Golden lads and girls" - and in the meantime, the space of a stage, must perform the routine, and the routines, of a life.

As with Act Without Words I, the "meaning" is totally embodied in the mime itself. It takes the shape of the image of life it conveys. A routine made of routines, it portrays man as a clown who must perform the daily "round", goaded by mysterious forces over which he has no control. His only choice lies in the manner of performing; otherwise his pensum is to play. And this is what we are present at in the performance of this mime: the performing of a life.

Beckett's later stage plays are characterized by an increasing focus on the attempts of the solitary individual to fill time given ever-limited resources: they move gradually closer to a dramatization of the interior monologues of the trilogy. Happy Days: A Play in Two Acts, Beckett's next stage play, completed in 1961, is a step closer to the solipsistic monologue. It does not, however, dramatize a condition of hermetically-sealed solitude as does the play

which comes after it, Play. The solitude of Winnie, the main character in Happy Days, is occasionally eased by contact of sorts with her husband Willie, and it is made more bearable by the knowledge that he is perhaps there and perhaps listening. Nevertheless, to a greater degree than any of the others, this play charts the movements of the individual consciousness.

The solitary struggle of the individual is still presented by means of the clown tradition. The props, the incongruous costumes, the repetitive gestures are all drawn from music-hall routines.[138] Beckett in Happy Days continues to mime the clown tradition for visual and verbal effects as well as for an image of man as solitary clown trying and failing and trying again in the "domain of the impossible" (in the stage plays that come after, the paraphernalia of the clown is gone but the image of man as clown remains).

The one visual constant in Happy Days is the body of Winnie immersed in earth, up to her waist in Act I and up to her neck in Act II. The "action" of Happy Days (basically Winnie's strategies for filling the time between "the bell for waking and the bell for sleep") takes place within the context of this grim image, a rendering literal of such worn

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[138] As Hugh Kenner points out (in an article included in Beckett at 60: A Festschrift), "[Winnie's] things are the bric-a-brac and hers the rituals of an English music-hall 'turn', circa 1890."

expressions as "one foot in the grave" and "half in the grave". Buried in an expanse of scorched earth under a blazing light Winnie is, as Beckett remarked during a rehearsal of the play, being "devoured by the earth".[139]

"Devoured by the earth", as Beckett translates it or "immersed in the Zeno-heap of days", as Richard Coe translates it,[140] this image of Winnie's mortality is kept unceasingly before us. The middle-aged Winnie is decaying, a finite creature in infinite time:

> Then ... now ... what difficulties here, for the mind. (Pause.) To have been always what I am - and so changed from what I was.[141]

Winnie has given up trying to solve this mystery. She lives in an eternal present where all is "running out" (Willie, her lipstick, her toothpaste, her medicine, her eyesight):

> I speak of temperate times and torrid times, they — are empty words. (Pause.) ... It is no hotter today than yesterday, it will be no hotter tomorrow than today, how could it, and so on back into the far past, forward into the far future. (Pause.) And should one day the earth cover my breasts, then I shall never have seen my breasts, no one ever seen my breasts.[142]

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[139]Quoted in Ruby Cohn, Back to Beckett, p. 190.

[140]Richard N. Coe, Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove Press, 1970), p. 105. First published in London, 1964.

[141]Samuel Beckett, Happy Days (New York: Grove Press, 1961), pp. 50-51.

[142]Happy Days, p. 38.

Her experience of time is (as Beckett describes it in his notes for the German production which he directed) "incomprehensible transport from one inextricable present to the next, those past unremembered, those to come inconceivable".[143] She finds amusing, therefore, her use of expressions that deal with time as an orderly series of days and smilingly refers to them as "the old style". The only order she now knows is "the bell for waking and the bell for sleep" (suggestive of both a hospital bell and a warning bell for performers) whose command she must obey. Time is reduced to an eternal "now".

The time between the bell for waking and the bell for sleep must, however, be filled, even with the limited resources available:

> Ah yes, so little to say, so little to do, and the fear so great, certain days, of finding oneself .... left, with hours still to run, before the bell for sleep, and nothing more to say, nothing more to do,...[144]

Resources are dwindling, but, as Winnie remarks, something always remains. She has three major resources for filling the "happy days" of her eternal present: her bag of props and her parasol, her words and - most important of all - her

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[143] Quoted in Ruby Cohn, Back to Beckett, p. 187.

[144] Happy Days, p. 35.

partner Willie. She is indefatigable in her use of them.

Although Winnie is "stuck in the ground" movement is a constant feature of her "happy days". Her upper body in Act I and her eyes in Act II are in continual motion. The main focus of her gestures is the bag which contains toothbrush and toothpaste, medicine and lipstick, revolver and mirror. These objects are literally props for Winnie, helping her through the day when "words fail":

> Words fail, there are times when even they fail. (Turning a little towards Willie.) Is that not so Willie, that even words fail, at times? (Pause. Back front.) What is one to do then, until they come again? Brush and comb the hair, if it has not been done, or if there is some doubt, trim the nails if they are in need of trimming, these things tide one over.[145]

After an initial prayer, Winnie begins her day in Act I by drawing on the resources of her bag - brushing her teeth, examining her gums in the mirror, putting on her spectacles, drinking her medicine; she closes her day by packing the bag, replacing the objects in reverse order so that the toothbrush, out first, goes in last - ready for another day, another "play". Whenever it becomes difficult for her to sustain her monologue, Winnie turns to the bag and its contents as a source of alternate activity (in the manner of Clown). Her little activities with the contents of the bag

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[145] Happy Days, p. 24.

and with her parasol "tide [her] over" until she is "in tongue again". Even in her extreme state of deterioration in Act II she turns her eyes to the bag, finding its mere presence, now somewhat "blurred", a source of consolation.

In the main, however, Winnie uses the bag as a last resort when her unceasingly cheerful monologue appears to be winding and trailing off into silence. Winnie's running commentary on her present condition parallels her incessant movement. In the manner of a music-hall comedian getting through a performance with his usual repertoire of worn phrases, stories and songs all woven together into a running patter, Winnie fills up the void with worn phrases, memories, stories and song.

As she repeatedly fingers familiar objects (in Act I), so does she give voice to the same phrases until they become a determined refrain, shoring up her failing monologue. "Great mercies, that is what I find so wonderful, many mercies, oh this will have been a happy day, oh this is a happy day" are some of her refrains, determined assertions of her happiness in a surpassingly bleak world.

Although she is now reduced to reading the inscription on her tooth-brush handle and the label on her medicine bottle, Winnie has once read the "classics" and she is characteristically grateful that fragments stay with her:

> One loses one's classics. (Pause.) Oh not all. (Pause.) A part. (Pause.) A part remains. That is what I find so wonderful, a part remains, of one's classics, to help one through the day.[146]

The "classics" held her through the day by providing matter for another of her verbal routines - the quotation routine. This "canter" is usually signalled by such remarks as (in Act I) "What is that wonderful line, what are those wonderful lines" and (in Act II, where memory has decayed further and where the fragments recalled are from minor poets such as Herrick and the sentimental versifier Charles Wolfe) "What is that unforgettable line, what are those exquisite lines, what are those immortal lines". The half-remembered fragments echo of woe and deadth - and, significantly, often of apparent death (as with the words spoken over the seemingly dead bodies of Shakespeare's Juliet and Imogen). The remnants of a past literary tradition, one that is "running out", wind their way through Winnie's monologue, testifying to her decay and her struggle against it. She tries to fill a void with the worn counters of "poetic" language: 'tis, enow, naught" - expressions which roll easily from her tongue and which are yet inadequate to hide satisfactorily from her the dying world of which they are a decaying part. Words are "running out", like everything else in Winnie's universe.

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[146] Happy Days, pp. 57-58.

To fill the silence of her long lonely sojourn on (in) earth and her long lonely marriage with Willie, Winnie also has stories and song. One story (recounted as an actual happening) deals with a couple called Shower or Cooker who observe her condition as they pass by "hand in hand". Another tells of a little girl named Mildred and her waxen Dolly (who resembles Willie in certain respects). Both stories are rather melodramatic pieces; both trail off inconclusively, as Winnie turns to other diversions. Like the Shower/Cooker story, the song is repeated in both Acts, both days. In Act I Winnie listens to it on her music-box and Willie sings it wordlessly; in Act II Winnie closes her play, in fine music-hall fashion, with a rendition of the same tune, the duet from The Merry Widow.

Sometimes Winnie finds the memories that "Float up... out of the blue" into her eternal present a source of diversion. She launches into a memory routine, repeated in a lower key in Act II, about a past lover:

> Winnie: (gazing front, hat in hand, tone of fervent reminiscence) Charlie Hunter! (Pause.) I close my eyes - (she takes off spectacles and does so, hat in one hand, spectacles in other, Willie turns page) - and am sitting on his knees again, in the back garden at Borough Green, under the horse-beech. (Pause. She opens eyes, puts on spectacles, fiddles with hat.) Oh the happy memories![147]

[147] Happy Days, p. 16.

She finds this routine of remembering satisfactory for the moment, so she moves into another memory-turn, recalling her "first ball", her "second ball", her "first kiss" (from a Mr. Johnson or Johnston or "perhaps ... Johnstone" whose bushy moustache links him with Willie). Memories that float into her mind provide Winnie with matter for happiness.[148]

Bag, parasol, quotations, stories, song, memories - all these aids to getting through the day are important props for invincible clown Winnie; they are all, nevertheless, auxiliary resources: Willie, the straight man of this clown pair in "that desert of loneliness and recrimination that men call love",[149] is her mainstay, the most important prop in her repertoire. Her being devoured by the earth and her solitude are made bearable for her only by the knowledge that Willie is still there and perhaps listening to her:

> Ah yes, if only I could bear to be alone, I mean prattle away with not a soul to hear. (Pause.) Not that I flatter myself you hear much, no Willie, God forbid. (Pause.) Days perhaps when you hear nothing. (Pause.) But days too when you answer. (Pause.) So that I may say at all times, even when you do not answer and perhaps hear nothing, something of this is being heard, I am not merely talking to myself, that is in

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[148]Sometimes memories bring home to Winnie the contrast between "then" and "now": the memory of her wedding-day and her closeness to Willie then twice, brings her to the verge of breaking down. But she goes on.

[149]Proust, p. 38.

> the wilderness, a thing I could never bear to do - for any length of time. (Pause.) This is what enables me to go on, go on talking that is.[150]

Willie is the raison d'etre of her monologue, of her going on: the bulk of her speech is made up of queries addressed to Willie (about gravity, about the earth's atmosphere, about points of grammar, about the definition of "hog"), somewhat imperious advice (to put his hat on, to return to his hole backwards, to use his handkerchief), requests for help, memories and stories addressed to him. Winnie is pathetically grateful for the slightest feedback from the taciturn Willie: his few monosyllabic responses to her questions, his infrequent appearances, his least acknowledgement of her imploring presence evoke Winnie's assertion that it is a happy day, it will have been a happy day after all. Although their relationship has decayed (as have their bodies) to the point where each is for the most part invisible to the other, Winnie is unceasing in her efforts to reach out and transfigure her solitude; unable to move to him she reaches out to Willie with her endless flow of words and triumphs insofar as she draws him to her in the closing tableau in which they almost touch. Willie, though "running out" like the toothpaste and other props, remains to help her through the day. In Winnie's world,

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[150] Happy Days, pp. 20-21. This is the need of the Self for the Other and the need of the clown for a straight man.

the hostile world of the clown, something of everything remains and she makes what use of it she can, as best she can, ultimately triumphing over her wretched condition by the very endurance and vitality she displays in the face of infinite decay.[151]

Winnie plays a routine of "happy days", repeating gestures, cliches, stories, refusing to give up the struggle to continue in a blasted world, image of her blasted hopes and dreams for her marriage and life with Willie. The very rhythm of her speech, composed of waves of words that fall back into the silence of "Pause", conveys a sense of her struggle with language:

> (She gazes front, holding up parasol with right hand. Maximum pause.) I used to perspire freely. (Pause.) Now hardly at all. (Pause.) The heat is much greater. (Pause.) The perspiration much less. (Pause.) That is what I find so wonderful. (Pause.) The way man adapts himself. (Pause.) To changing conditions. (She transfers parasol to left hand. Long pause.)[152]

Even the pieces uninvaded by "Pause" suggest in their movement the effort of one who is improvising, filling the silence, spinning meagre little strings of words to fill the day - and the play:

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[151]Suicide is an option which she rejects: Brownie the revolver ("Ever uppermost") is expelled from her bag.

[152]Happy Days, pp. 35-36.

> Ah yes, so little to say, so little to do, and the fear so great, certain days, of finding oneself... left, with hours still to run, before the bell for sleep, and nothing more to say, nothing more to do, that the days go by, certain days go by, quite by, the bell goes, and little or nothing said, little or nothing done.[153]

Like the characters of the trilogy and Texts for Nothing, like Vladimir and Estragon, like Hamm and Clov, Winnie urges herself on, encourages herself to keep going in her routines calculated to hide the void. At the beginning of her first routine (Act I) Winnie gives herself a command, "On, Winnie". She obeys this order, never ceasing completely in her "rituals of incapacity", although she often falters as she searches for new turns. "And now?" and "What now?" are questions she constantly asks herself - five times in Act I and three times in Act II. She is aware of herself as performer, as one who must go on bombarding Willie - and the audience - with words and thereby denying the "wilderness" all about.[154]

Winnie's struggle is embodied in a work which partakes of the nature of that struggle: cycles of repetition with a dying fall. As well as being thematic, repetition is a structural principle in Happy Days. Act II

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[153] Happy Days, p. 35.

[154] "... I am not merely talking to myself, that is in the wilderness, a thing I could never bear to do -" (Happy Days, p. 21).

moves along the same curve as Act I: Winnie wakes, performs her routines (now considerably diminished in comparison with those of Act I) and makes ready for the night. Act I opens with a prayer and moves to a close with a mention of song; Act II opens with a prayer of sorts ("Hail holy light" - Milton's invocation at the beginning of Book III of Paradise Lost) and closes with a song. Act II is in structure and substance[155] an echo of Act I: a repetition at a reduced level of vitality.

Within this basic pattern, Acts I and II of Happy Days form separate cycles. Act I is circular in movement: all returns to the position occupied at the beginning. Winnie opens Act I with a prayer after remarking "Another heavenly day"; she closes with an injunction to pray, after remarking "Oh this is a happy day! This will have been another happy day". The contents of the bag are taken out near the beginning of the Act and are replaced near its close. Like the objects, Willie occupies the same position (just behind the mound) at the end of the Act as at its beginning; he too returns to his opening activity, the reading of newspaper ads after having donned a handkerchief and a straw boater (set, in each case, "at a rakish angle").

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[155] The memories of Charlie Hunter, the story of the Shower/Cooker couple, the habit of quoting, the use of clichés, the calls to Willie - these are present in II as in I.

Everything returns upon itself, in these "eternal cycles of recurrence".[156] But even this is not certain, in this inexplicable world of the decaying Winnie and Willie; Act II while repeating the cycle of activity in Act I does not return upon itself in the same way. The final tableau ends on a note of uncertainty: the cycle has not been completed. Does Willie kiss or kill or slither back to the ground? Is Winnie's song swan-song, love-song or simply musical routine? Each is a possibility: all one knows is that decay advances, like the day, that death is all around and yet that Winnie will not relinquish her determination to get through her "happy days" as cheerfully as she can.

The over-all pattern of the work, however, is, as has been suggested, one of repetition. Repetition is the backbone of the work as it is of Winnie's existence. The title of the English version of the play points this up. It is drawn from an old music-hall song, "Happy Days"; this banal song is characterized by repetition, as the following verse illustrates:

> Happy days are here again
> The skies above are clear again -
> Let's sing a song of cheer again -
> Happy days are here again![157]

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[156] Richard N. Coe, Samuel Beckett, p. 105.

[157] I have been unable to track down this song; I am quoting from memory here.

This slight piece with its trite language, its repetition of "again", its return in the fourth line to the words of the first, its reflexive mention of "a song of cheer", its blithe insistence on happiness in a world of clear skies contains in miniature major elements of the play itself and of Winnie's world of play.

The comic business of Happy Days draws extensively on the clown tradition.[158] Winnie's business with magnifying-glass, spectacles, handkerchief and toothbrush, Willie's antics with the straw boater and handkerchief, the spectacular burning of the parasol, the pornographic postcard, a magnificently-dressed Willie crawling on all fours, Willie's play on "Formication" - all are reminiscent of music-hall gags. This explicit linking of Winnie and Willie with clowns reinforces the portrayal of them as clown-figures and, furthermore, creates an ambience of the world of performance. Happy Days, like Beckett's previous plays, flaunts its theatricality, its "play" nature.

As in Waiting for Godot and Endgame, Happy Days involves the audience in its routine, refusing to permit them to watch dispassionately the mechanical manoeuvres of "clockwork cabbages". Winnie's story of the coarse Mr. Shower or Cooker (both renderings of the German word for "look",

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[158] An interesting side-note: the clown persona of Emmett Kelly is called Weary Willie.

according to Ruby Cohn) punctures any complacency that might be felt, much as Hamm's little parody of a rational being does. Mr. Shower or Cooker greedily eyes the spectacle of Winnie imbedded in the earth and asks his woman-companion for an explanation; this is Winnie's account of part of the conversation:

> What's she doing? he says - What's the idea? he says - stuck up to her diddies in the bleeding ground - coarse fellow - What does it mean? he says - What's it meant to mean? - and so on - lot more stuff like that - usual drivel - Do you hear me? he says - I do, she says, God help me - What do you mean, he says, God help you? (Stops filing, raises head, gazes front) And you, she says, what's the idea of you, she says, what are you meant to mean?[159]

Gazing front, Winnie utters the latter question and by implication she is asking it of the audience as well as recreating the query of Mr. Shower/Cooker's companion. The further implication is that the situation of the audience and of Winnie is similar: a neat pattern of meaning is absent from their day as from Winnie's.[160] They, like Winnie, are

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[159] Happy Days, pp. 43-44.

[160] And Willie's. Willie's situation parallels Winnie's in several respects: he is also decayed and decaying; his vaseline is running out; he reads and re-reads obituaries and want ads in old newspapers (reading as pointless as Winnie's of the medicine label); he too fiddles with his hat; he reaches out for Winnie.

engaged in activity (presence at a play) to fill the time: stories, song and memories make up their ritual as they do hers, since both are involved in the play-ritual. And they, like Winnie, are manoeuvred into "[magnifying] the Almighty by sniggering with him at his little jokes, particularly the poorer ones",[161] for they, aware of the vast discrepancy between Winnie's state and her insistent descriptions of it as happy and blessed, are drawn into laughter at the bitter ironies - a laughter which is at once reluctant and horrified. This play of failing routines induces in the audience a sense of their own anguish, their own solitude and their own absurd endurance: they see in the mirror of Happy Days their own "play" and their own "issueless predicament of existence".

Happy Days marks a kind of turning-point in Beckett's drama (to date); he has not since used the props and gags, the paraphernalia of the clown, in his stage plays. However, his characters continue to be players engaged in routines of failure which must be carried out. Although the direct links are no longer made, the image of man as clown is still operating in his works, as he (and his player-clowns) attempt to "eff the ineffable".

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[161] Happy Days, p. 21.

In Play: A Play in One Act, the stage-play which Beckett completed after Happy Days (in 1963), no visual trace of clown remains. The sense of a routine, an "endless ritual of incapacity", remains, however. The entire piece is a routine performed by three isolated and solipsistic performers - a routine based on the incessant play of each one's consciousness in which the mind, although gradually dying away, never does so completely but rather continues to mull over a past love-triangle, attempting to come to terms with what has happened. Play is essentially a dramatization of the processes of the solitary consciousness, beset with a problem similar to that of Molloy:

> ... 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.[162]

Barely visible as the curtain rises on Play are three identical grey urns, each about a yard high, touching one another at front centre. From these urns protrude three heads, on the left and right those of women and in the centre that of a man. The faces of these urn-caught personages are "so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of the urns" and are "impassive throughout".[163] These heads of w_2, m and w_1 (as the three are designated) exist for the audience only when

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[162] Molloy, p. 31.

[163] Samuel Beckett, Play in Play and two short pieces for radio (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 9.

a spotlight is projected on their faces; their speech is "provoked" (the term used in the stage-directions) by a spotlight which hits their faces only. As the spot lands on a face, the impassive ageless countenance pours forth words in a toneless voice and at a rapid pace. When the spot moves, the speaker immediately falls into silence and darkness and no longer exists for the audience, seeming to be one with the urn.[164]

Each speaker is unaware of the presence of the two others; although the urns touch one another, although the players have been involved in the same past situation (have touched one another's lives) and are now involved in the same process, the same play, they are each self-contained, each immured in his own urn and his own consciousness. The speech pattern of Play reflects this isolated state; it consists of a sequence of three fragmented intercut monologues, each divided into two sections - a narrative section in which each speaker gives his account of the triangle and a reflection section in which each muses on the past, on his present limbo-like state and on the fate of the other two.

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[164] Light, which is the sine qua non of a stage play, has become literally the sine qua non of their existence. Beckett is exploiting the implications of "play" to the full.

From the fragmented accounts of the first section (elicited in bits and pieces by the playing light) a story of a rather banal order emerges: m is living with w_1, when he begins an affair with w_2; w_1 suspects, accuses m and threatens to kill herself; m denies her suspicions and swears that he loves her only; w_1, still suspicious, visits w_2 and threatens to kill her; w_2 also denies everything; w_1 then hires a detective who is bribed by m; m, finding w_1's suspicions and murderous threats unbearable, confesses his guilt and is forgiven; w_1 visits w_2 a second time "to have a gloat"; w_2 then decides to end the affair, but m cajoles her; m promises each woman that he will go away with her as soon as his "professional commitments" have been met. The triangle continues as before until suddenly, mysteriously, everything ends; m finds that "[he] could no longer" and disappears; w_1 and w_2 each assume that he has left her for the other; w_1 becomes ill, then eventually drives to w_2's house which is "all bolted and barred"; w_2 burns m's clothes.

The narrative accounts, each given in trite, cliché-ridden language (the language of cheap romances), end here.[165]

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[165] m's use of worn phrases is typical:
At home all heart to heart, new leaf and bygones bygones. I ran into your ex-doxy, she said one night, on the pillow, you're well out of that. Rather uncalled for, I thought. I am indeed, sweetheart, I said, I am indeed. God what vermin women. Thanks to you, angel, I said. (Play, p. 14.)

There is no explanation given as to why the narratives end abruptly (two of them in mid-sentence), although the hints of death and murder which echo through the accounts suggest that the sordid affair has ended in death. Their present state may then be a purgatory or limbo of some sort and the light, referred to in the notes appended to the script as "a unique inquisitor", may be an agent of punishment and truth, seeking to elicit a confession from each of the characters.

The second section of Play, signalled by a decrease in the strength of the spotlight and a corresponding decrease in the vocal strength of the three urn-dwellers, is also made up of intercalated fragmented comments from w_2, m and w_1. This half is, however, played (as Hugh Kenner has remarked) in the key of Now rather than in the key of Then. The speakers use the present tense: they reflect on their present state, the demands of the light, and the present situation of the other two. All are confused and disappointed by their present condition: each had expected something more peaceful, more restful, each wants the light to leave her (him) alone. There are, as in the first section, suggestions that each is guilty of some unspecified wrong and that forgiveness, peace and rest are longed-for.

Despite such suggestions, however, the only certainty is that the three speakers are each immured in separate urns, each compelled to speak and fall silent at the whim of a

spotlight which causes them discomfort, each forced to go over and over a situation which in the past caused them considerable suffering. In short, the only certainty is that they are engaged in a routine of remembering which must be performed at the behest of the playing spotlight.

On and on go the three players, performing their pensum, pouring out words in an attempt to give shape to a past, to achieve present peace - an equilibrium that is never attained. Unlike Beckett's previous plays, Play dramatizes total solipsism - the self-contained movements of three separate consciousnesses whose lives have not truly touched at all (as signified by the separate urns which yet touch one another). In Play individual isolation and the play of individual consciousness are rendered in stage terms by means of play of light and interplay of words. The impossibility of linking with another is vividly conveyed in visual and verbal terms, as is the impossibility of ending given the desire to end. Man must go on, even when reduced to the limbo of his consciousness and even, perhaps, when confined in an actual purgatory; to go on striving forever is his inescapable pensum in

> a world where inner and outer space become indistinguishable, a world confining yet limitless because of its lack of distinctive signs, a world tottering, unstable, yet surviving; a world of deceptive glimmers which,

> promising at first, change into hostile obstacles, a world of gratuitous gestures.[166]

Play is endless; the answer to m's repeated question: "I know now, all that was just ... play. And all this? When will all this - .... All this, when well all this have been ... just play?" is twofold: ever and never. "Ever", since their activity is continually becoming "play", a dramatic performance, as it unfolds; and "never", since their play of consciousness is destined to go on and on, forever diminishing but never ending, forever sustained by the play of light upon them.[167]

As Renée Riese Hubert suggests, Play has no "true beginning or end";[168] its movement is circular, its shape that of a circle. The first playing-through of Play (the play is repeated in toto) returns upon itself: the cycle opens with a five-second blackout followed by a faint spotlight on all three faces for three seconds, a spotlight which elicits faint unintelligible speeches spoken in unison; it closes with exactly the same sequence of blackout, spotlight and unintelligible choral speech. Then the play is repeated up to the final question of m ("Am I as much

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[166] Renée Riese Hubert, "Beckett's Play Between Poetry and Performance," Modern Drama, IX (1966-67), p. 342.

[167] Play is built upon puns.

[168] "Beckett's Play Between Poetry and Performance," Modern Drama, IX, p. 344.

as ... being seen?"); the closing sequence of cycle one is omitted and the play moves into the opening sequence again, this time with the voices at normal strength, and appears to be beginning over again for yet a third time when the curtain comes down. The pattern established is one of ever-contracting circles of repetition, a pattern which at once reflects and embodies the "endless reverberation of dying consciousness" which is the subject of the play Play and the play.[169]

Presumably because of similarities of theme and of locale of "action" (some critics are certain that the world of Play is purgatory or hell, although the text simply suggests this), Beckett's Play has often been compared with Sartre's Huis Clos (No Exit or In Camera). The differences between these two works, however, are much more significant than the similarities. Sartre's play is shaped with all the neatness of a theorem demonstrating the proposition that "Hell is other people", with conclusion tidily stated at the end; it permits the audience to remain as coolly detached as when working out a Euclid theorem. On the other hand, Beckett, exploiting to the full the implications of the simple facts that light is the sine qua non of a stage play and that an audience comes to a play wishing to be

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[169] Renée Riese Hubert, "Beckett's Play Between Poetry and Performance," Modern Drama, IX, p. 341.

enlightened about the situation of the players performing on the stage, creates a work whose very action forms "an image of the theatrical experience in which the audience is taking part".[170]

The illumination of the faces of the players is simultaneous with the seeing of the audience: the audience becomes the "unique inquisitor" and the pleas of the players to the light to leave them alone become pleas addressed to the audience. The audience is inexorably and totally involved in this unending process of calling the players into life and demanding that they narrate, reflect, explain. They are caught up in the unending cycles; they are part of the process of the characters' agony. They, like W_2, M and W_1, are uncertain when "all this [will] have been ... just play". And finally when they leave the theatre and the triangular affair and its aftermath have become "just play", reflection and speculation will go on endlessly in the "endless reverberation" of their dying consciousness, as they (like the three urn-bound ones) attempt to make sense out of all that has happened, to examine the evidence and come to conclusions.[171]

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[170] Pletcher and Spurling, Samuel Beckett, p. 111.

[171] W_2: What do you do when you go out? Sift? (Play, p. 19).

Play, unlike Huis Clos, draws the audience into its ritual, engendering in them the uneasiness, uncertainty and endless speculation of the players on the stage. Sartre's "well-made play" is an intellectual construct designed to illustrate a point. Beckett's Play is a ritual of solitary, dying consciousness which embroils both players and audience in its world of uncertainty, alienation and solitude. Players and audience become "moribund buffoons". Here are no clockwork cabbages and no chloroformed world. Here is no detachment - rather, finite beings immersed in infinite time trying to explain the inexplicable and going on trying and trying yet again. Indeed, although the most common signs of Clown are entirely absent from this work, the world is still very much that of Clown.

In the Beckett canon of stage plays, this work of many words and no movements is followed by a work of few words and few movements, the beautifully orchestrated Come and Go. This "dramaticule", as Beckett subtitled it, is indeed miniscule drama: just 121 words, it plays anywhere between 3 and 7 minutes (7 in Beckett's production of it). The dramaticule contains no visual traces of Clown; the characters are three women named Flo, Vi and Ru (delicate, tentative-sounding names that have flower-echoes) who are dressed in full-length coats akin to those that might be worn by Chekhov's famous three women, the three sisters. These

women, however, exist in a world of darkness and impending death, a world of unarticulated doom in which memories of a hope-filled past give a kind of consolation. While no "antic round" of clown (or of witch either) is performed by Flo, Vi and Ru, they do enact a round - a round of coming and going which images forth their transient sojourn on earth. One woman leaves the light of the playing area and is immediately swallowed up by the dark.[172] One of the remaining two then whispers some message that seems to be of doom about the departed one into her companion's ear. The recipient of the message is shocked, inquires if the absent one knows and is answered with some variation of "God forbid". This takes place three times, in a flow of movement and language which is each time repeated with minor variations. This round is framed by the tableau of the women sitting on their bench (reminiscent of the log in their childhood playground) - at the opening with hands clasped in laps and at the close with arms intertwined and hands interlocked in each other's hands. The very round has linked them together in the circle of light (life) outside of which all is darkness (death). The playing area in which they invoke memories of the playground of their childhood and of dreamed-of love and whisper of dreaded things to come

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[172]The note on lighting reads: "Soft, from above only and concentrated on playing area. Rest of stage as dark as possible."

is the area of life: they sustain one another by a ritual of gestures and words, as when they were children. Playground and playing area are in this sense one. Although they must go into the dark alone, they play together in the circle of light.

Come and Go is an exquisite refinement of the clown's routine; it attains to the condition of sculpture in its limning of the muted lives of Flo, Vi and Ru (life flows, full of rue). Each word is carved from the silence; each movement from the stillness. Beckett, the clown-artist for whom "the area of possibilities gets smaller and smaller",[173] moves further into the domain of the impossible, making a piece for the theatre out of nearly total stillness and silence, a piece in which "nothing happens with all the solidity of something".[174]

Even briefer than the brief round of Come and Go is Breath, a thirty-second piece orginally written for the review Oh! Calcutta! which Kenneth Tynan produced in New York. Breath is short enough to be allowed to represent itself in full, rather than by means of truncated quotes; here is the text in full:

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[173]Israel Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters," New York Times, p. XI.

[174]I cannot recall the provenance of this phrase; it may be Hugh Kenner's.

CURTAIN
1. Faint light on stage littered with miscellaneous rubbish. Hold about five seconds.
2. Faint brief cry and immediately inspiration and slow increase of light together reaching maximum together in about ten seconds. Silence and hold about five seconds.
3. Expiration and slow decrease of light together reaching mimimum together (light as in 1) in about ten seconds and immediately cry as before. Silence and hold about five seconds.

CURTAIN[175]

All play, all human life is here reduced to a birth-cry, an inhaling and exhaling and a death-cry (identical to birth-cry) all occurring in the space of thirty seconds with the rise and fall of light (consciousness) paralleling the rise and fall of breath. Human life and consciousness are seen as but a momentary breath and light in the vast darkness of infinity.[176] Pozzo's image of human mortality,

> ... one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second.... They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more,[177]

has been expressed in theatre-terms. Breath is the quintessential expression of the theme of human mortality

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[175]Reproduced in Alec Reid, All I Can Manage, p. 96.

[176]In one of Beckett's early poems this image of life occurs: "the space of a door that opens and shuts".

[177]Waiting for Godot, p. 57.

which resounds through Beckett's work.

Not I, Beckett's latest stage-play to date (completed in 1972), returns to words in another dramatization of the solipsistic condition of a dying consciousness. In Not I the human figure has been reduced to a mouth; what an audience can see and hear is a mouth (all else is blacked out) speaking at a still, silent figure in a black hooded djellaba. From the mouth pours a "steady stream" of words, in broken but urgent rhythms - "fifteen minutes of rushed monologue"[178] at once reminiscent of Lucky's demented barrage and Winnie's unceasing flow and yet different from both.

Mouth appears to be in a limbo-like state similar to that of the characters in Play. A silent life of nearly seventy years has all of a sudden one April morning given way to a new state; Mouth "found herself in the dark", no longer in contact with her body but with her brain working on, and suddenly "words were coming" - cascades of words she is unable to stop. Her words are heard by a "dead still" hooded Auditor who may be a figure of death or a figure of justice demanding confession and atonement (as with the light in Play).[179] Auditor and Mouth are faintly lit, all

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[178] Ruby Cohn, Back to Beckett, p. 213.

[179] Auditor is also a figure of the audience.

else is immersed in the darkness of the void.

Mouth's world is, then, that of a dying consciousness whose "dull roar in the skull" goes on and on, giving rise to her broken flow of words. The movement of "the brain flickering away on its own" is externalized in a stream of fitful, flickering phrases. The audience is for fifteen minutes subjected to this ceaseless, flickering stream, its attention riveted on the spotlighted mouth and the monologue that tumbles out of it.

Mouth's monologue is at once an account of her transmogrification and an attempt to understand why it is she must speak, what it is she has to do:

> ... now can't stop ... imagine!... can't stop the stream ... and the whole brain begging ... something begging in the brain ... begging the mouth to stop ... pause a moment ... if only for a moment ... and no response ... as if it hadn't heard ... or couldn't ... could pause a second ... like maddened ... all that together ... straining to hear ... piece it together ... and the brain ... raving away on its own ... trying to make sense of it ... or make it stop ... or in the past ... dragging up the past....[180]

Mouth wonders if there is

> ... something she had to tell ... could that be it?... something that would tell ... how it was ... how she - ... what had been? ... yes ... something that would tell how it had been ... how she had lived ... lived on and on....[181]

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[180] Samuel Beckett, Not I (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p. 7. (The pagination is mine, as this text is unpaginated.)

[181] Not I, p. 9.

She is not certain of this, not certain why the flow must come but only that the effort must be made to go on speaking of how it was in response to some inscrutable demand, perhaps a demand that she be punished.

Some indication of what Mouth may have to tell is given by her repeated refusal to utter the first-person pronoun in her outpourings. Auditor responds four times to her "what? ... who?... no! she!" with a "gesture of helpless compassion". Mouth in effect refuses to acknowledge that it is she who has lived through the events she recounts, that it is she who is now speaking - a creature of mauvais foi, she is seeking to evade her own Self (hence the title Not I).

Mouth encourages herself in the manner of previous clown-characters in Beckett's work:

> ... pick it up there ... get on with it from there ... another few -
>
> ... try something else ... think of something else ... oh long after ... sudden flash ... not that either ... all right ... something else again ... so on ... hit on it in the end....[182]

In "sudden flashes" Mouth recounts details of her birth and vignettes from her life up to the age of seventy when home is "a mound in Croker's Acres". Her account, made up of repeated fragments does not hit on "it" (the ineffable

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[182] Not I, p. 9.

something she is trying to tell) and, as the curtain starts down, she returns to the opening of her monologue, re-commencing her routine of words poured out to appease the Auditor without and/or the dull roar within.

This torrent of words from Winnie reduced to a disembodied Mouth (Mouth is linked to Winnie by her possession of an old black shopping bag and by her use of Winnie's refrain, "tender mercies") induces in the audience the same reaction as that of Mouth - a longing that the stream of words stop. John Fraser in reviewing the 1973 Toronto production points this out:

> ... after two incredible shrieks and ten minutes of verbal diarrhea you feel like running onto the stage and trying to shut the flow off.[183]

As well as her longing to end, Mouth's perplexity and confusion at her state are engendered in the audience by the very structure of the piece - an endless flow of ellipsis-punctuated phrases which contains no dénouement, no epiphany but rather repeats itself endlessly beyond curtain-rise and curtain-fall. The audience is once more present at and involved in an enactment of the insoluble predicament of existence - this time concretized by means of the outpourings of a dislocated Mouth (the verbal channel of consciousness rendered concrete).

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[183] John Fraser, "Fine fare, classic or exotic," The Globe and Mail (September 11, 1973), p. 15.

Not I, the latest of Beckett's works in the dramatic mode, has brought us back full circle to the world of the Unnamable; Beckett has put on the stage the world of the "moribund grotesques" of the trilogy:

> the within, all that inner space one never sees, the brain and heart and other caverns where thought and feeling dance their sabbath....[184]

Clown has once again become voice only, spinner of words made of words, a dying, failing, falling voice attempting, in fulfillment of some inscrutable pensum, to "eff the ineffable", to utter the unutterable I.

The image of man as clown persists through all of Beckett's stage plays. However, as has become evident in the course of discussion a reducing process takes place as Beckett moves closer and closer to depicting the very movement of the individual consciousness: tangible clown figures who play with hats and boots as well as words give way to speaking heads in Play, a disembodied Mouth in Not I. The heads of Play and the Mouth of Not I may seem to have little to do with Clown at first glance, but the similarity is there nevertheless. Routines are enacted for an audience, a thwarted struggle is taking place, an alien and inimical landscape surrounds the word-spinners. The ambience of this world is still that of Clown - a confusing landscape without

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[184] Molloy, p. 10.

landmarks - and the play with words endlessly permutated and combined characteristic of Winnie and her predecessors continues. Whether a seedy Belacqua, an earth-devoured Winnie or a Mouth hanging in space, Beckett's characters are essentially representations of man as clown, stoically fumbling and faltering through an alien landscape, filling the silence with words and continuing to endure despite the cruelty of the cosmos.

In his works for radio and television, Beckett moves, as he does in his works for the stage, from a world of characters interacting with one another (in All That Fall) to a world of solipsism - of characters haunted by voices in the head (in the radio plays Embers, Words and Music, Cascando and the television play Eh Joe). In these plays there is also, as in the stage plays, a corresponding movement from explicit use of a clown figure (Maddy Rooney, "a big fat jelly" of a woman) and slapstick routines (such as the lifting of Maddy into Mr. Slocum's car) to a utilization of the underlying stratum of the clown's routines: a constant struggle constantly threatened with failure in a world alien to the struggling one.

In the purely aural world of the radio plays the struggle of the clown figures is primarily with words: in All That Fall Maddy's difficult journey to Boghill Station and back in a world where all falls is reflected and

intensified by her struggle with a dying language along the way; in Embers Henry composes stories and conjures up voices to drown out the noise of the sea (death-bringer) in his head; in Words and Music the artist Croak attempts to have his warring "comforts", his "balms", Words and Music, perform together in harmony; in Cascando another figure of the artist, Opener, tries in vain to merge Voice and Music in order to finish his seemingly unfinishable story of Woburn.

Each radio play concretizes a struggle that ends in "a dying fall" (Orsino in Twelfth Night remarks of a piece of music: "That strain again! it hath a dying fall"); the struggling figures do not win victory over words or over time - things go on falling into decay. The very medium supports this theme of transience and finiteness, as Hugh Kenner, with his usual acumen, points out:

> ... the mode in which the [plays themselves exist], as a series of auditory effects in time, sustains the theme of transience....[185]

Within each soundscape Beckett's voices body forth a world of solitude, finiteness and uncertainty - a world in which voices give birth to words which die away even as they fall from the lips. Yet the flow of words meanders on; the silence is filled with sound.

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[185] Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett, p. 170.

Beckett's stage plays and his radio plays are alike in that they exploit the mediums in which they have been conceived to the fullest in order to render concrete, accessible to the eye or ear or both, the living changing reality of solitary, finite man existing in an infinite universe. His achievement is, as it is hoped that the foregoing discussion of his work (the stage plays in particular) substantiates, to have "effed" the ineffable, to have created a body of work which is "the cry of its occasion/ Part of the res itself and not about it". His oeuvre by means of the pivotal figure of the clown bodies forth the state of flux and uncertainty of existential man. The "condition of unbalance, unrest, anguish and ambivalence" of the individual in a universe in which he is by his very nature de trop has been externalized, rendered in all its living concreteness and specificity. Beckett has shaped an oeuvre which, as Rosette Lamont suggests, does not try "de dire mais de montrer":

> [Cet oeuvre] n'est pas comme celui de Sartre, et même de Camus, l'oeuvre d'un normalieu de génie qui prêche sa thèse du haut de son estrade de conférencier. Bien qu'il se préoccupe de la situation de la homme il sait que la façon la plus directe d'atteindre l'esprit et le coeur du spectateur [ou du lecteur] c'est non pas de dire mais de montrer.[186]

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[186] Rosette Lamont, "La Parce Métaphysique de Samuel Beckett," in Samuel Beckett: configuration critique, ed. Melvin J. Friedman (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1964), p. 101.

Existential man has been transferred from the treatises of Jaspers et al. to the fiction and drama of Beckett, and there he lives in all his solitary anguished freedom as Clown, ineluctably there, present to eye and/or ear, persevering in his struggle, endlessly performing rituals of incapacity in an absurd universe.

Ultimately, for "this great solitary oeuvre" which permits only the most minute of affirmations, the affirmations of the absurd endurance of Clown, Beckett deserves the accolade bestowed by him upon a fellow-artist, Jack B. Yeats:

> He is with the great of our time ... because he brings light, as only the great dare to bring light, to the issueless predicament of existence, reduces the dark where there might have been, mathematically at least, a door.[187]

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[187] Samuel Beckett, "MacGreevy on Yeats," Jack B. Yeats: a centennial gathering, p. 73.

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