

SAMUEL BECKETT - A STUDY IN REALISM

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

P. Bethlehem.

27 day of February, 1986.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the connection between Beckett's stage plays and the concept of realism, an elusive term in literary criticism used to describe the relationship of art and life but which also refers specifically to the 19th century movement of 1840-1880. The views on realism of succeeding generations provide the background against which 19th and 20th century concepts are viewed and Beckett's work is ultimately compared. To obtain a perspective of Beckett's position, his writing is discussed in relation to critical views of his works and such systems of ideas as Existentialism, Absurdism, Modernism, Romanticism and Classicism.

An overview of the plays focuses on two elements, characterization and language, which are regarded as key factors in promoting the realistic basis of his work. Far from being abstractions, Beckett's characters are seen as diverse, distinct and psychologically complex beings. Beckett's concern with the individual consciousness and the psychological condition of the characters he creates, is viewed as a natural development of Ibsen's "psychological realism" and part of the mainstream of 20th century literature.

Beckett's search for a form to convey his concerns led him to use colloquial and contemporary language structured on a musical model. This enabled him to depict the flow of thoughts and feelings, and to convey the sense of uncertainty which pervades his time and reflects the dramatic changes caused by new discoveries in physics and depth psychology to the 20th century perception of reality.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION - BECKETT'S INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

Samuel Beckett received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. The award recognised not only his achievement in that sphere but confirmed the international impact of his contribution. Martin Esslin claims that "no writer of our time has provoked a larger volume of critical comment, explanation, and exegesis in so short a time".(1) However, Beckett's recognition was slow in coming; his novel *Murphy* had been rejected by forty-two publishers and by 1951, fourteen years after its publication, only ninety-five copies, of an edition of three thousand, had been sold; it took nine years before he succeeded in getting the novel, *Watt*, published. It was in 1953 with the performance of *Waiting for Godot* at the Théâtre de Babylone in Paris, that Beckett was catapulted into fame. Since that time his work has fascinated, disturbed and angered audiences which varied from the intellectual theatre élites of London, Paris and New York to the inmates of the San Quentin Penitentiary. The following critical comments on *Waiting for Godot* reveal the controversial nature of Beckett's work as well as the deeply felt responses it was capable of evoking.

Both Harold Hobson of the 'Sunday Times' and Kenneth Tynan of the 'Observer' recognised *Waiting for Godot*'s originality and its profound implications for the drama. Hobson urged his readers:

"Go and see *Waiting for Godot*. At the worst you will discover a curiosity, a four-leaved clover, a black tulip, at the best something that will securely lodge in a corner of your mind for as long as you live."(2)

Tynan wrote:

"It forced me to re-examine the rules which have hitherto governed the drama, and, having done so, to pronounce them not elastic enough. It is validly new, and hence I declare myself, as the Spanish would say, *godotista*."(3)

However, Walter Kerr of the 'New York Herald Tribune' and Pierre Marcabru in 'Arts-Spectacles' express contempt and a fascinated repugnance for the play. Kerr writes:

"Waiting for Godot is not a real carrot; it is a patiently painted, painstakingly formed plastic job for the Intellectual fruit-bowl. . . The play asking for a thousand reading; has none of its own to give. It is, in the last analysis, a veil rather than a revelation. It wears a mask rather than a face."⁽⁴⁾

Marcabru claims:

"And this is the great power of Waiting for Godot, nausea rises, malaise remains. This malaise, as in all of Beckett's plays, is due to a sort of passion for the morbid, for decay, for the ruin of flesh and brains. A disgust fascinated by anything decomposing on its feet. The mannerism of a gourmet presented with gamy meat. A sort of genius at inhaling the smell of gangrene. Odors and pus."⁽⁵⁾

Although extreme reactions on the part of critics have persisted, each new work since Waiting for Godot has been eagerly received and the attitude towards his writing is best summed up by John Russell Taylor's comment. Writing a critique of Rockabye, he calls it "a slight monologue/duologue" "a playlet" and adds:

"As usual with Beckett the piece has occasioned a lot of philosophical disquisition. No doubt this would all be discussed less if the piece were not by Beckett, even though it is, as they say exquisitely written."⁽⁶⁾

Critics have traced many and varied influences which are believed to have affected Beckett's work but a discussion of these must inevitably be speculative, and may finally prove to be an exercise of peripheral interest only. The likelihood of omitting important but less traceable influences remains a constant possibility for besides the fact that influences may not be acknowledged, they may be so deep-rooted that they operate at an unconscious level. The difficulty of ascertaining how the creative process transmutes experience to achieve conscious and unconscious intentions, as well as the lack of a clear demarcation separating the role of lived and imagined experience, adds to the elusiveness of such research.

Although born in Dublin of Irish parents, and rooted in a Protestant Anglo-Irish culture, Beckett made Paris his home in 1937. His studies and early academic work as a student of French and Italian at Trinity College, as French tutor at Campbell College, Belfast, and later, Assistant in French at Trinity College, Dublin, imbued him with the culture of Europe, and specifically that of France. His close link with French and English tradition is indicated by his use of both languages in his writings and in their subsequent translations done by him. His academic background ensures the comprehensiveness of his reading, and critical works such as his essays *Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . . Joyce and Proust* indicate areas of specific research. Furthermore, his interest in the early Italian poets and in the troubadour and Minnesinger poets of France and Germany indicates that his knowledge of literature encompassed European writing from the earliest examples of recorded works to the present day; he is known to have met the key figures of modernism from Stravinsky to Ezra Pound and to have been part of Joyce's literary circle in Paris. The following list of names is an indication of the breadth of his literary interests: poets such as, Dante, Villon, Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Leopardi, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Yeats and Eliot, novelists such as, Rousseau, Voltaire, Cervantes, Fielding, Swift, Sterne and Dickens, and dramatists such as, Racine, Corneille, Marivaux, and specifically, Chekhov, Ibsen, Strindberg, Maeterlinck, Synge and O'Casey, are believed to have been of special interest to him.(7)

In spite of the wide-ranging nature of Beckett's reading and his knowledge of the arts, he appears intent on stressing the personal nature of his work claiming his intention to "desire to express his feelings. When asked by Gabriel D'A" her contemporary philosophers had any influence on his thought, he replied that the answer was:

"I never read philosophers."

"Why not?"

"I never understand anything they write."

"All the same, people have wondered if the 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."

"What was your reason then?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. I'm no intellectual. All I am is feeling. Molloy and the others came to me the day I became aware of my own folly. Only then did I begin to write the things I feel." (8)

Although one needs to be cautious in accepting Beckett's humble and simplified assessment of his own achievement, critics such as Pilling and Balr, when describing the sources of inspiration for the play *Not I*, appear to support his claim.

Pilling writes that "Beckett's notebooks contain a synopsis of the work which reveals its (*Not I*) organisation around five basic clusters of biographical experience rather than as might have been expected, around thematic abstractions". (9) He does not reveal what these are. However, the suggestion is that, like Beckett's other plays, *Not I* is firmly rooted in actuality.

Balr provides a more detailed account of some of the sources. The first experience is concerned with Beckett's observation of an Arab woman, in Morocco, shrouded in a djellaba sitting on the edge of a pavement waiting intensely. "Every so often, she would straighten and peer into the distance. Then she would flap her arms aimlessly against her sides and hunker down once again." (10) Beckett was perturbed by the woman's anxiety and tension and she became the enigmatic "auditor," the figure described in the stage directions as a "tall, standing figure, sex indeterminable, enveloped head to foot in loose black djellaba, with hood . . . intent on Mouth, dead still throughout but for four brief movements. . ." (*Not I* p.1).

The second source of inspiration for *Not I* was Caravaggio's painting of the beheading of St John. The violent, macabre, solemn image, black in the main, which he had seen in Malta, remained with him after he had returned to Paris and acquired a dramatic intensity which he translated into a visual stage setting. Except for the faintly lit figure of the auditor and the mouth, all else on stage is hidden in the dark.

The third source of inspiration mentioned by Bair was to be found in Beckett's Irish experience:

"I knew that woman in Ireland . . . I knew who she was - not 'she' specifically, one single woman, but there were so many of these old crones . . . And I heard her saying what I wrote in *Not I*. I actually heard it."(11)

In spite of Beckett's claims as to the source of his work and his dismissal of philosophy, not only have philosophical affinities and allusions been traced by critics but his work has been seen as expounding a philosophy. Critics such as Cohn, Webb and Pilling claim he has read and been attracted by philosophical thinkers from the pre-Socratics to Wittgenstein.(12) Some of the names which have been associated with Beckett are: Heraclitus, Democritus, Pythagoras, Zeno, Gorgias, Aristotle, Descartes, Montaigne, Gullinckx, Malebranche, Spinoza, Berkeley, Hume, Schopenhauer, Voltaire, Vico, Mauthner, Heidegger and Sartre. Beckett's first published poem, *Whoroscope*, a monologue spoken by Descartes, and his essay *Dante . . . Bruno. Vico. . . Joyce* confirm his familiarity with the works of philosophers. Pilling, however, while outlining what would have appealed or been rejected by Beckett in the views of various philosophers, and indicating by the use of quotations evidence that Beckett is referring to a particular thinker, claims that:

" . . . he is an amateur, a dilettante, an aesthete where philosophy is concerned. He gleans ideas from many philosophers, gathering from them what is interesting and valuable to his perception and rejecting at times the ideas which would necessarily follow from the core idea."(13)

Pilling thus explicitly differentiates Beckett's means of exploration from the philosopher's, concurring with the view taken by this dissertation and elaborated upon in the following chapters, that although Beckett's work expresses a vision of life, it does not present, nor is it bolstered by, a systematic philosophy.

Religious influences on Beckett's work have been suggested and names such as St Augustine and the Manichaeans have been linked to his. Fraser writing on *Waiting for Godot* expresses the view that:

"The fundamental imagery of *Waiting for Godot* is Christian. . . The tramps with their rags and their misery, represent the fallen state of man. The squalor of their surroundings, their lack of a 'stake in the world' represents the idea that here in this world we can build no abiding city. The ambiguity of their attitude towards Godot, their mingled hope and fear, the doubtful tone of the boys' messages, represents the state of tension and uncertainty in which the average Christian must live in the world, avoiding presumption, and also avoiding despair." (14)

Beckett has acknowledged his use of religious symbols but stresses that he does so only because of his familiarity with them. He dismisses the suggestion of religious implications in his work explaining that, although he was brought up as a Protestant, 'almost a Quaker', he had since rejected the faith. (15)

Other possible influences on Beckett's writing are, the films of Chaplin and Keaton, his interest in music, the visual arts and the psychological theories of Freud and Jung. Furthermore, one must include the pervasive effect of the social and political climate of his time.

Beckett's life encompassed two World Wars. Although he may have been too young to be aware of the impact of World War I, he was a participant in the Second World War as a member of a French Resistance group and later, at the end of the war, as an interpreter and storekeeper for the Red Cross. His impending arrest during the war forced him to flee to unoccupied France, where he lived for two years in Rousillon, a village in the Vaucluse. The effects of the war in terms of the physical devastation which it caused, the displacement of people, the psychological disorientation and the moral malaise which is its legacy, can be as little ignored as the trends such as, the wavering of religious faith and the rapidity of technological change, which were accelerated by it.

This dissertation does not propose to deny the validity of abstract responses to Beckett's plays, its field of reference for this study. It intends to suggest however, and the focus of its exploration will be to show, that the abstract super-structure depends on a well-grounded realistic basis of which the complex and meticulously created

characters constitute the most important element. While acknowledging affinities between Beckett's work and various philosophical and literary movements, this dissertation intends to suggest that Beckett's plays are part of a realistic tradition. Such a claim requires that the characteristics of such a tradition be defined, its ramifications explored and that the links with some of the pertinent philosophical and literary movements be surveyed. Before dealing with these issues, however, it would be useful to survey Beckett's plays themselves since they form the basis of the discussion. The editions used are given in the bibliography.

ENDNOTES

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CHAPTER 2

THE PLAYS

Beckett has written sixteen plays for the stage including *Eleuthéria*, which remains unpublished to this day, and *Breath*, a wordless, 35 second image. His plays depict a progressive minimalism which gradually reduces the number of characters, discards movement and the use of props: the six characters of *Waiting for Godot* are reduced to a shadowy auditor and a mouth in *Not I*, and the elaborate stage activity of *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* has been eliminated completely in *Play*. It is interesting to note that Beckett was a novelist before he turned to drama and the development of his plays suggest that he gradually returned to the concerns and the form which he had adopted in the novels. The limited number of characters, the use of monologue and the concentration on the individual's perceptions are the most salient characteristics the novels and the later plays have in common.

Waiting for Godot is a play in two acts with four main characters and two minor parts. It is set in the evening, on a country road with a low mound and a bare tree, which acquires a few leaves in the second act, as its only props. The play revolves around the expectation of Vladimir and Estragon, the protagonists, of the arrival of Godot, a personage who never materializes but regularly sends messages promising to come the following day. The two acts indicate that the span of time is part of a continuum of similar days in the past, and in all likelihood, in the future. Pozzo and Lucky, a master and slave, appear in each act and provide an interlude in the lives of the main characters.

Waiting for Godot, is neither a play about waiting nor about Godot. It is a play about doing in a context of uncertainty. What is one to do while one is waiting, for waiting is a vacuum that needs to be filled, cluttered even, so that one may be prevented from thinking and perhaps being confronted with the solitude and the ignorance which pervade one's life. So Vladimir and Estragon, pull off boots and put them on, exchange hats in an elaborate routine, examine belts with

the prospect of hanging themselves, eat, walk, fall, embrace, sing, hide but mainly talk, to each other or to Pozzo and Lucky, in an effort to pass the time.

In a situation where choice is arbitrary and irrational, as in the examples offered of the salvation of one thief and not the other at the Crucifixion, the beating of one boy and not the other by Godot, Vladimir and Estragon's choice, to wait for Godot, is equally arbitrary and irrational. Waiting becomes a stasis, a decision to procrastinate and to avoid further decision. An inevitable tension is created between the inactivity of waiting and its suggestion of the immobilization of time, and living which necessitates change in the form of doing or saying.

The play is dominated by uncertainty.(1) Not knowing the pervasive condition in which the characters pursue their lives. Vladimir and Estragon do not know who Godot is, what exactly they asked of him, whether he will come. The boy, messenger of Godot, does not know why his brother is beaten and he not. Nothing can finally be ascertained for Vladimir and Estragon. As Beckett himself has said: "Waiting for Godot is a play that is striving all the time to avoid definition. . .".(2) Neither time, place nor event can be fixed to become a signpost of reality from which purposeful action can be taken. Memory is fallible, at best vague, and the absence of a coherently-remembered, structured past, as well as a future whose inevitable uncertainty is enhanced by an absence of goals, leaves the protagonists rootless and confused in a present made up of unrelated moments.

The plot, perhaps best described as a melodic line which runs through the whole play, is closely related to the notion of the elusive and unknowable nature of reality. It is concerned with Vladimir's attempt to establish connections of time, place and event in his and Estragon's life. Repeatedly deflected in his attempts, he keeps returning to seek a clue or establish some agreement with the other characters which

will corroborate his memory of the past and create a stable reality. The play culminates in his acquiring a vision of life, which reinforces the motives for his actions without, however, effecting any change in them. In the futility of all purpose and action and the absence of distractions, the play posits value and reveals a reality of identity and existence in relationships alone.(3)

Critical opinion on *Waiting for Godot*, as already indicated in the introduction, has been extensive and varied with critics and audiences putting into effect the words of C.B. of the *San Quentin News*:

"It (the play) was an expression, symbolic in order to avoid all personal error, by an author who expected each member of his audience to draw his own conclusions, make his own errors."(4)

Endgame, Beckett's second play, was first performed in French at the Royal Court Theatre London, in 1957. The play maintained the four character format found in *Waiting for Godot* and once again, centres on the dramatic presentation of a "tied" relationship. The harshness and abrasiveness of Hamm and Clov's partnership conforms to the master/servant pattern found in the Pozzo and Lucky combination of the earlier play.

Hamm, the central character, is blind, paralyzed and dependent for all his needs, physical and emotional, on his servant, or perhaps his adopted son, Clov. The latter equally in pain and in a state of physical deterioration, complies reluctantly and truculently to requests made of him, moving about stiffly, with a staggering walk. The other two characters, Hamm's parents, Nagg and Nell, are confined in ashbins and being also paralyzed are equally dependent on Clov. The play provides an intimation of the plays to come in creating the focus of interest around a dominant personality; an audience's attention is constantly seeking to discover what motivates Hamm's behaviour and to clarify his complex relationship with Clov.

The set of *Endgame*, described as a "refuge by Hamm, is as much a prison as it is a shelter. "Outside of here it's death"(p.15) says Hamm, but the set itself is a negation of life: a bare room bathed in grey light, a picture facing the wall, ashbins and Hamm covered, the curtains drawn over two, high, small windows attainable only with a ladder. A present existence determined by deprivation and sterility is confirmed by a set which stresses the notion of enclosure, claustrophobia and a sensory void.

Endgame is a play concerned with ending.(5) The final moves in the "old endgame lost of old" (p.51) have been played and yet the characters are reluctant to stop playing. As Hamm says "And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to . . .end". (p.12) This central motif is clearly stated in the first words of the play spoken by Clov "finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished" (p.12) and is repeated in nearly identical form by Hamm. A determination to end all life is the desire of both Hamm and Clov and the set reinforces this central motif of the play, stressing at the same time the physical and emotional isolation of the characters.

Endgame is a disturbing play. It is unsatisfactory because its elusive, elliptical, unresolved quality instead of intimating a wider range of possibilities, which is in the nature of such writing, leaves an audience confused.(6) In an attempt to elucidate the play, critics have proposed metaphorical representations, analogies with the process of entropy and heat exchange, the First Law of Thermodynamics and the Second Law of Thermodynamics,(7) associated it with Biblical stories, Shakespearean texts, such as *Hamlet*, *Lear*,(8) the Gospel of John and Revelation,(9) postulated that it reflected the endgame or the third dimension of a chess game,(10) and delved deep to establish autobiographical connections.(11) If there is a meaning to *Endgame*, it surely lies in its evocation of emotion similarly to a piece of music, for the critical responses to the play which show a determined effort to elucidate it by positing a combination of alternative interpretations, are never quite satisfactory.

Perhaps Fletcher and Spurling's conclusion is in the end the most valuable to bear in mind:

"To attempt to force the whole play into any one of these 'meanings' would be as meaningless as to try to force a painting into the meaning of one of its many layers of paint."⁽¹²⁾

"There is no key to Endgame any more than there is to Beckett's own life or to the life of anyone. Rather there is a mass of detail lodged together. . ."⁽¹³⁾

Responses to the theatrical production varied as much as they did for *Waiting for Godot*. Harold Hobson declared himself vehemently in favour:

"*Fin de Partie* has outraged the Philistines, earned the contempt of half-wits and filled those who are capable of telling the difference between a theatre and a bawdy-house with a profound and sombre and paradoxical joy. Its presentation is among the greatest of the services that the English Stage Company has rendered to the British public."⁽¹⁴⁾

Kenneth Tynan and Marc Bernard, however, registered their disappointment. Tynan declared:

"I suddenly realized that Beckett wanted his private fantasy to be accepted as objective truth . . . For a short time I am prepared to listen in any theatre to any message, however antipathetic. But when it is not only disagreeable but forced down my throat, I demur."⁽¹⁵⁾

Marc Bernard, less forcefully, indicated his dissatisfaction with the play while comparing it to *Waiting for Godot*:

"Endgame. . . has neither the same plenitude, nor the same effectiveness. I was not bored, although there are some dull moments, but I constantly had the impression that I was listening to a medieval fatrasie."⁽¹⁶⁾

Krapp's Last Tape, the first of Beckett's plays to be written in English, was first performed in 1958, in London. The play is seen as "the most openly autobiographical of Beckett's writings . . . worked

over with painstaking precision in an attempt to disguise these traces".(17) When it was first performed, it was acclaimed by critics who wrote of "the magic of this dazzling play,"(18) saw it as "a haunting and harrowing work,"(19) and "Beckett's most lyrical and tender play".(20)

The play is concerned with revealing the unfulfilled life of an egocentric, sixty-nine year-old man whose inability to commit himself to a relationship has left him bereft of all meaningful contact. A complex character study of an emotionally restricted man with narrow concerns, is evoked. Krapp lacks warmth, the capacity to love and the sympathy to suffer. The tragedy of the play resides in the character's final realization of the misguided direction of his life and his sense of irrevocable loss.

Approximately forty-two years previously, Krapp, the only character in the play, had instituted what was to become a yearly ritual, the making of a recorded diary of the events of his past year. Krapp, alone and alienated, finds solace in a voice reaffirming the past and his existence in it. Furthermore, the recorded voice becomes a form of company, another presence, and an activity which fills the emptiness of his life.

The set represents Krapp's den. It contains a small table with two drawers, a chair, a tape-recorder, a microphone, a number of cardboard boxes and reels of tapes. The table and adjacent area are bathed in a strong white light while the remainder of the set is in darkness. Three times Krapp disappears into the dark area where, from the sounds of a bottle against glass and corks popping, activity is assumed to be continuing.

The action of the play is centred on the tape-recorder. The device permits the simultaneous presentation of two moments of the present in an apparent denial of time; the tape-recorder reveals the past as it was perceived in its own present and the play-back allows it to co-exist with the actual present. Two stages of Krapp's life, co-

existing simultaneously like a set of self-reflecting mirrors, are constantly being compared and contrasted with each other by means of the recording. The isolated and lonely condition of Krapp at sixty-nine is revealed as having been brought about by his constant rejection of contact and his withdrawal from involvement with others. However, the tape-recorder reveals, too, the fragmented and selective nature of memory. Every year, Krapp chooses to commit to tape what has been of relevance to him during the course of the year. Inevitably, the act of selecting causes the recording to consist of a series of moments and Krapp is seen to perceive life in that way. The continuity of experience is reduced to a series of unconnected instances in time capturing disparate events.

Krapp's Last Tape marks a turning point in Beckett's plays. The concentration on one figure and the use of the monologue, varied and explored further in later plays, as opposed to the interchange which forms the fabric of the two earlier works, reinforces the idea of isolation. Suffering, a pervasive theme of the plays, is located in the mind and the subsequent plays vivify Edgar's statement in King Lear "Who alone suffers, suffers most in the mind".(21)

Happy Days, performed in New York in 1961, is a tragi-comedy which portrays an individual's determined attempt to avoid confronting the reality of her life by adopting a pattern of behaviour and an attitude which would protect her from such an undertaking. Winnie, the central character of the play, attempts to persuade herself that happiness is attainable, and can be achieved by whatever means will cause the time, during which she is compelled to be conscious, to pass. Any crumb of attention offered to her, or any activity which distracts her from the awareness of the pervasiveness of her solitude, helps to confirm her optimism, and is seen as a contribution to the achievement of her "happy day." As the play progresses, the irony which juxtaposes the happy-go-lucky associations of the title and such repeated lines as "this is going to be a happy day"(p.19) "this will have been a happy day"(p.30) with the vacuousness of Winnie's life, is revealed.

Winnie is the focus of interest in *Happy Days*. Her conversational chatter fills the space around her, clutters the loneliness of her life to give it a semblance of purposefulness and meaning. The responses to her questions by Willie (her partner and only other character in the play) are rare, factual and distant in tone, but Winnie persists in addressing him, accepting his minimal contributions as an indication that her "day" will turn out to be a happy one. Winnie needs Willie's presence as a listener and his involvement in her past helps to establish her existence in her own mind.

Two strategies are developed by Winnie to ensure her psychological survival. Firstly, she adopts the belief that her life is happy; her attempts at self-deception at times appear heroic in their obstinacy to refuse to succumb to her loneliness and her fears. Her second ploy is the implementation of a routine, a set of habits which will fill the time during which she is forced to be conscious. Even though these habits are meaningless, they ensure that she is not at a loss for something to do or to say and that she is thus able to protect herself from the "wilderness".

Winnie lives in her mound of earth as if it were a normal room. There, she attempts to approximate the regular routine of life. No sooner has she woken at the sound of a bell and said her prayers than the large shopping bag in which she keeps all her paraphernalia comes into use. She extracts from it, a toothbrush, a toothpaste tube, a bottle of tonic, a hat, a musical box, a revolver, a lipstick and the audience is told that there are countless other objects for her use in it.

Memories too, become objects for Winnie, remembered and repeated to fill up time. Her recall of lines of poetry, significant because they help to place her within a literate and intellectual background, and because they reveal her subconscious feelings which are associated with sorrow or distress, are of value to her because they provide her with something to say. Although language has a number of functions in *Happy Days*, its purpose for Winnie is similar to that of the

toothbrush or parasol. Words become objects for her. She uses them like grains of sand to fill the empty vessel of her life. Speech is her means of avoiding thought, acquiring a value as noise, and acting as interference which distracts her from the distressing consciousness of her loneliness. However, language also has a paradoxical function in the play, it is a means of communication and a means of avoiding knowledge, it simultaneously blocks out reality and attempts to create it.

The effect of Winnie's prolonged speaking, often with no reply, creates an impression that her speech is a monologue. However, Willie's intrusions are of a sufficient number to establish the play as a dialogue. Although the speech shows little organization or logic, words are not used as they will be in the later plays, *Play and Not I*, to render internal thoughts audible. In *Happy Days*, one is always conscious that one is listening to speech.

Happy Days is the first of Beckett's plays in which the set is so unusual as to have a shock effect on the audience.⁽²²⁾ In the first three plays already discussed, the sets, although minimal, in no way disturb an audience's established sense of reality. The incarceration of Nagg and Nell in bins in *Endgame*, has a jolting effect but is revealed some time after the opening of the play and becomes accepted as a bizarre element occurring in a conventional set. In *Happy Days*, Winnie is presented as immobilized in a low mound of earth covered with scorched grass. Around and beyond her, the scorched grass extends, by means of the effect of a backcloth, to suggest an unbroken plain meeting the sky in the far horizon. In Act 1, the mound is low, reaching to just below her waist. In Act II, Winnie is embedded up to her neck and has become totally immobilized, unable to move her head, compelled to face the front throughout the act. Willie, is hidden behind the mound for most of the play only the back of his head being seen occasionally. The set is bathed from the beginning to the end of the performance in a constant, blazing light.

The set evokes a sense of restriction within the immensity of space. An impression of vastness, created by the symmetry and emptiness of the scene, is reinforced by the unwavering blazing light. This is a harsh and painful living environment; the earth is scorched, the light is a source of intense heat. The appearance of an ant becomes an event worthy to be noted and serves to indicate both the desolation of the landscape and the fact that life persists in such a hostile environment. So painful are the conditions that Winnie imagines a longed-for release from the light and the heat as a melting away into the dark of oblivion. Unchanging space, continuous, consistent light create a sense of time being suspended, as if an eternal moment in space were captured. Although the two-act structure and the further reduction in the possibility of mobility are an indication that time exists, the linear time scheme of past, present and future appears to be of little relevance in *Happy Days*.

As in the case of previous plays, the critics' responses to *Happy Days* have varied, ranging from negative sentiments:

"Happy Days is too predictable," "...the language... is flat and prosaic," "...those repetitions have finally become rather boring,"(23)

qualified praise:

"Happy Days is the tightest and best-managed of Mr Beckett's plays. It has double-meanings and perplexing points, but it moves in a straight line,"(24)

to appreciative comments which stress:

"...the dramatic strength, the mythic quality and the ambiguity of the play,"(25)

It is evident, however, that *Happy Days* is a meticulously crafted play which succeeds in combining outrageously imaginative elements and prosaic, concrete qualities enhancing both aspects by their confrontation.

Play, originally written in English, was first performed in German translation at the Ulmer Theatre, Ulm-Donau, in 1963. The play dramatizes the suffering brought about by consciousness which is unavoidable and responsible for maintaining the essence of existence.

The plot of **Play** is unambiguously explicit. It deals with a love triangle between wife, husband and mistress and its aftermath, a conflict situation so commonplace in life and literature that it is regarded as a cliché. What is different in **Play** is that the passionate melodrama of back page newspaper reporting is not the focus of the audience's attention. It is not the past action but the present emotions and their roots in, and as a consequence of, the past, which is one's fundamental concern. This plot, simple and mundane, with its 'slice of life' quality, allows for audience identification but is juxtaposed and counter-balanced by a set startling in its originality which shocks and disorientsates.

The set of **Play** reveals three characters visually indistinguishable from one another. All three are up to their necks in identical urns. No movement is possible, no gesture, no facial expression distinguish one from the other; their expressions are "impassive" throughout and their voices "toneless". The spotlight, the "inquisitor," a fourth presence whose function may be seen metaphorically as a seeker of truth, the perceiving eye of conscience, a malicious torturer or the unavoidable means of self-perception, moves randomly from one face to the other revealing to the audience that all three are at present in identical situations physically trapped, forced to respond to the commands of the light. The fact that the "response to light is immediate"(p.9) indicates clearly that there is no choice and no possibility of escape for these "victims".

There appears to be little doubt that the scene depicts an after life.(26) The presence of urns with their funereal associations, faces "so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of the urns,"(p.9) the concentration on the past with its recall of action and the present static anguish, all help to suggest that the scene is set beyond life.

The characterization in *Play* presents one with three fully realized personalities, each locked in their own consciousness. It reveals the way in which the same central event of their lives was apprehended as well as the different responses to the fate each subsequently suffers. The three characters, W1, W2 and M, are isolated individuals whose actions in life had brought them together but whose inner world had remained inviolate. The polyphonically-blended monologues reveal the memories of the past, the characters' existing anxious, guilt-ridden suffering and their longing for the peace and silence of oblivion. The three are doomed by their ignorance as to the nature of the conclusion of their relationship to a remorseless questioning of their situation into eternity. They are evidently unable to accept the breakdown of relationships which verge on the sordid, and which, considering their inability to forsake them even in death, are curiously loveless.

Meticulously and unsparingly, shearing the content to its essentials, Beckett has achieved in *Play* three distinct portraits of unheroic individuals suffering alone and unremittingly in their guilt, fears and regrets. All three characters are forced to be conscious of the past, to remember it in an endeavour, which is never successful, to come to terms with it. A direct link is created between the present torment and the events of the past; the desire for forgetfulness becomes a desire to obliterate the past and thus to end that torment. However, the repetition of the play, once in its entirety as well as a few lines to suggest a third repetition, indicates that the goal of oblivion will not be attained. Beckett's option for the replay, to present either an exact replica or to use a variation with a lower "key of light" and correspondingly weaker voices, indicates that a variation did not represent a shift in significance.

As in other Beckett plays, such as *Waiting for Godot* and *Not I*, the cyclical pattern suggests an absence of finality and the inevitability of suffering continuing into eternity. The ritualistic repetition creates the illusion that the characters transcend their finitude and participate in a timeless universe. However, this sense of timelessness is

juxtaposed by the presentation of a sordid affair, lacking in universal import and unheroic in its dimensions.

The response to the thematic content of the play differs substantially amongst critics. It varies from the evident relish at "that stew of angry contempt and foetid sexuality is the real substance and theme of the play,"(27) to the blunt statements "the play is about adultery,"(28) "the play pivots on death,"(29) "Play is a matter of situation rather than meaning and communication"(30) and "in Play it is probably the impossibility of an extinction of consciousness through death itself that is dramatized".(31)

Theatre critics appear to agree that Play is a memorable experience having a profound effect upon its audiences. *Mélie* writes:

"Comédie est une pièce absolument unique . . . témoin de l'extrême variété du génie de Samuel Beckett."(32)

(Play is absolutely unique, testimony to the extreme variety of Samuel Beckett's genius.)

Harold Hobson reviewing the play writes:

"All in the story that had seemed vague becomes sharp and clear. The incidents stand out, only the emotions - the sadness, the compassion, and the pain - are still beyond computation."(33)

Laurence Kitchen claims that the play communicates like "tightly compressed chamber music on a subliminal level".(34)

Generalized interpretations which posit the view that the play is a vision of suffering humanity, existing in an emotionally alienated state, entangled during their lives in the futility of passions which leave them finally in a Sartrean hell of irresolvable regrets to be borne in perpetuity, may have validity.(35) However, these interpretations take into account only the content of the play, omitting, in spite of the fact that a theatrical experience is multi-dimensional, to incorporate the form, that is the set and structure of the play. The content of Play is concerned with the suffering of individual minds caused by the

consciousness of uncertainty, ignorance and regrets maintained as ever-present by memory. This combined with its visual and aural impact focuses and extends the emotion of suffering. In the sense that one associates the word "tragedy" with grandeur of emotions, beings who pit themselves against powerful forces whether they be gods or society and its values, and who assume equal stature to them because they can contemplate opposing them, one could say that *Play* is not a tragedy. Yet, the characters, depicted as impotent and fallible, suffer and continue to exist conscious of their distress, and therein lies the tragedy.

Play pursues the technique first initiated in *Happy Days* of yoking together two sharply juxtaposed elements, the fantastic and the realistic. The effect of the fantastic, to increase an audience's alertness by startling it out of its conventional expectations, and that of the realistic, which allows for an empathic response, adds to the intensity of these plays. The characterization which has become progressively more dependent on the use of the monologue reveals the psychological nature of Beckett's focus and his developing concern to delve deeply into an individual psyche and reveal the innermost conscious and subconscious workings of the mind. This interest reaches its climax in Beckett's next play, *Not I*.

Beckett considered *Not I* a major dramatic work. The play was written hurriedly in twelve days after a five week holiday in Morocco in 1972 and was performed that same year in New York.

The play dramatizes the condition of a woman of seventy as she babbles uncontrollably in one of her rare occasions of speech when she is no longer able to contain her anguish at the loneliness and purposelessness of her life nor able to repress a sense of guilt. The gush of words reveals the causes which led to her present condition as it simultaneously blocks the emergence of a truth concerning herself. One witnesses a conscious, wilful evasion to acknowledge responsibility for a never-divulged, elusively-suggested deed.

The speaker dwells, with interruptions and digressions in the four attempts to tell her story, on an event which occurred one April morning while she was wandering in a field looking aimlessly for cowslips with which to make a ball. The first account tells how she stopped, stared and fainted, became aware of a buzzing in her ears and a ray of light appearing and disappearing. Because the thought flashed through her mind that she was being punished for her sins, the event appears to be of a revelatory nature.

After being persistently interrupted by an inner voice, the speaker returns a second time to the beginning of the event and explains her reaction to her awareness that she was speaking uncontrollably as she did "for reasons unknown," (Waiting for Godot p.43) once or twice a year, in the winter. Only a moment before, she had been unable to make a sound when suddenly, involuntarily, the words were precipitating themselves out of her. The mouth, she claims, continued as if maddened. The speed and intelligibility of her present speech reenacts the frenzied outpouring of words of which she speaks and confirms the probability of the event.

The third time she returns to the story, Mouth adds a delicate, sensual detail. She tells how in a field, in April, in the morning sun, with nothing about but the larks, she sank her face down in the grass. Again she mentions being in a state of trance unable to control her speech. At this point, the suggestion is introduced that it is not only *her loneliness which had created the hysterical moment in which she finds herself*. Her sense of guilt appears to have become uncontrollable but at the crucial moment, she refuses to associate herself with the narrative stressing it is "she" and therefore, "not I," who was involved.

The fourth attempt to tell what happened that April morning brings on a surge of irritability against the inner voice and a dissatisfaction with the way the narrative is proceeding. Her response to the inner voice suggests that Mouth is indulging in fantasizing or making up a story, and that finding that outcome unsatisfactory, she attempts to manipulate her imagination in a direction, and to a conclusion, which would give her satisfaction.

The pathological, alienated state of the speaker is unambiguously indicated by her use of the third person pronouns "her" and "she" when referring to herself, and "they" when referring to the outside world. She insists that the events she describes happened to "she" avoiding pointedly the use of the pronoun "I" which at no time appears in the text. In this way, she refuses to accept her centrality in the events which occurred, depersonalizing and fictionalizing the situation in an attempt to protect her ego from the threat represented by the truth. Mouth reveals herself to be aware of conventional, socially-accepted modes of behaviour yet the obsessive dwelling on the event is an indication of a neurotic mind bent on avoiding what she knows to be the truth and seeking to create its own facts. Mouth becomes an artist, creating and rearranging the events of her life into an acceptable and coherent form.(36) The imagination, acting according to her psychological needs provides solace in the form of company and also creates a fictionalized version of a life, making reality out of illusion. It is impossible to assess the truth of the details of Mouth's story yet the complex condition of a mind at work, as well as its emotional state, is recognisably realistic.(37)

The play is a monologue since the voice emanating from the mouth is the only one heard by the audience. However, in reality, the moment is a self-directed dialogue in which the speaker is interrupted, responds, and ever asserts her will, over the questioning, probing and prodding of an internal voice. There are clear indications of a sub-text which involves a dialogue.

The set of Not I is minimal in the extreme. The presence of an indeterminate auditor is set in opposition to a mouth which it faces diagonally across a stage. Both appear to be suspended in a void, the auditor standing on an invisible podium 4' above the stage and the mouth about 8' above stage level. The lighting is faint on both the auditor and the mouth; all else is in darkness. The near total darkness of the presentation may depict the unfathomed, unconscious region of the mind, and similarly, the presence of a mouth only may intensify the idea of the dissociated nature of the character aware of

her fragmented physicality and lack of coherence. Beyond these possibilities, however, the outward denuded presentation of the play does not appear to suggest further symbolical interpretations. The *mise-en-scène*, which discards all that is not relevant and would distract from concentration on the essentials of the play, becomes a vivid and memorable image which intensifies the attention given to Mouth. The unusual, quasi-static presentation (only four brief movements consisting of the auditor's lifting and dropping of the arms occur in the play) has the effect of creating a sense of dislocation, making an audience more intensely aware of everything that happens.

The effect of the play is at a subliminal level since the speed of performance, fifteen to seventeen minutes, does not allow for a coherent, rational response from an audience. One's understanding rests on a flickering awareness of ideas, suggestions and images created by the speaker's words which succeed each other rapidly. The effect is akin to being bombarded by a rapid succession of images, intuiting that they ought to create a coherent whole yet finding that one has a hold only on flickering patterns. Fletcher et al writing about the public's reaction to *Not I* claim that "the reviews were generally enthusiastic, greeting the play as a new, exhilarating theatrical experience, but they were in some doubt about why they responded so warmly to it".(38)

Vivian Mercier sees *Not I* as a play about the "denial of identity and one that asserts, with typical Beckettian ambiguity, the very identity it seeks to deny".(39) *Not I* is about identity but it is also about suffering, anxiety, guilt, alienation, deceit, language and the imagination. Its elusiveness leads one to the awareness of the Incertitude surrounding all knowledge. Unlike *Play* but like *Endgame* and *Happy Days*, the function of the imagination as a creative process used to create a self, is given greater prominence. Mercier claims a connection between *Not I* and a number of other works by Beckett; *Not I*, he feels, can be interpreted as a one character version of *Play* "Mouth's monologue is a logical development of

Winnie's pseudo-dialogue," but could also, more plausibly, be seen "as a dramatization of *The Unnamable*".(40) These comparisons stress the use of the monologue and the interiorization of the action.

More than any other play, *Not I*, with its ruthless shearing of inessentials and its concentration on the psyche of an individual, puts into practice Beckett's words in *Proust*:

"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 extra circumferential phenomena, drawn in to the care of the eddy."(p.48)

The play represents simultaneously, a culmination in Beckett's dramatic development in the probing of an internal mental state revealed by means of the monologue, and a full circle return to the explorations and technique of his novels.

Breath, a thirty-five second skit, written on the back of a postcard for Kenneth Tynan's production, *Oh Calcutta*, is an austere, harsh, concrete image in which many concerns, persistent in Beckett's work, are included. The play consists of a stage littered with rubbish and two identical cries, one which precedes an inspiration of breath, and a second which follows an expiration. An increase and decrease of light, which however remains suffused, accompanies the breaths. This isolated image, free of any distractions, avoids becoming melodramatic by its simplicity and its brevity. However, this play, consonant with Beckett's oeuvre, does not add to it; it rather emphasizes particular concerns. The limited image, free of ambiguity, allows, as does all of Beckett's work, a release of associations which amplify it and give it resonance beyond its statement.

The play posits a view of existence as worthless and pervaded by suffering; distress accompanies both birth and death and neither joy nor beauty are seen to be part of life. Beckett's concern with the brevity of life and experience as a moment in time isolated from other moments and encapsulated by a void, as well as a view of the

content of existence as a clutter of rubbish, find expression in this play.

Come and Go, a cameo play, was produced in Paris in 1966 in its original language, French. The play explores patterning and reveals in miniature, Beckett's preoccupation with form and sound. The highly symmetrical arrangement of repetitions of movement and language combine to create a balletic effect stressing the musical foundation on which his longer works are based.

Three women, "ages undeterminable"(p.17) figures "as alike as possible"(p.21) their features hidden by the brims of hats, the colours of their costumes in dull shades, are the protagonists of the piece. The situation, simple in the extreme, indicates that they have had identical experiences: their ambitions were the same, their memories are shared, and each knows a secret about another which remains hidden from the one to whom it pertains.

Like Beckett's previous plays, light and dark are used to isolate characters and intensify attention on them. Similarity between this play and Beckett's larger works resides in the interest in form, its intimation of a narrative based on a past which exists in memory, illusion as an aspect of existence, and the presence of a sense of loss. *Come and Go* is interesting for its intimation of possibilities and for its concentration on patterning, but it is slight and does not pretend to be otherwise.

That time, performed in 1976 at the Royal Court Theatre, London, to mark Beckett's 70th birthday, dwells on the preoccupations of a consciousness and is reminiscent of *Not I*. Self-revelation exposes a character who is isolated and whose memory explores the past which dominates and fills his mind. Obsessively and persistently present, the past imposes itself on his consciousness, preventing it from existing at rest. The play reveals a neurotic search which finally, unlike in plays such as *Play* and *Not I*, comes to an end. The final silence which is followed by a smile suggests resolution and satisfaction.

Three different voices, interweaving polyphonically, present fragmentedly, the memories of three different periods of the Listener's life. The internal monologue flows continuously, recognizably part of the hallucinations which are revealed in A's memories.

A's recall is centred on the last time he returned, as an old man, to visit the ruin, Foley's Folly, where he used to play and hide as a child. He had eventually realized that the tram that would have taken him there no longer operated, and because he had vowed to speak to no one as long as he lived, had given up the idea of reaching his destination, and had sat on someone's doorstep until it was time to catch the night ferry back.

B's voice speaks of love but the scene, set on the edge of a wood or a towpath in the sand, is always static with the lovers looking straight ahead, only the faint murmuring of a vow of love being heard. That memory gradually begins to assume a sense of unreality and he begins to wonder whether it wasn't all a fabrication to keep the void and "the shroud"(p.16) at bay.

C's voice remembers three experiences which, like the first memories, stress the Listener's isolation and alienation. These moments recall three events, in the Portrait Gallery, the Post Office and the Public Library, where moments of perception lead finally to the voices being stilled and the Listener attaining peace of mind.

Dramatically vivid, the set, with its stark use of light and dark in a manner reminiscent of previous plays, concentrates attention on a head suspended in space. The set highlights the isolation of the individual as well as suggests the unknown and hidden realm of thoughts and fears. As in *Not I*, the distress caused by a lonely and isolated life has caused the imagination to come to the rescue and to fill the silence with words which may be retelling fact or creating illusions. The fallibility of memory and the uncertainty of reality, which imprison psychological existence in limbo, are countered only by the certainty of the inevitability of death; the voices reveal a fear of

death which is constantly repressed until the moment when the Listener is forced to confront it and gains release from it. Beckett has succeeded in recreating the complexity of a suffering mind caught in the distress of its neuroses and reaching a state when it is able to come to terms with its fears. However, one would agree with Cushman's assessment that in relation to Beckett's oeuvre the play represents "a process of refinement but not necessarily of enrichment".(41)

Footfalls presented simultaneously with *That time* in 1976, has, according to Bair, an evident biographical basis, Beckett's mother's terminal illness and her insomnia.

A realistic situation is presented in the "tied" relationship of a woman in her forties looking after her bed-ridden and suffering mother and the mother's concern for her daughter's ceaseless and compulsive walking. Once again, the dialogue and the action is lodged in a character's, this time the daughter's, mind. It is the complexity of this consciousness unable to come to terms with some intolerable thought, distancing herself with the use of the third person pronoun, or transforming her thoughts into a tale, which is the focus of one's attention. May, later referred to as Amy, embodies two characters in the voice of her mother and her own, and reveals the existence of a neurosis and a guilt which has imprisoned her during her life time.

Footfalls is another play by Beckett which explores the idea of memories, and hence the past, as haunting and imprisoning. In a pseudo-dialogue, the mind of one character dwells obsessively on a past relationship fraught with anxiety, guilt and emotional distress. Eerie, ghostlike scenes are however presented, and balanced, by language which is colloquial, simple and domestic. The play expertly suggests ideas, intimates a narrative, includes ambiguities but leaves an audience incapable of creating a coherent and structured episode. The uncertainties of the play increase the possibilities of what may have occurred but the gaps prevent one from reaching a satisfactory conclusion. Irving Wardle echoes this view when he states he does not understand the play but feels it creates a potent impression.(42)

A Piece of Monologue, performed in New York in 1980, continues the use of techniques and concerns used in a number of Beckett's plays, and because of the absence of that originality which one has come to expect from Beckett, tends to appear repetitive with an inclination toward caricature. The monologue, its obsessive nature and its distress embodied in the repetitions, is used to reveal the speech/thought of the character. The isolated and dissociated nature of the character explored in *Not I* and subsequent plays, as well as the need to distance reality by fantasizing, are evident once again. Echoes of *Endgame* exist in recalling a desolate context for existence:

"Nothing there either. Nothing stirring there either. Nothing stirring anywhere. Nothing to be seen anywhere. Nothing to be heard anywhere." (*A Piece of Monologue* p.12)

The notion of birth and death inextricably bound together evokes shades of *Waiting for Godot* and like the protagonist of Krapp's *Last Tape*, the Speaker attempts to reduce his life to "nothing" wishing even to expunge the existence of feelings.

Ghostlike, a being in life but out of it, since he has severed all connections with the living, the Speaker reenacts nightly a ritual of language and gesture. White-haired, in his white gown and white socks, like a ghost who cannot attain peace, every nightfall he moves to the window, looks on to nothing, then begins the lighting of the lamp. Once he has performed this action, always in the same manner, using three matches, he then moves on to face the blank east wall on which were once the pictures of his parents. Every night, he waits for the first word to gather itself in his mouth to set himself going, and every night the same word "birth" sets in motion the speech/thought of the evening. The habitual nature of the actions and the linguistic repetitions (the lighting of the lamp is mentioned five times), make it appear that time is at a standstill.

Rockaby, written for a seminar in Buffalo in 1981, is a short, concentrated poem in which image, sound and motion create a memorable experience of a psychological condition. The *fin de siècle*

costume creates a bizarre visual impact which in conjunction with the simple, repetitive language (a structured pattern of sound) and the hypnotic rocking, induce a condition of total absorption in the audience. In this play too, lighting is used dramatically to focus attention on the character while the surrounding darkness stresses her isolation. The sparseness of the scene intensifies the situation and the monologue/dialogue allows one to enter into the consciousness of the character on stage. The thoughts, prodded into expression by the insistent "more" which wills the recall of the past, reveal the cause of the character's present state, her past life and her emotional needs.

Rockaby is a memory play which recalls the character's search for contact, her desperate need being conveyed by the persistence of her search for "another like herself/another creature like herself/a little like"(p.19) "another living soul/going to and fro/all eyes like herself"(p.20) She expresses the desire to find "famished eyes/like hers"(p.23) which would be eager "to see/be seen".(p.23) The psychological anguish and the craving to find some means of breaking her enforced isolation is conveyed by the forcefulness of her obsessively repetitive language. As in *Not I*, loneliness and alienation induce in W a state of dissociation which cause her to refer to herself in the third person, as well as to create her own company, the internal voice becoming her "own other living soul".(p.25)

Isolated, bitter, hopeless and angry, W speaks of four stages in her life. The first pictures her as active "going to and fro"(p.20) seeking "another like herself".(p.19) The second tells of her going in and sitting "quiet at her window . . . facing other windows"(p.22) looking for another human face. In the third part, she is reduced to looking for "one blind up no more"(p.23) as an indication of the existence of others. When none of these attempts meet with any success, *disillusioned, she decides to let down the blind and descend the "steep stair" to sit in her mother's rocker.* In the fourth section, the daughter reenacts her mother's actions, suggesting in this way that both of them had been driven to live and end their lives in the same conditions. However, W's awareness of her mother's state evokes a

sense of impotent anger. She submits, though not passively, to her state of isolation and demands the annihilation of consciousness.

The musical quality of Beckett's writing referred to in his other works, is evident here too, and is reinforced by the associations of the title of the play with a nursery rhyme and song used with a soothing motion, to lull one to sleep. Such a song would be used in a situation of love and care but is used here to reveal an attempt to recreate those sensations and feelings by an individual who is deprived of them and suffering from this deprivation.

Ohio Impromptu, written for a seminar at Ohio State University in 1981, presents a complex, hallucinatory situation in which a being in deep distress achieves relief from his suffering by embodying it in art. His sorrow becomes a story told by an imaginary character, a projection of his own self, who becomes the means by which he exorcizes his grief.

That the play is concerned with an internal monologue, in which a Listener listens to his own telling of his own story, is evident from the staging. Beckett presents two identical beings in identical dress, sitting in the same manner, the one as Reader, the other as Listener. As part of the story, the Reader reads the words "with never a word exchanged they grew to be as one"(p.31) and the end reveals them as simultaneously lowering their right hands to the table, raising their heads and looking at each other, *unblinking and expressionless*. A gesture which differentiates the Listener from the Reader is his knocking on the table, which causes the Reader to regress to a previous sentence, while a second knock allows him to continue with the narrative. The regressions do not occur to stress salient points but appear to mimic the normal regressions of reading. In this play, the narrative does not have to be pieced together from hints, but is presented fully, in consecutive form, and the present situation becomes explained by the revelation of the past.

The life which is revealed, is that of a man who, following the loss of his "dear one," leaves his abode. Since the place they had shared was pervaded by her presence, he hopes that the unfamiliarity of his surroundings will bring him relief from his grief. He had been advised by her, against such a move for she had suggested that memories would bring him consolation. Thoughts of returning to the former place could not be contemplated and the man had been disturbed by nightly fears, until one night, someone appeared who claimed that he had been sent by the "dear one" to confront him. From time to time, this being appears and reads from a worn volume the whole night through, and then disappears without a word. This continues until the whole story is told. The final part of the narrative tells of what is happening at the very moment of telling. The story reveals that the "dear one" had informed the Reader that he need not go again to the Listener since he was no longer needed but also, that the Reader remained and confronted the Listener. This is then reenacted, the two beings facing each other "as though turned to stone".(p.32) A state of mindlessness has been achieved, the hallucination integrated, the split consciousness reconstituted and the longed-for void achieved. Despair and suffering have been purged and a sensory, emotional and intellectual vacuum established.

The plays discussed in this chapter have all been written for live performance on the stage and employ language, or at least a modicum of sound, as one of their elements. Beckett also wrote: one film script, *Film*, three plays for television, *Eh Joe*, *Ghost Trio* and . . . *but the clouds*, two mimes, *Act without words I and II*, and four radio plays, *All that fall*, *Embers*, *Words and Music* and *Cascando*. These, however, do not come within the scope of this study and have, therefore, not been included in the discussion. Much attention has been given to the plays which have formed the basis of varied interpretations of Beckett's work. The following chapters will concern themselves with an analysis of Beckett's characterization and language, an assessment of his alleged links with various literary movements and as a philosophical playwright. Chapters six and seven will focus on placing Beckett's work within a tradition of realist drama.

ENDNOTES

1. Esslin, M. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968, p.44.
2. Bair, D. *Samuel Beckett*. London: Pan Books, 1980, p.327.
3. Critics have differed in their views of the main concern of the play.
Lamont, R. *Beckett's Metaphysics of Choiceless Awareness*. In: Friedman, J.J. ed. *Samuel Beckett Now*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 207.

Lamont writes:

"*Waiting for Godot* is structured upon the antimony of the two races of men."

Bair, D. *op.cit.* p.325.

Bair claims:

"He chose to write about the abstract idea of waiting for time to pass and for something to happen in every man's life. . ."

Esslin, M. *op.cit.* pp. 49, 60.

Esslin states initially:

"The subject of *Waiting for Godot* is not Godot but waiting, the act of waiting as an essential and characteristic aspect of the human condition." (p.49.)

Later he writes:

"It (*Waiting for Godot*) is open to philosophical, religious, and psychological interpretations, yet above all it is a poem of time, awareness, and the mysteriousness of existence. The paradox of change and stability, necessity and absurdity." (p.60.)

4. C.B. *San Quentin News*, 28 November 1957, 1,3. In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. *Samuel Beckett - The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, p.111.

5. Hesla, D.H. *The Shape of Chaos*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1971, p.159.

Hesla writes:

"Beckett's work is eschatological. It deals with the last things - the end of man (*The Unnamable*, *Krapp's Last Tape*) . . . or the end of the world (*Endgame*)."

6. Hesla, D.H. *Ibid.* p.149.

Hesla places the difficulty of the play in the writing itself:

"The fact that Beckett has suppressed the antecedent causes which give rise to the situation on stage, as well as the probable consequences of that situation raises serious problems for the critic of *Endgame*."

Ellot, T.S. *Hamlet*. *Selected Prose of T.S. Elliot*. Ed. by Kermode, F. London: Faber and Faber, 1975, p. 48.

Ellot, writing of *Hamlet*, uses words which seem to be particularly apt as a description of the effect of a performance or a reading of *Endgame*. The play, he claims:

" . . . is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art. And when we search for this feeling, we find it. . . very difficult to localize."

7. Hesla, D.H. *op.cit.* pp. 154-157.

8. Bair, D. *op.cit.* p.395.

9. Cohn, R. *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962, pp. 226-242.

10. Bair, D. *op.cit.* pp. 393-395.
Hesla, D.H. *op.cit.* pp. 151-152.
11. Bair, D. *op.cit.* pp. 392, 395.
12. Fletcher, J. and Spurling, J. *Beckett - A Study of his Plays*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1972, p.80.
13. *Ibid.* p.70.
14. Hobson, H. *Sunday Times*, 7 April 1957, 15. In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. *op.cit.* p. 161.
15. Tynan, K. *Observer*, 7 April 1957, 15. In: Graver L. and Federman, R. eds. *op.cit.* p.164.
16. Bernard, M. *Nouvelles Littéraires*, 9 May 1957, 10. In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. *op.cit.* p. 166.
17. Bair, D. *op.cit.* p.45.
18. Pilling, J. *Samuel Beckett*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976, p. 85.
19. Brustein, R. *New Republic*, 22 February 1960, 21. In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. *op.cit.* p. 192.
20. Fletcher, J. and Spurling, J. *op.cit.* p.88.
21. Shakespeare, W. *King Lear*. Ed. by Muir, K. 9th ed. London: Methuen, 1975. Act III, Sc. VI, L.103.
22. Pertinent to the function of the unusual set are Beckett's comments on the role of habit which he discusses in some detail in the essay *Proust*.

He explains:

"Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability, the lightning-conductor of his existence. (pp. 7-8)

Hence, ". . . the pernicious devotion of habit paralyses our attention"(p.9) but the strange set, with its disorienting effect, produces a "tense and provisional lucidity in the nervous system,"(p.9)

23. Brustein, R. *New Republic*, 2 October 1961, 45-6. In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. *op.cit.* pp. 259-260.
24. Dennis, N. *Encounter*, January 1963, 37-9. In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. *op.cit.* p. 264.
25. Beckett, S. *Happy Days - Oh Les Beaux Jours*. Ed. by Knowlson, J. London: Faber and Faber, 1978, pp. 126-127.
26. Rosen, S.J. *Samuel Beckett and the Pessimistic Tradition*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1976, p.64.
Rosen claims that *Play* presents:
". . . an after life essentially like life itself but a little more painful, that is a condition in which solitude, failure of communication, futility, torture and uncertainty are all the more sharply felt. Beckett uses the situation of death to focus in another way on what he considers the essential characteristic of life. But he also wants to talk about death itself, I think, and in effect to deny it, or at least to deny its existence as an absolute. Without ignoring the bleakness of Beckett's after life milieu the reader can still detect the motive of consolation behind them, for they offer a kind of immortality. The characters of *Play* are not dead in the strictest sense; their consciousness functions and unlike the living, they are spared the pain and fear of dying."

Rosen's view supports the idea that the setting of *Play* is indicative of a situation after life. However, the "motive of consolation" based on the possibility of "a kind of immortality" is difficult to detect. The suffering to the point of hysteria of W2, the unexpected torment claimed by M who had expected peace and forgetfulness from "the dark," the impotent anger of W1 who longs for the light to leave her and the evident desire of all three characters for an unattainable oblivion, offer no hint of consolation in their present situation. Furthermore, immortality would hardly be a boom in an after life where "solitude, futility, torture and uncertainty" prevail.

27. Alvarez, A. Beckett. London: Woburn Press, 1974, p. 107.
28. Balr, D. op.cit. p. 462.
29. Cohn, R. *Just Play - Beckett's Theatre*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, p.7.
30. Fletcher, B.S. et al. *A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett*. London: Faber and Faber, 1978, p. 170.
31. Esslin, M. ed. *Samuel Beckett - A Collection of Critical Essays*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965, p.7.
32. Mélése, P. Beckett. Paris: Editions Seghers, 1966, p.87.
33. Hobson, H. *Sunday Times*, 12 April 1964. In: Fletcher, B.S. et al. op.cit. p. 169.
34. Kiinen, L. *The Listener*, 30 April 1964. In: Fletcher, B.S. et al. op.cit. p. 169.
35. Sartre, J.P. *Théâtre*. Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1947, p.167.

Comparisons have been made between Sartre's *Huis Clos* and *Play*. There are a number of similarities between the two, such as, suffering in a situation beyond the control of the characters, past actions as well as the egocentricity of each character having determined the punishment, the inability to tell the truth and to achieve a sense of identity except by means of external corroboration. Yet Sartre's play with its overt didacticism, its direct appeal to the intellect, its use of dialogue, and its passion, speaks of life rather than death and focuses on a social message "Hell is Others." For Beckett, hell resides in the individual's own being and consciousness.

36. Passages in other works by Beckett indicate that this was an early concern which persisted in his writing.

In *Molloy*, a narrative which purports to reveal the events of the character's life is seen to be a creation by its narrator:

"Then I went back to the house and wrote, It is midnight.
The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight.
It was not raining."(p.162).

Munn, N.L. *Psychology*. 3rd ed. London: George G. Harrap, 1956, p. 285.

Munn expresses the view that the creation of a coherent vision of reality is part of the thought process:

"Thinking is typically a sequential arousal of symbols. We think of one thing, that starts us thinking of another, that of still another etc. In this way we manipulate and rearrange, as it were, the various aspects of the world which have fallen within the range of our experience."

37. The realism refers to a close correspondence between clinical studies in psychology and Beckett's presentation of his character. The following statements are examples of the literature pertinent to the play. (Other features which establish a link with

recognizable "reality" are the nature and the use of language, the general life experience of, and the scenes described by, the speaker.)

A Short Guide to Mental Illness for the Family Doctor.

2nd ed. Dagenham; May and Baker, 1977, pp. 51, 53, 50.

"The outstanding feature of the illness schizophrenia is the presence of hallucinations, which are . . . perceptions without a relevant object in the external world. The commonest hallucinations in schizophrenia take the form of voices . . ." (p.51)

"One of the most characteristic symptoms of schizophrenia is a feeling of passivity, in which the patient has the experience that his thoughts, actions or emotions are not his own, but that they are forced upon him." (p.53)

In schizophrenia "the normal steady progress of thought may be interrupted and the train of thought then starts again on a new track. This is known as thought blocking". (p.50)

Munn, N.L. *op.cit.* pp. 190, 148.

Munn states that:

"Simple schizophrenia is characterised by general mental retardation. The patient sits and stares into space, has no ambition, would just as soon be riding freight cars, be walking the street or living in the institution as doing anything else. These schizophrenics give the impression of being extremely introverted, living within themselves, and taking no interest in what goes on around them. It is seldom anything can be done for them, and they stay in the institution until they die, sometimes at an advanced age." (p.190)

Munn describes the inability of an individual to refer to himself as self-repudiation. (p. 148)

This notion is used in other Beckett works.

Mayoux, J.J. Samuel Beckett and Universal Parody. In:

Esslin, M. ed. Samuel Beckett - A Collection of Critical Essays. p.80.

Mayoux writing of Texts for Nothing says:

"The "I" . . . soon becomes "He" but this "he" is at the same time an "I" intent on denying himself."

38. Fletcher, B.S. et al. op.cit. p.192.
39. Mercier, V. Beckett/Beckett. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, p.185.
40. Ibid. p. 224.
41. Cushman, R. Observer, 23 May 1976, 30. In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. op.cit. p. 344.
42. Wardle, L. The Times, 21 May 1976, 13. In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. op.cit. p. 342.

CHAPTER 3

CHARACTERIZATION

An audience's conception of character is governed by a number of factors, the most important being the nature of its function in a play, and the perceptions and demands of the age. The personification of moral qualities in medieval drama, the stereotypes of Victorian melodrama and the characters of Realistic drama differ, but each satisfies the expectations of its time.

"The fictional representation of a person,"(1) a being created by an author and revealed by his/her statements and actions, is the definition of character assumed by this dissertation. The specific and unique qualities, "the particularizing eccentricities of the individual,"(2) are seen as the means by which a character is raised out of the norms of the stereotype and the generalizations of the universal, and humanized. Psychological complexity and verisimilitude, a multidimensional ambiguity fused with integrity and coherence of being, and a consistency with their context will bring into existence recognizable human beings whom an audience can understand. Symbolical characters, embodied in a drama of ideas, are perceived as incapable of involving an audience.

Such a definition of character is consonant with the demands of characterization made by Realistic drama which aims at:

"...the recreation of the ways in which people, within human limits, actually speak, feel, think, behave, act."(3)

Ibsen, expressing the way in which his plays differ from Classical tragedy writes:

"My desire was to depict human beings and therefore I would not make them speak the language of the gods."(4)

Chekhov, Strindberg and Ibsen emphasized the real existence of characters as real people who had real problems. Life-like, they filled a social place and were imbued with a past. However, the illusion of reality created by the setting and the costumes served to highlight the

psychological depths of the character which was the focus of their drama's attention. In Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Nora Helmer is presented as a multidimensional character. She has a background, a social milieu and diverse relationships all of which are seen as formative of a personality and converge to determine her present actions. The conflict which arises from the crime she commits leads to her reevaluation of herself in her social role as wife and mother and to an assertion of her own personal needs over society's dictates. Nora is seen during the course of the play as grappling with a problem, developing and changing, as one's expectations of human beings in such situations would be. Williams stresses this human focus of Realistic drama when he writes:

"The driving force of the great naturalist drama was not the reproduction of rooms or dress or conversation on the stage . . . It was a passion for truth, in strictly human and contemporary terms . . . A long prepared redefinition, of the sources of human understanding and of the objects of human concern, found at last, in this form, its decisive realization. It is one of the great revolutions in human consciousness to confront the human drama in its immediate setting, without reference to "outside" forces and powers."(5)

The mimetic and human quality of characterization are emphasized by Lukács and Styan. Lukács, while placing his critical views in a social and ideological context, claims categorically:

"It is inescapable that an audience is concerned with the actions, thoughts, conflicts of people. If animals were portrayed on a stage, it would be their likeness in its broadest sense, to people that would keep an audience interested."(6)

Styan proclaims:

"We pity or admire because we are throughout the performance in contact with humanity in human situations: the figures in the pattern are, after all, human figures in a human pattern".(7)

It appears insufficient, therefore, to claim as does Robbe-Grillet that "the essential thing about a character in a play is that he is "on the scene": "there".(8) Such a claim can be made of an item of furniture. Brimer's attempt to describe in negative terms what constitutes a character is equally invalid:

"...but the essence of a character is no more than that he should be able to speak and act on stage. A character can, therefore, be entirely inconsistent in his actions and words, entirely lacking in motives, entirely lacking in past history, a social position, an attitude towards life, entirely lacking in what we would call personality and yet remain a viable dramatic character."⁽⁹⁾

Not even such ambiguous and elusive characters as Pinter's Goldberg and Stan in *The Birthday Party*⁽¹⁰⁾ are free of a social context, a past and intimations of motives; nor are they random and inconsistent in their words and actions.

A number of claims are made in this chapter concerning the characterization in Beckett's plays: firstly, that the characters are distinct and distinguishable from each other, not only within the context of each play but within the totality of his dramatic output; secondly, that this follows from the depiction of psychological complexity which is a key factor in promoting a sense of realism; and thirdly, that the presentation of character constitutes a refinement of the concerns of characterization found in 19th century Realism and is consonant with the trend of character presentation in 20th century literature.

In his novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, Beckett expresses an awareness of the complexity of individuals which may be useful to bear in mind in an assessment of his characterization since it suggests that Beckett models his characters on his perception of real people and does not seek to promote symbolic abstractions. The Mandarin, speaking to Belacqua, says: "The reality of the individual, you had the cheek to inform me once, is an incoherent reality and must be expressed incoherently". (*Disjecta* p.48) Earlier, speaking of characters who have or acquire a life of their own, he writes:

"Their movement is based on the principle of repulsion, their property not to combine but, like heavenly bodies, to scatter and stampede, astral straws on a time-strom, grit in the mistral. And not only to shrink from all that is not there, from all that is without and that in its turn shrinks from them, but also to strain away from themselves. They are no good from the builder's point of view, firstly because they will not suffer their systems to be absorbed in the cluster of a greater system, and then, and chiefly, because they themselves tend to disappear as systems."⁽⁴⁶⁾

Telling a tale of the making of a liū-liū, an instrument in which each reed produces only one note, Beckett writes:

"If all our characters were like that - liū-liū-minded - we could write a little book that would be purely melodic. . . But what can you do with a person like Nemo who will not for any consideration be condensed into a liū, who is not a note at all but the most regrettable simultaneity of notes."(p.43) (my italics)

Alan Schneider corroborates the view that Beckett's characters are distinctive individuals when he says:

"Beckett himself has always stressed that he was writing about what he termed a 'local situation', ie, Hamm and Clov (as well as Nagg and Nell) were individual personalities operating in a given set of circumstances. They were not to be considered abstractions or symbols, or as representing anything other than themselves. After that if the audience - or the critics - wanted to look for significance of some kind, let them do so, at their initiative and peril."(11)

Ruby Cohn too insists:

"His people are not identical, each person acts in his own space, even his limbo is somewhere in a theatre."(12)

Beckett's characters reveal themselves in language that becomes the embodiment of consciousness. The flux of impressions, thoughts and emotions, caused by external stimuli or prompted by the subconscious are presented, without an imposed logical arrangement, in an attempt to capture the spontaneity and randomness of the workings of the mind. The consciousness perceived as being in a state of flux, exists at different levels, encompassing different time scales and including the unconscious forces which motivate and limit behaviour.

Although in *Waiting for Godot*, the definition of character is dependent on interaction and juxtaposition with other characters, the later plays depict isolated beings, captives of their self-created reality. Because solitude and the sense of alienation have become unbearable, the illusion of interchange and communication is created by the character's own imagination, revealing in this way a subconscious need and adding to the complexity of the mind depicted.

Five studies of major characters and two minor characters follow to illustrate the diversity, specificity and complexity of Beckett's characterization. The three character studies of *Play* serve to illustrate the differentiation between characters in the same play, whereas those of Krapp and Hamm illustrate the differences between two male characters in different plays, and those of Nagg and Nell serve as examples of such traits extended to the minor characters.

Play

The relationships in *Play* reveal three beings who were intimately involved in the past as having no connection or awareness of each other's presence in the present.

W1 is revealed by her language and her actions as a woman of coarse sensibility, jealous, hostile, possessive, vigorous and active. She has her husband watched by a detective and when after a lapse M takes up his affair once again claims that she "began to smell her off him again".(p.14) The use of animal imagery suggests a vicious, alert, animal-like quality in her which is reinforced by W2's statement "She came again. Just strolled in. All honey. Licking her lips".(p.12) She goes to confront the mistress on two occasions, once to threaten her and the second time to gloat over her, and the report of the language she uses helps to confirm her own statements and her violent nature. W2 reports "I smell you off him, she screamed, he stinks of bitch,"(p.11) and also that "she would settle my hash".(p.11) When confronting the light she asks violently "Bite my tongue and swallow it? Spit it out?"(p.12) W1's jealousy and possessiveness are revealed when, confronted by M's confession, she is astounded, but accepts it, for she wants him to be "all mine".(p.14) Her mediocrity of mind emerges from her use of cliché, such as "to what will love stoop,"(p.12) and in the description of W2 in which she indulges "pudding face, puff spots, blubber mouth, jowls, no neck, dugs you could . . .".(p.13) Her torment resides in her ignorance as to whether the man may at present be happy living with his mistress in her notion of an idyllic setting in the sun, and in her acknowledgement

that she is guilty of hiding the truth; the pain of consciousness is too great to bear and she attempts to rid herself of the light by saying repeatedly "Get off me".(p.16)

Beckett's portrayal of W2, the mistress, distinguishes her very carefully from W1 in language and action.(13)

W2's image is essentially a passive one. The first time W1 bursts in upon her, she is sitting stitching at a window. The second time, she is doing her nails by the open window. There are indications that the three characters belong to the middle class, W1's pleasures include "the Riviera or our darling Canary,"(p.12) M has "professional commitments,"(p.12) but W2's life appears to be more leisurely. When W1 imagines M's life with her, she thinks of W2 looking out of an open window, beyond the olive groves, at the sea, her hands folded on her lap. Her speech too appears to be placid and unhurried. She understands the significance of the confession made to W1 and her urbanity is evident when, unlike the wife, she makes no threats but only states that she would not accept second place. There are hints of her disdain of W1 as well as a sense of her own superiority when she claims "her photographs were kind to her. Seeing her now for the first time full length in the flesh I understood why he preferred me,"(p.10) and later when she says "I stopped him and said that whatever I might feel I had no silly threats to offer"(p.13) Her difference in social status is conveyed by her language and actions for when her privacy has been disturbed by the intrusion of W1 she calls Erskine, the butler, to show her out. The end of the affair is followed by a burning of all that belonged to M, a final irrevocable act which may suggest that a suicide had occurred.

Even though life had been the greater trial of the two, W2 acknowledges her disappointment that death was not the release she had hoped for. Her response to the light is an acceptance that it will persist and will "blaze (her) out of (her) wits"(p.16) seeking something which she is not able to give. She persists in questioning her sanity "Am I not perhaps a little unhinged already?"(p.20) and replying

reassuringly "I doubt it".(p.20) Her laughter, however, suggests a hysterical, unbalanced mind finally expressing its sense of solitude and alienation in a cry of despair "Are you listening to me? Is anyone listening to me? Is anyone looking at me? Is anyone bothering about me at all?"(p.17)

The third character in the triangle and the cause of the crisis is M. He is portrayed as a weak, confused man who cannot long bear the tension of deceit and opts out of the relationships unaware of the tragic consequences of his decision. He callously mocks W1 when he responds to his mistress's account of his wife's visit, displaying a hypocritical disregard as to whose death was at issue "I can't have her crashing in here, she said, threatening to make my life. I must have looked incredulous. Ask Erskine, she said, if you don't believe me. But she threatens to take her own, I said. Not yours? she said. No, I said hers. We had fun trying to work this out".(p.12) His hypocrisy, when he responds to W1's statement that he is better off with her, by claiming that she was his choice because of her superior qualities, is intensified by this thought "God what vermin women".(p.14) Nevertheless, his fear and guilt are clearly stated when there is a suggestion that W1 may commit suicide "Then I got frightened and made a clean breast of it. She was looking more and more desperate. She had a razor in her vanity-bag".(p.13) His sexuality is stressed by both women and his relationships have a spurious emotional content. The same technique is used to convince both women of his love; he takes them both in his arms and swears that he could not live without them. But an indecisiveness and confusion can be deduced from his musings on his protestations of love "I meant it what is more. Yes, I am sure I did,"(p.11) which he claims in the case of both women.

His wife presents him as animal-like in his cowardice, an assessment which may, however, be more revealing of her perceptions than his behaviour, claiming when he comes to confess, that "he slunk in, fell on his knees".(p.11) Both women feel that money is the factor which draws him to the other woman. He could be characterized as deceitful, to the women and to himself.

The unexceptional quality of M's mind and sensibility emerges in two ways. Firstly, his vanity sentimentalizes the way in which the women may be united by his loss, revealing his lack of understanding of either of them. Unaware of the reactions to his disappearance, he imagines the two women sitting together drawn by their mutual loss but in doing so he is distracted by, and becomes totally absorbed with, the way the two women like their tea. He muses "perhaps they meet, and sit, over a cup of that green tea they both so loved, without milk or sugar, not even a squeeze of lemon".(p.17) Secondly, he fantasizes unrealistically about what would be, to him, an idyllic situation: the three going away together, the one who was awake first waking the other two. He would row a dinghy while the two women would loil on an air-pillow or as his erotic imagination prefers it, "sheets".(p.21) He comments on the women's inability to accept such a relationship by concluding "We were not civilized".(p.21) His pervading sense of guilt is confirmed when he asks "Am I hiding something?"(p.19) Yet beyond his conscience lurks a personal fear, that he may not exist. Tentatively and doubtfully he questions "Am I as much as . . . being seen?"(p.22)

M disappears and the possibility that he may have committed suicide is only briefly suggested when he says "Down, all going down, into the dark".(p.15) Death was his hope for release from an untenable relationship but his disappointment is conveyed by the words "peace is coming, I thought, after all, at last . . . I thought".(p.15) He regrets the affair, longing to wipe it out of existence "Yes, peace, one assumed, all out, all the pain, all as if . . . never been . . . I mean . . . not merely all over, but as if . . . never been - ".(p.10) An audience's inevitable reaction to M's hiccuping is to interpret it as a sign of alcoholism and degeneration but this is not reinforced by any other statement and finally serves only to undermine M's stature, belittling his suffering. A comment relevant to one's response to the hiccuping may be found in Proust where Beckett writes ". . . I am inspired to concede a brief parenthesis to all the analglvorous who are capable of interpreting the 'live dangerously' that victorious hiccupough in vacuo, as the national anthem, to the true ego exiled in

habit"(p.49) M is prophetic when he claims "There is no future in this"(p.16) for all three characters are encapsulated in an eternal present as the repetition of the entire play suggests. Being will be an eternity of the present existence, the suffering of consciousness and regret.

Beckett has achieved three carefully realized portraits of convincing, if unadmirable, individuals. An audience's visual imagination and emotional sympathies can recreate the scenes which the characters' memories have described and the states of mind which have been revealed. Identification and empathy are thus achieved by the recognition of the integrity and validity of the characters portrayed.(14)

This view is in total contrast to the one expressed by Eliopoulos who claims that Beckett's characterization is involved in creating "non-persons", and that the depersonalization of characters in the anonymity of such names as W1, W2 and M "destroys any possibility of empathy, for character identification with a non-person is difficult".(15) Cohn, however, affirms the concreteness of Beckett's characterization when she says:

"Too much critical shorthand has been written about a single Beckett hero changing name from work to work, but one has to be blind not to distinguish Hamm from Dan Rooney; deaf not to know Mouth from M, Vladimir and Estragon are not identical twins; on the rare occasions when Beckett speaks of his characters, he calls them "my people." Not symbols, or objects, or fictions, but people."(16)

In much of Beckett's writing, the connection of the protagonist with other individuals appears ephemeral and shadowy, and the attitude to names appears to reinforce the protagonist's perception of the nature of such relationships. In *Premier Amour*, the "hero" reveals his attitude to the woman who pursues him as well as his solitariness and alienation by calling her Loulou or Lulu and finally Anne. In *Molloy*, the reader is told "But the lady, a Mrs Loy. I might as well say it now and be done with it, or Lousse, I forget, Christian name something

like Sophie, held me back . . .".(p.32) Later Molloy speaks of her saying "She went by the peaceful name of Ruth I think. But I can't say for certain. Perhaps the name was Edith".(p.53) Later again he claims "And I even think I had time to love one or two, oh not with true love, no nothing like the old woman, I've lost her name again, Rose, no, anyway you see who I mean".(p.116)

One is furthermore aware of a determined effort by Beckett not to fix a name to a character and thus not to fix a character by a name and his statement on this issue in *Proust* leaves no possibility of ambiguity as to his attitude nor the firmness of his intent. He says ". . .the Name is an example of a barbarous society's primitivism, and as conventionally inadequate as 'Homer' or 'sea'".(p.32) In *Play*, dependence on names for identification is uncalled for since the characters are present throughout the performance and at no time address each other. Furthermore, since the audience is a witness to a state of mind, the use of pronouns, I, he, she, them, indicates that the referents are clear in the speakers' minds and that the three minds are solely focused on their own thoughts. There is no sense of a need to clarify for an audience for there is no awareness of the presence of one. These two aspects contribute to the authenticity of the situation which one is witnessing and the absence of conventional nomenclature having the function of depersonalizing appears to be an irrelevant issue.

Endgame

Blind, paralyzed and isolated by his disabilities, Hamm, the central character in *Endgame*, is portrayed as both alienated and alienating. His is a portrait of a twisted, frustrated and angry being whose characterization dwells on negative aspects. He is presented as grotesquely childish and foolish, tyrannical, violent, egocentric, cruel and determined to wield power over those around him. These traits resemble Lear's to such an extent that the resemblances can hardly be ignored though he lacks both the generosity and the remorse which humanize Lear.

There is a harsh, abrasive quality in Hamm which is conveyed by the language he uses, ugly both in its vindictiveness and its unexpected bursts of violence. "You pollute the air!"(p.13) he hurls at Clov when he is not commanding him to "Get me ready,"(p.13) "Put me in a coffin", (p.49) or "Go and get the gaff".(p.31) Repeatedly the directions which accompany his speech convey tension and harshness, as for example "with sudden fury": "frenziedly" "violently".(pp.24,22) His tyrannical manner is directed to his parents as well. Of Nell he asks "What's she blathering about? . . . Damn . . . busybody . . . Have you bottled her? . . . Screw down the lids".(p.22) Nagg he calls his "accursed progenitor" and he mocks the conventional attitude to old parents by saying "The old folks at home! No decency left! Guzzle, that's all they think of".(p.15) His destructiveness and malice is revealed in his prophecy of Clov's future state. Used at first to prevent Clov from leaving the shelter to build a raft which he, himself, had suggested, it becomes a wish which points to the cause of his cruelty and tension. ". . . Like me" Hamm repeats "you'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever, like me . . . Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of all the ages wouldn't fill it, and there you'll be like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe".(p.28) The evocation of frustration, impotence and isolation, pervaded by a sense of unhappiness, is inescapable in this image. A sinister episode presents him as grotesquely absurd and malevolent. Childishly and unsuccessfully, he attempts to deceive himself that his toy dog is a living entity over which he can exercise his power. He insists that the toy be placed before him in a servile position as if he were imploring to be taken for a walk. Hamm evinces evident satisfaction from an imaginatively cruel deed in which a supposedly living being is made to suffer.

Hamm's need to be in the center of the room is an indication not only of his egocentricity, which requires that he establish his centrality, but reveals too, a neurotic anxiety which cannot abide change. He needs to be right in the centre agitatedly and contradictorily insisting that his position must be exact "Roughly! Roughly! Bang in the

centre"(p.24) Hamm's fear of change is seen too, in that his life is dominated by routines. That there is a time for pain-killers is understandable, but he also has a time for his story. The satisfaction of his needs takes priority over all else in the shelter.

The ambiguity of Hamm's story and his determination that it should be viewed as a tale is an indication not of Hamm's creative and artistic ability, for it is an uncertain, bungled narrative, but rather as evidence of a psychological need to expiate a guilt. The story is repeated endlessly. It is "the one you have been telling yourself all your . . . days"(p.40) according to Clov, and it shows, in Hamm's last soliloquy, the role he played in other people's lives, or perhaps more correctly, in their destruction. The repetition of the story for Hamm is an attempt to expunge the guilty memory of the people he might have saved. Hamm tries to avoid responsibility and to extenuate his guilt by claiming "I was never there . . . Absent, always. It all happened without me"(p.47) professing also a sense of alienation and lack of involvement as a personal loss, but Clov unambiguously reminds him that he was instrumental in the events that occurred.

Hamm plays at various roles, acting out a clichéd part of pretended modesty by a writer when he prompts Clov to ask him questions about his story, and then answers with apparent reticence and humility. He creates a moment of sentimentality when he asks Clov to kiss him or say a few words for him to ponder in his heart. Posturing, he imagines an audience and creates a fiction "He never spoke to me. Then, in the end, before he went, without my having asked him, he spoke to me. He said . . ."(p.50) Hamm plays at creating an event. His initial words "Me-to-play,"(p.12) in which he stresses his centrality, also initiate a major ambiguity, that all the events that follow may be episodes of a game, whose consequences are not meaningful because they are reversible.

The play ends with a discarding, like Prospero, of movement and speech, and everything resting in its final place. Hamm neither asks for pity nor gets it. He cannot be seen tragically either in Aristotelian terms nor from any modern theoretical view point of tragedy. His initial rhetorical question is a gesture to elevate his misery to a heroic level but is deflated instantly by his own boredom. Godlike, Hamm, in a reversal of the Biblical command at the beginning of creation, announces "Then let it end".(p.49) His life and the end of all existence is suggested, and the "It must be nearly finished"(p.12) of the opening of the play is seen to have reached its climax.

Krapp's Last Tape

Krapp bears little resemblance to Hamm; comedy and regret attenuate his negative traits. As seen by the audience, Krapp is a "wearish old man" and details of his appearance are used to confirm the idea of age. He has grey hair, is hard of hearing, is very near-sighted, has a cracked voice and his walk is laborious. His attire reinforces the notion of age in that his black trousers and waistcoat have acquired a rusty tinge. The heavy silver watch and chain, reminding of a Victorian patriarch, accentuate his loss of dignity and status. Similarly, clownish aspects of his appearance are still further reductive; his narrow trousers, too short for him, make him look childish, like an overgrown schoolboy; his white boots, narrow, pointed, and of an excessive size, are Chaplinesque; and his white face and purple nose are reminding of a clown's mask.(20) A neglected physical appearance reveals him to be careless of his personal habits and contrasts noticeably with the care he bestows on his tapes which are numbered, listed and titled. He is unshaven, his hair is disordered, his white shirt is grimy and his boots dirty.

Krapp is a man encapsulated in his egotism, emotionally restricted, unable to make a commitment. His concerns are narrow, he lacks warmth, the capacity to love and the sympathy to suffer. His father's death is reduced to "Last illness of his father,"(p.13) his mother's fate

is viewed in terms of his own discomfort "There I sat, in the biting wind, wishing she were gone".(p.14) He has never suffered deeply but neither has he been happy or joyful. Recalling past years, he uses phrases such as "flagging pursuit of happiness"(p.13) and ten years later "Spiritually a year of profound gloom and indigence until . . . The vision at last".(p.15) Not hearing Old Miss McGlome singing, he comes to the realization that he has never sung and will never sing. Moments of contentment are restricted to isolated memories, such as "Be again in the dingle on a Christmas Eve, gathering holly, the red-berried,"(p.19) and the episode in the boat, evoked with an inescapable immediacy which transports him back to that time and, because of the contrast to his present state, reinforces his loss and his misery.

Krapp caught in his circle of light performs actions which are simultaneously ridiculous and sad, for one witnesses a great displacement of air and expenditure of energy for no purpose. Fumbling for keys, opening drawers, stroking a banana, slipping on a peel are actions which fill time and provide a semblance of purposefulness until "finally he has an idea. . .".(p.10) The initial mime at the opening of the play reveals not only the emptiness of Krapp's existence but also helps to reveal a number of different facets of his personality. One is made aware of a reduction in the use of his faculties when he peers at his keys; there is an inclination to secretiveness or miserliness in the purposeless locking of drawers; and evidence of a compulsive need is indicated in his eating of bananas. The second time, behaviour which may have been amusing in its first appearance, is witnessed from an altered perspective. Within the context of decrepitude, loneliness and alienation, the actions become grotesquely sad.

The different stages of Krapp's life are revealed in three ways, by visual means, reporting and commentary, and are affirmed by corroborating action. Within the visual context of the play, Krapp at sixty-nine speaks of his past year and thus informs one of his present life. The audience also hears Krapp at thirty-nine tell of his life and reporting on a tape which told of conditions when he was twenty-seven.

On his sixty-ninth birthday Krapp is in his den, in his old rags, an envelope in his pocket. This is evidently a long-standing habit since, at thirty-nine, at the Winehouse, he jots down a few notes on the back of an envelope and once again preparing to make what will be his last tape, Krapp at sixty-nine takes out an envelope and consults the back of it. A writer and disillusioned by his lack of success, Krapp is a more bitter person than he had been earlier. He judges his previous self as "that stupid bastard,"(p.17) is impatient of the rhetoric and aspirations expressed in the tape, and winds it forward twice during the statement of the revelation which was supposed to have been a turning point in his life. He is angry and senses the futility of his life for now he has "nothing to say, not a squeak".(p.18) The passage of time has become irrelevant and his happiest moment is reduced to revelling in the word "spool". His past year consists in going out once or twice and sitting shivering alone in the park, going to church once and falling asleep, reading a page of *Effie*, crying as he read it, and the occasional visits of Fanny, the "bony old ghost of a whore".(p.12)

Two episodes reveal Krapp's unhappiness at this stage. In the one, he sits "shivering in the park, drowned in dreams and burning to be gone".(p.18) In the other, he lies propped up in bed and his mind wanders, imaginatively reliving moments of his youth. His memory dwells on moments which had been meaningful to him, gathering red-bellied holly at Christmas time, walking with his dog, in a haze, and stopping to listen to bells. Unhappy though he claims they were, they appear as active and sensuously rich in comparison with the deprivation of his present existence.

The audience is informed that at twenty-seven Krapp had been involved in an intermittent relationship, living on and off with a girl called Bianca. He was prone to excesses in his habits, drinking too much and having too engrossing a sexual life. Constipation was a problem. He was hopeful and earnest about his future aspirations centred on his magnum opus and thankful that he had reached maturity. The twenty-seventh year, with the death of his father and

one relationship terminated, is crystallized in an image of departure and separation "A girl in a shabby green coat, on a railway-station platform".(p.13)

The post mortem at thirty-nine reveals a further step towards complete isolation. Krapp avoids the expression of emotion in speaking of his mother's imminent death by transmuting it into art. Recalling a ballad, he says "mother lay a-dying".(p.14) Of his mother's death, he retains the recollection of a sensation which assumes the place of any genuine emotion. Posturing dramatically, he claims he will retain the feel of a small black ball he was holding when the blinds of his mother's room were lowered, to his dying day. At sixty-nine, on taking out the spool described as "Mother at rest at last . . . The black ball" he is puzzled and questions "Black ball?"(p.11) His isolation and his inability to understand its full implication is evident in the scenario he describes as he waits for his mother to die. He sits alone on a bench watching his mother's window. There is "hardly a soul"(p.14) there, except for a few regulars whom he claims he got to know quite well. His qualification of his statement "oh by appearance of course I mean!"(p.14) reveals a separation between himself and others disguised by an apparent aloofness on his part. His advances are rejected by "the dark young beauty"(15) and Krapp is shown at thirty-nine to have no involvement with others.

The tape made by Krapp at the age of thirty-nine, reveals a number of emotions and attitudes which confirm the complexity of the characterization. He is contemptuous, pious and cynical in his assessment of himself at twenty-seven. One becomes aware of an emotional aridity which attempts to disguise itself by mannered posturing in his recollection of his mother's death; the visionary moment exposes an idealistic fervour but also, a self-indulgent desire for aggrandizement. The last section, restorative in its calmness, reveals a sensual and lyrical quality in Krapp's character. Recalling a bathe in a lake and drifting in a punt in the blazing sun, the soft sighing of reeds and the close physical contact with a girl, a moment of sensuous satisfaction, all the more poignant because of Krapp's decision to withdraw from the commitment it required, is suggested.

The state of final isolation expressed in the tape as a moment of perfect tranquillity "Never knew such silence. The earth might be uninhabited"(p.10) has become the reality for Krapp. The play ends with him alone, surrounded by total silence.

Krapp's inclination towards the aesthetic, the exotic and the romantic is seen in his response to language and people. Speaking of his mother's widowhood, he uses the unusual word "viduity"(p.14) and, recalling the expansive romanticism of Othello, he describes the nurse's eyes to be "Like . . . chrysolite".(p.15) He admires Bianca's "very warm"(p.12) "incomparable"(p.13) eyes and remembers vividly the dramatic image of "one dark young beauty . . . all white and starch, incomparable bosom, with a big black hooded perambulator".(p.15) The moment of revelation, which he proclaims a "miracle,"(p.16) is reminiscent of Wordsworth's spots of time when he learns to "see into the life of things".(18) Alone, at night, at the end of the jetty with the elemental world in a state of turbulence, the wind howling, the foam flying from great granite rocks onto the light of the lighthouse, Krapp experiences "the vision".(p.15) Caught up with idealistic fervour, he dedicates himself to his opus but his use of conventional metaphors "the light of understanding and the fire"(p.16) which dissolve the storm and the night, do not augur well for his success as a writer.

Krapp's activities, his attitudes and some linguistic recurrences serve to indicate the continuity in his character. These links, which show Krapp acting and responding consistently according to the characteristics with which he has been endowed, reinforce the realism of the characterization. Both on his thirty-ninth and sixty-ninth birthdays Krapp is in his den, making and listening to tapes. Constipation, the eating of bananas, the consumption of liquor, the pleasure in words, as well as repeated responses, for example: at twenty-seven Krapp sneers at this youth and thanks God "that it's over", (p.13) at thirty-nine speaking of the relationship with Bianca, he says "well out of that,"(p.12) and at sixty-nine recording his final tape he says "Just been listening to that stupid bastard . . . Thank God that's all done with anyway"(p.17) convey a coherence of being. The

continuity which helps to establish a character does not, however, exclude development and growth, and Krapp is perceived to have progressed from an unconscious egocentrism to a full awareness of its implications. The vision of the thirty-nine-year-old experienced during the stormy night has become irrelevant for the sixty-nine-year-old who advances the tape impatiently in an attempt to miss this section. The dismissal of a lost possibility of love by Krapp at thirty-nine with the words "No, I wouldn't want them back"(p.20) is refuted by the older man's repeated listening to that portion of the tape. The past is irredeemable and the growth in understanding has been achieved by the realization of loss.

Endgame

It is not only the main characters who are clearly differentiated; minor characters too exhibit distinctive traits which serve to contrast them with each other and to convey their uniqueness.

The scenes between Nagg and Nell represent a grotesque comedy in which two old people, white-faced, incapacitated, with failing eyesight are presented visually as unwanted refuse.(19) Habit ensures that their relationship continues in a "daily farce". Nell asks, when Nagg knocks on the lid of her bin, "What is it, my pet. Time for love?"(p.18) Nagg's suggestion that they kiss is a repeated ritual with the expected outcome. Isolated in their bins they are concerned with pursuing their own thoughts, and have little interest in each other, communicating out of habit. There is an absent-mindedness in Nell's automatic answers to Nagg which reveal her emotional distance from him:

Nagg: Do you remember -

Nell: No.

Nagg: When we crashed our tandem and lost our
shanks."(p.19)

...

"Nagg: Could you give me a scratch before you go?

Nell: No. (pause) Where?"(p.20)

...

"Nagg: . . will I tell you the story of the tailor?"

Nell: No. (pause) What for?"(pp.20-21)

Nagg's portrait reveals similar traits to Hamm. He is angry and destructive, making petulant demands for his rights, insisting that he will not be neglected. He has been reduced to a state of total dependence and vengefully wishes Hamm could be reduced to a state of unhappiness when he would need his father and Nagg would remain unresponsive. His parenting reveals his selfishness for, when Hamm as a baby cried at night he was not only refused comfort, but was moved out of earshot so as to avoid disturbing his parents. Hypocritical in his offering of his biscuit to Nell, cynical about values, the character trait which is constantly stressed is his immaturity; he can be bribed with the promise of a sugar-plum and sucks at his biscuit in his bin. His first words reduce him to the level of an infant wanting his food. Self-absorbed, he concentrates on his own gratification insisting "I want me pap!"(p.15) His response to Nell's claim, that she laughed at his story about the tailor because she had been happy, is childishly rejected "It was not, it was not, it was my story and nothing else. Happy! Don't you laugh at it still? Every time I tell it. Happy!"(p.21) Nagg has a volatile temperament, full of hostility and malice, and even the memories which he recalls with some vitality do not mitigate the sense of distaste which he evokes.

The portrait of Nell reveals a contrasting personality to her husband's. Milder, more sensitive, she remembers nostalgically going rowing on Lake Como. The awesome experience of looking into the depths of the water suggest an impressionable character able to evoke a memory sensorily "It was deep, deep. And you could see down to the bottom. So white, so clear"(p.21) She continues to be absorbed in the image, unaware of Nagg's story and Hamm and Clov's interruption. There is a poignancy in Nell's awareness of loss and her memory of, and yearning for, a happier time. More caring, she admonishes Nagg for his unkindness in laughing at Hamm's distress. She speaks perhaps the saddest and certainly the most cryptic line in the play "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness, I'll grant you that"(p.20)

These analyses not only reveal the complexity and diversity of Beckett's characters but they indicate a concreteness of presentation which discards the possibility of their being seen as symbols. Beckett has neither rendered his characters anonymous(20) nor have his "Lums become a cursed metaphor for modern man"(21) nor has he created "crepuscular creatures (whose) almost total loss of identity and individuality frees them from contingency".(22) A coherence of being and psychological complexity, as well as traits and attitudes readily identifiable as belonging to recognizable people in life situations, convince one of the realism of Beckett's characterization. Its relationship with the tenets of 19th century Realism and character presentation in 20th century literature will be discussed in Chapter seven.

ENDNOTES

1. Fowler, R. ed. *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, p.26.
2. Oliver, W.I. *Between Absurdity and the Playwright*. In: Bogard, T. *Modern Drama*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965, p.17.
3. Williams, R. *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1968, p. 332.
4. Ibsen, H. In: *Ibid.* p. 333.
5. *Ibid.* p. 334.
6. Lukács, G. *Writer and Critic*. Ed. and tr. Kahn, A. London: Merlin Press, 1978, p. 179.
7. Styan, J.L. *The Elements of Drama*. Cambridge: The University Press, 1967, p. 164.
8. Robbe-Grillet, A. *Samuel Beckett, or "Presence" in the Theatre*. In: Esslin, M. ed. *Samuel Beckett - A Collection of Critical Essays*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965, p. 108.
9. Brimer, A. *Dramatic Character in Literary Criticism*. Paper presented at the S.A. Conference held at the Randse Afrikaar. t, Johannesburg, 1984, p. 15.
10. Pinter, H. *The Birthday Party*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1960.

11. Schnelder, A. *Chelsea Review*, Autumn 1958, 3-20. In:
Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. *Samuel Beckett - The
Critical Heritage*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul,
1979, p. 184.
12. Cohn, R. *Just Play - Beckett's Theatre*. Princeton:
Princeton University Press, 1980, p.7.
13. Méleè, P. Beckett. Paris: Editions Seghers, 1966, p. 86.
An interesting point which emerges in the interpretation of
character by Méleè is a different view of the characters W1 and
W2 to the one presented in this chapter. Méleè writes:

"L'épouse parle de façon simple et correcte, entraîné
parfois par la jalousie à des écarts de langage. La
maîtresse par contre est beaucoup plus vulgaire, l'argot lui
est familier.
(The wife speaks in a simple and polite manner, led at
times by jealousy to deviations from this. The mistress,
however, is more vulgar, she is used to slang.)

Kenner, H. *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett*. London:
Thames and Hudson, 1973, p. 176.

The assessment of character made by this chapter is more
consonant with Kenner's opinion that:

"W1 becomes uncouth when talking about the other woman.
W2's breeding is perhaps a little more thoroughly
aristocratic and her spite more refined and consciously
superior."

The two critics are commenting on different texts of *Play*,
Méleè on *Comédie*, the French version, and Kenner on *Play*,
the English text. It is interesting, furthermore, that the
language is seen as distinctive of the character who uses it, and
therefore, as a means of establishing individuality.

14. Doherty, F. *Samuel Beckett*. London: Hutchinson, 1971, p. 146.
Doherty, writing on the general effect of Beckett's work proposes
that its impact lies in its ability to create an empathetic
situation. He states:

"... but from this literature of failed people, rejects and derelicts, failed writers, a whole world of hopelessness and emptiness, he created a vision of the world as hell which has spoken to people of their own condition."

15. Ellopulos, J. *Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Language*. The Hague; Mouton, 1975, p. 115.
16. Cohn, R. *op.cit.* p. 12.
17. These two details have been altered by Beckett in subsequent productions as he wished to minimize the associations with a clown.
18. Wordsworth, W. *Poetical Works*. Ed. by Hutchinson, T. London: Oxford University Press, p. 164.
19. Bair, D. *Samuel Beckett*. London: Pan Books, 1980, p. 396.
Beckett explained that he had confined Nagg and Nell in trash cans because "technically it was the only feasible way to have them make their abrupt but unobtrusive entrances and exits . . . It was simply a question of logistics . . . I put them there so they can pop their heads up or down as needed and nothing else is called for".
20. Ellopulos, J. *op.cit.* p. 115.
21. Ellopulos, J. *ibid.* p. 116.
22. Lamont, R. *Beckett's Metaphysics of Choiceless Awareness*. In: Friedman, M. J. ed. *Samuel Beckett Now*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 199.

CHAPTER 4

THE LANGUAGE OF THE PLAYS

Because language, the instrument of communication and hence of civilization, creates the world inhabited by the individual, every period has found it necessary to attempt to define its role in relation to its vision of reality. One may or may not agree with Heidegger's view that:

"Language is a quasi-objective event which has an existence of its own prior to all particular individuals."(1)

However, there would be no difficulty in acknowledging that "all experience involves language and that language is ineradicably social".(2) Klawitter sums up its importance "...every man inevitably lives in a world his words create around him".(3)

The Absurdist view of the functional disintegration of language is often taken as a concept representative of the attitude to language of all modern writers. The view is based on the proposition that since existence is purposeless and meaningless, language, the means of communication, has been devalued and rendered irrelevant. George Steiner claims:

"It is no paradox to assert that much of reality now begins outside language. . . Large areas of meaningful experience now belong to non-verbal languages such as mathematics, formulae, and logical symbolism. Others belong to 'anti-languages' such as the practice of non-objective art or atonal music. The world of the word has shrunk."(4)

Elloupos supports this view of an "anti-linguistic"(5) tendency in his focus on drama:

"In the modern drama, the characters can speak to each other without communicating anything, for the experience has become incommunicable. There is little use of language as a means of influence for the desire to influence another presupposes a definite purpose in the mind of the speaker, and lack of purpose is the major concern of the absurdist."(6)

It is relevant to note, however, that while the devaluation of language is assumed, evidence of a more malleable and flexible medium which will meet the needs of modern perceptions, is suggested. Copeland, while accepting the Absurdist attitude to language, indicates that words are being used more subtly, their nuances now conveying meaning. He writes:

"The reader is not expected to pay attention to the words or the context of the dialogue but to the implication, the suggestion behind the words: the lonely soul and the hopeless effort at overcoming solitude."(7)

Hinchliffe elaborates further:

"Increasingly since the Second World War actors (and audiences) have begun to respond consciously to the sub-text as well as to the text - that is to recognize what is being said beneath what is being spoken - a practice usually traced to Chekhov and particularly as produced by Stanislavski."(8)

Esslin blames, not language itself, but the rigidity of grammar acting as a barrier to the discovery of meaning:

"If all our thinking is in terms of language, and language obeys the arbitrary conventions of grammar, we must strive to penetrate to the real context of thought that is masked by grammatical rules."(9)

Some critics have claimed that Beckett's use of language conforms to the acknowledged attitude of Absurdism. Cohn writes:

"Beckett exhibits little of the more obvious virtuosity of the earlier English fiction: instead there is an insidious undermining of language as a means of communication or expression of intelligence."(10)

Ellopulos supports this view:

"Beckett's struggle to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of language, the disintegration of thought, finds its ultimate expression in an absence of language. Beckett has regarded mere words as powerless to express the dialogue of man and his theatre has evolved from limited dialogue through monologue to profound silence."(11)

The theory that Beckett's work exhibits "anti-linguistic tendencies,"(12) that "Beckett's philosophy is to devalue language as an effective means of communication"(13) and that his "task to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of language finds its ultimate expression in an absence of language"(14) is unconvincing. Communication is to be found in interpersonal situations focused on dialogue in *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and tending to monologue in *Happy Days*, and is an expression of the introverted, solipsistic and pathological in *Play*, *Not I* and *That time*. The mimes, *Act Without Words I* and *II* and *Breath* are minor works interspersed in his oeuvre; their silence can hardly be seen as representing the culmination of Beckett's dramatic endeavours.

The Absurdist opinion of language was not, however, the sole, nor the representative, view of language in modern literature. Eliot expressed the need to evolve a sensory language which would make "direct communication with the nerves (producing) suggestively enigmatic images which would penetrate to those 'primitive' levels at which all men and women experienced alike".(15) Meaning, according to Eliot, was "no more than a sop to the reader to keep him distracted, while the poem went stealthily to work in him in more physical and unconscious ways".(16)

Not only the existence of a different theory of language but a recognition that it was being implemented, is indicated by Richards when he describes the ordering principle of Eliot's "Waste Land":

"...his poetry is a "music of ideas." The ideas are of all kinds, abstract and concrete, general and particular, and, like the musician's phrases they are arranged, not that they may tell us something, but that their effects in us may combine into a coherent whole of feeling and attitude and produce a peculiar liberation of the will."(17)

Such a language implies assumptions about the nature of the listener/reader and the nature of knowing. It attempts to ignore the semantic component of, and the intellectual response to, language and

to highlight sensory and effective ways of knowing previously neglected. Language, which had always been perceived as speaking directly to the intellect was seen as capable of informing intuitively, immediately and comprehensively to a being who was perceived as more complex and multi-faceted than had previously been acknowledged.

Beckett has complained about the inadequacy of language to perform the task he required of it. In an unpublished letter to Axel Kaun, he dismisses grammar and style:

"They appear to me to have become just as obsolete as a Biedermeier bathing suit or the imperturbability of a gentleman. A mask."(18)

Everytime one tries to make words express something other than themselves "ils s'alignent de façon à s'annuler mutuellement".(19) (They align themselves so as to obliterate each other.) For Beckett, writing involves the expression of the ineffable:

"The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express."(20)

Originality of statement is dismissed:

"Heureusement, il ne s'agit pas de dire ce qui n'a pas encore été dit, mais de redire, le plus souvent possible dans l'espace le plus réduit ce qui a été dit déjà."(21)

(Fortunately, it is not a matter of saying what has not yet been said, but of resaying, as often as possible in the most reduced space what has already been said.)

However, Beckett is concerned about finding a form appropriate for the statement of his concerns. In an early interview with Alan Schneider, he expresses his sense of satisfaction by the balance and symmetry in the lines of St. Augustine:

"I take no sides. I am interested in the shape of ideas. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine: 'Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned.' That sentence ... a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters."(22)

To Driver, he explained the problem which had arisen concerning form:

"This form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else. . . To find a form that accomodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now."⁽²³⁾

Thus Beckett's dissatisfaction with language and form stems from the fact that it does not reflect the reality that he perceives, and searching for a new form, he moves towards an approximation to music, a model which had the attention not only of poets like Eliot, but of novelists of his time, such as Virginia Woolf. Beckett indicates this concern when he asks:

"Is there any reason why that terribly arbitrary materiality of the word's surface should not be dissolved, as, for example, the tonal surface, eaten into by large black pauses, in Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, so that for pages at a time we cannot perceive it other than, let us say, as a vertiginous path of sound connecting unfathomable abysses of silence?"⁽²⁴⁾

Beckett's attraction to music can be explained by the fact that it would satisfy his need for a form which did not merely tell, would not be about something, but, as his assessment of Joyce's work indicates, would be the thing itself.⁽²⁵⁾ Furthermore, his wish to recreate a sense of uncertainty, the fact that he is concerned with depicting the movement of the mind, the flowing of thoughts, sensations and feelings in a random but unending continuum, and that he expressed a desire that this writing would affect the senses and the emotions, by-passing the intellect,⁽²⁶⁾ indicate the reasons he would gravitate to such a form. His admiration for a fluid art, which does not compress experience within a closed pattern, is evident in his description of the paintings of the van Velde:

"Que dire de ces plans qui glissent, ces contours qui vibrent, ces corps comme taillés dans la brume, ces equilibres qu'un rien doit rompre, qui se rompent et se reforment à mesure qu'on regarde? Comment parler de ces couleurs qui respirent, qui halètent? De cette stase grouillante? De ce monde sans poids, sans force, sans ombre?"

To Driver, he explained the problem which had arisen concerning form:

"This form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else. . . To find a form that accomodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now."(23)

Thus Beckett's dissatisfaction with language and form stems from the fact that it does not reflect the reality that he perceives, and searching for a new form, he moves towards an approximation to music, a model which had the attention not only of poets like Eliot, but of novelists of his time, such as Virginia Woolf. Beckett indicates this concern when he asks:

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"Que dire de ces plans qui glissent, ces contours qui vibrent, ces corps comme taillés dans la brume, ces équilibres qu'un rien doit rompre, qui se rompent et se reforment à mesure qu'on regarde? Comment parler de ces couleurs qui respirent, qui haletent? De cette stase grouillante? De ce monde sans poids, sans force, sans ombre?

Ici tout bouge, nage, fuit, revient, se défait, se refait. Tout cesse, sans cesse. On dirait l'insurrection des molécules, l'intérieur d'une pierre un millième de seconde avant qu'elle ne se désagrége."(27)

(What is one to say of these planes which slide, these contours which vibrate, these bodies as if hewn in a mist, these symmetries which a nothing will break, which destroy themselves and reconstitute themselves as one looks? How is one to speak of these colours which breath, which are breathless? Of this swarming stasis? Of this world without weight, without power, without shadow?

Here everything moves, swims, flees, returns, undoes itself, remakes itself. Everything ceases, ceaselessly. Like the insurrection of molecules, the interior of a stone a millionth of a second before it disintegrates.)

Beckett's Interest in music is described by Bair:

"He urged Jean Reavey to pay attention to modern music, because he believed it was the strongest influence on modern drama. He likened the stripped-down simplicity of many contemporary scores to a willingness to take greater risks in the search for new forms, and it was this willingness to confront failure that made it so exciting."(28)

He attended the rehearsal of Pinget's *La Marivelle* and used it as "an illustration of how important the proper use of music could be to a playwright, especially one who was cognisant of uniting the two disciplines".(29) He was fascinated by Bartok's music and expressed his interest in studying it to see if it might be useful to his own writing.(30)

Reference is made repeatedly to the musical quality evident in Beckett's writing. *Lalou*, for example writes of "that inexorable Crescendo which the Thirteen Texts for Nothing constitute, like so many movements of a musical suite,"(31) and Kitchin claims that *Play* communicated like "tightly compressed chamber music on a subliminal level".(32) The plays abound with musical associations: titles, such as *Rockabye*, *Happy Days*, *Words and Music*, the contrapuntal structure of *Play* and *That time* with their interweaving voices, the sonata form of *Footfalls*, and the lyricism of passages, such as the dead voices of *Waiting for Godot* and the boat episode of *Krapp's Last Tape*. It rests essentially, however, on the use of repetition, which assumes the part of a melodic refrain, and on a finely modulated

rhythmic structure to his works. Furthermore, Beckett's preoccupation with music is indicated by its repeated use as a metaphor: "Music is the Idea itself,"(33) "the night firmament is an abstract density of music, symphony without end", (34) He writes of a character as "a simultaneity of notes,"(35) "a symphonic, not a melodic unit".(36) In a letter to Alan Schneider, he states:

"My work is a matter of fundamental sounds . . . made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else."(37)

Thus Beckett's inclination towards a musical language is not an attempt to devalue language as a means of communication but, like Eliot, to convey a richer, more coherent and intuitively assimilated meaning. Language, however, cannot like music confer a finite value to a word. Although a musical note will be affected by the context of notes which precede and follow it and tone will be conferred by both instrument and player, it remains itself. Words, however, beyond the effect of context and tone, carry meanings and associations, both private and social, accumulated over time, which produce layers of signification. By stressing the sound of words, Beckett adds to the meaningful potential of language rather than detracts from it.

Four plays, *Waiting for Godot*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Play* and *Not I*, will be used as examples to discuss aspects of Beckett's language relevant to this dissertation. However, a discussion of a number of stylistic features prominent in his work, such as tone, rhythm and parody, is beyond the scope of this research which seeks to explore the realistic qualities of his writing, and is therefore omitted.

In *Waiting For Godot*, the relationship between Vladimir and Estragon is based on a mutual awareness of their condition and in the acts which will help them bear it. The main activity around which they concentrate to enable them to pass the time, is talking. They initiate a series of language acts or verbal games of whose purpose they are well aware; conversation becomes the characters' means of

warding off loneliness and isolation, of preventing them from experiencing the pain of thinking and confronting the futility of their lives. Far from demonstrating "how men talk past each other without actually communicating,"(38) the effect of the conversations is often to create moments, small pockets of time, separate from each other, which encapsulate the two protagonists, separating and isolating them from the world around them, creating a time of unity when a bond between two people is forged. These interludes of interchange have a musical quality in which a voice answers another, sometimes echoes it, the end of one interchange leading to another through a few, groping and tentative words/notes. Combined with the repetitions, which are a feature of the text, the rhythmic quality of some of the passages create moments of great lyrical beauty, poetic moments of stasis, a time out of time, which become all the more poignant because of their being intercessions, brief respites before the anxiety of existence reestablishes itself. These conversations create, out of the relationship of the two men, duets which link them beyond the content of words, the process establishing its own meaning. Such an example is perhaps the most quoted passage of *Waiting for Godot*:

"Estragon: It's so we won't think.
Vladimir: We have that excuse.
Estragon: It's so we won't hear.
Vladimir: We have our reasons.
Vladimir: They make a noise like wings.
Estragon: Like leaves.
Vladimir: Like sand.
Estragon: Like leaves.
Silence
Vladimir: They all speak together.
Estragon: Each one to itself.
Silence
Vladimir: Rather they whisper.
Estragon: They rustle.
Vladimir: They murmur.
Estragon: They rustle.

Silence

Vladimir: What do they say?

Estragon: They talk about their lives.

Vladimir: To have lived is not enough for them.

Estragon: They have to talk about it.

Vladimir: To be dead is not enough for them.

Estragon: It is not sufficient.

Silence

Vladimir: They make a noise like feathers.

Estragon: Like leaves.

Vladimir: Like ashes.

Estragon: Like leaves." (pp. 62-63)

It is the colloquial quality of the language, however, persuading one that the conversations between the protagonists is of the kind that two people who have known each other long and well are likely to have, which underlies the realism of the play. The elliptical moments, the vagaries and digressions, initiated by emotional rather than intellectual needs, are true to one's experience of living communication, as are the passages in which the trivial and the solemn, bladder problems and philosophy are placed parallel, assuming equal importance:

"Estragon: You might button it all the same.

Vladimir: True . . . Never forget the little things of life.

Estragon: What do you expect, you always wait till the last moment.

Vladimir: The last moment . . . Hope deferred maketh the something sick, who said that?"(p.10)

The colloquial nature of the language remains irrefutable in spite of the variety of styles which range from the monosyllabic simplicity of:

"Vladimir: You think so.

Estragon: I don't know.

Vladimir: You may be right."(p.30)

to the high-flown rhetoric of "Let us not waste our time in idle discourse! Let us do something while we have the chance! It is not everyday that we are needed,"(p.19) and the gracious and gentle:

"It's evening, sir, it's evening, night is drawing nigh. My friend here would have me doubt it and I must confess he shook me for a moment. But it is not for nothing I have lived through this long day and I can assure you it is very near the end of its repertory."(p.86)

Like *Waiting for Godot*, the language of Krapp's last Tape retains its verisimilitude as the speech of an individual because of its colloquial nature but it represents also an apt example of language reflecting the complexity of characterization. The previous chapter discussed in some detail the life experience and the characterization of Krapp. His egoism and restricted emotional range, his inclination towards the aesthetic and exotic as well as a coherence and continuity of being were revealed by his statements in his earlier tape and his present responses to it.

Krapp is a writer, and therefore, no surprise is felt at his interest and pleasure in words as is evident in lines such as:

" - unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire,"(p.16)

or his savouring of the sound "spool".(p.11) The language rises as in:

". . great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-gauge spinning like a propeller. .
."(p.16)

recapturing the intensity and excitement of his feelings. Similarly, his sensuality and nostalgia is captured by the lyricism of the description of the episode in the boat:

"We drifted in among the flags and stuck. The way they went down, sighing, below the stem! I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us gently, up and down, and from side to side."(p.17)

The hope, aspirations and anticipation of the younger years revealed by a linguistic comprehensiveness are replaced by a paucity and nakedness of language reflecting the emptiness of his present life. The linguistic deterioration is articulated by Krapp in the making of the last tape with the words:

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

There is no evidence of the breakdown of language in *Play*. Language is used to convey the movement of minds, the "stream of consciousness," and is the means by which Beckett reveals the thoughts and feelings of his characters as they emerge. Once again it is the colloquialness, the regression and evasions which convey the authenticity of the situation and the individuals.

The characters of *Play* do not communicate with each other but are depicted as isolated beings communicating with themselves, the audience becoming privy to their inner thoughts and feelings. Beckett's use of the monologue(39) conveys vividly the notion of isolated beings concentrating on themselves even though the interweaving of the fragmented utterances suggests the inextricable interconnections of the three characters. The monologue is also a device used to convey the "stream of consciousness" and reinforces the idea that one is listening to thinking. When M says:

"Perhaps they meet, and sit, over a cup of green tea they both so loved, without milk or sugar, not even a squeeze of lemon"(p.17)

one is aware that one is "overhearing" thoughts. The only time the monologue appears to be externalized is when the spotlight is addressed as "you":

"W2: You might get angry and blaze me clear out of my wits. Mightn't you?"(p.16)

The lack of reference between the characters and the even tone of delivery indicate that they express their thoughts irrespective of their

surroundings and unaware of the presence of an audience which is totally excluded from their behaviour.(40)

The simple, colloquial nature of the language indicates the level at which the characters operate. The lack of complex syntactic structures, of specialized vocabulary or of discriminating subtleties, are as indicative of an intellectual milieu as are references to grass being mowed(p.13) or "a jaunt on the Riviera"(p.12) in suggesting the economic background of the characters.

Not I, "an aural mosaic of words"(41) represents a culmination in Beckett's probing of an internal state by means of a monologue. The frantic rush of words dominates the play and reveals a character and her individual perceptions in all their complexity and confusion:

"... sudden flash. . . very foolish really but . . . what? . . . the buzzing? . . . yes . . . all the time the buzzing . . . so-called . . . in the ears . . . though of course actually . . . not in the ears at all . . . in the skull . . . dull roar in the skull . . . and all the time this ray or beam . . . like moonbeam . . . but probably not . . . certainly not. . ."(p.3)

The mind is seen, in its attempts to describe precisely the nature of the sound in her head, to be fastidiously discriminating. However, at other times, language fails, revealing a mind unable to come to grips with issues, skimming fragmentedly and searchingly, filling the space with words such as "so on,"(p.11) and thus avoiding a respite and the possibility of a confrontation with a distressing idea.

Repetition is the most salient feature of the language of Not I. The repetition of phrases, ideas, reactions and the continual return to the central event, are an indication of an obsessive mind encapsulated in itself, working in well-worn grooves and caught in the context of its thoughts. Not only are words repeated as in "godforsaken hole called . . ."(p.1) but different words, a rephrasing, is used to express the same idea, "parents unknown . . . unheard of . . ."(p.1) The central event is recalled four times and within a section of text a particular idea is reiterated obsessively:

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The mind is seen, in its attempts to describe precisely the nature of the sound in her head, to be fastidiously discriminating. However, at other times, language fails, revealing a mind unable to come to grips with issues, skimming fragmentedly and searchingly, filling the space with words such as "so on,"(p.11) and thus avoiding a respite and the possibility of a confrontation with a distressing idea.

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"so no love . . . spared that . . . no love such as normally vented on the . . . speechless infant . . . In the home . . . no . . . nor indeed for that matter any of any kind . . . no love of any kind . . . at any subsequent stage . . ."(p.1)

The repetitions working as leitmotifs, become interwoven in the rest of the language, but with each repetition of the main theme, the event one April morning, a variation is introduced, modulating one's previous understanding and generating new interest. It is by means of the repetitions and the interweaving of ideas and words, which break the sequential, logical ordering of information, that a sense of immediacy is achieved conveying the notion of the protagonist's experience occurring at the very moment that it is being witnessed.

The colloquial nature of the language of *Not I* with its false starts, subterfuges and evasions depicts once again, the "stream of consciousness" and conveys a sense of authenticity and psychological reality to the character.

When writing about language, at this time in the 20th century, it may seem necessary to include an analysis of Beckett's use of language from a structuralist point of view. However, structuralism is concerned with a system of internal linguistic relationships stressing the function of dualities, such as binary opposites and parallelisms. Based on research in the phonological system, its value lies in its attention to the role accorded to language within a particular work. Because it detached the text from its surroundings and made it an autonomous object free of external relations and commitments, it is at odds with the views that imbue 20th century literature.

Structuralism rejects the idea that meaning begins and ends in the individual's experience and that the world is endowed with meaning by the phenomenological self. One need only call to mind the works of key modern writers such as James, Woolf and Joyce with their

attention fixed on the individual, to realize how remote structuralism is from both the underlying assumptions of these works and their effects on an audience. To reduce literature to a familiarity with reading conventions, as structuralist poetics does, is to dismiss its expressionist and communicative role and, thereby, to reduce its function solely to that of a formal, if intricate, exercise. There would be greater validity in suggesting that to understand the language of a text is to recognize the world to which it refers and which serves it as reference.(42) Since this study is concerned with the social and communicative quality of language, it aims to explore the relationship of the literary work and the external environment known as reality and a structuralist approach would thus be of little relevance.

Beckett's language is a multi-dimensional medium for it is both theme and form, varying from the mundane and banal to the poetical and musical, itself thereby reflecting the ambiguity of his work. His language reveals character and differentiates between characters; it is the creative tool of the imagination acting "not simply as an image of reality but as an instrument in terms of which reality is realized - made real".(43) The plays rest on language, one could even go so far as to say that they present language as the only reality. Words fill the existence of Vladimir, Estragon, Winnie and the characters of *Play*; when Clov asks Hamm "What is there to keep me here?" Hamm returns "The dialogue".(p.39) The development of the plays from dialogue to monologue heightens further the importance placed on language until in *Not I* the play concentrates on a mouth and a flow of words. Beckett's meticulous concern for language, his presentation of it as the sole means of interpersonal as well as self-directed communication, inextricably intertwined with thought, existence and the perception of reality, negates the view that his writing exhibits an "insidious undermining of language,"(44) an attempt to "devalue language as an effective means of communication".(45)

FOOTNOTES

1. Eagleton, T. *Literary Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983, p.63.
2. *Ibid.* p. 60.
3. Copeland, H.C. *Art and the Artist in the Works of Samuel Beckett*. The Hague: Mouton, 1975, p. 174.
4. Esslin, M. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Penguin Books, 1968, p. 397.
5. Eliopoulos, J. *Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Language*. The Hague: Mouton, 1975, p. 103.
6. *Ibid.* p. 53.
7. Copeland, H.C. *op.cit.* p. 173.
8. Hinchliffe, A.P. *Modern Verse Drama*. London: Methuen, 1977, p. 66.
9. Esslin, M. In: Eliopoulos, J. *op.cit.* p. 56.
10. Cohn, R. *The Comic Gamut*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962, pp. 216-217.
11. Eliopoulos, J. *op.cit.* p. 100.
12. *Ibid.* p. 103.
13. *Ibid.* p. 109.
14. *Ibid.* p. 100.
15. Eagleton, T. *op.cit.* p. 41. Eagleton is paraphrasing Eliot.

16. Ibid. p.40. Eagleton is paraphrasing Eliot.
17. Faulkner, P. **Modernism**. London: Methuen, 1977, p. 18.
18. Harvey, L.E. **Samuel Beckett - Poet and Critic**. Princeton: University Press. 1970, p. 434.
19. Ibid. p. 434.
20. Beckett, S. and Duhuit, G. Three Dialogues. In: Beckett, S. **Disjecta**. London: John Calder, 1983, p. 139.
21. Harvey, L.E. *op.cit.* p. 424.
22. Schneider, A. **Chelsea Review**, Autumn 1958, 3-20. In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. **Samuel Beckett - The Critical Heritage**. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, p. 173.
23. Driver, T. **Columbia University Forum**, Summer 1961, 21-5. In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. *op.cit.* p.219.
24. Harvey, L.E. *op.cit.* p. 434.
25. Beckett, S. Dante . . . Bruno. Vico . . . Joyce. In: Beckett, S. *op.cit.* p. 46.
26. Bair, D. **Samuel Beckett**. London: Pan Books, 1980, p. 526.
Beckett's response to Cronyn, the producer of **Not I**, who expressed concern that the audience would not be able to understand the play if the lines were spoken at the speed he required, was:

"I am not unduly concerned with intelligibility. I hope the piece would work on the necessary emotions of the audience rather than appealing to their intellect."

27. Beckett, S. La peinture des van Velde ou Le Monde et le Pantalon. In: Beckett, S. op.cit. p. 128.
28. Bair, D. op.cit. p. 465.
29. Ibid. p. 465.
30. Ibid. p. 465.
31. Lalou, R. Nouvelles Littéraires, 22 December 1955. In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. op.cit. p. 138.
32. Kitchin, L. The Listener, 30 April 1964. In: Fletcher, B.S. et al. A Student's Guide to the Plays of Samuel Beckett. London: Faber and Faber, 1978, p. 169.
33. Beckett, S. Proust. London: Evergreen Books, 1931, p. 71.
34. Beckett, S. Dream of Fair to Middling Women. In: Beckett, S. op.cit. p. 46.
35. Ibid. p. 43.
36. Ibid. p. 44.
37. Bair, D. op.cit. p. 397.
38. Copeland, H.C. op.cit. p. 174.
39. Beckett uses the monologue in a variety of forms from Krapp's Last Tape onwards. Krapp's Last Tape involves a two dimensional monologue using Krapp's voice at two different points in time, the one emanating from the tape-recorder. Happy Days has been called a "pseudo-dialogue" since the stress is on one character's prolonged talking with intermittent responses from

her partner. Both *Play* and *That time* employ three polyphonically-blended monologues. Not *I*, *Rockabye* and *A Piece of Monologue* employ one voice only. In all the plays, the monologue intensifies the notion of isolation and focuses clearly on Beckett's area of concern, the revelation of the individual character and consciousness by means of the flow of speech/thought.

40. Sinfield, A. *Dramatic Monologue*. London: Methuen, 1970. p.7.

Sinfield claims that a monologue inevitably includes "an auditor whose influence is felt". In *Play*, the role of the silent auditor is played by the spotlight. Sinfield also states that an added dimension is provided for the reader/spectator which is "the task of following the thought of a speaker who is quite unaware of the reader". The exclusion of any awareness of the audience is an aspect of the convention of the missing fourth wall.

41. Oliver, E. *New Yorker*, 2 December 1972, 124. In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. *op.cit.* p. 328.
42. Culler, J. *Structuralist Poetics*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, p. 135.
43. Grant, D. *op.cit.* p.10.
44. Cohn, R. *op.cit.* pp. 216-217.
45. Eltopulos, J. *op.cit.* p. 109.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATIONS OF BECKETT'S PLAYS

A number of labels have been pinned to Beckett in an attempt to describe him, or perhaps lay claim to him. This chapter discusses some critical views of his work, and the connections which have been made between Beckett and philosophical and literary movements, in an attempt to obtain a clearer perspective with regard to Beckett's position within such generic definitions as "realistic" and "absurd."

There appears to be an inescapable attraction in seeing Beckett's drama as the expression of vast and sweeping generalizations. Criticism of his plays has concentrated on the universal and cosmic implications of his work and Beckett is often seen as using his plays as vehicles for expressing a philosophy, his characters assuming a symbolic function.

Hesia, in his book *The Shape of Chaos* writes:

"Beckett's non-specific settings enable him to isolate his characters from any social reality that might deflect attention from the generalized human situation he is portraying."⁽¹⁾

The settings of Beckett's plays have led to a flood of speculation and symbolical interpretations. In *Waiting for Godot*, for example, the tree has been seen as the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the Tree of Life, the Cross, the Tree of Judas, the gallows, the sign of hope and regeneration and the tree of the Noh plays down which the awaited God descends. Irrespective of the different views taken, however, only one item of information is conveyed, the tree's change from bareness to bearing "four or five leaves" is an indication of change and of time having passed. Webb, too, interprets actions and objects in Beckett's plays symbolically. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, the eating of bananas is seen as an indication of phallic concerns,⁽²⁾ the boat as a womb and Krapp's phrase "Let me in" as a desire to return to the womb.⁽³⁾ Takahashi writing of *Endgame* says:

"Endgame is a play concerned with eschatology, the imminent end of a game which is Western civilization itself."(4)

Fraser claims:

"What *Waiting for Godot* essentially is is a prolonged and sustained metaphor about the nature of human life."(5)

Further comments in the same vein, which, however, relate specifically to characterization, are found in abundance. Lamont calls Beckett's characters "crepuscular creatures" and says:

"Although these mirror images suggest the irrevocable duality of spirit and flesh, their almost total lessness of identity and individuality frees them from contingency."(6)

Fraser, writing of the protagonists of *Waiting for Godot*, interprets them in symbolical Christian terms:

"The tramps with their rags and their misery, represent the fallen state of man."(7)

Of Lucky, he writes:

"He is the proletarian. He stands for a contemporary reality . . . half-baked knowledge, undigested knowledge, the plain man's naive belief in a Goddess called Science."(8)

Lyons, grouping Beckett with Genet and Ionesco, claims the conventions of realism are violated "by refusing to create images of human beings who practise plausible behaviour in familiar scenes within the co-ordinates of chronological time".(9) Esslin, too, assesses the characters of *Waiting for Godot* symbolically viewing the pairs as complementary personalities. He writes of Pozzo and Lucky, they "represent the relationship between body and mind, the material and the spiritual sides of men, with the intellectual subordinate to the appetites of the body".(10)

Undeniably, a cause of the richness of Beckett's writing is its ability to intimate meanings which extend beyond the evident significance of a statement and, no doubt, a reason for its appeal is its capacity to accommodate a variety of interpretations. An example of the suggestive quality of his writing is to be found in Vladimir's statement in *Waiting for Godot*:

"But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not."(p.79)

The claim presents itself as a statement of irrefutable fact; the precision and specificity leaves no room or ambiguity. At this moment and in this place, Vladimir and Estragon are all mankind since there is no one else present. Furthermore, the reduction of humanity to the two men is presented as valid under specific conditions; in other places, at other times, the statement would not hold. Yet, like a sound produced by striking the key of a piano, the words reverberate, echo and are amplified. When space, time, and the all-embracing "all mankind" are combined, a sense of cosmic implications and magnitude is evoked. The overtones of the sentence extend beyond its meaning in context, and have the opposite effect, that of expanding the two individuals to become representative symbols of all mankind beyond the moment, in an extratemporal perspective.

A more complex response which attempts to come to terms with a paradoxical quality in Beckett's work has been voiced by some critics. Katherine Worth describes his plays as "a drama of the interior, oblique, dream-like and ethereal, that is also intensely physical, concrete, insistently aware of itself as theatrical process".(11) Esslin referring to *Waiting for Godot* also highlights the element of paradox:

"It (*Waiting for Godot*) is open to philosophical, religious, and psychological interpretation, yet above all it is a poem of time, awareness, and the mysteriousness of existence. The paradox of change and stability, necessity and absurdity."(12)

The emphasis on paradox in Beckett's writing is touched on by Beckett himself when, in an interview with Tom Driver, he spoke of life as being inscrutable:

"If life and death did not present themselves to us, there would be no inscrutability. If there were only darkness, all would be clear. It is because there is not only darkness but also light that our situation becomes inexplicable."(13)

Two examples which illustrate the emphasis on paradox found throughout Beckett's writing are Nell's statement in *Endgame*:

"Nothing is funnier than unhappiness, I grant you that."(p.20)

and Winnie's in **Happy Days**:

"To have been always what I am - and so changed from what I was."(p.38)

It has already been mentioned that affinities with, and allusions to, philosophical works have been traced by critics of Beckett's writing. Some critics have stressed the philosophical nature of his work and have concluded that its value rests on its philosophic content. It is near impossible to read Beckett criticism without coming across views such as:

"Beckett is a philosopher, and there is no doubt that he has meditated Bergson's lessons on the comic. Mechanization turns the man subject, endowed with a more or less autonomous consciousness, into an object and a sort of automaton,"(14)

or:

"Beckett evolves towards spareness according to the Schopenhauer prescription."(15)

Ruby Cohn in her article "Philosophical Fragments in the Work of Samuel Beckett" cites specific examples in which philosophical concerns are used and then transmuted in Beckett's work:

"Sartre's viscosity becomes ubiquitous mud in **How It Is**, and scorched earth in **Happy Days**. Heidegger's Dasein becomes earth-crawling through the mud in **How It Is** and burial in the earth in **Happy Days**."(16)

That Beckett indicates a personal vision of life through the recurring concerns in his writing is evident and not in question. What is in question, and this dissertation argues against, is the view that Beckett expands a philosophy, meaning a cogent, structured model of the nature of existence, and that his plays are vehicles for promoting this philosophy.

The vision of life which emerges from Beckett's plays is that existence, pervaded by uncertainty, is purposeless and culminates in death, the final silence of nothingness. Subterfuges to repress recognition of this reality, to fill the vacuum and dispel the boredom

of existence, cannot alleviate the mental anguish which results from such an awareness. The suffering of the isolated and alienated consciousness, presented in all its complexity, which is the central focus of Beckett's plays, is viewed with compassion but also, paradoxically, is seen as encompassing both the tragic and the comic possibilities of being trapped in a ludicrous existential situation. However, Beckett's work cannot be said to embody ideas expressed in a sustained or systematic way. On the contrary, his themes are more in the nature of musical harmonies, stated, replaced by others which then resurface later in the same work and in other works. In this way, Time, memory, space, God, commitment, love, deceit, guilt, loneliness, the imagination, egoism, impotence, paradox, ignorance, absence of system, suffering and a sense of loss, are repeatedly traceable in his plays, but assume relevance only according to their importance in the mind depicted. Proust's description of a Vinteuil sonata captures the effect of Beckett's writing:

"But the notes themselves have vanished before these sensations have developed sufficiently to escape submersion under those which the following, or even simultaneous notes have already begun to awaken in us. And this indefinite perception would continue to smother in its molten liquidity the motifs which now and then emerge, barely discernible, to plunge again and disappear and drown, recognised only by the particular kind of pleasure which they instil, impossible to describe, to recollect, to name: ineffable."(17)

Like the flowing of music, themes are raised and submerged, present yet elusive, in the constant process of consciousness of Beckett's characters.

Attempts to encapsulate Beckett's 'meaning' in a communicable interpretation and to articulate the reason for the profound effect his plays have on an audience have been made repeatedly, providing a rich store of handy catch-phrases. Copeland quotes an example of such efforts:

"Beckett seeks an essential reality described variously as 'the bases of Being' (Harvey) 'the marrow of eternity' (Hasser) 'Le silence' (Lamont) and 'l'authentique' (Lamont). But perhaps a better description of the essence he aims for would be one

that emphasizes the mystery and horror of what lies in the depths - our gratuitousness and the dreadful emptiness of self-consciousness. As Jean Onimus writes 'Beckett focalise l'attention sur ce qu'il bien appeler le Terrible ou le Néant et qui se situe au centre de l'existence consciente.' (Onimus)(18) (Beckett focuses attention on what can well be called the Terrible or the Void situated at the centre of conscious existence.)

To attempt to fix Beckett's plays into a pattern or system of meaning is to miss the very quality which has enabled them to create a new mode of experience, thus refocusing attitudes and altering modes of being. The number and variety of ideas, the musical scoring of language, the intensity of emotion and the original visual effects have allowed them to remain elusive beyond the attempts of some criticism to classify and transfix them. Beckett's opening sentence in his essay *Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce* acts as a salutary warning "The danger is in the neatness of identification". (Disjecta p.19)

A comparison between Beckett's and Sartre's plays(19) reveals the gulf which exists between the philosopher whose plays are intended to illustrate ideas and whose aim is thus an intellectual one, and the work of the playwright in whose plays ideas are found. Thomas Bishop's introduction to *Huis Clos* assesses Sartre's intentions:

"Le principal effort de Sartre, à travers ces ouvrages, c'est de réduire des raisonnements philosophiques complexes à des propositions accessibles et de les incarner ensuite dans des situations simples ou se débattent des personnages faciles à comprendre et à identifier."(20)

(Sartre's main intention, throughout his works, is to reduce complex philosophical arguments to accessible propositions and then to incarnate them in simple situations where easily understood and easily identifiable characters confront each other.)

Esslin confirms the existence of that gulf when he claims Beckett's superiority over Sartre, not only because of Beckett's:

"... higher level of artistic intensity and creativeness but also because Sartre's narrative prose and theater clearly bear the marks of having been preconceived as an illustration of

general concepts and are therefore denied the profound immediate experiential validity of Beckett's writings."(21)

Beckett's own responses to philosophy and philosophers already mentioned in the first chapter need to be taken into account. In an interview with Tom Driver, he reiterates his rejection of philosophy as it concerns his work:

"When Heidegger and Sartre speak of a contrast between being and existence, they may be right. I don't know but their language is too philosophical for me. I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that is simply a mess."(22)

More specific, and narrowing the range of Beckett's philosophical commitment, is the Existentialist label which has frequently been attached to him. It may be as well from the outset to keep in mind Pilling's words on this issue:

"Existentialism is a much abused term covering a multitude of sins and is frequently used by Beckett critics for something really far more complex."(p.23)

Pilling, perceives Beckett's work to be eclectic and richly comprehensive, not merely the application of one philosophical point of view. Many of the concerns of Existentialist philosophy arise out of the social issues and stresses of our time, as well as representing a reaction against the philosophical beliefs which preceded them. It would not, therefore, be surprising if Beckett's responses to the tensions of his time corresponded to the issues discussed by these philosophers in the same way as his interest in delving into an individual consciousness, was also the direction taken by Freudian depth psychology and many of the writers of his time. The cautionary words expressed by Macquarrie support this view:

"We have to be careful not to lump together as 'existentialist' any literature that happens to show penetration into the problems of human existence . . . We have to point to something more definite than just vague and possibly accidental resemblances between the understanding of man found in literary writers and that found in existentialist philosophers."(24)

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Existentialism concentrates on problems related to human existence. It focuses on man and the subjective, individual nature of perception, and hence the "I" claims a uniqueness of being as well as a unique place and perspective in the world. Although uniqueness and solitariness are stressed, existence is seen as communal, and constant interaction in this world is fundamental to it. The issues of freedom, choice, commitment, and responsibility are stressed by Sartre when he says:

"We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world - and defines himself afterwards. If man, as the existentialist sees him, is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself."(23)

Existence, concrete and particular, precedes essence, which is abstract. Free will, and thus responsible decision, are the means by which an individual can authentically create an identity, mold himself in his own image.

That many of the themes of Existentialism are to be found in Beckett's work is evident.(26) Anxiety, guilt, alienation, despair, the quest for meaning, identity and death, are threads which wind their way from play to play. The human and personal focus of his work, as well as the rejection of abstraction and intellectualism, are other parallels between Beckett and Existentialist thinkers. Furthermore, his characters are endowed with the complete autonomy and responsibility that Existentialism extends to individuals. Beckett's rejection of traditional, routine ways of doing, of habit "as an automatic adjustment of the human organism to the conditions of existence" (Proust p.9) which prevents the awareness and action (accepted in its widest sense) necessary for existence to attain concreteness and fullness, is confirmation of his identification with Existentialist thought.

Like the Existentialists, Beckett believes in the value of the emotions as a means of apprehension and this is revealed by his lack of interest in an intellectual response to his work. To Cronyn, the producer of the New York production of *Not I*, who was concerned that the

audience would be unable to follow the lines if they were spoken as fast as had been specified, Beckett's answer was "I am not unduly concerned with intelligibility. I hoped the piece would work on the necessary emotions of the audience rather than appealing to the intellect".(27) It was the emotive power of the outpouring of words, heard in the dark, and demanding total attention, which would provide the experience of entering into the deranged mind of Mouth, and enable one to understand its condition.

In accordance with Existentialist concerns, Beckett's work, suffused by the idea of death, is also concerned with evoking life, its unhappiness and the distress which is endured within the dimensions of temporality. Change and development, however slight, are unmistakably present in the plays: a leafless tree grows a few leaves, Pozzo loses his sight, Mouth returns to her tale of the event one April morning and introduces a slight variation each time. If Time did not exist neither would death, claimed Beckett in Proust,(p.56) although it may be argued that if time did not exist, the eternal unchanging condition would be death. Change, which irrevocably accompanies the inevitable succession of instants, exists in Beckett's writing within a consciousness which, while aware of the linear patterns, transcends it. By including the past in the form of memory and the future through imaginative anticipation, Time, while moving in a linear progression, is made up of instants which each encompass the totality of time and become moments of eternity. The linear movement exists simultaneously with this extratemporal quality which is enhanced by the use of linguistic and structural repetition.

However, differences of emphasis and focus exist between Beckett's plays and Existentialist writings. The first of these lies in the complexity of Beckett's characterization, which creates distinct individuals, and stands in opposition to the easily understood and identifiable characters of which Bishop speaks in Sartre's work.(28)

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Beckett's characters are granted autonomy and responsibility but the notion of commitment, with its implications of involvement and interaction in the world and regarded as important by Sartre and Camus, is lacking in Beckett's work. The concern with uncertainty, as well as a sense of impotence, prevalent in the plays are not happily yoked with commitment. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon's commitment to wait is an aspect of their inability to act purposefully. The waiting becomes an excuse which protects them from having to take a decision, it becomes a commitment by default. Clov's sense of mutually exclusive commitments, both to Hamm and to his own decision to leave, clouds the issue with ambiguity. Krapp's commitment to dedicate himself to his work is the reverse side of his withdrawal from commitment to relationships and interaction.

The idea of a godless universe which characterizes the age of nihilism is not a clearly defined issue in Beckett. Certainly, the apparent purposelessness of the lives presented, the characters' isolation and alienation, and the sense that individuals bear total responsibility for the lives they create for themselves, suggest an awareness of a spiritual vacuum. Yet Winnie laughs at God's weaker jokes, acknowledging his presence even if it is perceived as malignant; Mouth laughs at the cliché "God is Love," a concept antithetical to her own loveless world. Beckett's characters wishfully, cynically, contemptuously, include the absent God as part of their consciousness, perhaps because it is a habit of thought which belongs to the "old days" or perhaps, as Eliot claims, because "human kind cannot bear very much reality." (29) This is not so much an atheist's world as one in which God has let one down.

Another label assigned to Beckett is "Beckett the Absurd dramatist". Since Beckett is regarded as a central member of this group, *Waiting for Godot* being seen by some critics as a key play of that movement, it is necessary to assess his association with its vision and techniques.

Absurd drama proposes that life has no meaning and is thus "absurd". It posits an irrational universe, without order, and reflects this view in its plays by introducing unpredictable events and ideas. The traditional conventions of drama are jettisoned: plot becomes less important, motivation for characters is reduced, there is no need for development or resolution, and therefore, the situation at the end of the play is the same as it was at the beginning. Since life is perceived as having neither purpose nor meaning, the role of language as the accepted and conventional means of communication, is questioned and becomes uncertain and ambiguous. However, the sensory elements, the visual and auditory components of a play, such as costume, movement, setting, props, lighting, make-up and sound, assume greater importance in an attempt to induce an affective response from an audience. The intention is to present a total sense of being and thus a true picture of reality as apprehended by the individual.

The futility of action in such a world affects the presentation of character. Heroism becomes a hollow and irrelevant gesture and man is presented as victimized by the meaninglessness of the world, at the mercy of an incomprehensible environment. Any relationship between man and his universe is negated. Because the audience of an Absurd play is confronted with characters whose actions and motives are largely incomprehensible, identification with the characters is almost impossible; the more mysterious their actions and their natures, the more difficult it becomes to see the world from their point of view. Esslin came to the conclusion that:

"Because the Theater of the Absurd projects its author's personal world, it lacks objectively valid characters. The action of Theater of the Absurd is not intended to tell a story but to communicate a pattern of poetic images."(30)

Beckett's plays convey a sense of the futility and precariousness of the lives of their characters who are all vulnerable and suffering individuals. However, the incomprehensible, unfathomable quality so pervasive in Theater of the Absurd exists in Beckett because of gaps in the information which he provides. Who is Mr Godot? What has

happened outside the room in *Endgame* and why are supplies running out? What event brought the characters of *Play* to such a situation? Each play brings its questions. The unknown is presented, however, as an acknowledgement of the limitations of knowledge. Irrationality essential to the vision of Absurd drama, central, for example, in Ionesco's *Amedée* or *How to Get Rid of It*, is not a key feature of Beckett's plays; Lucky's speech in *Waiting for Godot* is delivered incoherently but the meaning is clear: for reasons unknown, and in spite of progress, man dwindles and dies.

There are other points of difference between Beckett's work and the general assumptions made about Drama of the Absurd. Beckett's plays, firstly intimate a continuum of events and do not only posit a situation. In *Play*, the sexual triangle, which one perceives to have been the basis of the present situation, is divulged. Krapp's *Last Tape* tells of a past life, its events and attitudes towards it. It is not that Beckett's plays have no plot but that the plots are presented backwards; what is on the stage is the culmination of past events. Compared to traditional theater, this represents a difference in starting point. Whereas the structure of traditional drama shows the past and present moving to a point in the future, that is, from cause to effect, Beckett's plays move from the present to the events and conditions which caused it, that is, from effect back to the cause. This is least evident in *Waiting for Godot*, where Incertitude, which pervades every aspect of existence, creates a hiatus between past and present, but it is clearly evident in subsequent plays by Beckett.

Secondly, unlike the Absurdist, Beckett's stage creates a space which helps to intensify the predicament of his characters. The sets, which have elements of the grotesque have an emotive function reinforcing visually and concretely the content of the play. There is no reason to assume that Beckett uses the stage metaphorically, to represent the world.

Thirdly, since Beckett's drama concentrates on revealing the consciousness of individuals, the lack of characterization found in Absurdist plays becomes a major point of contrast and represents the key element which excludes Beckett from the fold of Absurd drama. Beckett's characterization, produces detailed and complex portraits of personalities and their states of being, which allows for an empathetic response to them and their predicament, and turns the dramatic event into a felt experience. Beckett's characters differ from those of Absurd dramatists in two other ways as well. His characters are not merely passive victims of their situation. They help to create it and are, therefore, active and responsible beings. Furthermore, his characterization includes change and development. Vladimir reaches a momentary perception of the truth of his situation; Krapp becomes aware that he had cast away the possibility of happiness and had mistakenly made the choice which had led to loneliness and sterility. Esslin's remark that the Theatre of the Absurd "lacks objectively valid characters" can be seen, from the character descriptions given in Chapter three to be inapplicable to Beckett.(31) One need only compare the wealth of detail accumulated around a Beckettian character with, for example, Adamov's, Professor Taranne, for the gulf between Beckett and the Absurdist to emerge unequivocally. All one manages to glean about Professor Taranne is that he is accused of an ambiguous incident which he attempts to refute, the accusation itself effecting his eventual breakdown. No personal detail is revealed only a situation is presented. The effectiveness of the play *Professor Taranne*, which is taken here as representative of Absurd drama, is not in question, but its evident difference in focus, specifically in its presentation of character, must question Beckett's inclusion in the ambit of Absurd drama.

Although there are a number of similarities between Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *Waiting For Godot*, these are superficial. One could list ideas such as: exploring the notion of suicide, the undermining quality of thought, hope as the fatal evasion of lucidity

and acceptance of reality, the unknowability of an individual and all else, and belief that tragedy resides in the consciousness of the protagonist. The notion of the worthless contribution of thinkers and the unintelligibility of the universe recall Lucky's speech/thought. Yet the rebellion that Camus sees engendered by death, the defiance evoked at the knowledge of an absurd universe, is not within Beckett's parameter of response. His characters, in their distress which is both physical and mental, persist, neither defiantly nor insistently, but for unexplainable reasons, continue doggedly. It is important to note that in spite of the echoes of Camus in Beckett's work, *Waiting for Godot* was performed two years before the publication of Camus' book. Once again one questions whether the ideas were not part of the sensibility of the time and thus affected both writers.

Beckett's affinity with the novelists of 20th century, whose focus of attention had shifted from the depiction of the external world and overt action to the exposure of the internal landscape of their characters, will be discussed more fully in the next chapter. However, a brief summary of the essentials of Modernism are appropriate at this point since Beckett's link with that movement has been stated explicitly. Faulkner writes:

"Only with the plays of Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco followed creatively by Harold Pinter did the drama take a form recognizably modernist."(32)

Modernism regarded traditional methods as unsuited to render anything but over-simplified accounts of experience. Their acute sense of a shift in sensibility caused by the socio-political events of the 20th century, and their awareness of the new thinking in the scientific and psychological fields, created the need to express this new perception of experience in all its complexity. Like the Absurdist, the presentation of a continuity of exterior events which leads inevitably to a planned conclusion was dismissed, and the consequent absence of rationalism led writers to free themselves from past constraints of plot, chronological linearity, and portrayal of character in the accepted sense of the word. Beckett's approach to plot and chronological

development was discussed earlier in the chapter but his affinity with Modernist views is clearly evident in his presentation of character. However, the claim that Modernist writers dissociated themselves from the 19th century assumption in which a writer assumed a shared sense of reality with his readers, but that they, on the contrary, challenged their audience's whole scheme of values, can be questioned in terms of its reference to Beckett. One need only consider the response of the San Quentin convicts to a performance of *Waiting For Godot* to refute this claim. The writer, in this case, can be seen not as challenging his audience's values but rather as articulating them. The inmates of San Quentin would not have responded so wholeheartedly to the play had its scheme of values not coincided with theirs.

A further claim on Beckett, made by critics and defenders alike, pronounces him a Romantic.⁽³³⁾ *This identification rests on his choice of a subjective viewpoint, his assertion of the role of the individual imagination, and his desire to perceive an essence, an Ideal, not visible in surface appearances.* His use of the interior monologue, by which the mind is revealed, is thus seen to derive from the wish to penetrate to an inner reality. Further signs of a legacy of Romanticism in his work are thought to be his attempts to seek new ways of presenting his vision, as well as a desire that his art should affect an audience through the emotions rather than the intellect. Finally, the sense of an irrevocable loss revealed by brief intrusions of poetic lyricism suggest a romantic longing not yet subdued.

As generalities, the above points, positing Beckett's link with Romanticism, appear to be irrefutable. However, some factors, which clearly differentiate Beckett from the Romantics, such as, Romanticism's love of the exotic, are omitted. Furthermore, the validity of the statement which claims that his choice of a subjective viewpoint is a distinctly Romantic trait, is misleading, unless one adds that it pertains to Existentialism equally well. A more important qualification needs to be made concerning Beckett's desire to perceive an Ideal, an essence, not discernible in observable reality; Beckett's

view of the Idea is that it is "ideal without being merely abstract," the "ideal real". (Proust p.56) The inner reality he seeks to reveal is psychological and realistic, and far removed from the romantic concept of the Idea as an abstract essence.

Although it may seem that no two theatrical modes could be further apart, comparisons can be made between Beckett's drama and classical theatre. The two share a number of concerns but differ at a fundamental level.

Classical drama presents a tragic vision in which the grandeur and energy which dared pit itself against the gods or a moral order is annihilated, free will and choice being the root of all action in the conflict between man and supernatural forces. The universe of such drama revolves around moral concerns, and consistency of character and form are perceived as the means of expressing its intention, that of controlling or ordering a chaotic and frequently hostile environment. Physical movements which are highly patterned and have a balletic effect enhance the ritualistic quality of this drama, creating thereby the illusion of direct participation in a timeless world, and allowing the individual to transcend the temporal limitations of his condition.

Beckett shares with classicism an awareness of a hostile environment, a concern for form, consistency of characterization and an interest in the problem of free will and choice.

His concern with form and its function was stressed by Beckett to Tom Driver in the idea that chaos has to be accepted and come to terms with, not in formlessness but in a form that needs to be created.(34) To an ever increasing degree, the form Beckett reaches for is musical, the physical patterning of classical drama, best exemplified by the movement of the chorus, being replaced by the interweaving of dialogues, monologues, and gestures. Antiphony and rich variations in tone are the means by which an inner sense of movement is created.

Beckett also shares with classicism a desire, satisfied by the latter through ritual, to transcend time.(35) As Beckett writes in *Proust* "the mortal microcosm cannot forgive the relative immortality of the macrocosm. The whisky bears a grudge against the decanter".(p.10) On the other hand, Beckett's tragic vision, unlike the classical with its social, political and cosmic ramifications, is a personal one. Its poignancy is derived by depicting a suffering experienced privately by an individual, the intensity of feeling revealed assuming the importance bestowed by the universal implications of classicism. Beckett's world is mundane and bereft of principles, and since his characters are isolated, social and moral concerns are reduced to the status of irrelevancies.

Although the assessment of Beckett's contribution to drama varies widely, there is little doubt as to his uniqueness and the great interest which his work has evoked. That his vision is focused on distress, suffering and alienation may be as much the influence of the political and social conditions of a period, his awareness of a pervading and timeless human condition, as it may be an aspect of his own personal dilemmas and conflicts. In concerning himself with the individual and his perceptions, Beckett reflects one of the major trends of his time, which is psychological and individualist in orientation.

ENDNOTES

1. Hesla, D.H. *The Shape of Chaos*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1971, p. 47.
2. Webb, E. *The Plays of Samuel Beckett*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972, p. 67.
3. *Ibid.* p. 72.
4. Takahashi, Y. *Encounter*, April 1982, vol. LVIII, no. 4, p.70.
5. Fraser, G.S. *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 February 1956, 84. In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. *Samuel Beckett. The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, p. 99.
6. Lamont, R. Beckett's Metaphysics of Choiceless Awareness. In: Friedman, M.J. ed. *Samuel Beckett Now*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 199.
7. Fraser, G.S. *op.cit.* p. 99.
8. *Ibid.* p. 103.
9. Lyons, C.R. *Samuel Beckett*. London: Macmillan Press, 1983, p. 16.
10. Esslin, M. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968, pp. 47-48.
11. Worth, K. The Space and Sound of Beckett's Theatre. In: Worth, K. ed. *Beckett - The Shape Changer*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, p. 185.
12. Esslin, M. *op.cit.* p. 60.

13. Driver, T. *Columbia University Forum*, Summer, 1961, 21-5.

In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. *op.cit.* p. 220.

Beckett's claim that the existence of both light and dark complicates existential issues serves as a further example of the proneness of Beckett's writing to complex interpretations. The opposites are used metaphorically by Beckett when he speaks of *Phèdre*, the protagonist of Racine's play by that name, moving into the light although the general movement of the play is into the dark; the light of understanding and the darkness of death. The associations of light and dark with dualistic theology and binary opposites such as, good and evil, enlightenment and ignorance, consciousness and the subconscious, are ever present in the mind of an audience. However, none of these allusions are essential for an understanding of the plays; light and dark are effective structurally as in *Play* where the light becomes a fourth character, as part of the context in *Happy Days*, and as an aspect of the visual presentation of *Not I*.

14. Mayoux, J.J. Samuel Beckett and Universal Parody. In: Esslin, M. ed. *Samuel Beckett - A Collection of Critical Essays*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965, p. 84.
15. Harvey, L.E. *Samuel Beckett - Poet and Critic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970, p. 401.
16. Cohn, R. Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett. In: Esslin, M. ed. *op.cit.* p. 117.
17. Proust, M. *Remembrance of Things Past*. Swann's Way. Tr. by Scott Moncrieff, C.K. London: Chatto and Windus, 1966, vol. 1. p. 283.

18. Copeland, H.C. *Art and the Artist in the Works of Samuel Beckett*. The Hague: Mouton, 1975, p. 26.
19. See Chapter 1 endnote 35.
20. Bishop, T. *Huis Clos de Jean-Paul Sartre*. Paris: Librairie Hachette. 1975, p. 13.
21. Esslin, M. ed. *Samuel Beckett - A Collection of Critical Essays*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965, p. 5.
22. Driver, T. *op.cit.* p. 219.
23. Pilling, J. *Samuel Beckett*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976, p. 129.
24. Macquarrie, J. *Existentialism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973, pp. 208-209.
25. Sartre, J.P. In: Macquarrie, J. *ibid.* p. 3.
26. Some of the themes of Existentialism have been the concern of man since the beginning of time and are found expressed in myths and Eastern philosophies, especially Buddhism. The prevalence of notions of being, anxiety and futility (nothingness) suggests that claims that their presence in Beckett's work emanates from Existentialism may be too limited a way of looking for sources.
27. Bair, D. *Samuel Beckett*. London: Pan Books, 1980, p. 526.
28. Bishop, T. *op.cit.* p. 13.
29. Elliot, T.S. *Complete Poems. 1909-1962*. London: Faber and Faber, 1963, p. 190.

30. Esslin, M. **The Theatre of the Absurd**. Harmondsworth:
Penguin Books, 1968, p. 393.

31. Cohn, R. **Just Play: Beckett's Theatre**. Princeton:
Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 14.
Cohn writes:

"A quarter-century after *Godot* was performed, it is common but perverse to maintain that Beckett's plays take place nowhere and at no time, that nobodies participate in a static action of repetitive activities."

32. Faulkner, P. **Modernism**. London: Methuen, 1977, p. 22.

32. Furst, L.R. **Romanticism in Perspective**. London:
Macmillan Press, 1979, p. 289.

34. Driver, T. op.cit. p. 219.

35. Although in *Play*, for example, randomness is stressed rather than an affirmation of the order of the universe as is normally found in classical works, the repetition of the entire play suggests a ritualistic quality in its patterning. Its formality of structure, adherence to the unities of time, place and action, its intensely serious purpose and the cause and effect relationship in the presentation of content, reinforce its affinity with classical drama.

CHAPTER 6

REALISM

The problems in discussing realism in general, as well as with particular reference to Beckett, are numerous. Realism is "the most independent, most elastic, most prodigious of critical terms".(1) Its "chronic instability" is indicated by Grant when he lists twenty-six examples of qualifying words which attach themselves to it as semantic support; the list ranges from "critical realism" and "militant realism" to "plastic realism" and "visionary realism".(2) The term existed originally in philosophy with a meaning totally different from its subsequent accretions. It referred to the belief in the reality of ideas and was contrasted to nominalism which considered ideas only names or abstractions. In 1835, with its introduction into the aesthetic field when speaking of Rembrandt's "human truth" as opposed to the "poetic idealism" of Neoclassical painting, the term came to be seen as standing in opposition to "idealism".

The difficulty in defining the term, for the purposes of this dissertation, is caused by the problem of ascertaining the nature of the relationship between art and life, an issue which has been constantly debated and redefined to suit the changing perceptions of reality of succeeding generations and particular cultural needs. Furthermore, the fact that two conflicting theories are proposed in an attempt to define realism adds to the difficulty of capturing the meaning of this elusive term.(3) The correspondence theory of realism suggests that the work of art is a simulacrum of reality, which it assumes exists anterior to the work of art. It submits itself to the real world with the intention of reflecting it loyally and dutifully. It can, however, degenerate into literalism such as is parodied so effectively by Dickens in *Hard Times*.(4) The coherence theory, in contrast, proposes that realism in a work of art is achieved not by imitation but by creation; the imagination, working with the materials of life reconstitutes them into a new combination. Reality thus becomes something which is brought into being and does not exist prior to art. Henry James referring to this process, proposed that

fact and truth were alternative and not synonymous, the former referring to external, existing reality, the latter to a created, imaginative one.⁽⁵⁾ The correspondence/coherence dilemma is an epistemological issue, not restricted to the arts but found in the scientific field inherent in the question as to whether one creates concepts out of which science is made or whether these are there, hidden all the time, waiting to be discovered. A brief survey of the changing relationship between art and reality may be useful in providing a perspective for the ramifications of the notion of realism.

Mimesis, the Aristotelian concept of art, maintained that all works of art were a "representation," a reproduction of an image or a dramatic action in the likeness of real objects or actions. However, there existed a strict separation of genre; tragedy and comedy each had their own codes and conventions, and each conformed to the ideas and behaviour attributed to the social class which it reflected. Tragedy was reserved for the aristocracy and represented people who were 'superior' while comedy was used to represent the lower classes and 'inferior' people. The correspondence of the work to the reality appropriate to its genre was deemed the measure which determined whether reality had been represented. Furthermore, the artistic work, seen only as a "representation" of reality, was to be based on what was possible and probable, these two being the means of achieving credibility and thus creating the illusion of life. Within its prescribed limits, mimesis shares the essential tenet of the correspondence theory, that is, that the work of art imitates a reality which exists independently of it.

Like the proponents of mimesis, the 18th century Neoclassical writers' credo was that Art was an imitation of "Nature" and they adhered to strict codes and conventions similar to those of the Ancient Greeks. The word "Nature", however, represented a specific concept: it did not refer to a material, physical reality but to a rational organization assumed to exist in nature and society, the "clock-work" universe designed by God, where everything had its proper place and worked efficiently. Neoclassicism thus aimed at representing the

principle embodied in visible reality and in adherence to the correspondence theory, it imitated a reality which existed prior to the work of art.

The 19th century Romantic movement, a reaction against the artificiality and emotional aridity of 18th century Neoclassicism, exalted the function of the imagination in its role as unveiler of the essence which underlies visible reality. It stressed the validity of the individual artist's perceptions, thoughts, feelings and experiences and thereby acknowledged their reality. Unlike the Neoclassicists, the Romantics, by endowing the imagination with creative powers and accepting a subjective reality, can be seen to conform to the coherence theory of realism. As the social and industrial changes of the late 19th century began to be seen as a threat to the stability of society, writers took refuge in the domain of unrestrained fantasy, diverging into melodrama and sentimentality. It was this which initiated the 19th century Realist reaction.

The 19th century European phenomenon, Realism,⁽⁶⁾ which found its most complete expression in France between 1840 and 1870-80, is a result of a number of factors emanating from economic, social and political causes. Lumley describes these:

"The political reaction from 1948, the rise of an industrial-bourgeois civilization, the trend away from romanticism and the natural revolt of one generation against its fathers, the prestige of scientific Positivism, the collapse of traditional values, the alienation of the artist from society, these are the most important cultural phenomena that entered the literary movement of the period after 1848."⁽⁷⁾

All art is an integral part of the social structure of its time, influenced by, but also influencing, its milieu. 19th century Realism, whose intention was the observation, analysis and depiction of contemporary life must, inevitably, be more involved with the conditions of its time than would a movement or tradition concerned with abstractions and ideals.

Art, for the Realists, was to be "true to life" and a number of criteria were established to determine whether this had been achieved. The first was that a work had to be objective, impartial and based on a meticulous observation of the real world thus to enable it to represent reality exactly and truthfully. Realism's endeavour was to achieve verisimilitude, a faithful counterpart of reality, attained by restricting experience to the phenomenon itself, neither interpreting it symbolically nor using it to express a condition; truth and sincerity were sought to represent only what had been seen or experienced. It emerged ironically, that although the quest for objectivity necessitated that the Realist eschew moral comment in his work, his whole attitude toward art implied a moral commitment to the values of truth, honesty and sincerity. His very refusal to idealize, or in any way embellish his subject, as well as the fact that his writing was infused with a critical attitude vis-a-vis the bourgeois values of the time, meant that the Realist took a moral stand.

The second demand made by 19th century Realism was that art deal with actual, contemporary issues, problems or events of one's own time. "Il faut être de son temps" proclaimed Daumier,⁽⁸⁾ requiring furthermore, that an artist reflect his era, his own historical moment. As Realism evolved the concept of contemporaneity became refined to the point of identifying the contemporary with the instantaneous; the immediacy of the very moment, the "now" became an essential aspect of the Realist conception of time, and the image of the changing and unstable came to be seen as closer to experience and to every day reality than the stable and permanent. The temporal continuity established by the classical world was rejected in favour of "the disjointed temporal fragment, a concrete instant of perceived temporal fact".⁽⁹⁾

The third criterion of 19th century Realism was that art was to exhibit social consciousness; the whole of society, not excluding its socially-derived members nor its less attractive aspects, including the

pathological, was to be available to the artist. Thus, by means of a new range of subject matter, 19th century Realism explored a wider range of experience, included the poor and the middle class, the humble, the commonplace, ordinary situations and objects of daily life, avoiding ready-made literary and artistic subjects.

Since 19th century Realism had as its objective the production of what purports to be an authentic account of experience, it presented events performed between individuals in particular circumstances and thus placed individual experience in a *spatio-temporal perspective*. The temporal process and the causal connection through time were seen as decisive elements directing the lives of individuals, and space, the inseparable correlate of time, became the physical *entourage* for the depiction of life. The extension of subject matter in the social realm was accompanied by an attempt to penetrate the depth of the human psyche, to give a complete picture of behaviour and to unveil motivations. Importance was thus placed on the thought process of an individual whose identity was seen to be established through time and the memory of past thoughts and actions. No sense of causality, nor a sense of the chain of events which constitutes the self, could be achieved without memory, and individual experience was thus affirmed by the use of autobiographical memory.

As mentioned earlier, the Realist writer drew his material from living sources, selecting ordinary events and the average human being for his subjects. These, coupled with the aims of truthfulness and contemporaneity, necessitated that the style of presentation be suited and authentic for the material and its purposes. Attention was thus focused on language which was to be tightly linked with what was being described in order to render it in all its concreteness and particularity. The attempt to present not only thought but emotion and even hallucinatory states, demanded that language become a more refined instrument in defining character, for the character's ability to express himself in words was a measure of his mental and moral condition, as well as his social background.

In this period, for the first time, writers began to observe and analyze their own times and to describe what they saw; the existing, observable, undistorted and unembellished representation of real life modelled on the scientific approach was their concern. Becker's statement that "the realist does not copy life . . . he explains it and gives his explanation the air of a copy"(10) suggests, however, that like all art, 19th century Realism is selective and interpretative, and that perhaps the analytical function of the Realist writer has been neglected, concentration dwelling in the main on technicalities.

It may appear that 19th century Realism and the Classical Greek concept, *mimesis*, are similar since both aim at providing a "representation" of life and both appear to have affinities with the correspondence theory. Furthermore, both are clearly outlined, expressed in an orderly manner and externalize all the elements. The two, however, differ on a number of issues.

19th century Realism aimed at producing an art true to the facts of contemporary existence and at giving as perfect an imitation of actual life as possible. Its method was based on observation, aiming at a meticulously impartial account, freed of past ways of seeing and therefore, new and different each time. Since it eschewed the past and legend as subject matter, its material gained in specificity and thereby an interest in the outcome of events. However, its determined contemporaneity meant that characters, attitudes and relationships were closely connected with contemporary historical circumstances; contemporary political and social conditions were woven into the action. Its art existed at a precise historical moment in a geographical space. Inevitably, placing lives and events within a historical context meant that a sense of perspective, as well as complexity was achieved. The two elements of figure and ground proposed by Auerbach(11) as criteria for a discussion of realism, and demonstrated so effectively in a comparison of a passage from Homer's *Odyssey* and the Biblical story of the sacrifice of Isaac, exists in 19th century Realistic literature, in spite of the externalization of

elements, by the prevalence of a complex background against which individuals are depicted and the immediacy of an actual present seen to derive from a temporal backdrop.

In contrast, mimesis included as suitable for representation, history, legend and the supernatural, all of which were presented in a context in which locale and time were transcended. The legendary basis of much Classical Greek writing meant that both the material and depiction of human beings would be organized in a simple, straightforward way; its well-known stories meant that a sense of anticipation was absent. A timeless present, with no perspective, generalized the action and depicted it on a flat canvas in which life was lived on a foreground only.

The morality implicit in 19th century Realistic literature is evident in its stance towards truth, its criticism of bourgeois values and its critique of the existing conditions in the depiction of the less attractive, sometimes sordid aspects of life. Its development from a period of democracy and its promotion of egalitarian social views indicated a social rather than a theocentric morality. The morality evident in Classical Greek literature was based on the accepted supremacy of the gods whose existence was intertwined with the lives of humans. They determined the moral code which could be neither transgressed nor offended and was beyond criticism. Life thus was infused with a sense of fatalism in which Destiny prescribed the events and their results.

Since tragedy, in the Classical Greek concept of literature, aimed at representing permanent values and eternal ideals it avoided the introduction of mundanity and chose as its protagonists, kings, princes and heroes placed in conflicts of cosmic dimensions. The commonplace, domestic and undistinguished were reserved for comedy, seen as the lesser of the two modes. In contrast, the domestic realism of the 19th century, presented ordinary objects, mundane situations and the average human being, and included as subject matter a testing of the conventional matters of importance to society by the raising of issues such as, the status of women, marriage and sexuality.

Furthermore, the two concepts differed most markedly in their attitude to language. 19th century Realism required that the language used by the characters to express themselves be seen to be exactly what the speakers would use if they were to come to life outside the theatre in the given situation. It was a non-poetic language appropriate to the individual's station in life, his temperament and the needs of the occasion. Dialogue was measured by the standard of colloquial speech. The language of Classical Greek literature not only did not have to correspond with what would be used if the characters came to life but was also a poeticized rhetoric belonging to the educated yet spoken by all, irrespective of class and function. The desire of 19th century Realism to create a world in which events seemed to develop spontaneously as a result of the interaction of characters who did not seem to be fictional beings is far removed from the ritualized use of chorus, narration and set speeches accepted by the concept of mimesis.

Realism in drama, became a distinctive kind of theatre in the late 19th century with the plays of Henrik Ibsen. The tenets of this theatre, however, were provided by the theorizing of Zola who insisted that drama should be absolutely faithful to the facts of existence permitting its own time to see itself on the stage. Before discussing the characteristics of this drama, however, it is necessary to point to the theatre itself which has inherent tendencies to convince one of the reality of its progeny.

A number of factors co-exist and combine to create a sense of actuality in the theatre. This is achieved by bringing together elements of everyday life: the presence of actors, perhaps furniture and objects, and the immediacy of the event taking place. Furthermore, to be successful, a play must have a measure of relevance for the audience; a fundamental acceptance of the playwright's views or interpretation of reality is necessary, if not inevitable. This is so in spite of the fact that the responsibility for

interpretation rests finally on the spectator, and that, due to the complexity which exists in the best drama, as well as the uniqueness of each individual's experience of life, there exists an endless possibility of differing interpretations. Kandinsky, in a statement related to art, expresses support for this view:

"Inherent in the artist's decision to employ a particular manner of form, composition, and so on, is an irrevocable point of view, and thus a claim to interpretation, which forestalls the viewer and holds him in tutelage, that is, it imposes a particular attitude on him. For even though the work of art in question, depending on how the viewer construes it, admits of several explanations, it is in the eyes of its creator a definite statement."(12)

The theatre is the most concrete form in which one can recreate human situations. The audience is confronted with a representation of action witnessed as it takes place, the emotions of characters are experienced directly; their motives and decisions have to be evaluated with the immediacy required in interpersonal situations. The successful illusion gives rise to the same responses and expectations as occur in life. The apparent spontaneity, the *visual and auditory* immediacy and spectator involvement impart to it the qualities of verisimilitude.

This issue is bound up with the complex process of perception and how we come to know what we know. Knowledge of the world is impossible without the intervention of the physical senses; the sense of sight dominates and determines the view of the outside world, and the sense of hearing is used to make contact. In the theatrical experience what is presented is mediated by these two senses and thus, the correspondence between life and the theatrical experience ensures that the *perceptual field* is accepted as reality.

Perception is related to the intellectual outlook of a time and is controlled by such factors as personal need, in which ambiguous information will be interpreted to satisfy that need, past experience, which creates the grid through which new experiences are filtered, accepted or rejected, and context. In the theatrical field, the

conventions, an element of past experience already part of an audience's expectations, but essentially of context, intervene to influence perception.

Inherent in the process of drama is the acceptance of conventions, the means by which an audience agrees to suspend disbelief. In a naturalist play, for example, the convention requires that actors should represent people behaving, that is speaking and acting, as closely as possible to the way they would in everyday life, maintaining the illusion that as characters they are unaware of the audience's presence. A sense of unreality results when a convention is disturbed and a deviation occurs from the tacit agreement between playwright, performers and audience. Although certain works have been able to unilaterally modify old conventions or to introduce new ones, most changes have taken place when there has been a willingness, albeit a latent one, to accept them.

The first characteristic of 19th century Realistic theatre, which came to be called "*bourgeois realism*" or "*psychological realism*," was that it presented on the stage concrete details of the actual world around its audience. The everyday, familiar, recognizable world was chosen as the context which would shape a character and in which the dramatic situation would ensue.

The second major characteristic of this theatre was its emphasis on the psychology of human action. The emotions and motivations of characters were examined fastidiously and the protective coverings of illusions, self deceptions and social façades removed to reveal the fountainheads of behaviour. The irrationality out of which action flows was exposed and the mask of reason which hides the complexity, inconsistency and contradictory quality of motives was removed. Ibsen's drama revealed the tragedy of being caught in a selfish, hypocritical, materialistic society, and concentrated not only on the *bourgeois milieu* whose inherent values were conducive to fostering a particular kind of tragic situation, but dwelt on the psychological effect of this milieu on the individual.

The third characteristic of 19th century Realistic drama is its convention of the "missing fourth wall". This development, due to the use of the picture frame in the theatrical structures of the early 19th century, as well as a shift to elaborate realistic sets, resulted in restricting actors to a scenic area behind the frame. The marked separation between actors and audiences, which had not existed earlier, either because the audience participated in the action, or was addressed directly, or because of a physical proximity between actors and audience, enhanced the role of the audience as witness of an event which appeared to unfold spontaneously and distinctly in front of them. The distancing enhanced the illusion that the actors were the characters they were portraying and the play became an event which the audience was allowed to observe and in which it participated imaginatively.

In 19th century Realistic drama, the wish to depict a truthful and objective representation of the real world meant that the role of observation superseded the part played by conventions. The desire to confront reality meant that ready-made formulae and preconceptions were avoided and seen as aids rather than necessities.

All forms of realism are marked by a desire for verisimilitude, and all perceptions as well as the art form which records them, are affected by the personality of the artist, his time and place. The 20th century perception of reality although inevitably influenced by the political and economic events and the technological advances of the period, has been altered in an essential manner by discoveries in the fields of physics and psychology.

The Newtonian perception of reality which had dominated the world for two hundred years was based on an acceptance of absolutes; laws of nature governed the order of the universe, similar laws, it was assumed, governed the social sphere. Scientific research during the 20th century, however, began to ascertain the impossibility of the

existence of absolute knowledge. All information was seen to be imperfect, affected by its dependence on the subjectivity of the observer. No dichotomy could exist between the world and the observer; their interaction was established in that the existence of the world and its interpretation were dependent on the perceiver, and this link altered the nature of all information. Bronowski explains the different view of reality which grew out of the new ideas in physics:

"The world is not a fixed, solid array of objects, out there, for it cannot be fully separated from our perception of it. It shifts under our gaze, it interacts with us, and the knowledge that it yields has to be interpreted by us. There is no way of exchanging information that does not demand an act of judgement."(13)

Bound up with the nature of human knowledge was the fact that errors, emanating from a multitude of causes could not be excluded from the most careful observations. Knowledge, thus, resided within a scatter of errors, the scatter being analyzable by means of the Gaussian curve.(14) Furthermore, enhanced by the rapidity of technological advances, the notion of change became an accepted, inherent factor of this perception of reality.

Newtonian absolutes were finally displaced by Einstein's theories. His Principle of Relativity proposed that experiences at different points in space and time differed and hence, the perception of the world, rooted in the individual, differed according to the position of the observer. The acceptance that knowledge could not be absolute was confirmed by Heisenberg's discovery that it was impossible to ascertain with certainty both the position and velocity of sub-atomic particles simultaneously. The Principle of Uncertainty was thus established and with it the view that human knowledge was personal, responsible and limited. Bronowski suggested that the idea of uncertainty could be further refined by positing the term, the Principle of Tolerance. He explains:

"If an object (a familiar face, for example) had to be exactly the same before we recognised it, we would never recognise it from one day to the next. We recognize the object to be the same because it is much the same; it is never exactly like it was, it is tolerably like."(15)

The theories put forward by Freudian depth psychology were the second important influence on the 20th century view of reality. Freud's study of the mind revealed its complexity beyond rationality and awareness, to include knowledge ensconced in subconscious and unconscious regions of the mind. His theories on the bases of neurosis and the nature of dreams had a profound effect in modifying the perception of reality. Although seeking to establish concepts of behaviour, his research focused on the individual and delved into the individual psyche.

This change to a psychological focus is evident in the work of the major novelists of the 20th century and it is interesting to note that Beckett's plays, which, as already mentioned in Chapter two, gradually began to reflect the concerns and techniques used in his novels, have many affinities with the issues and concerns explored by the novels of his time.(16) Forster, in *Aspects of the Novel*, sums up the direction taken by characterization and proposes the element which separates a character from a living human being. Characters, he claims, "are real not because they are like ourselves . . . but because they are convincing".(17) The acceptance of the reality of a character is dependent on one's awareness of one's own existence which enables one to appreciate, at times perhaps identify with, and thereby be convinced by the revelations of the writer. "They (characters) are people whose secret lives are visible, we are people whose secret lives are invisible".(18) As the novel develops in the 20th century, writers become more interested in the "secret lives" of their characters. They move inwards to pursue psychic states, concealed emotions, elusive sensations, into the area of consciousness and subconsciousness. The conventional novel which created characters by external description of physical appearance and personality was superseded by attempts to depict the stream of consciousness using the individual's own point of view to reveal what was going on in his mind.

Henry James in his preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* describes his inspiration as "the character and aspect of a particularly engaging young woman, to which all the elements of a subject, certainly of a

setting were to need to be superadded".(19) He continues "place the centre of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness . . . and you get as interesting and as beautiful a difficulty as you could wish".(20) The individual's consciousness thus becomes the focus around which all else revolves.

James was not alone in placing his centre of interest in the protagonist's mind. Conrad in *Under Western Eyes* reveals the conflict of his protagonist, Razumov, over the betrayal of Haldin in an interior monologue full of contradictions. Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* rejects all the preconceptions of the traditional novel in its first three sections and places its viewpoint firmly in the consciousness of three characters. Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* explores the rhythms, the shifting moods and uncertainties in her characters' consciousness while establishing the individuality of perception which keeps them all separate. James Joyce in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and in *Ulysses* reveals his protagonists' inner world, and attempts to represent the complex interplay of perceptions and reflections in the manner in which they occur.

Freud maintained that consciousness "defies all explanation or description"(21) its "processes are unknowable".(22) He elaborated:

"We know two things concerning what we call our psyche or mental life: firstly, its bodily organ and scene of action, the brain (or nervous system), and secondly, our acts of consciousness, which are immediate data and cannot be more fully explained by any kind of description. Everything that lies between these two terminal points is unknown to us, and so far as we are aware, there is no direct relation between them. If it existed, it would at the most afford an exact localization of the processes of consciousness and would give us no help towards understanding them."(23)

He adds, however:

"Nevertheless, if anyone speaks of consciousness, we know immediately from our own most personal experience what is meant by it."(24)

The issue of consciousness became a major concern of psychology; Adler(25) made it the centre of personality; Rogers(26) saw this private world of experience as capable of being known "in any genuine and complete sense" only by the individual himself; Wundt(27) who defined psychology as the science of consciousness, was the first to apply experimental procedures to its analysis through the method of experimental introspection. This resulted in consciousness being dissected into mental elements, providing a detailed description of conscious experience in terms of such elements as sensations, images and feelings. Consciousness came to be seen as a process linked with the perceptions, transmitted from the external world by the sense organs and the content of emotions, ideas and memories, all bound together by the function of speech. This private world of inner experience exists for the individual himself as thought often realized as internal speech. For an audience, whether in the theatre or as a reader, the representation of consciousness, intangible and unseen, is dependent upon language. It is perceived auditorily and thus retains the experiential quality of a living experience.

William James provided the metaphor which described the state of consciousness and became the name of a form in literature. He wrote:

"Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life."(28)

The stream of consciousness was devised to encompass all that was going on in a person's thought processes and the emotional processes. It develops the sense of the growing awareness of a person's psychological make-up and the processes involved. If done with authenticity, irrelevancies would be included and there would

be no sequential ordering, no chronological pattern. The stream of consciousness shifted the emphasis from society to an emphasis on the individual, and even further, on the individual mind. It obsessively revolved around the individual, his idiosyncracies, anomalies and biases, of his view of the world. Therefore, inaccuracies, imbalances and a fragmented view were inevitable. The mind flashes to allusions, harks back on the past in moments of recall, anticipates the future, darting backwards and forwards incessantly.

Linda Nochlin tracing the development of 19th century Realism in art claims that "the amalgam of qualities, structures and attitudes - the Realist style or the Realist movement - had begun to come apart at the seams as an integral unity".(29) Writers such as Renan, Levin, de Vogüé too, proposed the demise of 19th century Realism offering a number of reasons for its decline; the disappointment in the ability of science to provide an objective understanding of reality and the view of 20th century philosophers that reality is to a large extent the product of consciousness and language, have been given as the two main causes for its rejection. Guy de Maupassant, for example, explaining this attitude in his essay "Le Roman," stresses both the subjective and the illusory nature of reality, and reveals affinities between his views and the coherence theory discussed earlier in this chapter:

"Quel enfantillage, d'ailleurs, de croire à la réalité puisque nous portons chacun la nôtre dans notre pensée et dans nos organes. Nos yeux, nos oreilles, notre odorat, notre goût différents créent autant de vérité qu'il y a d'hommes sur la terre . . . Chacun de nous se fait donc simplement une illusion du monde . . . Et l'écrivain n'a autre mission que de reproduire fidèlement cette illusion avec tous les procédés d'art qu'il a appris et dont il peut disposer . . . les grands artistes sont ceux qui imposent à l'humanité leur illusion particulière."(30)

(How childish it is, anyway, to believe in reality when each of us carries his own in his mind and body. Our different eyes, ears, sense of smell, taste, create as many realities as there are people on earth. So every one of us simply creates his own illusion of the world. And the writer has no other task but to faithfully reproduce this illusion with all the art he is master of and which will be of use to him. The great artists are those who force us to accept their own illusion.)

Robbe-Grillet(31) proposes the concept of a "new realism" a "realism of presence." Things, gestures, characters, words will be characterized by their quality of being there, an idea borrowed directly from Sartre, the concept of "être-la" or thereness. His suggestion posits a neutral view of existence, free of symbolic nuances. The world he claims, is neither meaningful nor absurd. It quite simply is, things are there. The view has interesting implications in its acceptance of only the reality of what is sensorily experienced, by which it obliterates the separation between illusion and reality. The fictitious characters of drama become real by their presence and a reality of actuality based on appearances excludes a cognitive and emotive interpreted reality based on meaning. Unlike the view of de Maupassant, Robbe-Grillet's "realism of presence" reveals an affinity with the correspondence theory of realism.

In an analysis of the decline of 19th century Realism, Nochlin offers the view that "some of its qualities were transvalued - i.e. they begin to acquire different or opposite meanings or implications to those they had in the Realist context".(32) For example, the social concern of a branch of the Realist movement becomes the dominant trait of Soviet Socialist Realism. She comes to the conclusion however, that "despite the split up of, and even the opposition to Realism, it is interesting to see that even its antagonists, or those whose own originality depended upon opposing it later in the century, hark back to some of its defining qualities in their own contexts of rebellion".(33)

Contrary to the view that 19th century Realism is defunct, this dissertation proposes that its aims, to create an art which is "true to life," contemporary and based on *careful* observation, have prevailed. However, the area of experience on which it dwells has contracted to concentrate on a major concern of the 19th century which has been highlighted by research in the field of depth psychology. The conclusion that "the subjective experience . . . is the only objective experience"(34) has led to a desire to reproduce as loyally as possible a personal and unique vision of the world, to note mental

states exactly, at the expense of attention to external and social contexts since the very existence and reality of the latter were seen to be dependent on the perceptions of the individual consciousness. The depiction in literature of the stream of consciousness, with its continuous and random flux of thoughts, emotions and sensations, has disclosed the area of experience to be explored and represented as more circumscribed, but also more focused than in previous literature.

ENDNOTES

1. Grant, D. *Realism*. London: Methuen, 1970, p. 1.
2. *Ibid.* p. 1.
3. Wellek, R. *Concepts of Criticism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963, p. 225.
Wellek claims that theorizing about realism is ultimately bad aesthetics because all art is "making" and is a world of illusion and symbolic forms.
4. Dickens, C. *Hard Times*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969, pp. 50, 51.
"Why, then, you are not to see anywhere, what you don't see in fact; you are not to have anywhere, what you don't have in fact. What is called Taste, is only another name for Fact." (p.51)
"Blitzer," said Thomas Gradgrind. 'Your definition of a horse.' 'Quadruped. Graminivorous, Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring, in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoots hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.'"(p.50)
5. Henry James expresses his view of the relationship of life and art in his short story "The Real Thing." The idea is taken up by Tom Stoppard in his play by the same name, produced in 1983.
6. Some confusion has arisen between the terms Realism and Naturalism, due to the fact that they were interchangeable in England whereas they remained quite separate in France. Naturalism, the observation of natural phenomena, derived its name from science and insisted on adhering meticulously to the *methods of scientific inquiry*. It employed the methods of observation, experimentation and documentation.

7. Lumley, F. *Trends in Twentieth Century Drama*. London: Rockliff, 1956, p. xix.
8. Nochlin, L. *Realism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971, p. 103.
9. *Ibid.* p. 30.
10. Becker, G.J. *Realism in Modern Literature*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1980, p. 92.
11. Auerbach, E. *Mimesis*. Tr. by Trask, W.R. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, pp. 3-23.
12. Hoffman, W. *Turning Points in Twentieth Century Art: 1890-1917*. Ft by Kessler, C. London: Allen Lane-Penguin, 1969, p. 170.
13. Bronowski, J. *The Ascent of Man*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1973, p. 364.
14. *Ibid.* p. 358.
15. *Ibid.* p. 365.
16. In wishing to depict the individual consciousness and in placing it at the centre of his drama, Beckett is seen to be part of the mainstream of 20th century literature. There are a number of other concerns which link Beckett to the novelists of his time: (1) the constant preoccupation with Time, as a concept and a device; (2) the decline in the value of the 'story' seen as too rigid for the expression of the flux of experience; (3) the desire for a rigorous focus; (4) his use of the other arts, such as painting and music.

Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Joseph Conrad are all concerned with Time. In, *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf stresses the existence of the moment in spite of the passing of time. James Joyce in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* presents a series of moments located in the present, in which past, present and future are fused, although the book, which is autobiographical, has a linear development. Joseph Conrad in *Under Western Eyes*, uses a diary and a tale told by a teacher of languages for time shifts to the past and present. Beckett's concern with Time is evident in the statements of his characters, for example :

"Pozzo: Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! Its abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you?"
(*Waiting for Godot* p. 89)

as well as in the experiential quality of his plays. In *Waiting for Godot*, the question of what one is to do with time, while one waits, arises. Time is extended in the process of waiting. Time is compressed in *Not I*, because of the precipitated nature of the speech as well as by the circularity caused by the repetitions. The notion of capturing the moment and thus paradoxically extending it into eternity is best illustrated by the repetition of *Play* with its suggestion that it is never-ending. The repetition becomes a means of dislocating time out of its linear perspective into new modes of being.

17. Forster, E.M. *Aspects of the Novel*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979, p. 70.
18. *Ibid.* p. 70.
19. James, H. *The Portrait of a Lady*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963, p. vi.

20. Ibid. p. vi.
21. Freud, S. *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*. London: Hogarth Press, 1963, p. 16.
22. Ibid. p. 18.
23. Ibid. p. 1.
24. Ibid. p. 15.
25. Hall, C.S. and Lindzey, G. *Theories of Personality*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1957, p. 118.
26. Ibid. p. 479.
27. Munn, N. L. *Psychology*. 3rd ed. London: George G. Harrap, 1956, p. 6.
28. James, W. In: Hesla, D.H. *The Shape of Chaos*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1971, p. 178.
29. Noehlin, L. *op.cit.* p. 235.
30. de Maupassant, G. In: Grant, D. *op.cit.* p. 51.
31. Robbe-Grillet, A. *Snapshots and Towards a New Novel*.
 Tl. Wright, B. London: Calder and Boyars, 1965, p.12.
32. Noehlin, L. *op.cit.* p. 235.
33. Ibid. p. 235.
34. Brinkmann, R. In: Wellek, R. *op.cit.* p. 237.

CHAPTER 7

BECKETT IN THE CONTEXT OF REALISM

The investigation of realism in Beckett's plays is aptly introduced by a statement made by Jan Kott. When asked "What is the place of Bertholt Brecht in your (i.e., the Polish) theater?" Kott replied "We do him when we want Fantasy. When we want Realism, we do *Waiting for Godot*".(1)

It is, however, Tynan's comment on that play, already quoted in the introduction and stressing the need to eschew the conventional and established when approaching Beckett's work, which reflects the exploratory spirit of the writing which follows. Tynan wrote:

"It forced me to re-examine the rules which his 'to governed the drama, and having done so, to pronounce it not elastic enough.'"(2)

The preceding chapter considered the ramifications of realism both as a general concept and as a specific 19th century movement. This chapter attempts to trace Beckett's link with realism, an aspect as yet unacknowledged in his work. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to examine Beckett's own statements concerning realism made in an early essay on Proust written in 1937. Although the views expressed form part of an analysis of that writer's attitude, it is evident that Beckett's views are not dissimilar.

Beckett appears to share Proust's rejection of realism when he writes of "the grotesque fallacy of realistic art" (Proust p.57) and when quoting Beaudelaire "that miserable statement of line and surface,"(p.57) "the penny-a-line vulgarity of a literature of notations"(p.57) His dismissal of realism is however, a more complex issue than is allowed for by his contemptuous expressions for:

"The literature that 'describes,' 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 façade behind which the Idea is prisoner."(p.59)

Beckett bases his rejection of realistic art on the view that it is solely concerned with "recording surface,"(p.63) that is, the copiable and superficial. His interest fixes on "the Idea" which he sees as encapsulated in a shell of discardable externals. However, Beckett's description of "the Idea" requires probing for his claim that Proust rejects "the concept in favour of the Idea"(p.61) suggests that his use of the word is different to the commonly accepted Romantic view of an abstract, platonic, distillation of the essential.

Beckett equates "the Idea" with the concrete. He explains Proust's admiration for the frescoes of the Paduan Arena as due to the fact that:

"... their symbolism is handled as a reality, special, literal and concrete, and is not merely the pictorial transmission of a notion."(p.60)

He acknowledges, furthermore, that Reality and Imagination, apparently irreconcilable, need to be combined to enable a whole, complete work to be created:

"Reality, whether approached imaginatively or empirically, remains a surface, hermetic, Imagination, applied - a priori - to what is absent, is exercised in vacuo and cannot tolerate the limits of the real."(p.56)

The absence of one component would lead to an imbalance unworthy of art. His concern is to establish "an essential reality"(p.5) representing a paradoxical synthesis of the real and the imaginative. Using the example of the recurrence of a past event in the form of an involuntary memory in the present, Beckett describes the ideal occurrence:

"... thanks to this reduplication, the experience is at once imaginative and empirical, at once an evocation and a direct perception, real without being merely actual, ideal without being merely abstract, the ideal real, the essential the extratemporal."(p.56)

Beckett's conception of "the Idea" is thus, not of an abstract conceptual essence but of a fusion of the polarizations of the intangible and abstract with the actual and perceived. This

encompassing totality is akin to the co-existence and interrelatedness of the tragic and the comic in life itself. His rejection of realism is thus based on the view that it represents a limited reflection of only the one component required in a work of art, that is, the external. Given the concerns and ramifications of realism as discussed in Chapter six, this is patently a limited analysis.

The metaphor used by Beckett to explain his notion of "the Idea" is music, for:

"... music is the Idea itself, unaware of the world of phenomenon, existing ideally outside the universe, apprehended not in space but in Time only."(p.71)

The validity of this statement is questionable and Marshall McLuhan's suggestion of the interplay between sound and space is worthy of consideration, specifically in its application to Beckett's later plays. McLuhan explains:

"Acoustic space is a dynamic or harmonic field. It exists while the music or sound persists. And the hearer is one with it, as with music. Acoustic space is the space world of primeval man."(3)

Space, contrary to Beckett's view, thus comes into being by the presence of sound. It is, nevertheless, true that music is not concrete in the sense that it can be grasped. However, just as one would not question the reality of language or the smell of a rose, the existence of music apprehended sensorily and affectively is unquestionable. That it is intangible in no way detracts from its reality; it is "real without being merely actual"(p.58) and "ideal without being merely abstract"(p.56). Beckett, thus, uses the word "concrete" when he speaks of "the Idea" to establish the reality of what has no substance and yet has existence. It is this evanescent reality, exemplified in his work by the depiction of consciousness and its psychological realities, which is his central concern.

A contradiction of Beckett's initial rejection of realism is evident in his approval of the manner in which Proust perceived art:

"(Proust sees) the work of art as neither created nor chosen, but discovered, uncovered, excavated, pre-existing within the artist, a law of his nature."(p.64)

The work of art, therefore, according to this statement, is representational, depicting what exists prior to it, and is seen to operate within the confines of the correspondence theory. The representational nature of Proust's method is stressed by the following comment:

"By his impressionism I mean his non-logical statement of phenomena in the order and exactitude of their perception before they have been distorted into intelligibility in order to be forced into a chain of cause and effect."(p.66)

Proust's art is described as imitative, reproducing events exactly as they occurred, *neither creating nor manipulating them for his own ends.*

Beckett's views on realism, as expressed in this early essay on Proust, can be seen to require evaluation, but they nevertheless, remain an indication of both the complexity of his concerns and the direction his writing is to take in the future.

Few would argue that if "art is a matter strictly of experience, not of principles,"(4) then a correspondence, or a reference, to the world beyond it is axiomatic. In that case, assessment of the artistic creation must involve some matching of the audience's perceptions against those implicitly or explicitly suggested in the work. Its significance or relevance will depend on what is already known for it will need to cohere against a background of established knowledge. Every spectator/reader is socially and historically positioned and will bring to the work a context of beliefs and expectations; his/her response will be conditioned by the kind of social and historical individuals they happen to be. This correspondence between the world, or the audience's perception of it, and the work, is not a measure of its value or competence but is a condition establishing a relationship. Any account of the realism in Beckett's work must therefore, trace the relationship between his work and its external context.

The claim that Beckett belongs to a realist tradition means that his work must meet, firstly, the demands made of a work of art by the 19th century Realist tradition. Briefly reviewed these are:

- that a work of art be contemporary, true, precise and satisfy the need for verisimilitude;
- that its language be both contemporary and reflective of content;
- that its characterization be concrete and specific;
- that its subject matter include the mundane and commonplace, if need be the sordid and the pathological;
- that it exhibit social consciousness;
- and
- that causality appear as part of the structure of existence.

Beckett's adherence to a number of these tenets has already been demonstrated and will, therefore, only be mentioned briefly in this chapter.

19th century Realism, linked language to subject matter aiming at truthfulness and contemporaneity. Attention was concentrated on creating a fine and modulated linguistic tool which would render contemporary perceived reality and its psychological effect on the individual in all its concreteness and particularity. The contemporary and colloquial nature of the language of Beckett's plays, by replicating the speech of its time, meets an essential demand of 19th century Realism. Furthermore, the apparently unstructured, spontaneous utterances of the characters create the illusion that their speech is such that it would have been the same had it been spoken in similar circumstances, by such a person, outside the theatrical context. The need for truthfulness and verisimilitude is thus met.

The earlier discussion on characterization in the plays (Chapter three) provides ample evidence of the characters concreteness and specificity. This was demonstrated by the wealth of detail which created complex characters who were well-rounded, recognizable, capable of provoking

a response as individuals thereby eliminating any possibility of symbolical interpretations. A sense of the actuality of the characters, and thus of the realism of the characterization, satisfies the requirements of 19th century Realism. Furthermore, Beckett's interest in psychology is a link with the 19th century "psychological realism" of Ibsen. Kenner recognises this when he writes:

"And *Play*, finally is School of Ibsen; incomparably the least "realistic" even of Beckett's plays, yet more entangled than any other in mundane tensions."⁽⁵⁾

Unlike Ibsen's drama, however, which portrays the interplay of the individual and his restrictive social environment, Beckett's plays differ in that the latter's characters are lonely, isolated beings for whom society as a monolithic presence is absent. Relationships, whether by their presence or their absence, nevertheless remain important, but the macro-socio-economic context is omitted. It is the focus on the individual's inner needs and mental dilemmas, found in both playwrights, which constitutes the link between them.

An absence of idealization in characterization followed from the 19th century requirement that literature ought to exhibit social consciousness, and that society's socially-deprived members and their less attractive aspects be available as subject matter. Beckett's depiction of individuals as tramps and derelicts does not take into account delicate sensibilities. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon suffer from bad breath, bladder complaints and smelly feet. Incidents in *Happy Days* are intended to shock genteel conventions; Willie blows his nose loud and long on a handkerchief which had been on his head and then proceeds to replace it. In another episode, one learns that he picks his nose and eats the mucus. Winnie attempts to rationalize her disgust by saying that his action is natural and is due to the lack of other possible activities. Willie emerges as a being who includes polarized qualities; pleasing and repugnant traits co-exist adding to a sense of realism and dismissing any possibility of idealization.

The requirement to display social consciousness is also expressed in Beckett's concern for the distress of others. This is unambiguously stated in an interview with Tom Driver to whom he acknowledged that his plays dealt with distress. He explains:

"I left the party as soon as possible and got into a taxi. On the glass partition between me and the driver were three signs, one asked for help for the blind, another help for orphans, and the third for relief for the war refugees. One does not have to look for distress. It is screaming at you even in the taxis of London."(6)

A further trait of Beckett's drama which complies with the demands of 19th century Realism is its inclusion of elements of mundane reality, the presentation of a "slice of life".

In *Waiting for Godot*, realism is enhanced by two factors; firstly by the awareness that uncertainty, waiting, and the hope for change are prevalent in everyone's life; and secondly, by the recognition of the "tied" relationship of Vladimir and Estragon, reminding of the delicate balance which exists in a parent and child, husband and wife connection with its modulated and shifting oscillations between dominance and subservience, replete of warmth, compassion, generosity, malice, indifference and cruelty. Play rests on a clichéd plot, the love triangle. The plot recalls Jarry's advice that for a playwright to lower himself to the level of the public he needs "to give them a commonplace sort of plot - write about things that happen all the time to the common man".(7)

In *Happy Days*, realism resides in the presentation of Winnie as belonging to a social milieu, her use of objects which are part of daily life, as well as acts which enhance her normality. For example, her humanity is recognized in such acts as her persistent efforts to read the indistinct print on a toothbrush. This episode allows an audience to identify with Winnie's feelings of frustration, persistence and triumph when she successfully deciphers the words. Krapp's *Last Tape* is written in a realist mode; the set is naturalistic and the performance conducted in accordance with the convention of the

missing fourth wall. The activities whether they be the eating of bananas, fumbling for keys or searching for tapes, are recognizably mundane.

The "contact with the everyday world with which drama must come to terms"(8) is further enhanced by the autobiographical details traceable in the plays. The use of life sources evident from Beckett's own account of the origins of *Not I*, the personal details woven into *Krapp's Last Tape* and the plot of *Play*, as well as the absence of historical, mythological and traditional ideas, suggest that Beckett is oriented to representing the actual.(9) The autobiographical component in Beckett's drama is, however, a complex element. It includes not only the use of personal detail, a part of all artistic creativity, but it assumes too, a thematic function promoting the view that individual experience is affirmed by the existence of autobiographical memory (the thought processes of the individual consciousness include the memory of past thoughts and actions necessary for establishing identity). Causality, and the continuity implied by it, is only made possible by an awareness of a chain of events, and is dependent on both memory and a sense of self. Thus, autobiographical memory enables the condition of cause and effect to be established. (Proust p.1) Beckett's use of the autobiographical in the process of experience reaffirms his emphasis on the literal and concrete and can be seen to satisfy a tenet inherent in 19th century Realism's perception of life.

Examples which reveal Beckett's concern with the relationship of memory and cause and effect are abundant in the plays. *Krapp's Last Tape* is based entirely on the reawakening and affirmation of the past by means of a tape-recorder. The isolated condition of Krapp at sixty-nine is revealed as having been brought about by his constant withdrawal from involvement with others. Cause and effect, a process

necessitating a time span which links actions in the past to conditions in the present, is thus affirmed. Play, as already discussed, has a plot reconstructed in part by memory. Its development rests on an understanding of the existence of a past, and a tormented present which is a consequence of the events and memory of it. Not I recalls and probes past experience and emotions but complicates the function of memory by entwining it with creations of the imagination. The past is revealed as the foundation for the present but the nature of memory is, however, not only presented as selective but also as creative, structuring a personal reality.

Thus, "the slice of life" effect achieved by the evident identification of elements in the plays to recognizable mundane reality, as well as the affirmation of causality as the developmental pattern of life, are links between Beckett's plays and the views of 19th century Realism. Its intention to deal with the actual and contemporary, as well as to offer a representation of what appears to be an authentic account of true experience, is satisfied.

The major difference between Beckett and 19th century Realism is that it omits to depict the external world from the point of view of an objective, omniscient author. This change came about as a result of the new perceptions of reality in the 20th century. Evidence is repeatedly provided to suggest that changes in technology, or in social and economic conditions, create dramatic changes in the world of art. However, it would also be true to say that the silent germination and growth of the seeds of change are often ignored until the blooms are incontrovertibly evident. Periods in literature that have crystallized around names such as Romanticism or Realism, and which have been gradual and slow in developing, appear as moments which stand juxtaposed, confronting each other across a clearly demarcated boundary. 19th century Realism's area of interest concentrated on the individual's psychological response to the effects of his society perceived as antagonistic to his needs. The 20th century intensified

the attention given to the individual, delving into his mental and emotional life. This concern necessitated that the viewpoint shift from the outward to the inner vision, that is, to the mind of the protagonist. The change represented not so much a dialectical swing of the pendulum as a deepening concentration on an aspect of existence already receiving attention in the earlier period. Supported by the theories in depth psychology and further enhanced by the new developments in physics, the change also intensified the already prevalent sense of an unstable and shifting reality, which existed in the 19th century, to a sense of pervasive uncertainty and ignorance in the 20th. These changes were reflected in the modifications which occurred in the use of language. While the 20th century pursued the tenets established by the previous era, conditions peculiar to itself necessitated that to remain representational, its language would have to change. The divergence was evident in the form rather than in the language itself which remained contemporary and colloquial. The difference manifested itself in the use of a *more fluid, continuous*, unpunctuated prose, replete of regressions and repetitions, which led to an absence of a sequential and logical progression in the expression of ideas causing a *more elusive form* to be evolved.

The second requirement that has to be met if Beckett is to be included as part of a realist tradition is that his work reveal affinities with the perception of reality of the 20th century. It is interesting to note that the view that an artist must be of his own time was proclaimed by 19th century Realism, and pursued to its logical conclusion, this idea implies that to be a realist in the 20th century, a writer must differ from his predecessors.

To be part of the 20th century, a work would need to disclose the following concerns:

- that knowledge is rooted in the individual and is, therefore, personal and subjective;
- that absolute knowledge is unattainable and existence is thus pervaded by uncertainty;

- that attention should be concentrated on the inner being of the individual thereby focusing attention on consciousness and ways of representing it;
and
- that language as a medium of communication and as a creator of meaning warrants special attention.

The first aspect of Beckett's writing which indicates a reflection of the 20th century view of reality is epistemological. The insights on man proposed by depth psychology and the new theories of physics developed in the 20th century embody a subjectivist view of knowledge. Knowing was seen to require apprehension by the senses, and interpretation and structuring into a coherent entity by the mind.

Selectivity of input due to sensory functioning, emotional needs and mental aptitude made it inevitable that what is known as reality will be as varied and manifold as the number of beings in existence. The acceptance of subjectivity meant that the individual was seen as the source and origin of all meaning. The subject brought the world into being in the first place. Furthermore, attention on the inner, mental life of the experiencing subject revealed that consciousness was not merely the passive reception of impulses from the outer world but a creative process making meaning and structuring reality. A move occurred away from the world of objects, and the world as object, to an examination of the mind perceiving them, and the reactions evoked to them, in order to disclose the infinite range and complexity of human sensibility.⁽¹⁰⁾ *Happy Days* provides the most overt of the many examples of this concern in Beckett. Surrounded by objects which form an essential part of her existence, attention remains focused on Winnie's thoughts, reactions and emotions to them, to Willie, her partner, the two passersby, and her recollections as they are revealed by her apparently unstructured chatter.

The acknowledgement that knowledge was personal and subjective led inevitably, to the view that the world is different for different observers. This idea is expressed by Beckett on a number of

occasions. "Memory is obviously conditioned by perception" (Proust p.17) claims Beckett, thus linking both the content and nature of memory with the perceiver. Two examples from *Endgame* serve to illustrate the individual nature of perception; the first is found in Hamm's story of the painter/engraver, who on being taken to the window to share Hamm's vision of the loveliness of the world, withdraws, because he can only see ashes; the second is Nell's elegiac "Ah yesterday" (p.18) countered by Cloy's "... bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day" (p.32). The unique nature of perception ensures the uniqueness of the individual's consciousness "the only world that has reality and significance" (Proust p.3) according to Beckett. Thus, for him, no objective reality exists apart from the consciousness of the individual. Harvey focuses on this concern of Beckett when he writes:

"If it (Beckett's aestheticism) rejects the macrocosmic "realities" it is because they are seen as unrealities, less than realities, obfuscations of reality . . . If the oeuvre is a closed world, it is because the individual is a closed world." (11)

Such an epistemological view, based on subjectivity, can only give rise to a pervasive sense of uncertainty and doubt. Bronowski expresses such an understanding when he says:

"We lurch after exactitude, and every time it appears within our grasp it takes another step away toward infinity." (12)

Spender echoes this idea when he claims:

"The principle of reality in our time is peculiarly difficult to grasp for the western world is less sure of its values than most previous cultures with which we are familiar; relativism and subjectivity are part of everyday experience." (13)

The incertitude of all knowledge and the attitude that all one knows is a matter of conjecture, are views explicitly stated by Beckett as well as found pervading his work. In an interview with Shenker, Beckett said:

"The kind of work I do is one in which I'm not master of my material . . . I'm working with impotence, ignorance . . . I think nowadays who pays the slightest attention to his own experience finds it the experience of a non-knower, a non-carer . . ." (14)

He also claimed that the word "perhaps" was the most important in his vocabulary. The word allows, inherently, for a limitless range of possibilities while equally revealing the total uncertainty in which lack of knowledge places an individual. In *Play* the characters speculate:

"M: Perhaps they have become friends. Perhaps sorrow. . .
Perhaps sorrow has brought them together. . .
Perhaps they meet . . ." (p.17)

"W²: And you perhaps pitying me, thinking, Poor thing, she needs a rest." (p.19)

"W¹: Perhaps she has taken him away to live. . . somewhere in the sun." (p.19)

This element of uncertainty has been present in Beckett's work since his earliest writing. In *Premier Amour* the protagonist says:

"Je me demande si tout cela n'est pas de l'invention, si en réalité les choses ne se passèrent pas tout autrement, selon un schéma qu'il me fallu oublier". (p.22)

(I wonder if all this is not made up, if in reality things did not happen in a totally different way, according to a plan which I had to forget.)

Unambiguously creating his narrative, the speaker also says "Disons qu'il pleuvait, cela nous changera un peu." (p.36) (Let us say it was raining, it will create a little change.) The statement "the unknown . . . is also the unknowable" (Proust p.1) indicates an attitude which not only sets the limits of knowledge but suggests too, that life must be pursued within a context of ignorance.

Martin Esslin writing of the effect of *Waiting for Godot* says:

"In *Waiting for Godot* the feeling of uncertainty it produces, the ebb and flow of this uncertainty - from the hope of discovering the identity of Godot to its repeated disappointment are themselves the essence of the play." (15)

And Bair states:

"Beckett himself has said that *Waiting for Godot* is a play that is striving all the time to avoid definition, and as always attention should be given to his words." (16)

The following passages from *Waiting for Godot* reveal the concern with uncertainty and the characters' awareness of the equivocal nature of existence:

- "Vladimir: What did we do yesterday?
Estragon: Yes.
Vladimir: Why . . . Nothing is certain when you're about.
Estragon: In my opinion we were here.
Vladimir: You recognize the place?
Estragon: I didn't say that.
Vladimir: Well?
Estragon: That makes no difference.
Vladimir: All the same . . . that tree . . . that bog.
Estragon: You're sure it was this evening?
Vladimir: What?
Estragon: That we were to wait.
Vladimir: He said Saturday. I think.
Estragon: You think.
Vladimir: I must have made a note of it.
Estragon: But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is is not rather Sunday? or Monday? or Friday?
Vladimir: It's not possible!
Estragon: Or Thursday?"(pp. 14-15)
- "Estragon: Wait! . . . I wonder if we wouldn't have been better off alone, each one for himself . . . We weren't made for the same road.
Vladimir: It's not certain.
Estragon: No, nothing is certain."(p.53)

Vladimir's concern with the story of the two thieves, found in only one of the Gospels, centres on the dilemma of incertitude. The question which confronts and perturbs him is how to discern the truth when faced with contradictions.

For the characters of *Play*, lack of knowledge and the resultant sense of uncertainty become the cause of distress. All three become bound on a wheel of speculation and, because their egoism had prevented them from forming valid connections, forces them to speculate in isolation. Total oblivion would have been preferable to the uncertainty in which they are doomed to exist. The audience of *Play*, too, finds itself, like the characters, in a situation of uncertainty and ambiguity for it never discovers, and is forced to accept, the lack of conclusive knowledge. It is never known, for example, what motivated M in abandoning both women, nor what subsequently happened to him. When W2 speaks of "that poor creature who tried to seduce you, whatever became of her, do you suppose? - I can hear her . . . Poor thing,"(p.18) it is not immediately clear that her instability of mind has led to a state of dissociation in which she addresses herself in the third person. Like the characters, therefore, the audience is placed in a situation of uncertainty and is forced to speculate in order to make sense of a situation.

Uncertainty caused by ambiguity is the factor which leads to *Not It's* profound impact. The ambiguity resides firstly in the presentation of an elusive event which appears to have triggered off the outpourings of Mouth. The audience at no time discovers what occurred that April morning, why the speaker was in court, nor why she adamantly refuses to acknowledge herself. Tantalizing suggestions which initiate speculation are made but remain unresolved.(17) Secondly, although one accepts that the words one hears represent speech, the monologue creates the impression that one is witnessing a thought process, the stream of consciousness. This ambiguity suggests the presence of two levels, a surface structure of conscious statements and a deep structure revealing underlying subconscious needs and motives. A third example of ambiguity occurs in the paradoxical presentation of the character, Mouth. Visually imagined, from her statements, as the stereotype of a subnormal individual, unresponsive, speechless, incapable of helping herself, the intellectual and emotional personality

revealed, however, is of a complex, wilful, determined, self-aware being. This aspect of ambiguity is further emphasized by her own ironical viewpoint of seeing herself as others see her. Nevertheless, in spite of the ambiguity, the presentation of Mouth is concrete and adheres to the correspondence theory of realism.

A linguistic device, used extensively in the plays, and relevant within the context of this discussion, is the use of questions. These are used for a number of different effects; they register moods, create self-directed dialogues, are used as a rhetorical device. But their most important function is to reinforce the notion of a desire to know and the inability to find out. They are an important means of evoking a sense of uncertainty in the plays. Robbe-Grillet assessing the modern novel makes a comment on Beckett pertinent to this discussion:

"Even with Beckett, plenty of things happen, but they are always questioning themselves, doubting themselves and destroying themselves to the point where the same phrase can obtain a statement and its immediate negation. In short, it isn't events that are lacking, it is only their character of certainty, their tranquillity and their innocence." (18)

The second characteristic which reflects Beckett's affinity with the 20th century view of reality is an intensification in the probing of the individual mind. Beckett's statement on the direction to be taken by the artist proclaims his interest clearly:

"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 in the core of the eddy.*" (Proust p. 48)

A concentrated, intense art, centred on the individual, specifically in the depiction of the individual consciousness, is Beckett's chosen direction. This interest in delving into, and recreating, the workings of the mind, as well as his concern with neuroses, hallucinations, obsessions and guilt, which suggest a keen involvement in mental pathology, place him in the mainstream of 20th century literature. It

was Proust's and James' investigation of areas of the mind as yet unexamined which anticipated this direction towards the dark areas of psychology.

Furthermore, Beckett's characterization is presented, specifically in the later plays, by a technique which is unique to the 20th century and is associated with Modernist writers. The "stream of consciousness," the term used to describe an internal mental process, became a literary form which attempted to reenact speech/thought and reveal the complex interplay of intellect and emotion, as well as the presence of subconscious and unconscious currents of knowledge and feeling. Virginia Woolf expressed the need for a new form to embody the change in the modern apprehension of the world and human relations in it. The new form was to reflect the greater interest in the psychological landscape and the texture of consciousness in asserting the mind's activity in perceiving the world. She proclaimed:

"Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness."(19)

Virginia Woolf was not alone in reflecting this awareness of a changed perception and the need for a new form. James, Faulkner, Joyce and Conrad, as already mentioned in Chapter six, are amongst some of the writers who reflected the change in sensibility in both their subject matter and form. Chernishevsky asserts a humanist focus, which embraces psychological concerns, to all art when he writes:

"The first end and most important feature of all works of art is . . . the reproduction of things that occur in real life and are of interest to man. By real life, of course, we understand not only man's relation to the object and creature of the objective world but also man's inner life."(20)

The expression of internal states is not new to literature. Shakespeare's soliloquies depicted the state of mind of his characters but their aim was to inform an audience of the character's thoughts and emotions perceived as coherent, ordered and rational. The modernist intention however, was to recreate the internal process

of the mind which was seen as random, fragmented and easily diverted by the multitude of stimuli which impinge upon it. *Not I*, *That time*, *Play* and even earlier plays such as, *Happy Days* and *Krapp's Last Tape* show clearly the congruence of content and form between Beckett and modernist writers.

To understand the modern mind one needs to understand the medium in which this mind exists, and, inevitably, language and the nature of discourse become a major concern. The changes in attitude towards language in the 20th century have already been discussed in Chapter four and Beckett's writing has been shown to depict effective communication. In the early plays, individuals responded and clearly interacted with each other in language that was contemporary, colloquial and appropriate. The language of the introspective plays represents concretely and literally the thoughts and emotions of individuals in the process of consciousness. Beckett's use of language, mundane and recognizably of our lives, furthermore acknowledges the creative function of language in the making of meaning and in constructing a subjective reality. Characters, such as Hamm in *Endgame*, consciously fabricate stories, intertwining their lives and their needs to create a reality which they find acceptable. Mouth in *Not I*, returns repeatedly to her narrative introducing new details and discarding unacceptable items in an attempt to create and structure a new reality. Beckett's language is seen to conform to the demands of both 19th and 20th century realisms thereby suggesting that there exists in essence a continuity of linguistic expectations between the two eras. Both seek to be representational of actual speech, the former of externalized language and the latter of internalized language. The development of Beckett's drama reveals his inclination first to the former and then to the latter.

Two elements which form the dimensions of existence, time and space, have already been mentioned in a discussion of the plays. They need however, to be placed within the context of 19th and 20th century realisms which have been the points of reference of this chapter.

The changes which took place in the presentation of time and space in the 20th century did so because of the concentrated attention given to the individual and his psychology. To be appropriate for the new contracted focus in subject matter, the use of the socio-political environment, the extended presentation of time and space in 19th century Realistic writing, had to be discarded. The change in the presentation of character thus came to affect the perception of both time and place; time was always now, the present of consciousness, and place was located in the mind. The earlier discussion in Chapter three rejected the view that Beckett's characters were symbolical representations and it follows that any abstract and cosmic implications of time and space, as well as their analysis as issues of separate and intrinsic value in themselves, are regarded as incompatible with a realistic presentation of character. Time and space are seen, therefore, as controlled by the requirements of subject matter and as having thus a specific function in each play.

It is interesting to note that the complexity and the paradoxical quality inherent in Beckett's work reveal its affinity with both the correspondence and the coherence theories of realism mentioned in Chapter six. His plays adhere to the correspondence theory in that they portray a reality which exists separately and prior to them, their intention being to imitate the workings of the mind and to reproduce that personal and unique vision of the world. Yet in the minds he depicts, the role of the individual imagination in creating its own perception of reality is acknowledged, and thus the coherence theory of realism becomes an integral part of the plays.

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1. Bentley E. Postscript 1967. In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. Samuel Beckett - The Critical Heritage. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, p. 110.
 2. Tynan, K. Observer, 7 August 1955, 11. In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. op.cit. p. 77.
 3. McLuhan, M. Counterblast. London: Rapp and Whiting, 1970, p. 79.
 4. Harrison, C. and Orton, F. eds. Modernism - Criticism - Realism. New York: Harper and Row, 1984, p. XV.
 5. Kenner, H. Samuel Beckett. London: Thames and Hudson, 1973, p. 211.
 6. Driver, T. Columbia University Forum, Summer, 1961, 21-5. In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. op.cit. p. 221.
 7. Jarry, A. Selected Works of Alfred Jarry. Eds. Shattick, R. and Taylor, W.S. London: Methuen, 1965, p. 70.
 8. Evans, G.L. The Language of Modern Drama, London: Dent, 1977, p. 23.
 9. The use of autobiographical detail was mentioned in Chapter one concerning Not I. Further examples are added here to support the idea that Beckett uses life sources in his plays.
- Bair, D. Samuel Beckett. London: Pan Books, 1980, p. 45.
- The most detailed autobiographical references have been traced in Krapp's Last Tape. In the play, Bair traces references to: Beckett's mother's widowhood and death; Peggy Sinclair, in the

summer of 1929, had read a book called *Effie Briest* and "wept and suffered as she read the novel"; the Baltic where he had spent a holiday with the Sinclairs; Fanny was Cissie Sinclair's other nickname. The gooseberries refer to a striking image which occurs in the opening scenes of *Effie Briest*; the drunkenness was a trait of Beckett's behaviour which had proved a source of tension in his family; the winter storm had been experienced during one of his late night prowls when he had found himself at the end of a jetty in Dublin Harbour; the vision which occurred was to result in the voluminous production of the next few years; the reference to seventeen copies of a book sold, referred to the sale of the French *Murphy*.

Bair, D. *op.cit.* p. 326.

Bair writes of *Waiting for Godot*: "Friends were astonished at how like ordinary conversations the play's dialogue seemed. It was as if Beckett had transported wholesale the teasing, whining, loving, caring and sometimes bitter conversations his friends occasionally overheard." This refers to the relationship between Beckett and his wife, Suzanne.

Bair, D. *op.cit.* p. 408.

Concerning *Endgame*, Beckett had made the comment that Hamm and Clov were actually himself and Suzanne (his wife) as they were in the 1950s when they found it difficult to stay together but impossible to leave each other.

10. Faulkner, P. *Modernism*. London: Methuen, 1977, p. 36.
11. Harvey, L.E. *Samuel Beckett - Poet and Critic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970, p. 421.
12. Bronowski, J. *A Sense of the Future*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1977, p. 224.
13. Spender, S. In: Faulkner, P. *op.cit.* p. 15.

14. Shenker, L. New York Times, 5 May 1956, Section 11, 1, 3.
In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. *op.cit.* p. 148.
15. Esslin, M. *The Theater of the Absurd*. Harmondsworth:
Penguin Books, 1968, p. 44.
16. Bair, D. *op.cit.* p. 327.
17. Driver, T. *Columbia University Forum*, Summer, 1961, 21-5.
In: Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. *op.cit.* p. 219.

Concerning ambiguity, Tom Driver in conversation with Beckett asks:

"Is it not characteristic of the greatest art that it confronts us with something we cannot clarify, demanding that the viewer respond to it in his own never-predictable way? What is the history of criticism but the history of men attempting to make sense of the manifold elements in art that will not allow themselves to be reduced to a single philosophy or a single aesthetic theory? Isn't all art ambiguous?"

18. Robbe-Grillet, A. *Snapshots and towards a New Novel*. Tr.
by Wright, B. London: Calder and Boyars, 1965, p. 64.
19. Woolf, V. In: Faulkner, P. *op.cit.* p. 31.
20. Becker, G.J. *Realism in Modern Literature*. New York:
Frederick Ungar, 1980, p. 27.

CONCLUSION

It is in the nature of all art forms that the individual perception of an artist is filtered by the individual perceptions of his audience during the process of assimilation and interpretation. That there are responses which hinge on religious, linguistic, musical and philosophical aspects of Beckett's plays should, therefore, not be surprising. However, had the plays been replete with the philosophy, the universal statements and symbolical characterization with which criticism has always concerned itself, the response to Beckett would not have been as emotionally charged as it has been(1). Such a response can only be affectively based. Without underestimating the affective qualities of the visual use of light and dark, the sometimes startling sets and the musical tendency of the language,(2) such an intense response is ultimately dependent on an empathic or sympathetic understanding of the work. This necessitates the existence of a common ground of experience and perception of life between the audience and the playwright. For this reason, reality, the concept of realism in all its ramifications, and the concrete essence of the plays, to borrow an idea from Beckett, became the focus of exploration for this dissertation.(3)

There are critical intimations, although no sustained study had been undertaken, to suggest that a realistic basis to Beckett's plays has been recognised. Nightingale comes to the conclusion:

"Late Beckett may be austere but he is not abstract. You can piece together a life-history, or at least a case study, from the hints he strongly feeds us."(4)

Cohn maintains:

"Each of Beckett's plays is best played literally. Beckett conceives his plays concretely, even when the concrete is no heavier than a breath."(5)

Affinities between Beckett's work and the literature of various periods, such as Classicism, Romanticism, and Modernism, have been discussed thus suggesting that his writing is eclectic and capable of transcending the limitations of a particular time.(6) The most persistent label,

that of Absurd dramatist, appears in the light of the previous discussion to be not only confining and reductive but also inappropriate. Chapters three and four concerned with Beckett's characterization and language, and Chapter five which deals with the interpretations of Beckett's plays indicated the fact that the basic assumptions of Absurdism are not present in Beckett's work.

Absurdism is a symbolical form. The elements of its drama are surface outlines which converge to create an image focused on expressing an angst. It lacks the probing and the detail necessary to represent the complexity of the individual and his/her response to the context of existence. Its aims are circumscribed and its achievements, therefore, limited.(7)

Contrary to drama of the Absurd, Beckett's plays, as was revealed in the earlier discussions, contain characters which are psychologically complex beings with distinct personalities; the plays have a plot; cause and effect are implied, thus indicating a continuum in time and negating the imagistic form of Absurd drama; the language is neither an invalid medium of communication nor irrelevant. It is colloquial, consists of speech acts, and thus is a means of interaction, reproduces, and thereby discloses, the movement of consciousness. Furthermore, the universe of Beckett's plays is not irrational; it is unknown and therefore, uncertain. His plays, balanced by paradox, use a tragic canvas but the picture includes comic brushstrokes, and this blend of the tragic and the ludicrous evokes a sense of compassion and acceptance absent in Absurd drama. Given these differences, to call Beckett an Absurd dramatist appears a misnomer.(8) A dissatisfaction with this label is expressed by Mercier who cites Racine and Sartre as models for Beckett in order to disclaim the Absurdist label:

"In retrospect, it is easy to see why the absurdist label was so mistakenly pinned to *Waiting for Godot* and then, inevitably, to the plays that followed. One of the chief reasons for this misunderstanding was, paradoxically, Beckett's adoption or adaptation of neo-classical form. The French drama critics were looking for a linear structure in *Godot*; confronted instead with a circular one, they almost unanimously decided that there was no structure at all. Accustomed on the whole, to

praise plays that were crowded with action, they forgot Racine's admirable phrase about making something out of nothing; they must even have forgotten Sartre's masterpiece, *Huis Clos* (No Exit), in which once the three principal characters have arrived on stage, nobody comes and nobody is allowed to go."(9)

Beckett's main contribution and originality to the theatre has been his ability to render the movement of the individual consciousness as a dramatic experience; that is, to create a presence out of what had been the evanescent material of thoughts and feelings. His concern with the presentation of emotional states and neurotic reactions suggests that his inclinations are towards psychology rather than philosophy, and the specific rather than the abstract. Although Beckett adheres to the tenets of 19th century Realism, his expression of the sense of uncertainty which underlies every aspect of the intellectual and emotional life of this century indicates that he reflects the dominant perception of the reality of his time. That his work is rooted in a realist tradition has been the conclusion of this research.

ENDNOTES

1. These issues are discussed in Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 5 which deal respectively with the intellectual background to Beckett's works, the plays themselves, the characterization and the various interpretations of Beckett's works.
2. See Chapter 2, Chapter 4 pp. 70-72, Chapter 5 pp. 87-88 and p. 102, endnote 13.
3. See Chapter 6, the discussion on realism and Chapter 7, the connection between realism and Beckett's work.
4. Nightingale, B. New Statesman, 28 May 1976, 723. In:
Graver, L. and Federman, R. eds. *Samuel Beckett - The Critical Heritage*, p. 347.
5. Cohn, R. *Back to Beckett*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, p. 218.
6. See Chapter 5 "Interpretations of Beckett's Plays".
7. Esslin, M. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968.

Esslin isolated and described a group of plays and playwrights who did not conform with the established conventions of the "well-made" play and identified the Drama of the Absurd. pp. 19-28. *Waiting for Godot* was regarded as the seminal play of this tradition.
8. Chapter 5 pp. 93-97 compare Beckett's work with Absurd drama and suggest differences which should exclude him from such a classification.
9. Mercier, V. *Beckett/Beckett*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 84.

APPENDIX

A CHRONOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF BECKETT'S WORK

1929

Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce (criticism)

Assumption. (short story)

Whoroscope. (poetry)

1930

For Future Reference. (poetry)

Anna Livia Plurabelle (text by Joyce, translated into French)

1931

Proust (criticism)

Four poems (poetry)

Alba (poetry)

Le Kid (play)

1932

Sedendo et Qulescendo (prose extract)

Text (prose extract)

Dante and the Lobster (short story)

Dream of Fair to Middling Women (novel-unfinished)

1934

Recent Irish Poetry. (article)

A Case in a Thousand (short story)

More Pricks than Kicks (novel - made up of a series of short stories)

Three reviews on Pound, Dante and O'Casey.

1935

Echo's Bones (poetry)

1936

Review of novel by Jack Yeats.

Cascando (poetry)

1938

Ooftish (poetry)

Murphy (novel)

Les Deux Besoins (essay)

1943

Watt (novel)

1945

Review of Thomas McGreevy's Book on Jack Yeats

Les Peintures des Van Velde; our le monde et le pantalon (essay)

Dieppe (poetry - translated into English)

1946

Saint - L^o (poetry)

12 poems (poetry)

Suite (novel)

Mercier et Camier (novel)

L'Expulsé (novel)

Premier Amour (novel)

Le Calmant (novel)

1947

Molloy (novel)

Eleuthéria (play - unpublished)

Murphy (novel - Murphy translated into French)

1948

Trois poèmes (poetry)

Malone meurt (novel)

1949

Three dialogues with Georges Duthuit (criticism)

En Attendant Godot (play)

1950

L'Innomable (novel)

1954

Waiting for Godot (play - En Attendant Godot translated into English)

1955

Nouvelles et textes pour rien (short stories and prose)

Molloy (novel - Molloy translated in English)

1956

From an Abandoned Work (novel)

Malone dies (novel - Malone meurt translated into English)

1957

Fin de Partie (play)

All that fall (radio play)
Tous ceux qui tombent (radio play - All that fall translated into French)
Acte sans paroles I (mime)

1958

Krapp's Last Tape (play)
The Unnamable (novel - L'Innomable translated into English)
Endgame (play - Fin de Partie translated into English)
Anthology of Mexican Poetry (translation)

1959

Embers (radio play)

1960

La Dernière Bande (play - Krapp's Last Tape translated into French)
Company (novel)
Act Without Words II (mime)

1961

Comment c'est (novel)
Happy Days (play)
Poems in English (poetry)

1962

Words and Music (radio play)

1963

Oh les beaux jours (play - Happy Days translated into French)
Cascando (radio play)

1964

Play (play)

Comédie (play - Play translated into French)

How it is (novel - Comment c'est translated into English)

1965

Film (film)

Imagination morte imaginez (novel)

Imagination dead imagine (novel - Imagination morte imaginez
translated into English)

Come and Go (play)

Assez (novel)

1966

Bing (novel)

Va et Vient (play - Come and Go translated into French)

Eh Joe (T.V. play)

1967

Stories and Texts for Nothing (prose - Nouvelles et Texte
pour rien translated into English)

No's Knife: Collected Shorter Prose 1947 - 1966 (prose - most
translated into English)

L'Issue (novel)

Watt (novel - Watt translated into French)

1969

Sans (novel)

1970

Lessness (novel - Sans translated into English)

1971

Le Dépeupleur (novel)

1972

The Lost Ones (novel - Le Dépeupleur translated into English)
Not I (play)

1973

First Love (novel - Premier Amour translated into English)
Breath and other shorts (plays)

1974

Mercier and Camier (novel - Mercier et Camier translated into English)
First Love and other Shorts (prose and plays collection includes
Enough and Ping)
Pas Moi (play - Not I translated into French)

1976

Pour finir encore et autres foirades (novel)
For to end yet again (novel - Pour finir encore et autres
foirades translated into English)
Ends and Odds (plays and "roughs" for theatre and radio New York
edition entitled Fizzles)

That time (play)
Footfalls (play)

1977

Ghost Trio (T.V. Play)
... but the clouds ... (T.V. play)
Drunken Boat (poetry - translation of Rimbaud's Le Bateau Ivre)

1979

A Piece of Monologue (play)

1981

Rockabye (play)

Ohio Impromptu (play)

Mal vu mal dit (novel)

1982

Ill seen ill said (novel - mal vu mal dit translated into English)

Disjecta (prose, criticism and a dramatic fragment)

Worstword Ho (novel)

1984

Catastrophe (play)

Collections of Beckett's already published works are mentioned only if they include new writing or a new translation.

All the translations mentioned, except the *Anthology of Mexican Poetry*, are from or to, English and French.

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