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Voices of suffering and hope: The world of childhood terror and loss in the plays of Samuel Beckett

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City University of New York, 1992

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VOICES OF SUFFERING AND HOPE:

THE WORLD OF CHILDHOOD TERROR AND LOSS

IN THE PLAYS OF SAMUEL BECKETT

by

Andrea G. Bell

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the City University of New York

1992

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INTRODUCTION

Samuel Beckett has been widely acknowledged as a voice of our age. One of this century's most influential writers, Beckett fashioned a theatre which altered the course of contemporary drama as radically as his prose transformed the conventions and direction of post-war fiction. The voices, landscapes, and images which we have come to recognize as distinctly Beckettian continue to haunt the modern imagination. Beckett's stark dramatic landscapes and unconventional stage images, which had initially baffled and even outraged many audiences, have long since been recognized as archetypal and highly evocative representations of the plight of humanity in the post-war era. Beckett's characters are among the most notable literary achievements of this century; their solitary voices, once thought to be inhuman cries at odds with dramatic convention, are now regarded as profoundly moving expressions of human suffering and hope. Their bodily decrepitude and ugliness, once thought to be incompatible with art, are now looked upon as concrete embodiments of the human condition.

A woman buried up to her neck in a mound of scorched sand; a legless, aging couple kept by their blind. wheelchair-bound son in garbage cans; a woman rocking herself to death; a heavily-lipsticked, disembodied mouth; a pair of homeless vagabonds; a

man on all fours tied by a rope around his neck to his master; a dishevelled and weary old man embracing a tape recorder--these are Beckett's stage images which have captured the modern imagination. As one witnesses Beckett's characters comically and with great pathos navigate through the dark and mysterious terrain of their dramatic landscapes, and as one listens to their voices cry out in the barren wilderness, one is caught in the grip of a powerful force. For one acknowledges an uncanny resemblance, struck by the impression that one is witnessing a scene that is at once terribly strange and unfamiliar and, at the same time, reminiscent of something experienced most deeply and privately, something unmistakably known and real. Beckett's plays provide a terrible yet liberating validation that what one has kept sealed off in silence and in secrecy, even from oneself, is not only real, but is also shared. The solace that so many claim to derive from seeing a performance of one of Beckett's plays has to do in part with this curious kind of self-reflection and self-validation they offer. For we have come to recognize that the anguished voices of Beckett's drama are our voices; we have come to see in the nightmarish images and austere Beckettian landscapes reflections of our own psychic geography.

With relentless and uncompromising integrity, Beckett captures in his plays the forces of tyranny and brutality, the apocalyptic horror, and the profound sense of futility and despair that have come to define life in a century ravaged by two world wars. Beckett's characters live in a world stripped of

meaning, without homes, without promise of release or salvation, without futures, and with pasts that weigh heavily but from which they are irrevocably divorced. And yet Beckett holds out hope for humanity in his piercing and evocative portrayals of this raging cast of solitary survivors, who suffer mercilessly and yet somehow go on, with their immense sadness and their sorrow; with their mordant, self-deprecating humor; and with their caustic and savage wit.

Few writers of this century have inspired the kind of critical activity that the work of Samuel Beckett continues to generate. Studies of Beckett's plays have been most notable for their range and diversity. Following is a brief overview of the kinds of approaches to Beckett's plays that have dominated the critical landscape over the last thirty years.[1] In studies with a philosophical orientation critics generally emphasize the metaphysical, epistemological, and religious dimensions of Beckett's work, identify its philosophical underpinnings, and call attention to the existential anxiety which afflicts its characters. Scholars approaching Beckett's plays from a linguistic perspective focus on Beckett's linguistic difficulty and originality and on how Beckett's radical use of language (and silence) shatters dramatic convention. Similarly, critics approaching Beckett from a formal or generic perspective have shown how Beckett's texts defy easy

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[1]Because there has been so much written on Beckett's plays, I shall include references to critical works on specific plays in the relevant chapters.

generic classification by breaking and perhaps re-defining the boundaries of generic form. Such studies generally conclude either that generic classifications need to be redefined to accommodate Beckett's plays or that it is impossible to assign to these works a generic classification. In stressing the relationship between the philosophical themes of Beckett's work in drama and its language and form, critics such as Martin Esslin have identified the self-reflexivity of Beckett's art, the essential oneness of its medium and message. Finally, critics who approach Beckett from a dramaturgical perspective emphasize such questions as staging; crafting of the scenes; movement; gesture; timing; the unusual demands that Beckett's dramatic texts place on actors, directors, and audiences; and the theatrical heritage out of which Beckett's plays have evolved.

Though such studies have done much to illuminate Beckett's linguistic and formal originality and the philosophical richness and scope of his art, they also have overlooked important dimensions of how and why his plays work and they have fallen short of adequately explaining their impact on audiences. There is a substantial divide between the recorded responses to Beckett's plays and discussion about them in the critical discourse. The space between the depth of feeling elicited by Beckett's plays and the high level of philosophical abstraction which predominates in the scholarly research needs to be eliminated.

It is not surprising that so many studies have emphasized

the abstract, philosophical dimensions of Beckett's plays. Philosophical inquiry into Beckett is indeed appropriate; his characters are plagued by metaphysical anxiety and many of his works are centrally concerned with questions of epistemology, metaphysics, and religion. Such matters cannot be reduced to psychology. Yet there is in Beckett's dramatic works an ongoing dialectic between the abstract philosophical and the felt psychological, between the intellectual and the emotional. How these interpenetrating realms of experience co-exist in Beckett's plays can be observed in the shifts within them between language and silence, movement and stasis.

Many critics have attested to the need for a psychological approach to Beckett's work; indeed, it is worth noting how few have undertaken such an approach, given both the sophisticated psychological apparatus that is available to the psychologically oriented reader and critic and given especially the deep psychological resonances to which readers and audiences responding to Beckett's work have testified time and again. Only very recently in the critical discourse on Beckett have scholars begun to acknowledge what many audiences and readers have long suspected--that Beckett's dramatic worlds evoke real, concrete experiences in the history of the individual and in the collective consciousness of our age. Yet even in these studies one notes a reluctance to pursue a clear, coherent, and

systematic account of the psychological dimensions of his work.[2] Beckett scholarship still has yet to illuminate fully the powerful appeal of Beckett's protagonists or the psychic significance of the symbolic geography that they inhabit. Thus, a critical appraisal of Beckett's work must, if it is to add anything of value to the immense body of Beckett criticism that has already been produced, explore the deeper regions of Beckett's psychological relevance, importance, and appeal than have heretofore been considered in Beckett scholarship.

Beckett himself provides the justification for a psychological approach to his work when he says of the artistic process that " . . . the only possible spiritual development is in the sense of depth. The artistic tendency is not expansive, but a contraction. Art is the apotheosis of solitude . . . the only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a descent. The artist is active, but negatively, shrinking from the world of extracircumferential phenomena, drawn into the core of the eddy" (Proust 56-57). I take Beckett's credo not only as descriptive of his art, but also as prescriptive, as a cue for the reader. There is much fertile ground for research awaiting the critic who

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[2]One notable exception is Thomas J. Cousineau's Waiting for Godot: Form in Movement (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1990) which approaches Waiting for Godot in terms of what he calls its "anti- Oedipal tendencies." Cousineau argues that there is a maternal presence in Waiting for Godot which acts in opposition to the barrenness and sterility of its landscape and which mitigates against the existential anxiety that plagues Vladimir and Estragon. While I too see the importance of the maternal in Godot, in my view she is anything but nurturing. I have much to say in the next chapter on Waiting for Godot about this matter.

journeys into the subterranean world of Beckett's protagonists and enters the psychic "space" suggested by their symbolic (and often quite literal) archaeological descents; this kind of excavatory approach is consistent with Beckett's description of the artistic process.

This is what I shall attempt in the following pages. I shall provide a close reading of Beckett's dramatic texts, placing particular emphasis on Beckett's use of language (and silence). In so doing I shall argue that a generative source of Beckett's visionary power and widespread appeal are the voices of childhood which resonate and recur throughout his plays. Beckett's plays present an uncanny recreation of childhood experience; they also render intelligible the pernicious and insidious influence of buried childhood memories on the experience of his adult characters. Moreover, the picture of childhood experience which Beckett paints and with which audiences so strongly identify, convinces us that childhood is more often than not a terrifying and painful stage of life, characterized by profound experiences of sadness, loss, betrayal, rage, impotence, loneliness, and isolation. The bodily origins of such experiences find expression in the viscerally felt existential anxiety that plagues all of Beckett's protagonists. Beckett's plays expose instances of parental tyranny and brutality and give expression to the pain and anguish children suffer at the hands of those on whom they are dependent.

The picture of childhood that emerges from a consideration

of Beckett's dramatic ouvre is in many ways consistent with the views of childhood presented by Alice Miller in such works as The Drama of the Gifted Child (New York: Basic Books, 1981) and Thou Shalt Not be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child (New York: Penguin, 1984).[3] In her intelligent and balanced approach, Miller illuminates the shortcomings of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, and presents alternatives to Freud's important but profoundly limited "discoveries" about childhood psycho-sexual development. In documented studies, Miller depicts the extremes of (emotional, sexual, and physical) abuse suffered by countless numbers of the world's children. She also offers proof that parental cruelty and childhood suffering are functions of conventional child-rearing practices, and not, as has been conventionally thought, aberrations or deviations therefrom. Also relevant to an exploration of the voices of the childhood terror and loss in Beckett's plays are Miller's insights into the stifling ban on self-disclosure that imprisons children in a solitary world of pain and sadness, children whose survival has depended on their remaining silent about the abuses to which they have been subjected. As Miller documents through case studies and as Louise DeSalvo proves beyond dispute in her book on

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[3]Rather than elucidating here all of Miller's reformulations of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, I shall present them in broad outline. I shall cite and refer the reader to the specific passages in Miller's texts as these become relevant to the play under consideration.

Virginia Woolf,[4] unless such individuals are able to "break the silence" about the suffering they endured as children, patterns of abuse will repeat themselves throughout successive generations, with parents who were themselves the victims of childhood abuse using their children to satisfy their own unmet childhood needs. Thus is the vicious cycle of abuse perpetuated through the generations with unrelenting force.

Other revisionist approaches to psychoanalytic theory are relevant to the analysis of childhood experience in Beckett's plays, in particular those of the American and English object-relations theorists and those of the (Lacanian) French feminists. Although many consider the views of these two "camps" irreconcilable, the reformualtions of both groups have provided valuable tools for disclosing important elements of character in Beckett's plays. The object-relations theorists, for example, take a fresh look at the role of the mother in relation to a child's psycho-sexual development. In so doing they have been successful in providing a model for understanding problems in psycho-sexual development in terms of the infant's pre-oedipal attachment to the mother. Moreover, the insights of the French feminists into the relationship between language, desire, and identity, particularly during infancy and childhood, have been extremely valuable with regard to the central concern in Beckett's plays with characters' relationship to words and to

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[4]Louise DeSalvo, Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on her Life and Work (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

language. Beckett calls attention to this relationship in each of his dramatic works.

Often Beckett's presentation of childhood experience is direct, in works whose characters are actual children or in which adult protagonists are plagued by memories of their childhoods which the author makes explicit; elsewhere the voices of childhood are less explicit, but equally if not more potent and pervasive influences. In such instances the barely audible cries of childhood are discernible in the voices of adult (and often aged) protagonists who are haunted by buried memories of childhood pain and compelled by unconscious forces to re-enact them. Although such characters might not be aware of the childhood roots of their suffering, their repeated re-enactments of scenes of childhood trauma impress this awareness upon audiences.

The biographical implications of my approach to Beckett's plays will no doubt occur to readers. The question of the relevance of what is known about Beckett's own childhood to the tragic conditions of childhood documented in his work is interesting and important. However, I have chosen for several reasons to confine this study to Beckett's plays and not to his life. Firstly, there is too much material in the dramatic literature that has yet to be explored to make it possible for one study to devote itself to both. Moreover, speculations about the relationship between the author's life and his work can be dangerous and misleading, especially where the facts of the

author's life have not been fully documented. Where relevant facts about Beckett's life which have been documented (in Deirdre Bair's 1978 biography) have a direct bearing on the text under consideration, I shall cite them. However, to treat adequately the connection between Beckett's life and his work would take an entirely separate and quite different kind of book than the one that I have set out to write. Additionally, the question of whether Beckett himself was an abused child becomes less urgent in light of a central premise of this study--that the tyranny and subjugation which Beckett documents in his plays define the psychic condition of our age.

In identifying and exploring Beckett's dramatic representations of childhood terror and loss I also consider related dimensions of his plays which have heretofore remained somewhat elusive. In particular I address the question of the political in Beckett by elucidating the connection his plays posit between the private and the public spheres of life, between parental and political forms of tyranny. Although he is never didactic and his works espouse no political cause, Beckett is a decidedly political writer. Beckett's plays firmly establish the view that the personal is political and that power struggles in the global arena have their counterpart in interfamilial struggles for dominance and control.

Beckett brings the forces of political tyranny and oppression closer to home, quite literally. In our identification with Beckett's solitary wanderers and nameless

voices, we realize that in fact we have no home, if by home is meant a place of safety and security. Home in Beckett's world becomes a place of nightmare, terror, and trauma; home is where one first encounters a world that is hostile, alien, and indifferent to one's needs. It is where the conditions of political tyranny and terror are experienced in their original and most destructive forms, leaving wounds that never heal and the tragic loss of a self that barely has a chance to be formed.

Among the more remarkable qualities of Beckett's writing for the theatre is its potential to restore hope and provide solace. This restorative power can be attributed in part to Beckett's use of language and silence. Thus I pay very close attention to the words in Beckett's plays and to the spaces between them as well, especially as these relate to the conditions of childhood that are the focus of this study. Beckett himself has said that "the experience of my reader [or audience] shall be between the phrases, in the silence, communicated by the intervals, not the terms, of the statement. . . . his experience shall be the menace, the miracle, the memory, of an unspeakable trajectory" ("Dream of Fair to Midling Women," 1930).

Unlike other texts about childhood experience, and as a result of their self-reflexivity, Beckett's works are not in any conventional sense <u>about</u> childhood (or <u>about</u> anything, for that matter). Rather they recreate a world into which the audience is immersed. Instead of witnessing a scene about childhood, one

participates in the dramatic re-enactment of childhood experience, re-experiencing the child's pain and terror as well as his eternal hope, with all of the original power and intensity of such feelings. Hence, the cathartic effects of Beckett's work.

Further, this self-reflexivity is also located in his protagonists' preoccupation, even obsession, with language, with expression, with silence, and with the process of writing. For Beckett's characters, problems of speech and of utterance are inextricably bound to the problems of identity caused by childhood suffering. In some cases this is because characters have been condemned to silence; in others it is because their trauma originated during a pre-verbal stage of development. For those of Beckett's characters unable or forbidden to speak of the horrors to which they have been subjected as children, the power to speak acquires profound associations, among them shame, self-loathing, and terror, feelings which should rightfully belong to the perpetrator, but which inevitably, and tragically, befall the victim. Yet Beckett's uncanny ability to give expression to the child's voice, even when it is the voice of silence, restores the power to know and to express even when what is expressed is, in Beckett's words, the fact that "there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express" ("Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit" 1940).

A few words are in order regarding my approach and

methodology. Beckett's plays have been compared to the Rorschach blots used by psychoanalysts to learn about new patients: in the process of interpretation one invariably reveals more (or as much) about oneself than about the play under consideration. To some extent, such a claim can be made of almost all interpretive acts: "meaning" resides somewhere in the space between audience (or reader) and performance (or text). That Beckett's plays demand that the audience participate more actively and become more involved as co-creators of "meaning" than does the work of a more conventional, less innovative playwright is nevertheless the case. This is due in part to the linguistic spareness of Beckett's plays and to the barrenness of their physical landscapes. In Beckett's plays, the silences and pauses carry as much weight, convey as much "meaning" as do the words; they are the "nothing" out of which the audience/reader attempts to make "something." There is often something baffling and beguiling about watching a Beckett play in performance; often the spectator feels as if something has been omitted. The plays tantalize the audience with the promise of knowledge to which we never quite gain access, which always just eludes us; we can't but suspect that something has been withheld, buried, suppressed.[5] I shall

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[5]When Alan Schneider, who was to direct the first American production of Waiting for Godot, asked Beckett who or what was meant by Godot, Beckett replied, "If I knew I would have said so in the play" (Alan Schneider, "Waiting for Beckett," Chelsea Review, New York, Autumn, 1958). Schneider's question suggests the almost inescapable feeling of readers and viewers who suspect Beckett of deliberately withholding information that is crucial to resolving the questions the play raises. Yet I do not think that Beckett is being cagey; we have to believe him when he claims not to know who

have much to say about this "omission" in the text as it applies to each play. Yet its overall effect is to compel the viewer to "finish the text," to fill in its gaps and ommissions, in a more active way than that required by more conventional dramatic works. Hence, the "truth" about the work one discovers is as likely to apply to oneself as it is to the text. Ideally, it will apply to both.

I have chosen for several reasons to focus in this study on Beckett's plays and not on the fiction, even though the theme of childhood terror and loss plays a significant role in both. Where there are strong parallels between a play under discussion and a work of fiction I shall refer the reader to the relevant passages of the narrative in question. However, I am most interested here in how Beckett uses and redefines the boundaries of the stage (and of radio and television drama as well) and in particular I would like to explore how questions of language and genre are central to and in many cases the same as questions of theme. Again, the medium and the message are one.

I am also concerned with audience response to Beckett's work; the special nature of the theatrical experience is itself an important consideration when exploring the effects of Beckett's work on audiences. Such matters as character, setting, space, time, language, silence, gesture, stage images, and props,

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or what Godot is. What is significant here is that the relationship of the audience to Waiting for Godot parallels the relationship of Vladimir and Estragon to their world; like Vladimir and Estragon, the audience must grapple with fundamental questions to which there are no available answers.

are essential to a consideration of dramatic impact and audience response. Moreover, the vocabulary of the theatre is different from the language of critical discourse on fiction. And finally, the impact of one genre depends on an entirely separate set of considerations than that of the other. The solitary act of reading, for example, is significantly different from the shared, communal nature of the theatrical experience; these differences have important implications when exploring the impact of a particular work.

Finally, dramatic conventions limit the playwright more substantially than the writer of fiction is constrained by the conventions of narrative form. For Beckett, these restrictions were a welcome relief; the formal constraints of the stage provided Beckett with "a form to acommodate the mess" which was unavailable to him as a writer of fiction. Beckett found writing plays much less taxing than having to deal with what he called "the wildness and rulelessness" of the novel. And yet even though Beckett considered that the limits imposed by theatrical convention were a needed diversion from the chaos induced by the writing of fiction, it is clear that as a playwright he had to do more with less.

For example, the theater has been referred to as the medium of the present tense. The writer of fiction has ample opportunity to digress about a character's past that is not available to the playwright. And yet in Beckett's plays the weight of time past is palpable and pervasive. In fiction the

writer can endow a character with a psychological history; explore in great detail his thoughts and opinions (and comment on them); and comment (ironically, for instance) on a particular character or event. The playwright does not have these options. Theatre has also been called the medium of presence. And yet Beckett uses it to dramatize absence by transforming absence into a palpable presence.

These and other questions of genre are central to my approach to the psychological dimensions of Beckett's work. At the very least an entire book is needed to address these concerns. Thus I have limited this study to an exploration of the work Beckett wrote for the theatre.

Chapter I:

Waiting for Godot

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

Estragon: All the dead voices.
Vladimir: They make a noise like wings.
Estragon: Like leaves.
Vladimir: Like sand.
Estragon: Like leaves.

Silence.

Vladimir: Rather they whisper.
Estragon: They rustle.
Vladimir: They murmer.
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.

"Astride of a grave and a difficult birth, down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps."

Vladimir and Estragon, the central figures of Waiting for Godot, are two homeless vagabonds, destitute and aging. When we first meet them and for the duration of the play, they are waiting by the side of a deserted country road for the arrival of an elusive and mysterious figure named Godot, who they believe in some vague way will put an end to their suffering and validate their painfully precarious existences. They do not know whether Godot will arrive, nor do they know what will happen to them if he does. Both are in constant physical distress. Estragon suffers from nightmares. Vladimir, the more intellectual of the two, is consumed by questions of salvation and damnation. Estragon struggles with his boots which are too small for him; Vladimir is pained by his hat. When Estragon is hungry Vladimir gives him a carrot or a radish to eat. Neither can remember what they did yesterday, nor can they establish with any certainty even the most fundamental facts of their existence. They contemplate committing suicide, but decide not to because "it's safer"--each is terrified of being left alone without the other. Like an old, married couple they bicker about how they would be better off alone and yet they do not, or cannot, part.

Each of the play's acts spans a single day, during the course of which Vladimir and Estragon devise games to play to pass the time while they wait for Godot and to keep their growing

despair at bay. They play at being Pozzo and Lucky, at being the tree, at abusing each other, at contradicting each other, and at making up. At times, when habit and language break down, they are left confronting the pain and precariousness of their existences. Waiting for Godot is comprised of a perfectly balanced oscillation between humor and pathos concerning the suffering of its central figures, between, on the one hand, their comic habits and ploys and, on the other, their piercing anguish when habit fails. Beckett's writings in Proust on habit are illuminating in this regard. Habit, Beckett explains, 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, Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit. Breathing is habit. Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals; the world being a projectiobn of individual consciousness . . . the pact must be continually renewed . . . (7-8).

Thus the

> periods of transition that separate consecutive adaptations [of habit] . . . represent the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being. (8)

When Vladimir and Estragon enter a "perilous zone" their dialogue becomes suffused with tenderness and compassion as they offer each other what little solace there is to be had amidst all of

their anguish and confusion, amidst "the suffering of being." Their condidion is one of total privation and lack; stripped bare, like Lear on the heath, they endure the injustice of the tyrannical forces which hold them hostage, but which they cannot name.

On each day Vladimir and Estragon are visited by another pair of aging figures, the tyrant/master Pozzo and his servant/slave, Lucky, though when these two return on the second day, Pozzo blind and Lucky dumb, Pozzo claims not to recall having been there the day before. At the end of each act Vladimir and Estragon are also visited by a young Boy who claims to be Godot's messenger and who comes each time bearing the same message, that Godot will not be there tonight but that surely he will arrive tomorrow. He too claims not to recall having seen Vladimir and Estragon on the previous evening. When he leaves, Vladimir and Estragon, disappointed again and still despairing, yet clinging to the hope aroused by the young Boy's promise, resume their agonized waiting in this barren place where "nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful."

The solace that so many claim to derive from seeing a performance of Godot can be attributed in part to Beckett's having found a language to capture experiences which reside essentially outside the grasp of words. Beckett's use of words, silence, movement, gesture, and setting in Godot gives voice to a pre-verbal realm of consciousness. By focusing on the interplay of several key elements in the play--its "psychic geography,"

i.e., its desolate and austere physical landscape; its use of words, silence, gesture, and movement; the demands the play places on audiences (as well as on actors and directors); and its characters (both absent and present)--I would like to explore how Waiting for Godot offers audiences a dramatic recreation of the pre-verbal memories of infancy and childhood buried in the collective unconscious of the human race.

The single most important feature of Waiting for Godot is the relationship of Vladimir and Estragon to the absent Godot. The action of the play is, paradoxically, a non-action: waiting. Thus, the most oft-quoted statement from the critical commentary on Waiting for Godot is Vivien Mercier's claim that it is a play in which "nothing happens, twice" (23). However witty Mercier's comment may be, it is finally either inaccurate or implicitly ironic. For Beckett himself has said that "nothing is more real than nothing." In Waiting for Godot nothing becomes something palpable and real; absence attains a definite presence. Alain Robbe-Grillet has claimed that "the stage is the privileged resort of presence" and that "the essential thing about a chartacter in a play is that he is 'on the scene': There."[1] Robbe-Grillet contends that Beckett's achievement in the theatre is the realization of absence in the medium of presence. Indeed the absent Godot acquires a very powerful presence in the play.

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[1]Alain Robbe-Grillet, "Samuel Beckett, or Presence in the Theatre," trans. Barbara Bray, from Pour en nouveau roman (Paris, 1963); reprinted in Martin Esslin, Ed. Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965) 115, 108.

There is little that Beckett's characters experience with as much intensity as they do their anguish over the desolation and emptiness, the nothingness, within and around them.

Vladimir and Estragon's anguished, obsessive waiting for Godot is their raison d'etre. But Godot does not arrive. We know this even before the curtain opens because Godot does not appear in our programs. And we know it because of the play's internal logic. Godot's sole dramatic function is not to come. If he did the play would collapse. Beckett's writings in Proust about desire and fulfillment are illuminating in this regard:

> The aspirations of yesterday were valid for yesterday's ego, not for today's. We are disappointed at the nullity of what we are pleased to call attainment. But what is attainment? The identification of the subject with the object of his desire. The subject has died--and perhaps many times--on the way. (3)

As the object of Vladimir and Estragon's desire, Godot remains, inevitably and eternally, absent.

When Beckett told Alan Schneider that if he knew who or what Godot was he would have said so in the play, he is implicitly cautioning him (and us) to resist the temptation to establish Godot's identity, for he does not have one. Rather Godot exists in the imagination. "The world is a projection of individual consciousness," Beckett writes in Proust. That Godot is a creation of the (collective) consciousnesses of Vladimir and Estragon is suggested on several occasions in the play. Despite their ardent hope for Godot's arrival, it is clear that they have

no idea what will happen to them if and when Godot arrives. On one hand they imagine that Godot will put and end to their suffering. And yet in Act II when they mistakenly think that they hear Godot approaching, rather than reacting with the joy and sense of relief that one might expect, they tremble with terror as they prepare to face Godot. On another occasion Estragon imagines that Godot is coming because he thinks he hears him yelling. When Vladimir asks him who Godot is yelling at Estragon says, "his horses." The two continually reinvent Godot as they go along.

That so many individuals have identified Godot as God is not surprising; Beckett makes the analogy difficult to resist, not only in the name Godot, but also in the religious allusions that appear with such frequency in the play. Beckett insisted, however, that theological or philosophical "meanings" were just not there in the play. The play itself contains an implicit warning against the simple equation that Godot equals God when Vladimir, at the end of Act II, asks Godot's messenger, "Has [Godot] a beard?" "Yes sir," the boy responds. "Fair or . . . (he hesitates) . . . black?" Estragon continues. "I think it's white, Sir," says the boy. "Christ have mercy on us!" Vladimir cries in response. Vladimir is horrified to learn that Godot's appearance conforms to the traditional image of God that has been embedded for centuries in Judeo-Christian thought. The implication here is either that (Vladimir's) Godot is decidedly not to be identified with God, or, even more menacing, that the

supposedly benevolent force in whose love people seek refuge and salvation, is in fact a cruel and merciless jokester, and that Vladimir and Estragon as well as "all of humanity" are his dupes.

That Vladimir and Estragon secretely know that they have created their conception of Godot and that he does not exist outside of the realm of their imaginations is suggested on several occasions throughout the play. Much of the play's "action" consists of their attempts to keep this knowledge at bay. In particular the games they play serve this purpose. However, none of their ploys are as effective at warding off their terror as are the language games that they devise. Vladimir and Estragon use language not as a vehicle of communication but rather as a defense and a means of protection. The two play verbal games to conceal from themselves their own suspicions abou the absent Godot--that he exists solely in their imaginations. That language is used as a game is suggested in Vladimir's comment to Estragon following a particularly time-consuming exchange" "That was a nice little canter." It is also apparent when for a moment Estragon refuses to respond to Vladimir, who subsequently cries, "Come on, Gogo, throw the ball once in a way, can't you?" As long as each agrees to play, the time will pass and they will have survived yet another day of unfulfilled longing.

Occasionally the language games that Vladimir and Estragon play open a window onto the play's central paradox: that not only have they invented Godot and endowed him with power over their

lives, but that they have hinged their hopes of "salvation" on an arrival of one who by (their own) definition cannot materialize:

Vladimir: Let's wait and see what he says.
Estragon: Who?
Vladimir: Godot.
Estragon: Good idea.
Vladimir: Let's wait until we know exactly how we stand.
Estragon: On the other hand it might be better to strike the iron before it freezes.
Vladimir: I'm curious to hear what he has to offer. Then we'll take it or leave it.
Estragon: What exactly did we ask him for?
Vladimir: Were you not there?
Estragon: I can't have been listening.
Vladimir: Oh . . . nothing very definite.
Estragon: A kind of prayer.
Vladimir: Precisely.
Estragon: A vague supplication.
Vladimir: Exactly.
Estragon: And what did he reply?
Vladimir: That he'd see.
Estragon: That he couldn't promise anything.
Vladimir: That he'd have to think it over.
Estragon: In the wuiet of his home.
Vladimir: Consult his family.
Estragon: His friends.
Vladimir: His correspondents.
Estragon: His books.
Vladimir: His bank account.
Estragon: Before taking a decision.
Vladimir: It's the normal thing.
Estragon: Is it not?
Vladimir: I think it is.
Estragon: I think so too.

As they wind down and run out of steam silence fills the air. One feels as if these words have merely punctuated the silence. Only for short intervals of time are Vladimir and Estragon able to sustain each new game, each successive attempt to create something out of nothing.

The subtext of the preceeding exchange is that Vladimir and

Estragon are waiting in vain, that Godot willnot come, that Godot exists only in their own eternally hopeful imaginations. This time when they re-invent Godot he becomes a businessman with a family, friends, a banker, and an agent. On one hand these designations seem entirely arbitrary--the words just leap spontaneously from Vladimir and Estragon's mouths. On the other hand, the depiction of Godot here seems to mock both the human conception of God (as father) and the conventional father as well, by turning Godot into a typical beourgios businessman, the absent paternal figure, too busy with his bank accounts and correspondents to care for his dependents.

Vladimir and Estragon must re-invent Godot as they go along in order to keep his image from disappearing. Each new invention is another projection, like a child's fantasy, which tells us nothing about Godot but a great deal about his creators and their psychic needs. The games that Vladimir and Estragon play, the ploys that they use, the stories they tell, and their fantasies of Godot, are like so much child's play--games devised by the solitary child to fill the void and to alleviate the terrible sense of emptiness and disappointment brought on by a parent who is absent, indifferent, negligent, or otherwise incapable of meeting the needs of one's child. Godot's identity is so elusive and changable because he has been created in response to elusive and even conflicting needs within his makers. Sometimes Godot is a benevolent savior; sometimes he is a tyrannical oppressor.

When Vladimir and Estragon idealize Godot they are doing

what neglected or abused children must do in order to survive. In her book on the impact of childhood sexual abuse on the life and work of Virginia Woolf, Louise DeSalvo, citing Alice Miller, describes that when children are being traumatized and abused by individuals on whom they are utterly dependent, "the tendency is to idealize them." "But," DeSalvo claims, doing so will "stand in the way of their experiencing rage and sadness" (6).[2] Vladimir and Estragon unleash their rage that accumulates as a result of their denial on one more helpless than themselves--Godot's messenger, a frightened little boy.

Vladimir and Estragon must reconceive Godot anew each time habit breaks down and they are left standing at the edge of a precipace too deep and wide to fathom. That the abyss they fear is their own inner emptiness and pain, the ghostly voices which inhabit the deepest chambers of their minds, is suggested in one of the play's most haunting and evocative exchanges. Vladimir and Estragon have become acutely aware that language is merely the function of habit, that they use words to conceal the truth and to deaden and obscure their pain. When language fails and before another compromise arrangement with "reality"[3] is

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[2]Alice Miller provides abundant evidence of this adaptive mechanism in several documented case studies presented in The Drama of the Gifted Child and Society's Betrayal of the Child.

[3]Beckett defines "reality" in Proust when he writes that the individual is moved "between this death [of a habit that has ceased to be effective] and that birth [of a new habit], reality, intolerable, absorbed feverishly by his consciousness at the extreme limit of its intensity, by his total consciousness organised to avert the disaster, to create the new habit that will empty the mystery of its threat--and also of its beauty."

reached, Vladimir and Estragon enter a perilous zone, opening a window onto the real and filling the silence with echoes of the mournful voices of the ages:

Estragon: In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.
Vladimir: You're right, we're inexhaustible.
Estragon: It's so we won't think.
Vladimir: We have that excuse.
Estragon: It's so we won't hear.
Vladimir: We have our reasons.
Estragon: All the dead voices.
Vladimir: They make a noise like wings.
Estragon: Like leaves.
Vladimir: Like sand.
Estragon: Like leaves.

Silence

Vladimir: They all speak at once.
Estragon: Each one to itself.

Silence.

Vladimir: Rather they whisper.
Estragon: They rustle.
Vladimir: They murmer.
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 hve 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 ahes.

Reality, Beckett explains, is our first nature, "a deeper instinct than the instincet of self-preservation" and it is "laid bare during these periods of abandonment" (10-11).

Estragon. Like leaves.

Long silence.

Vladimir: Say something!
Estragon: I'm trying.

Long silence.

Vladimir: (in anguish) Say anything at all!

In the anguished silences each member of the audience no doubt also hears his or her own version of "all the dead voices." Perhaps it is in the rustling of a piece of paper, the breathing of the person to one's right, the cough of someone in the balcony--suddenly these sounds become infused with a sense of mystery and haunting beauty; they take one back to another time and place. And then we feel our kinship with Vladimir and Estragon; we are able to grieve for their suffering and loss and in so doing we mourn the losses and sorrows we have endured. As Martin Esslin observes, "this passage, in which the cross-talk of Irish music-hall comedians is miraculously transmuted into poetry, contains the key to much of Beckett's work. Surely these rustling, murmering voices of the past . . . are the voices that explore the mysteries of being and the self to the limits of anguish and suffering. Vladimir and Estragon are trying to escape hearing them" (Theatre of the Absurd 39). Words are all they have left to shield them against the murmers of "all the dead voices" and they are slipping away, leaving them on the brink of a bottomless sorrow and emptiness too great to fathom. They therefore "relapse into their wait for Godot" (Esslin 39).

As long as Godot does not arrive Vladimir and Estragon can hold on to the only thing that makes life endurable: the hope that he will. This agonizing and paradoxical state of waiting for someone or something that does not and will not arrive but on whose arrival the very purpose for living is predicated, defines the tragic conditions of Vladimir and Estragon. It also defines the world of the child who has been neglected, abandoned, or abused. Amidst their despair and uncertainty Vladimir and Estragon at least have each other for companionship and comfort. At times their relationship overflows with sweetness, tenderness, and compassion, even as they bicker and vow to part forever. Certainly the relationship between Vladimir and Estragon goes further than any other in Beckett's world to suggest the possibility of love and release from tyranny. And yet finally they are as bound and oppressed by their dependence on the absent Godot as Lucky is on the cruel and merciless Pozzo.

That Vladimir and Estragon's dependence on the absent Godot is analogous to Lucky's dependence on Pozzo is suggested several times in the play. Estragon repeatedly asks Vladimir whether they are in fact tied to Godot, a question which takes on sinister significance when Pozzo and Lucky enter, the latter literally tied to his master by a rope around his neck where it causes a festering wound. Vladimir and Estragon are as bound and fettered by their dependence on Godot as Lucky is by his dependence on Pozzo. Twice Estragon mistakes Pozzo for Godot, the implication being that Vladimir and Estragon have consigned

themselves to the same cruel fate that binds Lucky to Pozzo.

The relationship between Pozzo and Lucky complicates and darkens the play's psychological landscape, as it suggests the potential for sadomasochism inherent in every human relationship. The paternal voice of Pozzo, and Lucky's simmering silence, broken only once by his frenetic, schizophrenic tirade, seem to function as a metaphor for the relationship between a tyrannical parent and a traumatized child. To cling so desparately to a cruel authority (or to an absent one) as Vladimir and Estragon cling to Godot, as Lucky clings to Pozzo, and as Endgame's Clov clings to Hamm, is to repeat the only pattern of relating that children of abusive or neglectful parents ever have experienced.

Thus far I have attempted to define Vladimir and Estragon's sense of emptiness and desolation in terms of the symbolic significance of their wait for Godot. However, even more curiously absent from Godot than the elusive Godot, whose absence Beckett transforms into a palpable presence, is any reference to a maternal figure. The absence of a (real or symbolic) mother is woven into the fabric of the play. What to make of it is unclear--so much is made in the play of the absent Godot, that we have at least the sense that he can be discussed as a projection of Vldimir and Estragon's imagination. Any comment on the striking absence of a mother figure in the play must remain purely speculative; there is little that can be said about it.

I have alluded to the significance that Thomas Cousineau attaches to this phenomenon in his book Waiting for Godot,

Waiting for Godot: Form and Movement (Boston: Twayne, 1990);[4] Cousineau argues that the maternal figure is not absent from Godot, but rather that she is embodied in the earth in which Vladimir and Estragon take refuge as, for instance, when Estragon quite literally crawls into a ditch in the ground each night. It is illuminating to consider how Cousineau arrives at this view.

Cousineau's emphasis on the human relationships in Godot, both literal and symbolic, leads him to argue that the construct of the family is a defining principle of the play, notwithstanding the absence of a literal mother or father:

> Even without a literal mother or father in the play, the enfeeblement of Vladimir and Estragon nonetheless dramatizes the situation of children who are utterly dependent on a parent: they cannot oblige the earth to nurture them, nor can they require Godot to keep his promise. The failure of these symbolic figures to fulfill their functions, as well as Vladimir and Estragon's inability to escape from their dependency, may suggest the persistence into adult life of frustrations and patterns of behavior first acquired in infancy. (83)

According to Cousineau, the tyranny of the family is simultaneous (and therefore synonomous) with the acquisition of language. Godot, he asserts, offers an escape from the oppressive constraints of language and the family. In particular Cousineau

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[4]Others have also noted the absence of the maternal and by extension the absence of any feminine principle in the play. In particular, during Beckett's lifetime there were several attempts by directors to cast a woman in one of the central roles, but Beckett adamantly refused to grant them his permission. Though many claimed that this refusal was sexist on Beckett's part, I do not agree. Rather, whatever Beckett is attempting to dramatize in Waiting for Godot would clearly have been diluted or lost with the presence of a female cast member.

claims that the emphasis in Godot on space, movement, and form, and its precisely timed choreography, create a visceral experience and a visual aesthetic which operate in opposition to the sense of suffering and despair that otherwise permeate the play. In these non-verbal elements of the play, Cousineau argues, characters are liberated from parental and linguistic tyranny. The world of the pre-verbal infant, symbolized in the movement and rhythms of the play, is characterized by joy in physical sensation and bodily pleasure. In Cousineau's view, Godot's movement, gesture, and choreographed sequences symbolize a pre-verbal stage of human development in which the infant exists in blissful harmony with the mother, unfettered by the later constraints imposed by language and by patriarchal domination.

Cousineau also argues that in Waiting for Godot Beckett is taking a stand against patriarchy. In its absence of women, he contends, "Godot implies that the shift to patriarchy has been a momentously wrong step . . . . the play would seem to defend the antipatriarchal assertion . . . ." Through the play's "access to the feminine," Cousineau claims, "the mother . . . not only survives but asserts her superior claim to our attachment . . . "

Cousineau's observations represent a decidedly positive shift in critical approaches to Godot by returning us to the psychic and emotional sources of the play's dramatic impact. His view that the nuclear family structure is symbolically invoked throughout the play despite the absence of a literal family, is

an important and valuable insight. Moreover, Cousineau is correct when he posits that the family at the center of Waiting for Godot is characterized as a supremely destructive force. Vladimir and Estragon do indeed have much in common with utterly dependent children whose parents have failed to respond to their most basic needs. Like Cousineau, I would argue that there is a strong maternal presence in Godot, despite, or perhaps because of, the glaring absence of or references to a mother figure.

However, though the play's choreography does indeed give pleasure (to the audience), and though there are important levels of significance conveyed by the non-verbal elements of the play, I differ with the conclusions Cousineau finally draws from these observations. More specifically, Cousineau's claim that the non-verbal elements of the play argue for a pre-verbal stage of development during which the infant's world is one of blissful innocence and unrestraint strikes me as profoundly inaccurate and naive. Most of the movement and gesture in the play as well as its prolonged silences express or are cause for extreme anxiety and pain. The spectator may derive pleasure from the play's choreographed movement and from its interplay of language and silence, because it is liberating and cathartic to participate in a theatrical experience that expresses and validates one's own inarticulate fears, frustrations, and longings. But nowhere does the play suggest that the world of the pre-verbal infant is one of blissful harmony. Quite the opposite may very well be the case.

Moreover, to attribute to Beckett an intention to condemn patriarchy seems to me inconsistent with Beckett's other dramatic representations of family life and with the actual evidence in Waiting for Godot; clearly the father or patriarch of this play is at best indifferent to Vladimir and Estragon's need. Yet nowhere in his writing does Beckett appeal to a vision of the mother as saviour. If Waiting for Godot is (implicitly or explicitly) "anti-patriarchal," neither is it "pro-matriarchal." To claim that Godot advocates the supremacy of the maternal is a projection onto the play of the critic's idealization of the mother, rather than an accurate account of how the maternal is figured in Godot.

If anything, the bleak and deserted landscape of Waiting for Godot is at best indifferent to human need; it is deep within the earth that Estragon encounters terrible psychic violence each night (each morning he reports having been beaten the previous night by at least ten people). The play's rather elusive references to anything maternal about the earth are limited to Pozzo's angry "that's how it is on this bitch of an earth" and to Vladimir's "grave speech": "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps." Perhaps Cousineau would claim that the failure of the maternal in Godot can be attributed to the perversion of nature that grows out of the patriarchal hierarchy at the heart of the play, but it seems to me that Cousineau's determined optimism is inconsistent with the play's psychological landscape.

The association of birth with death, of the womb with the tomb, is a recurring theme throughout all of Beckett's work. Here the reference suggests a revulsion at the process of birth, perhaps a veiled expression of rage at the (absent, unloving) mother. If there is a maternal presence embodied in the landscape of Waiting for Godot it is a far cry from the mythical earth-mother, in whose bosom the infant is nurtured and protected. The play envisions the human being as bare and unaccommodated, bereft of anything even remotely resembling the comfort of "mother-love," idealized or not. The precariousness of Vladimir and Estragon's existence can be seen as a function of the absence of any parental recognition, paternal or maternal.

It is in this failure to be seen, to have their existence validated in the eyes of a responsive (m)other, wherein resides the source of their metaphysical anguish. As Beckett has said, citing Bishop Berkeley, "esse est percipi--to be is to be perceived." Vladimir and Estragon suffer from a viscerally-felt existential anxiety which paralyzes and terrifies them. From the outset of the play one can see that they lack even the most elemental trust in the very fact of their existence. We have, for example, the opening exchange of the play, when Vladimir walks on stage to find Estragon struggling with his boot:

Vladimir: . . . So there you are again.
Estragon: Am I?
Vladimir: I'm glad to see you back. I thought you were gone forever.
Estragon: Me too.

Estragon's childlike "am I?" and "me too" suggest on the one hand that words have been divested of meaning--Vladimir's claims would appear self-evident or at least not worthy of comment--and, on the other hand, they suggest the precarious state of Estragon's sense of self. Each lacks a sense of self, owing perhaps to the fact that neither has had his existence validated by a nurturing external presence. Thus they must resort to schemes: "We always find something, eh, Didi, to give us the impression we exist?"

Vladimir and Estragon's reliance on each other to give them the sense that they exist grows increasingly more precarious and the games they play to the same end become increasingly inadequate as the play progresses. Though they are completely dependent on one another, neither can do much to ease the other's pain or to alleviate the sense of metaphysical anxiety he suffers as a result of his feelings of insignificance and insubstantiality. Both are tormented by a visceral awareness that their existence is contingent upon a presence that they have been denied and which seems eternally to elude them. And yet they persist in pinning their hopes on the absent Godot. In so doing they are repeating a pattern for which the groundwork was laid early in life. They are caught in a cycle of regression and repetition, condemned to play out over and again the negation of self that characterized their primary experiences as human beings. It is a familiar pattern to most of us who did not have the benefit of what D. W. Winnecott has called "good enough" parenting.

As one watches Vladimir and Estragon one is struck by the extent to which Beckett calls attention to the bodily nature of their suffering. Both experience acute anxiety in physical ways. As we shall see, there is a progression in Beckett's plays towards increasing physical impotence, immobility, and paralysis; in Godot the decline of the physical body is already present. Vladimir and Estragon are in constant physical distress. Yet unlike Hamm, Winnie, and Mouth, all of whose paralysis is concrete and physical, Vladimir and Estragon can still get about on stage. However physically confined and paralyzed they may be by their psychological and metaphysical predicaments, mobility is still within their narrow range of options, though whether this is to be regarded as a blessing or a curse is something of a vexed question. For no matter where they go "the essential doesn't change"; one muckheap is the same as any other; suffering is constant and pervasive in a universe that is at best indifferent to human need.

Moreover, the distinct emphasis on Vladimir and Estragon's physical conditions, on their agitated movement and reliance on gesture as a means of communication, strongly suggests a pre-verbal level of significance in the play. Like the infant writhing in pain which it can neither name nor express and from which it knows no relief, and like the child whose anxious cries fall on deaf ears, Vladimir and Estragon attempt in vain to secure a response to their existences through their unceasing and agitated movement and physical routines. The importance of

movement, gesture, and bodily activity in Waiting for Godot cannot be stressed too strongly. All of the focus on physical pain in the play serves not only to underline the terrible physical decay of aging, but it also reminds us that pain is initially experienced in the body where it continues to be stored, causing persistent mental distress even (or especially) when it remains inaccessible to consciousness and to language.

The psychic and bodily pain that afflict Vladimir and Estragon are caused in part by their being at the mercy of one who is unresponsive to their fundamental need for recognition. Godot can be viewed as a projection of that need. Even more telling are Vladimir and Estragon's reactions to the little Boy, Godot's messenger, who arrives on the scene at the end of each act to announce that Godot will not arrive this evening but that surely he will be there tomorrow. The role of the little Boy in Waiting for Godot seems to have eluded most critics whose studies contain barely a mention of this character. To be sure, Godot's messenger is a strange and mysterious presence. However, he serves a crucial function in the play which I would like now to consider.

As the messenger and bearer of news from Godot, the little Boy is identified with Godot and takes on the symbolic role of Godot's surrogate or stand-in. Yet he is trembling each time he appears. In his frightened innocence and ignorance the Boy thus also becomes the prototypical child in fairy-tale and myth--vulnerable, unknowing, even angelic. Moreover, though merely a

child, the mystical aura surrounding the Boy gives him an ageless, timeless presence. In his seemingly magical appearances and disappearances out of and into the ether he materializes much like figments of dreams or nightmares. Indeed, in Godot Beckett confuses the boundary between sleep and waking, between dreaming and reality. The Boy hovers over that murky boundary between the real and the unreal.

I will return to the inversion throughout Godot of the dream and reality, but I would like now to focus on the Boy's symbolic psychic significance. In the Boy's dual roles as both a stand-in for the idealized paternal figure (Godot) and also as an image of childhood innocence and vulnerability, he allows Vladimir and Estragon to project onto him their deepest feelings about both the absent or cruel father and the frightened child within them who keeps them paralyzed and at his mercy. Their reactions to the Boy reveal their frightened indulgence of a tyrannical parent; their rage at having been betrayed by him; and their contempt for the hurt and eternally hopeful child within themselves that keeps them bound to their tortured vigil.

When he enters at the end of the first act the little Boy is trembling with fear. Estragon can barely contain his violent rage at the Boy. Both he and Vladimir have seen him before and they know what he has come to tell them. Vladimir feels sorry for the child and attempts to mitigate the effects of Estragon's cruelty by speaking to the Boy more gently:

Vladimir: Approach, my child.
(Enter boy, timidly. He halts.)
Boy: Mister Albert . . . ?
Vladimir: Yes.
Estragon: What do you want?
Vladimir: Approach!
(The boy does not move).
Estragon: Approach when you're told, can't you?
(The boy advances timidly, halts).
Vladimir: What is it?
Boy: Mr. Godot . . .
Vladimir: Obviously . . . (pause.) Approach.
Estragon: (Violently). Will you approach! (The boy advances timidly.) What kept you so late?

Estragon turns his fear that he will once again be told that Godot will not arrive into violent rage against the child who comes bearing this message. In the Boy Estragon senses the hope which keeps him waiting and the knowledge that his waiting is in vain. Thus Estragon lashes out at the Boy in his impotent fury at having been disappointed once again. It makes sense that it is Estragon who is most enraged at Godot's messenger, for if it weren't for Vladimir's coaxing, Estragon probably would have given up his vigil. Estragon has almost extinguished his childhood hope. One can imagine the price he has had to pay in order to do so, for to let go of hope is to undo the lie, the lie that keeps them alive and suffering. But when Vladimir urges him to persist in his waiting he rekindles Estragon's childhood hope, something that each might be better off without. Thus when Estragon lashes out at the boy Vladimir feels responsible and so he intervenes:

Vladimir: (to Estragon). Let him alone.

Estragon: (violently.) You let me alone. (Advancing, to the Boy.) Do you know what time it is?
Boy: (recoiling.) It's not my fault, Sir.
Estragon: And whose is it? Mine?
Boy: I was afraid, Sir.
Estragon: Afraid of what? Of us?

Estragon's anger continues to mount with each passing moment. He is so enraged because he has been unable to resist the temptation to continue hoping when he is almost ready to relinquish hope. The pain is excruciating. When Vladimir attempts to ask the boy a seemingly neutral question Estragon swoops down like a vulture:

Vladimir: Are you a native of these parts? (Silence.) Do you belong to these parts?
Boy: Yes Sir.
Estragon: That's all a pack of lies. (Shaking the boy by the arm.) Tell us the truth!
Boy: (trembling). But it is the truth, Sir!
Vladimir: Will you let him alone! What's the matter with you? (Estragon releases the Boy, moves away, covering his face with his hands. Vladimir and the Boy observe him. Estragon drops his hands. His face is convulsed.) What's the matter with you?
Estragon: I'm unhappy.
Vladimir: Not really! Since when?
Estragon: I'd forgotten.

One wonders what made Estragon forget his pain. Perhaps it was having his own victim to terrorize--thus do we see how the oppressed becomes the oppressor in the vicious cycle of tyranny and abuse. Estragon initially reacts to the Boy with sadistic rage and fury. Gradually these feelings give way to deeper feelings of shame, humiliation, and torment expressed by his "convulsed" face. Estragon's contempt for the Boy is a measure of his own shame and self-loathing; he treats the Boy with the

violent hatred of one who could ill afford to acknowledge let alone express such feelings as a child. He might also be re-enacting a memory from his own childhood; when he questions the boy he does so with a tone of scorn and anger. Such derision is in all likelihood a part of what Alice Miller refers to as one's "introjects," Estragon's internalized voices of parental disapproval. Having been unable to respond to the injustice which befell him as a child, the adult will often inflict on those more vulnerable than oneself (one's own children, for example) the torture to which he had once been subjected. Alice Miller documents this phenomenon in several case studies presented in The Drama of the Gifted Child and Society's Betrayal of the Child.

The Boy is an objectification of the little boy within Estragon, and a reminder that his own innocence and trust have been betrayed. When Estragon accuses the boy of lying he is reacting against the unfulfilled promise of his own childhood innocence and hope, against the eternally hopeful little boy within himeslf and the parent who kept him waiting in vain.

Before the little Boy leaves, Vladimir asks him whether Godot beats him. "Whom does he beat?" Vladimir asks when the boy answers no. That Godot must beat somebody is taken for granted. "He beats my brother," the boy replies. This response recalls Vladimir's anguished worry over the parable of the two thieves. While at first he is somewhat comforted by the fact that "one of the thieves was saved" (there is a fifty percent

chance of salvation), he later realizes that of the four witnesses only one says anything about a thief being saved; the other three say nothing about this at all. One cannot even depend on there being a fifty/fifty chance of being "saved." The parable of the two thieves as well as the little Boy's revelation that Godot beats his brother but not him, might symbolize the arbitrary way in which a parent mistreats one child while the other, equally traumatized but for different reasons, is left to stand and watch. Moreover, despite the apparent innocence of Godot's messenger, he is trembling with terror, much like the innocent child, guilty of no wrong-doing, awaiting the wrath of an irrational parent. In this sense the Boy is a reminder to Vladimir and Estragon of the traumatized, terrified child within them. To observe the Boy is to come face to face with their own vulnerability and fear; when they look at him they are seeing a part of themselves which they have invested all of their energy in keeping buried. The fact that the Boy remains nameless and the use of a capital "B" in the text of the play when he is mentioned, extend his significance from a symbol of Estragon and Vladimir's childhood hopes and fears to a symbol of childhood hope and fear in general. The Boy's ageless quality, moreover, suggests his eternal presence within the adult.

Before the Boy leaves Vladimir asks him whether he sees them, hoping to prevent him from failing to remember them tomorrow as he fails now to remember having seen them the previous evening. The Boy assures Vladimir that he does in fact

see them, but when he returns the following evening he claims once again not to recall having met Vladimir and Estragon before:

Boy: What am I to tell Mr. Godot, Sir?
Vladimir: Tell him . . . (he hesitates) . . . tell him you saw me and that . . . (he hesitates) . . . that you saw me. (Pause. Vladimir advances, the Boy recoils. Vladimir halts, the Boy halts. With sudden violence.) You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me! (Silence. Vladimir makes a sudden spring forward, the Boy avoids him and exits running. Silence . . .).

That the little Boy does not recall having seen Vladimir before and that he might fail again to remember having seen them this evening is almost unbearable for Vladimir, whose mental anguish, as I've indicated, is caused in part by his not having had his sense of self confirmed by seeing himself reflected back in the eyes of a responsive being outside of himself. If the Boy does not remember having seen Vladimir and Estragon then their tie to Godot becomes even more tenuous and their hope in having their existences validated upon his arrival seems even more ill-fated.

Vladimir and Estragon's impotence and paralysis can be attributed in part to their ignorance; because they do not know whether Godot will arrive they are powerless to act. Their immobility is captured in the brief tableau at the end of each act when one says to the other "Let's go," but "they do not move." It is also reinforced in an exchange that is repeated on several occasions throughout the play:

Estragon: . . . Let's go.

Vladimir: We can't.
Estragon: Why not?
Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot.
Estragon: (despairingly) Ah!

Vladimir and Estragon's ignorance is far-reaching, extending back into the past as well as forward into the future. They are burdened by the weight of a past they cannot remember and so deprived of the solace that memory might provide, deprived also of a past on which to ground a present sense of self. Although they suffer from a defect of memory, the suggestion throughout the play is that memory itself is a problematic and unreliable construct and that therefore the conception of a self that endures through time is merely an illusion.

Moreover, an inability to remember is a common response to trauma, amnesia being the most extreme manifestation of such a protectice mechanism. Certainly the amnesia from which Vladimir and Estragon suffer can be viewed in this light. Much of the play's humor and pathos derives from Vladimir and Estragon's inability to remember anything about the when's and where's of their experience. Their agonizing dependence on the elusive Godot is also a function of a profound form of amnesia. Were they able to recall the true nature of the absence within their beings they would be forced to acknowledge that they have already undergone the loss they fear in Godot's failure to arrive and they would know that it is irrevocable. Anxiously awaiting Godot's arrival allows them to maintain their ignorance with regard to this central truth.

Thus it is not merely their ignorance that imprisons Vladimir and Estragon, but in a sense it is also their knowledge; they are ignorant only in so far as they fail to admit into their conscious awareness the buried knowledge they embody. The amnesia from which Vladimir and Estragon suffer suggests not ignorance, then, but rather repression. As tortured as they seem to be by their ignorance, they are equally tormented by what they know, by knowldge that is stored in their bodies and which finds expression in Estragon's nightmares, in Vladimir's persistent physical agitation, in their mental anguish, and in their unceasing physical malaise and distress, the visceral remnants of a cataclysmic, pre-verbal trauma. They are caught between the opposing poles of an irreducible paradox, between wanting to know and needing not to know.

When Estragon presses Vladimir to listen to his nightmare in the first act, Vladimir recoils in terror, suspecting that he would not be able to withstand knowing whatever the dream contains:

Estragon: . . . Let's stop talking for a minute, do you mind?
Vladimir: (feebly). All right. (Estragon sits down on the mound. Vladimir paces agitatedly to and from, halting from time to time to gaze into the distance off. Estragon falls asleep. Vladimir halts finally before Estragon.) Gogo! . . . Gogo! . . . GOGO! (Estragon wakes with a start.)
Estragon: Restored to the horror of his situation). I was asleep! (Despairingly.) Why will you never let me sleep?
Vladimir: I felt lonely.
Estragon: I had a dream.
Vladimir: Don't tell me!
Estragon: I dreamt that-
Vladimir: DON'T TELL ME!
Estragon: (gesture towards the universe). This one is enough for

you? (Silence.) It's not nice of you, Didi. Who am I to tell my private nightmares to if I can't tell them to you?
Vladimir: Let them remain private. You know I can't bear that.

The nightmare of waking life is indeed enough for Vladimir. Thus the audience remains in the dark about the content of Estragon's dream, but we are given ample clues throughout the play to suggest how painful and terrifying it must have been, including the physical beatings and brutality which Estragon reports having had to endure during the night while asleep in the ditch:

Vladimir: . . . May one inquire where His Highness spent the night?
Estragon: In a ditch.
Vladimir: (admiringly). A ditch! Where?
Estragon: (without gesture). Over there.
Vladimir: And they didn't beat you?
Estragon: Beat me? Certainly they beat me.
Vladimir: The same lot as usual?
Estragon: The same? I don't know.

The archaeological imagery here suggests a literal as well as psychic descent. It is impossible to determine (and it finally matters little) whether Estragon is in fact actually beaten each night or if the violence he experiences is psychic, the return, during sleep, of repressed experiences of violence and brutality which elude consciousness and language. Given the dream-like quality of the play as a whole, its blurring of distinctions between sleeping and waking, between dreaming and living, the question of what actually happened becomes increasingly impossible to answer, not only in the case of Estragon's

beatings, but also in relation to everything that "happens" in the play. In Act II Estragon once again claims to have been beaten ~~before~~ again, but says that he is at a loss to understand why. The ever-astute Vladimir is quick to explain:

Vladimir: . . . I wouldn't have let them beat you.
Estragon: You couldn't have stopped them.
Vladimir: No, I mean before they beat you. I would have stopped you from doing whatever it was you were doing.
Estragon: I wasn't doing anything.
Vladimir: then why did they beat you?
Estragon: I don't know.
Vladimir: Ah no, Gogo, the truth is that there are things that escape you that don't escape me, you must feel it yourself.
Estragon: I tell you I wasn't doing anything.
Vladimir: Perhaps you weren't. But it's the way of doing it that counts, the way of doing it if you want to go on living.
Estragon: I wasn't doing anything.

The exchange recalls an earlier passage:

Vladimir: Suppose we repented.
Estragon: Repented what?
Vladimir: Oh . . . We wouldn't have to go into the details.
Estragon: Our being born?

The magnitude of their suffering convinces Vladimir and Estragon that they are being punished. Their crime? Having been born. Sadly, such feelings afflict individuals who have been abused as children and stem from their intuitive sense of justice and their inability to account for undeserved punishment. The child cannot afford to blame the abusive parent, on whom he depends for survival. Thus abused children seek the cause of the suffering to which they are being subjected in some defect of their own

natures and attribute to themselves an inherent evil accompanying them at birth.

In Act II Estragon has another dream, but in this one he "was happy." Still Vladimir refuses to listen; it would seem that from his present vantage point, Vladimir would find it equally distressing to be reminded of a past time of happiness as he would to confront repressed memories of violence and pain. In opposition to the violence suggested by Estragon's nightmare in Act I, and aside from his "happy" dream in Act II, there are several references throughout the play to the possibility of a happier time.

Alongside of the play's images of tyranny and suffering are voices of tenderness, compassion, and love. At times Vladimir and Estragon comfort each other and comment on their conditions in poetry that achieves a haunting and desolate beauty:

> Vladimir: Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? To-morrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waite for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be? (Estragon, having struggled with his boots in vain, is dozing off again. Vladimir looks at him.) He'll know nothing. He'll tell me about th eblows he received and I'll give him a carrot. (Pause.) Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on his forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (He listens.) But habit is a great deadener. (He looks again at Estragon.) At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, He is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. (Pause.) I can't go on! (Pause.) What have I said?

Vladimir's "grave speech" resonates with sorrow on behalf of his

friend Estragon and pierces the darkness of the theatre with a rare moment of illumination and insight into the whole terrible tragedy of the human condition. So stripped here is Vladimir of the habit of living that he knows not whether he wakes or sleeps. He has entered a "perilous zone" and is in touch with "the real." His speech offers audiences solace because it is filled with the grace and clarity of truth. At other moments of the play the voices of Vladimir and Estragon are similarly suffused with tenderness and compassion. Such voices work against the play's harsher and more persistent images of tyranny and terror as they hold out the promise of a better time. Whether or not such a time existed once in some far away past or could ever exist again remains an unanswered question. Nevertheless, we are tantalized with such possibilities: like Vladimir and Estragon, we hold out, in the hope that our suffering will not have been in vain.

It no longer seems surprising that the most enthusiastic response to an early performance of Godot came in 1957, from what many considered an unlikely audience--a group of fourteen hundred convicts on death row at San Quentin Prison. According to Martin Esslin, a play that had "bewildered the sophisticated audiences of Paris, London, and New York, was immediately grasped by an audience of convicts" (The Theatre of the Absurd, 2).[5] Among

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[5]More recently, a noted child psychologist has used a videotaped performance of Godot in his practice and has reported that children consistently sit wrapt in attention when viewing the play. They laugh at the comic routines, they are saddened by the suffering, and they seem to respond immediately and viscerally to the rhythms of the play.

the several reviews of the play printed in the prison newspaper, one claimed that:

> [Waiting for Godot] 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. It asked nothing in point, it forced no dramatized moral on the viewer, it held out no specific hope . . . . We're still waiting for Godot, and shall continue to wait. When the scenery gets too drab and the action too slow, we'll call each other names and swear to part forever--but then there's no place to go. (qtd. in Esslin, 2-3)

The inmates immediately identified with Vladimir and Estragon and grasped the relevance of Godot to their own conditions. They heard in Godot their own impassioned cries, felt in the fate of Vladimir and Estragon their own precarious and fragile existences. According to the prisoners, Beckett understood them; he knew what it was like to be "condemned for life to solitary confinement."

That the inmates had committed crimes for which they'd been ~~incapacitated~~ incarcerated was, for the moment, and is, to the point I would like to make, irrelevant. For as we have come to understand through our identification with Beckett's cast of raging, alienated survivors, in the subterranean recesses of our own psyches, we too have been pronounced guilty, merely for our "having been born." Vladimir and Estragon survive, as we all do, without a home, without the promise of release or salvation, without future, with a past that weighs heavily but from which they are irrevocably divorced. We too live in a world that is

not of our own making, only we escape in the tedium and distraction of the day from apprehending the awful truth of it all; as Vladimir claims, "habit is a great deadener."

These are the tragic lessons of childhood--that we must devise games and habits of living to shield us from the pain of childhood neglect and abuse, habits born of trauma and fear which protect us as they imprison us and prevent us from living. The tragedy is even more profound when we realize the child's innate capacity for joy and for love and for trust that parental neglect and abuse stifle or murder. For alongside of the images of tyranny and subjugation in Waiting for Godot are gentler images and fainter voices which speak a language hardly intelligible, a language of poetry and rhythm, which suggest that things do not have to be this way, that there is a way out. Though Beckett could not show us the way, his play inspires each member of the audience to seek it in the truth within oneself.

Chapter II:

Endgame

If Waiting for Godot offers audiences the promise of hope, Endgame would seem to lay such hope to rest with a vengence. In Endgame Beckett realizes to their fullest the possibilities for violence and brutality that in Godot are only part of a much larger landscape. Godot's vision of human suffering, its unsettling suggestions about the human capacity for sadomasochistic violence, reach in Endgame a magnitude of terrifying proportions. Waiting for Godot offers solace to audiences, not only in "the possibility of human recognition and of love" suggested by the relationship of Vladimir and Estragon (Williams 145), but also in the desolate beauty of its poetry, language which mitigates against its harsher images of violence and brutality. Despite the austerity of its landscape and the spareness of its language, Waiting for Godot evokes sympathy and compassion for its two main characters, who can still believe in and hope for the possibility of salvation. The vision of Godot is in this sense redemptive: one suffers for a reason, though one cannot know what that reason is. There is a purpose to life, even though it cannot be grasped.

The same cannot be said of Endgame. Its language is harsh and brutal. Rarely do its characters elicit total sympathy; that Hamm and Clov might, like Vladimir and Estragon, be considered "all of humanity" is a possibility few have been willing or able

to acknowledge. Vivien Mercier has claimed that Endgame does not allow for audience identification because "the characters reveal themselves as monsters rather than as men. We can laugh at their ugliness of mind and of body, we can pity them, but we cannot identify with them" (Mercier 23). However, if Hamm and Clov pose problems for audience identification which extend beyond those presented by Vladimir and Estragon it is not because they are any the less representative; rather it is because they evoke an even darker psychological landscape than that of Godot with hardly a trace of the tenderness which binds Vladimir and Estragon in Godot. Endgame's central figures are bound by the same kind of sadomasochistic interdependency that defines Lucky's relationship to Pozzo in Godot.

Like Godot, Endgame is set in a deliberately vague, non-specific landscape, allowing for a focus on inner states. Yet Endgame's bare interior, in contrast to the open expanse of Godot's stage set, serves to intensify the impression of stifling entrappment. The psychological and metaphysical paralysis of Vladimir and Estragon has become for all but Clov in Endgame a literal and concrete bodily condition.

The familial structure of Godot and the childhood origins of its characters' suffering and hope are indirectly suggested through the use of stage images, symbol, and metaphor rather than overtly stated. In Endgame, on the other hand, although the stage images and symbols remain highly evocative, and although the use of metaphor is still strong, Beckett quite clearly and

explicitly locates the source of the violence and cruelty that define human relations in the entangled web of family dynamics. Endgame presents us with the most concentrated and overt focus on the family in all of Beckett's stage plays. The extended family at the center of Endgame stands in stark contrast to the archetypal myth of the family that has been embedded for centuries in western consciousnes. Beckett is uncompromising in his treatment of the tyranny and brutality that define family relations in Endgame. Moreover, the setting of Endgame is evocative of a post-nuclear landscape, a geography that is also symbolic of its characters' mental states; the play paints a grim and compelling picture of the connection between parental and political forms of tyranny, between family conflict and global war.

Hamm and Clov, tyrant/father and (adopted) servant/son, are sadomasochistically bound. Hamm keeps the legless Nagg and Nell, his "accursed progenitor(s)," in garbage cans, a fitting image for the kind of treatment which the audience discovers he had received at their hands as a child and for which this is a form of retribution. Hamm controls the food and the medicine which he administers (through Clov) to his dependent parents with calculated cruelty. When Hamm asks Nagg, "Scoundrel, why did you engender me?" Nagg replies, "because I didn't know." "What? asks Hamm, "What didn't you know?" "That it'd be you." Here as elsewhere in Endgame, Hamm's rage at his parents for having begotten him is simultaneously experienced as a profound self-

loathing which has at its roots his parents' neglect and sadistic abuse of him. So great and so primitive is the rage that Hamm unleashes at his parents that it has come to include a violent revulsion at the processes of generation and procreation in general:

Clov (anguished, scratching himself): I have a flea!
Hamm: A flea! Are there still fleas?
Clov: On me there's one. (Scratching,) Unless it's a crablouse.
Hamm: (very perturbed.): But humanity might start from there all over again! Catch him, for the love of God!

The blind, paralyzed Hamm, bloodied handkerchief across his face, reigns over Clov and his other dependents with venomous rage, a thinly veiled disguise for his own terrible sense of inadequacy and impotence.

The bare interior of Endgame's stage set, which some have likened to the inside of a skull and which others have compared to a basement bomb shelter in the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust, would seem to offer no promise of release from its terrifying paralysis and entrappment. And yet finally Endgame does present the possibility of hope, a promise that in the final analysis seems to be more convincing than the illusory promises held out in Godot. The vision and shape of Godot is cyclical; there is no escaping the endless cycle of repetition and regression in which Vladimir and Estragon are entrapped. The movement of Endgame, on the other hand, oscillates between the cyclical and the linear, intimating the possibility of release

from the vicious cycle of violence and abuse in which these three generations of family members are caught. In commenting on the more concrete possibilities for hope in Endgame as contrasted with the more vague and elusive intimations of hope in Godot, critics have observed that the more extreme and relentless brutality of Endgame functions in direct proportion to the validity of its hope of escape and renewal; if change is to be realized, they contend, it is conditional upon a direct, unmitigated confrontation with the stark and horrific conditions which make it necessary.

That Clov might leave and break free of Hamm's tyranny is the source of the play's dramatic tension and the form of Endgame's hope. Clov changes as the play progresses and the perspective of the play gradually shifts from Hamm's to that of Clov; thus Hamm also seems to undergo a change. When Clov has made his decision to leave, Hamm must acquiesce, for the rules of the game have changed, with Clov now playing the role of the writer/director whose vision the play embraces. Both must accept the fate that is implied by Clov's leaving. Yet precisely what that fate entails remains ambiguous after the final curtain has fallen. The "something [that] is taking its course" in Endgame is the change that is taking place within Clov and which threatens the forms of life in the play. For if Clov leaves then the others will surely die; he is the only character who can get about on stage and the others are dependent on him for food and other forms of sustenance.

The boy whom Clov suddenly sees on the other side of a window where before there was only a barren wasteland, who represents the horrifying possibility of another "potential procreator," suggests that Clov might break free of the entropic world in which he has been held captive, for it is upon seeing the boy that Clov decides he is ready to venture out. The image of the boy thus seems to represent to Clov an alternative to Hamm's insistence that "Outside of here it's death" or that "Gone from me you'd be dead."

The image of the boy, however, is deeply ambiguous and contains within it the tensions at the heart of the play:

Clov: . . . . Nothing . . . nothing . . . good . . . good . . . nothing . . . goo-- (He starts, lowers the telescope, examines it, turns it again on the without. Pause.) Bad luck to it!
Hamm: More complications! (Clov gets down.) Not an underplot, I trust. (Clov moves ladder nearer window, gets up on it, turns telescope on the without.)
Clov (dismayed): Looks like a small boy!
Hamm (sarcastic): A small . . . boy!
Clov: I'll go and see. (He gets down, drops the telescope, goes towards door, turns.) I'll take the gaff. (He goes for the gaff, sees it, picks it up, hastens towards door.)
Hamm: No! (Clov halts.)
Clov: No? A potential procreator?
Hamm: If he exists he'll die there or he'll come here. And if he doesn't (Pause.)
Clov: You don't believe me? You think I'm inventing?
Hamm: It's the end, Clov, we've come to the end. I don't need you anymore. (Pause.)

Whether or not the boy exists remains uncertain. He might, for example, be Clov's projection, representing a remnant of the innocent child within Clov which has never been allowed to emerge; thus he might stand for the childhood of which Clov was

deprived and his function might be to offer Clov the promise of hope and the possibility of regeneration. The suggestion that Clov is "inventing" also raises the posibility that the little boy is a fiction which stands in opposition to Hamm's "chronicle," the story that Hamm has been "telling yourself all your days." Thus it may allow Clov, as Hamm's fiction has enabled him, to construct an identity, in Clov's case one that is separate from his need for Hamm. In this respect the boy functions as a self-generated and self-sustaining mythology. It doesn't really matter then whether the boy exists as a figment of Clov's imagination or if he is actually there; what matters is whether Clov is prepared to believe in the boy and what the boy means to him.

For there is an unsettling possibility, regardless of whether the boy is a fantasy or not: rather than suggesting the likelihood of escape and renewal, the image of the little boy might be a reminder of innocence betrayed and of the possibility that the cruelty that has persisted through the generations within the closed walls of Endgame's interior might be perpetrated on yet another innocent child. This troubling possibility is subtley suggested when Hamm asks Clov for his pain killers at the end of the play and Clov tells him that "there are no more pain killers." Though we in the audience do not know if Clov is telling the truth, the possibility that he is lying is suggested when Hamm claims that the bottle had been full not long before. If Clov is lying, then it would seem that he has begun

to seek revenge uopn Hamm in the same way that Hamm has attempted to reverse the sado-masochistic structure of his relationship with Nagg and Nell. It is not a great leap from here to imagine Clov's searching for an innocent son to abuse as Hamm has found in him. Nevertheless, it might still be that by leaving Clov might break the cycle of abuse once and for all.

To resolve the ambiguities Clov must walk through the door into the unknown on the other side; whether or not he will do so remains uncertain when the final curtain falls. For Clov, crossing that thresshold is fraught with fear, anxiety, and danger, not the least of which derives from the possibility that Hamm possesses the last store of food on the earth and that therefore Clov's survival is contingent upon staying with Hamm. Here Beckett has created the perfect metaphor for the way in which a tyrannical parent, terrified of being abandoned by a dependent child, attempts to effect a lifelong symbiosis. Hamm says, in effect, not only will "I die if you leave me," but "you'll die if you leave me" too. Thus the play deeply complicates the nature of Clov's choice by suggesting that the price that he must be pay for leaving is his life. For Clov, to stay would be a form of murder and to leave might very well constitute a form of suicide if, that is, we accept Hamm's view that there is no outside world.

There is, however, another possibility: It might well be that the non-existence of an outside world is a function of Hamm's sadistic fantasies; the denial of the existence of a world

beyond this room might be a matter of belief rather than of fact, a projection of individual consciousness onto the world outside of the self. Beckett himself has acknowledged in Proust that "the world is a projection of individual consciousness. . . . One cannot know the objects in the world in themselves. . . . " The closed, stifling world of Endgame's interior is the world according to Hamm, and Hamm has done his best to convince Clov that there is no outside world in which to seek refuge. Again Beckett has created a perfect metaphor for the tragic conditions of childhood. The child's entire experience of the world is that which is contained within the walls of his childhood home. It is defined by his parents and confined to the life he lives under their roof. For the child there is no outside reality and no possibility for reality-testing. It hardly matters that there are other "realities." Especially for the abused or neglected child the world becomes a terribly closed place from which there appears to be no escape. The child who is symbiotically bound to a sadistic parent lives without knowing that things could ever be different. Such children grow into terrified, paranoid adults who see the world as the dangerous, suffocating place it was in reality for them as children. Often they remain incapable of recognizing the "otherness" of those outside of themselves, the consequence of never having been able to effect a separation between themselves and their parents whose mistreatment or neglect has kept them bound to them in the futile belief that things might change. Clov's indeterminate age thus extends the

metaphor to include not only the harrowing experience of the child, but also that of the adult whose view of the world is darkened and narrowed by childhood experiences of parental tyranny.

The tension of Endgame and the ambiguous terms of its hope are suggested at the play's outset. The play opens on Clov's conducting his tedious daily business - moving obsessively about the bare interior, peering out of windows, into ash cans, and at Hamm, seated at the center of the room with "a large blood-stained handkerchief over his face." Moving from Hamm to the door, Clov utters the play's ironic opening lines:

> Clov (fixed gaze, tonelessly):
> Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. (Pause.)
> Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap.
> (Pause.)
> I can't be punished anymore.

"Finished" - though perhaps a curious word with which to begin a play, it is perfectly in keeping with the major pre-occupaions of Endgame, a work not only concerned with the processes of dissolution and dying, but one equally, if less overtly, concerned with questions of origins and generation. "The end is in the beginning and yet you go on," Hamm says toward the end of the play. Endgame reinforces the association of birth and death, the womb and the tomb, which recurs in varied forms in all of Beckett's works. To what, though, is Clov referring? What is it

that "must be nearly finished?" It would seem to be his life. Clov seems to be willing the end of his life, unable to die, hardly able to keep on living. "The impossible heap" is the story that cannot be told, of life without end. And yet we discover that perhaps what Clov is referring to, the "it" that "must be nearly finished," is his life with Hamm, a possibility that is suggested when Clov claims that he "cannot be punished anymore." That Clov is contemplating leaving, then, is ambiguously suggested right from the play's outset. That leaving is in an elusive way associated with a kind of death is also suggested here by the use of the word "finished," a word which is repeated on a number of occasions throughout the play and which acquires increasingly more ambiguous associations as the play progresses, suggesting at once the notions of completion (as in ending a story), leaving, and death (both murder and suicide). The disturbing possibility that Clov's leaving is associated with death becomes increasingly plausible as the action of the play advances and one realizes the extent to which Clov's very survival might depend on staying with Hamm. Clov is bound to Hamm by a dependency that is destroying him; to break free of this dependency he must risk the possibility that he will not be able to survive - these are the harsh terms of Endgame's hope. And yet they are no more harsh than the impossible choices which define the conditions of children in families only superficially different from the one in Endgame.

Hamm, too, has had enough, "and yet I hesitate, I hesitate

. . . to end." Hamm is the tyrant/ father and tyrant/son, who rages and rules over his domain with a fierce cruelty that is the inverse of the impotent rage and sense of failure that threaten from within to destroy him at every turn. The blood which oozes from Hamm's head is but one of many physical indications of just how deeply and irrevocably he has been wounded. "There's something dripping in my head. . . . A heart, a heart in my head," says Hamm. And on another occasion he claims, "Last night I saw inside my breast. There was a big sore." Such are Hamm's almost surreal expressions of the pain which is destroying him.

Hamm's is the wrath of the injured, impotent child. He depends for his survival on the mercy of his hostage/son Clov, at whom he lashes out in fury - "You pollute the air" - and whom he taunts with sadistic cruelty:

Hamm: I've made you suffer too much. (Pause.) Haven't I?
Clov: It's not that.
Hamm: (shocked.): I haven't made you suffer too much?
Clov: Yes!
Hamm (relieved.) Ah! You gave me a fright! . . . .

As we listen to Hamm and Clov and as we watch them interact it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that they are playing an intricate game that Hamm has devised with rules and terms to which both tacitly agree. Both are self-consciously theatrical, Hamm more so than Clov (hence the appropriateness of his name). Each seems to know what the other expects and each has his own stake in keeping the game going. All of their verbal repartee

begins to seem like a language game, a carefully choreographed dance designed to keep at bay the growing realization within each that this game must soon end:

Clov: What is there to keep me here?
Hamm: The dialogue. . . .

Clov: . . . Do you believe in the life to come?
Hamm: Mine was always that.

Much of Endgame's humor derives from such linguistic surprises, which allow the characters to express a very dark vision while at the same time keeping what would otherwise be unbearable pain and sadness at a carefully measured distance. The entirety of Endgame lends credibility to Nell's claim that "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness."

Both Hamm and Clov seem acutely aware that their language functions as an elaborate substitute for action. Even the prospect of Clov's imminent departure seems to fall within this pre-determined pattern - both talk enough about it; they have rehearsed their parts well. Yet if Clov were to leave it would truly constitute the end of the game and so when the play ends the final move has yet to be made. And so the talk and the play (in both senses of the word) continue, with Hamm subjecting Clov to further threats of torture and with Clov almost matter-of-factly acquiescing:

Hamm: I'll give you nothing more to eat.

Clov: Then we'll die.
Hamm: I'll give you just enough to keep you from dying. You'll be hungry all the time.
Clov: Then we won't die.

The exchange not only underlines the extremes of parental cruelty that dominate in Endgame, but it is also evocative of the methods used to torture victims of political tyranny in the global arena. Moreover, repeated references throughout the play to hunger and starvation, and to food offered and withheld, reinforce the primitive quality of the hated interdependency at the heart of the play. Hamm controls the means of sustenance; he possesses what might be the last vestiges of food remaining on earth (depending on how we interpret Hamm's claim that the four inhabitants of this bomb shelter are the sole survivors of some sort of holocaust) and the key to the cupboard in which the food is stored. And yet since he can't move, he is dependent on Clov to get him his food and to feed him. Food is at the center of the story Hamm tells throughout the play, his "chronicle" of the man who comes to him crawling "on his belly" begging for food to keep his starving son from dying, a story to which we shall have occasion to return.

Food is also the means by which Hamm, through Clov, tortures his aging, dependent parents, Nagg and Nell:

Nagg: Me pap!
Hamm: Accursed progenitor!
Nagg: Me pap!
Hamm: Give him his pap!
Clov: There's no more pap.

Hamm (to Nagg): Do you hear that? There's no more pap. You'll never get any more pap.
Nagg: I want me pap!
Hamm: Give him a biscuit.
(Exit Clov.) Accursed fornicator! How are your stumps?

This image of the infantilized parent, utterly dependent on his crippled son to meet his most basic needs, is a bitter parody of the archetypal myth of the aging parent who relies on the warm nurturance of an adult child to care for him in his declining years. The milk of human kindness does not flow here nor did it when Hamm was a child and dependent on Nagg and Nell to meet his most basic needs:

Nagg: . . . . Whom did you call when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark? Your mother? No. Me. We let you cry. Then we moved you out of earshot, so that we might sleep in peace.

(Pause.)

I was asleep, as happy as a king, and you woke me up to have me listen to you. It wasn't indispensible, you didn't really need to have me listen to you.

(Pause.)

I hope the day will come when you'll really need to have me listen to you, and need to hear my voice, any voice.

(Pause.)

Yes, I hope I'll live till then, to hear you calling me like when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark, and I was your only hope. (56)

Nagg's reminiscence ties together a number of Endgame's important thematic strands and sheds much light on the present conditions

of the play's four characters. Among the most immediately striking of Nagg's revelations is the curious fact that when Hamm cried out it was not for "your mother" but for Nagg. While it is indeed worth taking Nagg at his word and considering the implications of the fact that Hamm cried out for him and not for his mother, it is also important to consider why Nagg has so deliberately chosen to mention the fact. Certainly it is conceivable that this is merely a reflection of Nagg's narcissistic need to see himself as centrally needed, especially if Hamm is an infant when he cries out, in which case it would be difficult to know which parent the child is crying for. One can only speculate as to the conditions of Nagg's own childhood that would result in his emphatic denial of the bond between mother and child as well as in his refusal to respond to Hamm's cries. Perhaps, though, Hamm did not in fact cry out for his mother, as Nagg attests. Perhaps he had already learned that to do so would prove futile, that Nell was as unresponsive to her son's cries as Nagg suggests she was. Such a possibility is certainly consistent with the absence of a maternal bond in Endgame and with the hatred of the processes of procreation that ~~are~~ was so central to the play's dark vision.

Of particular importance in this regard is Hamm's reation to Nell's death, or rather his failure to react when he finds that his mother is dead. So minimal is Hamm's reaction that it is easy for audiences to not even notice that Nell has died. Given Hamm's tendency towards hyperbole and given especially his pre-

occupation with finishing and with endings, his failure (or inability) to say a word upon learning of Nell's death is all the more striking. It suggests that there is something about his feelings toward her that he cannot admit to himself. It is as if Hamm's very tenuous hold over his barely contained rage and his tyranny over the other inhabitants of his little kingdom would perish in an instant were he to begin to admit his sorrow by acknowledging just how deeply he grieves, not for the loss of his mother through death, but for the greater and more tragic loss that he has already experienced as a result of her lifelong absence. For such a condition loss hardly seems to be the appropriate word, in so far as it is impossible to lose that which one has never had. And yet Hamm suffers immensely from the feelings of loss; it is the single most important fact of his early childhood experience, perhaps more basic to his torment and self-loathing than the cruelty of his father, though the combination of the two would be lethal for any child. As a result of his early childhood deprivation, the only connection to other human beings that Hamm is able to experience is one based on violence, hatred, and neglect. This is the legacy that he has inherited from Nagg and Nell and which he passes on to Clov.

How greatly Nagg relishes his ability to deny the infant Hamm his needs is equalled only by his vindictive anticipation of yet another opportunity to perpetrate still further abuses on his now adult son: "Yes, I hope I'll live till then, to hear you calling me like when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in

the dark, and I was your only hope." Much of what happens in Endgame makes sense when seen in light of this image of the infant Hamm, left alone and terrified in the dark by a mother and father who refuse to alleviate their son's pain when they are the only ones in a position to do so. Nagg now rationalizes his behavior by claiming that "You didn't really need to have me listen to you."

Hamm's bitter disappointment in his own parents' failure to respond to his childhood cries finds expression in everything that Hamm says or does in the course of the play. In dramatizing Hamm's sadistic treatment of Clov and his cruelty to Nagg and Nell, Beckett not only documents the relentless persistence with which patterns of abuse are repeated across successive generations, but he also reveals an important dimension of another disturbing social ill - the mistreatment of the aged by their adult children on whom they are now dependent. Thus does Endgame shatter two of society's most cherished myths - the one that envisions childhood as an idyllic time of innocence and bliss and the other which suggests that aging parents can depend on their benevolent offspring to nurture and care for them as they supposedly cared for their children. The relationship between both sides of the equation is frightfully clear.

Now it is Hamm's turn to play the tyrant, and he does so with a vengence and with great theatrics, treating his adopted son Clov with the same sadistic abuse to which he had been subjected as a child and closing the lids on Nagg and Nell in

their separate garbage cans when he grows tired of listening to their chatter. Certainly Hamm's compulsive need to be situated "bang in the center" of the room is compensation, however paltry, for having been moved to the periphery of the closed circle created by his parents when he was a child. His grandiose and rather pitiable conception of himself as a failed god who could have saved millions, is also a response to his childhood helplessness and impotence. Hamm's demand that Clov place the fake, unfinished, three-legged dog of indeterminate sex ("the sex goes on at the end") in a position which suggests that the dog is "standing there imploring me" should be viewed in the same light.

To keep at bay the well of pain and sorrow caused by the extreme privation of his childhood, Hamm subjects Clov to his sadistic fantasies. "With prophetic relish" he says to Clov: "One day you'll be blind, like me. 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." Hamm's blindness provides him with no spiritual illumination; rather it is the constant physical reminder of his profound anguish and spiritual desolation deriving from his unalleviated childhood terror. Thus from the world of darkness and desolation within him and without, Hamm denies an important means of sustenance and symbol of life in the play - light - just as he withholds food as compensation for his childhood deprivation. The story of Mother Pegg is a

case in point:

Clov (harshly): When old Mother Pegg asked you for oil for her lamp and you told her to get out to hell, you knew what was happening then, no? (Pause.) You know what she died of, Mother Pegg? Of darkness.
Hamm (feebly): I hadn't any.
Clov (as before): Yes, you had.

Mother Pegg, it is suggested, was Hamm's lover - "She was bonny once, like a flower of the field," Hamm claims, and then "with a reminiscent leer," he continues, "and a great one for the men!" Mother Pegg is a figure in whom is combined both lover as well as mother (with a capital M!). Hamm's refusal to give Mother Pegg oil for her lamp is a twist on the New Testament parable about the wise and foolish virgins (Morrison 31) which Beckett uses here to express Hamm's sexually based sadism, his sexual self-hatred, and his ambivalent feelings about the sexual union of the "accursed fornicator(s)" who begot him.

Hamm has made sure that Nagg and Nell cannot touch each other from their separate garbage cans. Yet despite his efforts to frustrate them they still have the power to taunt and to tease him with their nostalgiac reminiscences of their shared past and with their continued exclusion of Hamm from their lives:

Nell: What is it, my pet? (Pause.) Time for love?
Nagg: Were you asleep?
Nell: Oh No!
Nagg: Kiss me.
Nell: We can't.

The exchange continues until Hamm interrupts:

Hamm (wearily.): Quiet, quiet, you're keeping me awake. (Pause.) Talk softer. (Pause.) If I could sleep I might make love. I'd go into the woods. My eyes would see . . . the sky, the earth. I'd run, run, run, they wouldn't catch me. . . .

Here we see a reversal of Hamm's childhood situation. Where Hamm's parents "moved him out of earshot" to prevent his childhood cries from disrupting their sleep, now Hamm quiets the parents whose "love talk" keeps him awake and prevents him from access to sight and to (sexual) love.

Hamm is crippled and consumed by his impotent rage at his parents and in particular by the sexual innuendo of their banter. A story that Nagg tells is especially loathesome to Hamm; that it is one Hamm has heard many times before is clear, for Nagg has been telling it to Nell since their engagement:

Nagg: . . . . Will I tell you the story of the tailor? . . . . It always made you laugh (Pause.) The first time I thought you'd die.
Nell: It was on Lake Como. (Pause.) One April afternoon. (Pause.) Can you believe it?
Nagg: What?
Nell: That we once went out rowing on Lake Como. (Pause.) One April afternoon.
Nagg: We had got engaged the day before.

Nagg proceeds to tell the story which turns out to be an obscene joke, interrupting himself to remark that "I never told it worse . . . . I tell this story worse and worse."

The obscenity of Nagg's story, its blatant suggestions of a

thwarted and debased sexuality, rouse Hamm to extremes of revulsion, outrage, and fury. "Silence!" he shouts, continuing to vent his rage and frustration in a frenzied tirade which echoes Clov's opening lines of the play:

> Hamm (exasperated.): Have you not finished? Will you never finish? (With sudden fury.) Will this never finish? (Nagg disappears into his bin, closes the lid behind him. Nell does not move. Frenziedly.) My kingdom for a nightman! (He whistles. Enter Clov.) Clear away this muck! Chuck it in the sea!

Hamm is driven to fury and despair by his exasperated rage. For all of his attempts at release he is left finally with a self-consuming and paralyzing hatred. The sexual violence that is at the heart of his primitive rage is further suggested by his disfigurement of all that is potentially generative and life-sustaining, particularly food and light.

Among the needs which Hamm's parents have failed to meet is his primary need for self-validation. Hamm has never been afforded an opportunity to see a reflection of himself in the eyes of a responsive (m)other or to have his existence validated by an appropriate response to his childhood cries. Instead, he was "moved out of earshot." Thus Hamm's identity has been founded upon an experience of lack. It is in this context that his "chronicle" can best be understood. His need to construct a self-sustaining fiction arises out of his extreme childhood deprivation; not only does it alleviate the pain engendered by his lacking sense of self, but it is also a protection against

the otherwise unbearable isolation and loneliness of his childhood:

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

Hamm's "chronicle" becomes his most important compensatory mechanism; he relies on it to validate and explain his experience and to give it shape and meaning. That telling the story is a means of survival is implicit in the fact that Hamm is unable to bring it to an end; instead, when he reaches an impasse, he thinks that he can always "bring in other characters." The "chronicle" functions on a number of important levels. On one level, it provides a commentary on the relationship the play establishes between life and art, between the story that is told and the teller of the tale, and between the process of fiction-making and the process of living. On another level, Hamm's "chronicle" allows him to reveal under the guise of fiction his own pain, desolation, and feelings of abandonment. In Canters and Chronicles: The Use of Narrative in the Plays of Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett. (Chicago: University of Chivcago Press, 1983), Kristen Morrison brilliantly explores the interrelationships between Hamm's "chronicle" and his present condition on stage: "Hamm's chronicle . . . betrays his deepest fear and need" (33), his "hatred and desolation," and "his own personal sense of never having had the solace he needed, not in

childhood and not now in his old age. . . . (38) "This story," Morrison continues, "has allowed Hamm to reveal his deep sense of not having been cared for and his deep resentment that such care could exist for anyone else. . . He has recounted his deepest feelings of neglect, resentment and hatred (felt as a child and re-enacted in reverse roles as an adult). . . . " (39)

Hamm's "chronicle" is the story he tells to explain both to himself and to Clov how he came to adopt Clov. "But for me, no father," Hamm reminds Clov, "But for me, no home." The fact of Clov's adoption raises important questions about the nature of the father-son bond in Endgame. On one hand, it serves to further shatter the myth of the happy family by reminding us that even when a child is wanted there is no reason to assume he will be "loved." On a more obvious level, the adoption also points to Hamm's inability to father his own child, a (most likely psychological) deficiency that is wholly consistent with Hamm's revulsion at the processes of birth and procreation. From Clov's perspective, the fact of his adoption would most likely magnify his sense of indebtedness and gratitude to Hamm, thereby further compounding the extreme interdependency of parent and child and complicating Clov's ability to leave Hamm. Though Clov questions throughout the play why he never leaves Hamm, the answers both he and Hamm provide ~~give~~ little in the way of any illumination. There is something about the parent child bond that defies reason; it just is. Regardless of how much pain and anguish is caused by the relationship there is a symbiotic interdependency

at work that makes separation equivalent to death for both parties. There can be no doubt that Clov has suffered immensely under Hamm's tyranny:

Clov (fixed gaze, tonelessly, towards auditorium): They said to me, That's love, yes, yes, not a doubt, now you see how --
Hamm: Articulate!
Clov (as before.): How easy it is. They said to me, That's friendship, yes, yes, no question, you've found it. They said to me, Here's the place, stop, raise your head and look at all that beauty. That order! They said to me, Come now, you're not a brute beast, think upon these things and you'll see how all becomes clear. And simple! They said to me, What skilled attention they get, all these dying of their wounds.
Hamm: Enough!
Clov (as before): I say to myself - sometimes, Clov, you must learn to suffer better than that if you want them to weary of punishing you - one day. I say to myself - sometimes, Clov, you must be there better than that if you want them to let you go - one day. But I feel to old, and too far, to form new habits. . .
Hamm: Clov! (Clov halts, without turning.) Nothing. (Clov moves on.) Clov! (Clov halts, without turning.)
Clov: This is what we call making an exit.
Hamm: I'm obliged to you, Clov. For your services.
Clov (turning, sharply): Ah pardon, it's I am obliged to you.
Hamm: It's we are obliged to each other. . . .

Not only does the passage express Clov's sense of alienation pain; what also resonates most powerfully here is the intensity of the bond between Hamm and Clov and its ambivalence. Though their words fail to capture the enormity of the loss both Hamm and Clov must feel, nevertheless one is left with a haunting sense of their fear and desolation. It feels as though the end has come at last.

What is perhaps Beckett's greatest achievement in Endgame is the humanity of its main characters. For by the end of the play the audience comes to pity Hamm even as his cruelty makes us

shudder. Hamm is unmistakably human; Beckett refuses to judge him and we cannot judge him either. It is Hamm's pain with which we are left when the final curtain closes. Endgame helps us to understand how these extremes of human cruelty and ugliness can grow out of the human need for love. For it is love which Hamm craves and is denied. On some level Hamm knows this and he suspects that Clov knows it too:

Clov: There's one thing I'll never understand. . . . Why I always obey you. Can you explain that to me?
Hamm: No . . . . Perhaps it's compassion. (Pause.) A kind of great compassion. . . .

Hamm's impotent rage and his cruelty barely enable him to contain his anguish and desolation; his is a sorrow so deep that we sit awestruck as we watch him struggle against the monstrous forces that take hold of him to protect him from it. The immensity of Hamm's hate exists in direct proportion to his capacity for love. Hamm's outrage is that of the child who longs for love but receives none. One sits amazed that human beings can cause each other so much pain and sorrow. For Hamm and Clov and Nagg and Nell are nothing if not human. In the end all of the pain and anguish and cruelty seem such a tragic waste, given the human longing (and thus capacity) for goodness and for love. It is an impression much like that with which we are left at the end of Shakespeare's King Lear. Like Lear, Endgame is unspeakably sad. Like Lear, its sadness is born of the deep and primitive bond between parent and child. Finally, whether or not Clov will

leave becomes a moot point. For what Beckett has dramatized are the conditions which make his leaving at once so necessary and at the same time so impossibly fraught with terror. Endgame captures the failure of family life, dramatically rendering the tremendous potential for violence and explosive rage at the heart of every family. The play exposes the cruelty of parents toward their children, the vengence of the unloved child, and the relentless repetition through the generations of patterns of parental tyranny and childhood terror.

Chapter III:

Krapp's Last Tape

We have seen in our exploration of Waiting for Godot and Endgame that the immense suffering of Beckett's dramatic characters derives in large measure from their buried memories of parental tyranny. In these plays the overt focus is on the father-son relationship; that the maternal figure might also play a profoundly important role in characters' psychic and sexual development is strongly implied in both works, but never directly addressed. Thus Krapp's Last Tape occupies a unique place among Beckett's dramatic works: it is the first play to present a male protagonist's condition as a function of his tortured relationship to his mother. The defining features of Krapp's condition, his arrested emotional and sexual development, become intelligible when viewed in light of the incestuous basis of the mother-son bond. Krapp suffers immensely under the weight of his ambivalence toward and identification with a mother who is at once seductive and severe. This dangerous and menacing maternal presence rules over Krapp's inner life, keeping him trapped in a solitary existence and rendering him emotionally and sexually crippled for life. In many of these respects Krapp can be seen as the dramatic counterpart of Beckett's fictional character, Molloy.

Many critics have located Krapp's difficulties in his ambivalent relationship to his mother; to my knowledge, however,

none has considered the possibility that the ambivalence grows out of the incestuous basis of that relationship, despite the evidence in the play in support of such a view. In the following pages, I would like to suggest that it is Krapp himself who tells the audience--through his repeated rituals and taped recordings--how greatly he suffers as a result of his early sexual trauma. In his compulsive and repetitious behavior Krapp recreates and re-enacts scenes of childhood sexual trauma, while at the same his memory of the actual experience remains buried and inaccessible to his conscious awareness. Further, I should like also to argue that Krapp is less the pathologically crippled outcast that many have taken him to be than a representative figure whose suffering and the roots of whose suffering are common in family life. For Krapp and many others like him, the burden of the past weighs heavily, insidiously infecting the present and obliterating the possibility for hope in the future as well.

An illuminating context in which to consider Krapp's condition is through the lens of revisionist approaches to psychoanalytic discourse ~~who~~ with have ~~revised and~~ redefined Freud's insights into the ways in which infants and young children are libidinally (or erotically) attached (or "cathected") to their parents. In so doing they have presented invaluable new findings with regard to the mother's role in the child's development and also with regard to the female's development. Their insights and observations have been useful in my efforts to place certain

aspects of Krapp's psycho-sexual development within a broader context. They have also provided a framework for understanding the representative significance of the suffering Krapp must endure as a result of his tortured relationship to his mother.

Freud posits that the child's raging libido is the source of his oedipal attachments and anxieties and of the difficulties he encounters in resolving them. He also claims that the successful resolution of the oedipal stage occurs when the father arrives on the scene and, threatening his son with the prospect of castration, helps the son to effect an identification with him and to abandon his hopes of possessing his mother. Freud says little about the mother's role in all of this, nor does he consider the development of the female child during this stage. He also fails to consider the attachment between the child (male or female) and its mother during the pre-oedipal[1] stages of development.

Particularly relevant to Krapp's Last Tape is the major adjustment Freud's thinking undergoes from the middle of his career, when he acknowledges the validity of his patients' painful testimonies of childhood sexual abuse, to his denial towards the end of his career that such accounts were valid. Freud rejects his patients' reports that they were being used by their parents for the parents' sexual gratification. Instead he

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[1]Like Madelon Sprengnether (The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis. New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), I use the term "pre-oedipal" as a matter of convenience even though "it may appear at times to be anachronistic" (2).

claims that such accounts were products of his patients' fantasy lives--projections of their oedipal wishes onto their parents. Given the abundance of evidence available to Freud that his patients were being sexually abused, one is tempted to speculate (and many have) about the (unconscious) motives behind Freud's shifting his position. Why did Freud choose to insist that reports of parents who sexually abused their children were false, the products of his patients' fantasies, rather than accurate accounts of what went on behind the closed doors of "respectable" middle-class families like his own?

Alice Miller is but one of many psychoanalytic thinkers who have taken Freud to task on this issue. Miller argues in The Drama of the Gifted Child and in Thou Shalt Not be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child that often it is the parent's sexual demands on the child which thwart the child's emotional and sexual development, not the child's uncontrollable libidinal drives, as Freud had imagined. It is not enough, Miller claims, to see the child as a mass of unruly, chaotic libidinal energy which is directed at the parent; rather, it is vital that the widespread (but carefully hidden) presence of the seductive and sexually inappropriate or abusive parent be exposed. The real culprit in the sexual trauma that afflicts Krapp and so many like him is a parent who is unable to control his or her libidinal attachment to one's child.

Krapp's experience is also consistent with the findings of the object-relations theorists and those of the Lacanian French

feminists. In particular the findings of the object-relations theorists regarding the infant's pre-oedipal attachment to his mother (and the mother's investment in her child during this stage) can help us to disclose the roots of Krapp's (oral) fixations, his compulsion to repeat, and the pre-verbal basis of his (sexual and emotional) paralysis. Moreover, the findings of the French feminists regarding the role played by language (acquisition) in childhood psycho-sexual development are also important with regard to the central emphasis in Krapp's Last Tape on Krapp's relationship to words and to language.

Beckett calls attention to Krapp's relationship to words and his preoccupation with language by means of the most innovative feature of Krapp's Last Tape: the tape recorder. Among its many functions, the tape recorder serves to dramatize Beckett's observations in Proust regarding the effects of time on the individual:

> There is no escape from the hours and the days, neither from tomorrow nor from yesterday. There is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us or been deformed by us . . . Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed but a daystone on the beaten track of the years and irredemiably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous. We are not merely weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday. (Proust 12).

Beckett makes the tape recorder an integral part of the play's development and dramatic impact. The device allows the audience to witness the profound damage that the weight of time past has wrought upon Krapp's present. The voices which emanate from it take on the quality of characters distinct from Krapp,

reinforcing and complicating the questions the play raises about the effects of time on individual identity. On the one hand, the tape recorder affords the audience an uncanny glimpse into one man's profound failure to piece together into a coherent whole the fragmented pieces into which time has torn him assunder. On the other hand, the device allows the audience to see the continuities and recurring preoccupations that predominate over the years of Krapp's life, giving to it a shape and coherence that Krapp himself is not able to see. The stage directions tell us that Krapp is nearsighted, but unspectacled, and that he is also hard of hearing--he is blind and deaf to the larger implications and repeated patterns that the audience recognizes in his on-stage acivities and in his taped recordings. It is interesting indeed that while Krapp is the most self-absorbed of all of Beckett's dramtic anti-heroes, he is also the least self-aware. Furthermore, the tape recorder affords Krapp an illusory sense of mastery and control. By switching the machine on and off and by rewinding and fast-forwarding his reels of recorded tape, Krapp can assume in fantasy a control over his life which in reality he is unable to attain.

The occasion of Krapp's Last Tape is the 69th anniversary of Krapp's birth and the making of his annual recording in honor of the "awful event." Krapp's birthday celebration is anything but a joyous event; rather it becomes an elegy for a life never lived, a funereal rite through which Krapp passes each year. Krapp's advanced age contributes to the play's atmosphere of

mourning. Moreover, the play's ambiguous title suggests either that this is Krapp's most recent tape, or, what is more likely, that it is the final tape that he will make. That the play is set "on a late evening in the future" reinforces this view while it also adds a level of irony to a play saturated with the sense of time past. Thus although Krapp himself cannot know this the play becomes a summing up of an entire life. Krapp's ignorance of the authorial designation that the tape he is about to make may be his last adds a special poignancy to his failure to live; looking at Krapp's life from the vantage point of time future (his last birthday) deepens the impression of waste already associated with Krapp's inability to free himself of the weight of the past. The effect of the play's titular and temporal designations is to foreclose the possibility that Krapp will change; instead we can be certain that he will continue to be locked in an endless cycle of repetition for the duration of his life.

Before Krapp embarks on his oxymoronic "new retrospect"--his annual birthday recording of the previous year's events--we watch him react with contempt and bitter regret to the voice of his 39-year-old self which emanates from a tape which he plays back for much of the play's duration. The recording makes explicit what in the presentation of Beckett's other male dramatic protagonists is felt as a strong undercurrent--the suggestion that there is something deeply troubling and destructive about their experiences as their mothers' sons. In

Krapp's rendering, the maternal figure is a menacing, austere, and foreboding presence, an almost mythical being, rather than a source of nurturance and comfort. It is, more specifically, her sexuality and the sexual dimensions of the mother-son relationship which seem most threatening. Krapp remains blind to the sexual basis of his ambivalence, to the buried erotic feelings that have bound him to his mother, rendering him emotionally and sexually crippled for life; the audience, however, is provided abundant evidence of how profoundly Krapp suffers from such feelings.

This evidence takes several forms: Krapp's references to his mother's death both in his ledger entry and, more importantly, in the taped passage which records his whereabouts and activities during the moments that his mother "lay a-dying"; the references to light and darkness which recur in connection with the death of Krapp's mother and in almost all of his descriptions of women; repeated references to "eyes" which suggest a kind of thresshold or boundary experience which allures Krapp but of which he is terrified; the use of fire and water imagery; Krapp's feelings of violent rage; the presentation of Krapp's sexuality as (with one exception) either auto-erotic or sado-masochistic; the eroticism and lyrical intensity of Krapp's description of a love relationship in which for a moment he seems capable of spiritual and sexual union; and finally Krapp's general physical and psychic condition to which I have already alluded. I would like in the following pages to explore each of

these considerations both separtately and in relation to each other. Then we will be in a position to ascertain what it is about the mother-son relationship that has gone so terribly awry here and how that relationship has undermined Krapp's development.

Even before Krapp utters a word, the play offers several clues into the nature of his psychic and sexual condition. The stage business and non-verbal activity during the play's opening moments introduce the audience to Krapp's auto-erotic sexuality, his compulsive anal retentiveness, his self-contained existence, his isolated self-absorption, and the insularity of his world. When the play begins we see the dishevelled Krapp before us on stage, looking as if he might at any moment come unravelled. The combined appearance of weariness and restless anxiety with which he goes about his silent ruminations and repeated series of rituals and physical gestures give the impression that they are time-worn means of ordering a chaotic and precarious emotional life. That these rituals are repeated at several key junctures in the play confirms such an impression. Of these activities, the most memorable is when Krapp "turns, advances to edge of stage, halts, strokes banana, peels it, drops skin at his feet, puts end of banana in his mouth and remains motionless, staring vacuously before him." It has been common in productions of the play to see Krapp remaining in this position--with two thirds of the banana protruding from his mouth--for quite some time.

The lavish attention Krapp bestows on his beloved bananas,

despite the fact that they are "fatal things for a man with my condition," is the most overt indicator of Krapp's auto-erotic, masturbatory sexuality. Not only does eating bananas soothe Krapp, but it also exacerbates his physical constipation; the compulsive activity thus suggests the link between Krapp's oral deprivation and his anal retentiveness. There is a distinctly childlike quality in the way in which Krapp lingers over the banana, as there also is in the persistence with which he withholds the pieces of himself. Just as Krapp cannot let go of his feces, he also hoards his material possessions--his ledger, his keys, his spools of recorded tapes, and his bananas--as tenaciously as he hoards and withholds his emotional and sexual self.

Having completed his initial series of rituals, Krapp sits down at a table lit "in strong white light" with "the rest of the stage in darkness." The lighting of the stage becomes an important means by which Beckett reinforces the references to light and darkness that figure so prominently in Krapp's imagination, as we shall soon see. Bending over his ledger, a book with entries which correspond to each of Krapp's spools of recorded tape, Krapp finds the entry he wants and reads: "Box . . . three . . . spool . . . five. (He raises his head and stares front. With relish.) Spool! (Pause.) Spoool! (Happy smile . . .)" With childlike indulgence Krapp persists in repeating the word "spool," fondling it in his mouth, elongating the vowel to make it "spooool," the pronunciation of which causes his lips to

make the same shape that they form when encircling a banana. That Krapp turns even his words into sources of nourishment in his mouth suggests how profoundly malnourished he is. What is felt most powerfully here is the solitary nature of Krapp's desperate search for palliatives to soothe his unfulfilled longing. One is reminded of Molloy and his sucking stones.

Moreover, the similarity of the word "spool" and the word "stool" evokes an association which Krapp's name has already suggested and which is further reinforced in Krapp's subsequent references to his "unattainable laxation" and to "the sour cud and the iron stool." The constipation from which Krapp suffers is both a bodily ailment and a metaphor for a psychic state characterized by the need to "hold on" to everything that can be claimed as one's own. It is difficult not to see in this kind of hoarding and retentiveness, in one's inability to "let go," that the individual in question is terrified of losing what little he has. Such an individual "holds on" for fear that someone will otherwise take away (or in response to having been robbed of)--not only his food and his possessions--but the very core of one's self.

Krapp's materialization of words also links him to other of Beckett's dramatic figures, most notably to Mouth in Not I, for whom words and the act of utterance take on a decidedly sexual and material significance. The association of speaking with sexual activity that we see in these two plays actually emerges quite early in Beckett's writings, in his first published piece,

a short story called "Assumption." "Assumption" is the story of a man who both longs for and dreads sexual release. Caught in the grip of a violent sexual frenzy borne of pent up libidinal energy, he recognizes in his desire for sexual consummation both the promise of liberation as well as the threat of death. In "Assumption" verbal and sexual ejaculation are identified. The narrator speaks of the unnamed protagonist:

> In the silence of his room he was afraid, afraid of that wild rebellious surge that aspired violently towards realization in sound. He felt its implacable, caged resentment, longing to be released in one splendid, drunken scream and fused with the cosmic discord. . . . Meanwhile, that flesh-locked sea of silence achieved a miserable consummation in driblets of sound, as each falling leaf saps the painful vigor of a tree in a cruelly windless autumn. ("Assumption" 42)

"Assumption" lacks the artistic control that Beckett was later to develop; nevertheless, it serves as an illuminating if somewhat overt exposition of several of the themes that would continue to interest Beckett, but which he would express with much greater subtlety in his more mature works.

Krapp's Last Tape, for instance, functions much like a musical composition--its interrelated "movements" accumulate to suggest a whole that is richer and more resonant than the sum of its parts. Through its repetition with variation of several patterns of thought and imagery, the play presents the audience with a picture of the complexity with which Krapp's past and present interpenetrate. The first of such repeated patterns we have noted in Krapp's preliminary stage business. The next is

presented in the form of an elusive cluster of references which Krapp reads from an entry in the ledger which accompanies his taped recordings. The entry summarizes the contents of the tape which Krapp wishes to hear this evening:

> Mother at rest at last . . . Hm . . . The black ball . . . (He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.) Black ball? . . . (He peers again at ledger, reads.) The dark nurse . . . (He raises his head, broods, peers again at ledger, reads.) Slight improvement in bowel condition . . . Hm . . . Memorable . . . what? (He peers closer.) Equinox, memorable equinox. (He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.) Memorable equinox? . . . (Pause. He shrugs his shoulders, peers again at ledger, reads.) Farewell to--(he turns the page)--love. (13)

These elliptical allusions tantalize the audience with suggestions of hidden significance which it cannot yet comprehend. We soon discover that we have been given in broad outline the elements that will figure most prominently in Krapp's more detailed taped account--the death of Krapp's mother (and his concommitant relief), a black ball, a dark nurse, the status of Krapp's bowel condition, the memorable equinox, and his farewell to love.

At this juncture what is most worth noting is the reaction of the Krapp we see before us on stage to each of the items he reads from the ledger; in fact, much of the play's dramatic (and comic) impact derives from the bodily and verbal reactions of the present Krapp to the written and spoken words of his earlier selves. Although the words he reads were penned by Krapp himself they appear to be as cryptic and elusive to him as they are to the audience. Krapp does not recall the "black ball" alluded to

in the ledger entry although he will speak of it in the tape we hear subsequently. It turns out that this is the ball he is holding in his hand when he watches the shade go down on the window to his mother's room, signaling to Krapp that she is dead. Krapp describes how he gives this "small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball" to a "little white dog," adding that "I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day." And yet thirty years later he does not remember it at all. Krapp also fails to remember the very meaning of the word "equinox," which turns out not to have been that "memorable" after all. Other references, however, suggest instead a continuity between Krapp's past and present which he fails himself to see; in particular the status of his bowel condition has remained a constant preoccupation.

These ironic juxtapositions give the impression that there is an unbridgable gap between the Krapp we see before us and the voices we hear of the younger Krapp. In this respect Beckett's presentation of Krapp is consistent with the difficulty we all face in the effort to construct for ourselves a stable identity that endures through time. When we look closely at the nature of the experiences which Krapp fails to remember we also learn something about the psychological stake there is in <u>not</u> remembering, in being able to forget the past, and in divorcing one's present self from the self one once was.

Krapp's on-stage reactions to the voices of his earlier selves affirm his (and the audience's) realization that he has rationalized his life-choices with lies or half-truths. Only in

retrospect does Krapp identify the self-delusion on the basis of which he lives, and so he is constantly filled with a sense of bitter regret and self-loathing for his misguided past decisions. And yet from this masochistic solipsism Krapp fails to learn; rather he digs himself into a deeper hole, hating himself more intensely with each passing year, persisting in the same kind of denial at each subsequent stage of his life. For example, after discussing on tape his decision to end a love relationship Krapp claims that "perhaps my best years are gone, when there was a chance for happiness. But I wouldn't want them back, no, not with the fire in me now, no I wouldn't want them back." And yet his words are belied by his actions, by his sorrowful embrace of a piece of machinery (the tape recorder) each time he replays the voice of his earlier self as it describes the love scene. The image becomes a terribly sad rendering of Krapp's unfulfilled longing for human connection. For fleeting instants Krapp sees his rationalizations for the lies that they are; but the self-loathing he feels for having been such a fool causes him to repeat the pattern again and again--he fails to learn from his mistakes.

Krapp's past is obliterated by the sham for which the present Krapp reveals it and because he invests so much psychic energy in denial; the value of his present is equally negated by Krapp's failure to change his ways. Krapp survives because he is able to suppress and to deny the truth about his experience; yet he suffers because he cannot believe his own lies even though

without them he is nothing. Hence the hoarding, saving, and re-playing of the taped voices of his earlier incarnations; his infatuation with bananas for the erotic pleasure they give him while at the same time they worsen his constipation; and his inability on every level to "let go," can all be regarded as compensatory reactions to his sense of impoverishment, to his deep and abiding sense of his own failure "to be."

Also significant in the ledger entry is its interplay of light and darkness, black and white. We have on the one hand the "black ball" and the "dark nurse" as well as the "memorable equinox," the time when the sun crosses the equator, making day and night of equal length. The references to darkness and black automatically produce in the listener an awareness of their "opposites," light and white. Krapp has suppressed in his written summary the references to these alternate sides of his binary pairs which do infact figure prominently in the taped recording. With two important exceptions, Krapp experiences these and other dichotomies--light and darkness, black and white, heat and cold, fire and water, inside and outside, stillness and motion, and silence and sound--as antithetical opposites which cannot be reconciled. For the most part, Krapp has been unable to experience life in any of its subtlety and complexity; instead he reduces experience into unrealistic either/or categories. He sees life as he experiences himself--as splintered rather than whole.

One final point should be noted about the ledger entry

before we consider it in relation to the taped passage to which it corresponds. The list in the entry is framed by two key references--the one to the fact that Krapp's "mother [is] at rest at last," the other to Krapp's "farewell to . . . love." Although it initially seems unlikely that it is his mother's love for him (or his love for her) to which Krapp is referring (the second reference would seem to pertain to romantic love as distinct from maternal love), the two allusions are, in fact, closely connected. Krapp is not puzzled by these references as he is by the others. If, as I would like to demonstrate, Krapp has been incapable of intimacy with other women because of his "love" for his mother, then perhaps it is indirectly the love between mother (as the embodiment of all women) and son to which Krapp is unwittingly bidding farewell. Or, in so far as the object of Krapp's romantic attachment has, unbeknownst to him, always been his mother, his farewell to love upon her death does in fact constitute a farwell to romantic love. One final possibility here is that when his mother dies Krapp is forced to bid farewell to the possibility that she might love him; that Krapp should greet this with a sense of relief (she is dead "at last"; he lets go of the hard, black ball, symbol of himself, and gives it to a "small white dog") and with feelings of loss as well is not at all as incomprehensible as it might at first seem. On the one hand there is the realization of the loss of all possibility for change as well as the loss (or release) of the self that he has held so taut; on the other there is a sense of

relief from the tension created by the discrepancy between fantasy and reality, between the undiminished wish to be loved and the growing realization that such a wish will be continually frustrated. There is no longer that to hope for.

Moreover, that Krapp specifically chooses to listen to a tape which centers around his mother's death before he makes the tape in honor of his 69th birthday suggests that the occasion of his birthday (or at least of this particular birthday) and the anniversary of his mother's death are linked in Krapp's imagination. I shall consider more specifically how these occurrences are related by focusing on the extent to which Krapp's ambivalence toward his mother is further complicated by his identification with her. Like Molloy, whose identification with his mother is made quite explicit from the outset of the novel, and who comes to resemble his mother more and more until he occupies her bed after she has died, Krapp too comes increasingly to identify with a mother whose death figures prominently in his imagination. Both similarly harbour tremendous rage towards their mothers, though Molloy is more cognisant of these feelings.

When Krapp plays back the tape of himself at age thirty-nine, we hear the voice of his earlier self report on several other matters before we hear him comment on the critical scene of his mother's death. In the first such passage we hear Krapp, in a robust "rather pompous" voice, bellow that he is "thirty-nine today, sound as a bell, apart from my old weakness, and

intellectually I have now every reason to suspect at the . . . (hesitates) . . . crest of the wave--or thereabouts." Krapp's old weakness is, of course, his constipation. Even at thirty-nine, moreover, Krapp seems more inclined to mock rather than to trust himself. He undercuts his assertion that "intellectually" he is "at the crest of the wave" by inserting, almost as an afterthought, "or thereabouts"--he deflates the metaphor, letting the air out of his hyperbolic bubble. For the metaphorical "crest of the wave" is by definition not a literal place; Krapp destroys the comparison by making the metaphor literal, negating the claim he has used it to make.

The thirty-nine-year-old Krapp goes on to describe how he celebrated the "awful occasion" of his birthday "as in recent years, quietly at the Winehouse" where there is "not a soul," a phrase that he repeats with minor variation on several occasions in the play. Thirty years later Krapp is still drinking and still completely alone. He proceeds to comment on his constipation and on his "fatal" consumption of bananas, his concern with the meaning and value of his life, and the fact that "the new light above my table is a great improvement. With all this darkness round me I feel less alone. (Pause.) In a way. (Pause.) I love to get up and move about in it, then back here to . . . (hesitates) . . . me. (Pause.) Krapp." Here darkness is associated with the loss of self, for it is only upon returning to the light that Krapp claims to feel safely restored to himself. Krapp fears the darkness, and yet clearly he finds

it a temptation--he surrounds himself with so much of it and he "loves" to venture out from his well lit table into the surrounding darkness. If the allusions and actual uses of light and darkness in Krapp's Last Tape are meant to evoke a psychological landscape, as I believe they do, then what they suggest are Krapp's dark interiors--the regions of dark irrationality and unreason which Krapp both fears and is drawn to within himself--and the means by which he keeps those places at a distance.

The taped voice of the thirty-nine year old Krapp continues its reflections, declaring Krapp's certainty that he never sings, even though he will later offer a drunken rendition of the song "Now the Day is Over." Then the voice of the thirty-nine-year-old Krapp proceeds to comment on an earlier tape he has just been listening to, one that was made ten or twelve years prior, when Krapp was about twenty-nine and "still living on and off with Bianca on Kedar Street." As Charles Lyons points out, Bianca is Italian for "white" and Kedar is Hebrew for "black." Often Krapp expresses his feelings about each of the women who have passed thorugh his life by referring to them in terms of light and darkness, black and white. He is also haunted by their eyes, a recurring motif in the play. "Not much about [Bianca]," Krapp-at-thirty-nine says, "apart from a tribute to her eyes. Very warm. I suddenly saw them again. (Pause.) Incomparable!"

Even at age twenty-nine Krapp is making resolutions to drink less and to have a less "engrossing sexual life. Last illness of

his father. Flagging pursuit of happiness. Unattainable laxation." Referring to himself in the third person, Krapp suggests that his father died and left Krapp's mother a widow when Krapp was about twenty-nine years of age. Moreover, Krapp seems at this point to have confused his identity with that of his father--it is not at all clear to which of the two Krapp's fragmented references apply. Krapp also remarks on his "magnum opus," his plans for which he will subsequently mock with bitter disdain and contempt. Both the narrating Krapp-at-thirty-nine and the listening Krapp-at-sixty-nine laugh derisively at the sentiments of the still younger Krapp. According to the thirty-nine-year-old Krapp, at twenty-nine he was already sneering at himself when even younger. Describing the "yelp to Providence" with which the twenty-nine-year-old Krapp ends his tape, the thirty-nine-year-old Krapp likens himself to a dog, an identification which will take on added significance later in the play.

This "movement" of the play ends with a haunting image: "What remains of all that misery? A girl in a shabby green coat, on a railway-station platform? No?" The image evokes feelings of abandonment; the picture is of one leaving or being left behind by a lover. We see the scene through the eyes of Krapp and receive a glimpse into his forlorn, lonely existence. The image also suggests that the indelible mark of time has already left its imprint; Krapp at age twenty-nine, alone and bereft, has only a memory of loss and abandonment to hold onto. Krapp denies

himself entry into the world of the living and the real and is hounded instead to the end by memories of loss and abandonment, fantasies of dying and death. Moreover, the use of the word "remains" is important here. Though used as a verb, for an instant one hears the word in its noun form, as in the "remains" of one who has died. Krapp's life is made up of the remains of his past, of the dead waste which has come to define him and of which he is afraid to let go.

The three words which subsequently emanate from the recorder, "when I look--," alarm Krapp. Upon hearing them he switches off the recorder, jumps up, and runs to the "darkness backstage" where the loud popping of corks indicates that he is once again fortifying himself with liquor. Most likely Krapp recognizes these words as prefatory to the critical passage concerning where he was and what he was doing when his mother died. For when he returns and starts the tape again we hear the voice of the thirty-nine-year-old Krapp describing the scene surrounding his mother's dying:

Tape: [When I look--] back on the year that is gone, with what I hope is perhaps a glint of the old eye to come, there is of course the house on the canal where mother lay a-dying, in the late autumn, after her long viduity (Krapp gives a start), and the--(Krapp switches off, winds back tape a little, bends his ear closer to machine, switches on)--a-dying , in the late autumn, after her long viduity, and the--

For all of its brevity, this excerpt is nevertheless important. The style of the passage, its archaic, formal language, has the

effect of distancing the speaker from the events he is describing. It allows Krapp to become, in a sense, other than himself. It is language that seems calculated to keep feeling at bay. The curious lack of affect here recalls the way in which in Endgame the death of Hamm's mother, Nagg, goes almost entirely unnoticed. Here too the detachment derives from the need to ward off feelings by which Krapp fears he would otherwise be overwhelmed. Krapp unwittingly expresses (but does not himself consider) those feelings when he plays back that part of the tape which describes what he is doing during the final moments of his mother's life. Some of those feelings are already apparent here.

The seasonal imagery of the passage, for example, is telling. Because Krapp rewinds the tape and replays part of this passage, we hear twice that the season is late autumn. The emphasis reinforces the feelings and associations commonly evoked by the literary reference to fall, among them melancholy, sorrow, mourning, and loneliness. The seasonal imagery here also suggests another dichotomy that runs through the play-- the inside/outside opposition. Krapp is outside. It is cold. The leaves have fallen from the trees; the earth is barren. Inside "the house on the canal" Krapp's mother "lay[s] a-dying." The depersonalized "the" house further distances Krapp from the events taking place within it. It is difficult to know the precise reasons for Krapp's removal from the house in which his mother lies on her death bed, though his claim to be "wishing she were gone" suggests his resentment and rage. And yet the very

fact that Krapp has positioned himself so that he can be "there when the shade went down" on the window of his mother's room, calls attention to the profound and unresolved ambivalence Krapp feels. He cannot be there and yet he cannot not be there. The intensity of the rage Krapp feels towards his mother and his desparate wish to escape from her tyranny seem equalled only by the depth of his need to be near her and to be reconciled with her. Although it seems at first that Krapp's exile form the house his mother inhabits (and from his mother herself) is self-imposed, one begins to acquire the sense that he has been banished, that he is not there because he is not wanted there.

Water imagery is also important in this scene and elsewhere in Krapp's Last Tape. Here the body of water is a canal, a narrow passageway which evokes feelings of constriction and which is presented in opposition to the "nice and lively" womb-like water of the stream which Krapp describes in a subsequent passage. The canal that runs past the house in which Krapp's mother is dying and which is likely the same waterway that runs past the bench from where Krapp watches the house also evokes an image of the birth canal through which the infant must pass on its way to being born. In the radio play All That Fall, Maddy Rooney tells her husband Dan Rooney about a lecture given by a "mind doctor" who attributes a young girl's premature death to the fact that she had "never really been born."[2] According to

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[2]Samuel Beckett, All That Fall. In The Collected Shorter Plays of Samuel Beckett (New York, Grove Press, 1984), p. 36-37.

Deirdre Bair, the anecdote comes from Beckett's own experience, when, in 1936 he attended a lecture at the Tavistock Clinic in Londin given by Carl Jung.[3] Jung spoke of a young girl whom he had been treating unsuccessfully for years and who died soon after she had stopped coming to him. "The only trouble with her," Jung is reported to have said, is that "she had never been born entirely." Beckett is said to have experienced the remark as a revelation; he embraced the idea that he himself had not been born entirely and attributed to that fact his lifelong depression, his preoccupation with suicide, and most importantly, his tormented relationship with his mother.

Moreover, Beckett is said to have claimed to suffer from memories of his difficult birth. Throughout all of Krapp's Last Tape there is the sense of suffocation, strangulation, or choking. Krapp has a persistent cough; he suffers from the fantasy that he is drowning; he inhabits a dark, musty room from which he rarely ventures out; and he is unable to sustain any vital human connection--in a sense, then, Krapp has "never been born entirely," in so far has he has never really lived. That this failure to live is figured as a problem in the process of birth itself serves to point up the extent to which Krapp dimly perceives that his failure "to be" is a function of his intensely ambivalent attachment to his mother. Because Krapp has buried the memories of his infancy and childhood, he is only able to

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[3]Deirdre Bair, Samuel Beckett: A Biography (New York: Summit Books, 1978), p. 209-210.

summon up a vague sense of his mother's power over him (and of the terrifying power of the maternal in general) by locating it in her having given him over into this accursed life.

That Krapp has remained incapable of facing his feelings about his relationship with his mother is further suggested by his reaction when the word "viduity" is sounded from the tape recorder. Krapp "gives a start" upon hearing the word, a physical reaction which belies his anxiety, perhaps a function of suppressed feelings associated with the word "viduity," feelings which have been stored in his body while being kept from his conscious awareness. Though spoken by Krapp himself at age thirty-nine, he has no idea now what the word means. Perhaps he has repressed the meaning of the word because it is associated with that which he finds most troubling about his relationship with his mother. Both his present emphasis of the word viduity--the fact of his mother's long period if widowhood--and the fact that he does not recall now what the word means, suggest that the position into which Krapp was thrust in relation to his mother by virtue of his father's death is associated with some extreme form of anxiety. His bodily reaction upon hearing the word would seem compatible with such a view.

It is also interesting that of all of the observations Krapp at thirty-nine makes about the scene of his mother's dying, what the sixty-nine-year-old Krapp finds most compelling is a single word whose meaning escapes him. Krapp commits himself to the task of looking up the word "viduity" in "an enormous dictionary"

which he goes "backstage into darkness" to retrieve. Upon returning to the stage with the dictionary he turns to the appropriate page and reads:

> State--or condition of being--or remaining--a widow--or widower. (Looks up. Puzzled.) Being--or remaining? . . . (Pause. He peers again at dictionary. Reading.) "Deep weeds of viduity" . . . Also of an animal, especially a bird . . . the vidua or weaver-bird . . . Black plumage of the male . . . (He looks up. With relish.) The vidua-bird!

Despite (or perhaps because of) the important implications of what he has just read, Krapp focuses on a grammatical construction he seems to find awkward--"Being--or remaining"--instead of on the content of his words. In so doing Krapp simultaneously reveals and conceals the significance of his mother's long period of widowhood prior to her death. That he chooses in the first place to include a reference to his mother's having been a widow for a long time indicates that the fact is important to Krapp. His initial use of such an obscure word, however, must have served then to distance Krapp from the feelings his mother's "viduity" evoked in him. Krapp's continued preoccupation with the sound of the word and especially with the configuration of the "vidua-bird," even after he has looked up the definition of the word, is important. As we have seen in the way Krapp relishes the sensation of how the word "spool" feels in his mouth, here too Krapp's relationship to words has less to do with their function as vehicles of communication than with their more primal, less conscious function as means of oral (and auto)

psycho-sexual gratification. Again we see Krapp respond to something about the word that is removed, at least on the surface, from its definition. The absence of relationship here between signifier and signified (or at least the absence of any obvious relationship), is a function of a psychically mandated determination not to feel. Krapp has effectively severed his conscious connection to language. At the same time, his almost hypnotic lingering over the way words feel in his mouth reveals how he has used language to serve a non or pre-linguistic purpose, i.e., to soothe and to calm him. When viewed in this light, the obsessive, compulsive, and masturbatory quality of Krapp's listening to the sound of his own words as they emanate from his recorder strikes one as a terribly poignant measure of how cut off from life and deprived of nurturance he feels.

Krapp's failure now to remember what the word viduity means suggests that the effort to detach himself from his feelings has worked. Nevertheless Krapp has brought out of the darkness and into the light something about those feelings, even if it is only the fact that they exist.

Having survived his re-entry into the scene of his mother's death, Krapp can now withstand listening to the voice of his thirty-nine-year-old self as it continues to describe the scene. In a passage which has not received the critical attention it warrents, we have the play's most significant revelations concerning the incestuous quality of Krapp's relationship to his mother. Krapp describes the

Tape: --bench by the weir from where I could see her window. There I sat, in the biting wind, wishing she were gone. (Pause.) Hardly a soul, just a few regulars, nursemaids, infants, old men, dogs. I got to know them quite well--oh by appearance of course I mean! One dark young beauty I recollect particularly, all white and starch, incomparable bosom, with a big black hooded perambulator, most funereal thing. Whenever I looked in her direction she had her eyes on me. And yet when I was bold enough to speak to her--not having been introduced--she threatened to call a policeman. As if I had designs on her virtue! (Laugh. Pause.) The face she had! The eyes! Like . . . (hesitates) . . . chrysolite! (Pause.) Ah well . . . (Pause.) I was there when--(Krapp switches off, broods, switches on again)--the blind went down, one of those dirty brown roller affairs, throwing a ball for a little white dog, as chance would have it. I happened to look up and there it was. All over and done with, at last. I sat on for a few moments with the ball in my hand and the dog yelping and pawing at me. (Pause.) Moments. Her moments, my moments. (Pause.) The dog's moments. (Pause.) In the end I held it out to him and he took it in his mouth, gently, gently. A small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball. (Pause.) I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day. (Pause.) I might have kept it. (Pause.) But I gave it to the dog.

Here as elsewhere in Beckett's dramatic works we have a series of references which seem to hold the promise of meaning while at the same time seeming to frustrate such expecations. And as we have seen in almost every Beckett play that we have considered thus far, a work's seemingly most important revelations are often couched in vague non-sequitors and ambiguous allusions. The patterns of imagery presented here become intelligible only to the extent that we are willing to consider them as one would the elements of a dream or a nightmare. Since the materials of Beckett's plays emerge from and are concerned with the hidden depths of consciousness such an approach would seem to be in order. To express his feelings Krapp relies on the disguised language and logic of dream images. This allows forbidden and buried psychic material to emerge without the danger involved in

direct expression. Thus the story Krapp tells is a disguised way of revealing something about his deepest feelings while at the same time it provides him with the requisite distance from such feelings to neutralize the psychic threat they would otherwise pose. The difficulties for interpretation implicit in the attempt to attribute significance to such cryptic allusions can be mitigated against by evaluating them in light of the images, language, and revelations presented elsewhere in the play.

Let us then consider the passage in detail and in relation to other passages in the play. The first important piece of information concerns the geography of the scene. Krapp is seated on a "bench by the weir"--a weir is a dam used to raise the water level or divert the flow of a stream; most likely the body of water is the same canal on which the house of Krapp's mother is situated. The landscape thus gives the visual impression of a disruption of the vital flow between mother and son, which in Krapp's imagination--as suggested by the various contexts in which water imagery occurs throughout the play--comes increasingly to be located in the very fact of his birth itself. Moreover, although a weir diverts or disrupts the flow of water, the body of water remains undifferentiated and finally one. The identification between mother and son is, paradoxically, ruptured and at the same time unbroken; for better or for worse, the mother-son bond can not be completely or permanently severed. Clearly for Krapp the connection has proven to be immensely destructive.

It is important to recall that Krapp records these reflections on the thirty-ninth anniversary of his birth and listens to them again on his sixty-ninth birthday, just prior to making his "last tape." The association between the death of Krapp's mother and Krapp's birth is suggested again in this passage when Krapp describes the nurse, a maternal image, as a "dark young beauty" with an "incomparable bosom" and her "big black hooded perambulator, most funereal thing"; the association is extended to include an identification of Krapp's own birth with his death--the infant's perambulator is likened to a coffin or a hearse; the nursemaid comes across as both a seductress and a potential murderess.

Krapp positions himself so that he can see the window of the room in which his mother is dying. His seeming indifference to his mother's death, suggested by the apparent lack of affect which characterizes this passage, is belied by the very fact of Krapp's physical positioning. The impression of Krapp as an exile is also reinforced by the way in which he is situated within the spatial and geographical dimensions of the scene. His mother is inside; Krapp is outside "in the biting wind, wishing she were gone." The inside/outside dichotomy is not only literal; Krapp's mother is inside a room in a house, but she also exists symbolically deeply inside of Krapp. And Krapp is not only outside in the cold, biting wind, but he is also an alienated outsider, both in relation to his mother, from whose affections he would seem to have been banished, and also in

relation to other human beings.

In this passage Krapp utters the following words: "There I sat, in the biting wind, wishing she (his mother) were gone. (Pause.) Hardly a soul." Towards the end of the play, when he is making his sixty-ninth birthday recording, Krapp notes that he "crawled out once or twice, before the summer was cold. Sat shivering in the park, drowned in dreams and burning to be gone. Not a soul." The repetition with variation of words and images in these two passages, separated from each other by a (real) time span of thirty years (and by a stage time span of only minutes), is striking, particularly in its revelation of an identification between Krapp and his now-dead mother.

The use of the word "crawled" in the second reference suggests both the infantile quality of Krapp's present emotional state as well as the weariness, helplessness, and physical decline that accompany advancing age. Thus it serves also as a comment on the return to the infantile in the aging individual. Like the aging Molloy, there has always been a small child within Krapp that has kept him crawling back to his mother. The reference to crawling evokes an image of the infant within Krapp, beckoning him to return to life's beginnings. Here the desire to unite sexually and merge with the mother is figured as a continued regression and return to the womb. It is also a wish for annihilation. That Krapp is always "going back"--replaying his tapes of his past--is symptomatic of this compulsion to return. Such a need would become a persistent compulsion only in

one for whom the maternal presence was inadequate at best. Thus for Krapp sexual intimacy is on some level synonomous with the annihilation of self. This is what he has been expressing in his references to darkness as a realm both desired and feared.

Moreover, in the second set of words Krapp's characteristic rage and vitriol has disappeared. Now at sixty-nine Krapp is left with a "burning to be gone" where before at thirty-nine he was "wishing she (his mother) were gone." Earlier Krapp was wishing for his mother's death; now he is wishing for his own, and the notion seems to evoke feelings in him of calm resignation. Perhaps Krapp imagines that in death he can achieve a union with his mother of which he was deprived in life. The use of the word "drowned" supports such a view, especially in light of the water/womb imagery used throughout the play. Moreover, that it is "dreams" in which Krapp is "drowned" implies a kind of psychic return (to childhood, to the depths of the mind) that I have been suggesting. This is further substantiated when, in the final "movement" of the play, Krapp is immersed in memories of his childhood. The phrase "hardly a soul" in the first passage, becomes "not a soul" in the second. This repetition with variation is also telling; the intervening death of Krapp's mother becomes the turning point between near and complete isolation for Krapp. The effect of the linguistic connections between the two passages is reinforced by the likelihood that Krapp is seated in both instances on the same bench.

Warm/cold imagery is also significant in both references--in the first Krapp is sitting in "the biting wind"; in the second, although Krapp ventures out "before the summer was cold," he is "shivering" and "burning to be gone." Here we have warm/cold imagery, images of fire and water (Krapp is "burning" to be gone; he is also "drowned" in dreams), and references which point to the inside/outside dichotomy (outside it is cold and Krapp is shivering; inside himself, where his mother is, metaphorically, he is "burning to be gone"). Each side of these binary pairs is itself infinitely reducible and ambiguous--fire is associated with both violent rage and sexual passion, water with the life-sustaining nourishment of the womb and with the possibility of death by drowning as well.

The "few regulars" who inhabit the park with Krapp comprise a group whose interest might be said to reside in their being, like Krapp, society's leftovers--"nursemaids, infants, old men, dogs." According to Krapp, he "got to know them quite well," yet he qualifies the assertion by adding "oh by appearance of course I mean!" The qualification is at once ironic, telling, and sad. The notion of getting to know people quite well would hardly seem compatible with "by appearance." Moreover, the sense of urgency with which Krapp adds the follow-up remark gives the impression that he fears that someone (his mother, perhaps) might be watching him, someone on whose account he cannot get to know people by any means other than by appearance. Krapp seems to react to his own inadvertent intimation of intimacy by

immediately offering the reassurance that there was really no intimacy at all. This subtly suggests that Krapp's disconnectedness and lack of intimacy with other human beings is rooted in fear and paranoia, in his perception that someone would be deeply offended and angry were he to deign to be close to another human being. Krapp's apparent fear of betraying his mother might very well be an expression through reversal of his own sense of betrayal at her hands which he cannot afford to admit to himself. Thus the sadness of the revelation is felt in how deeply cut off from himself and from others Krapp has had to be without ever understanding why or that things could ever be different.

Of particular interest to Krapp is one of the nursemaids, a "dark young beauty . . . all white and starch, incomparable bosom, with a big black hooded perambulator, most funereal thing." I have already noted the nursemaid as a "stand-in" for Krapp's mother in this disguised account and I have alluded to the association of birth and death implicit in the description of the hearse-like perambulator. I have also suggested that in the nursemaid/mother is combined the spectres of both seductress as well as murderess. The interplay of darkness and light here is also important; according to Krapp's rendering, the nursemaid is associated with images of both black and white, darkness and light. She is both a "dark young beauty" as well as "all white and starch;" that she is both "dark" and "young" would seem to be veiled references the nursemaid's mysterious sexual allure. Her

"white and starch" and her "incomparable bosom" stand in sharp contrast to her sexual significance and suggest instead something harsh, severe, and maternal about the figure of the nursemaid. The female breasts seem to evoke in this instance a maternal significance for Krapp which he attempts to keep separate from the woman's sexual appeal. Despite Krapp's determination to divide the sexual and the maternal into separate categories, the listening audience must acknowledge that the image of the nursemaid combines both the dark erotic sexuality of a lover as well as the distinct harshness and severity of an unresponsive mother.

Two questions present themselves concerning this matter: Why does Krapp so vehemently need to see the two sides as separate; i.e., why this urgent, desparate need to maintain the boundary between woman as sexual being and woman as maternal figure? And how, given this overwhelming need to impose such distinct boundaries, does Krapp deal with a real rather than a fantasy individual, in whom are combined both dimensions of womanhood? These are not rhetorical questions.

In response to the first, I would like to suggest that the reason that Krapp feels the need to maintain such rigid boundaries derives from an experience in which such boundaries were transgressed. More specifically, the evidence in the play seems to me to accumulate in support of the view that Krapp's relationship to his mother was incestuous; all of Krapp's psychic and sexual disabilities, as well as his overt and seemingly

irrational symptomatology, become intelligible when we consider them in light of such a possibility. As in life, in Krapp's Last Tape there is never a direct revelation of such an experience; rather there is an accumulation of evidence which finally impresses on one its extreme likelihood. In this respect Krapp's experience is representative, exaggerated only in appearance, perhaps in order to force the audience to take notice of just how much damage countless numbers of people suffer, people who live (or fail to live) much as Krapp does, but who do so in silence, ignorance, and obscurity. In many such cases there is no hard "proof"; there can't be when an individual's survival has depended on the ability to repress and to deny the traumatic experience and when no one else is present as a witness.

It is impossible to determine whether Krapp's mother has sexually assaulted him. Yet sexual violation need not be physical. It is often much more subtle and more confusing, but no less traumatic for a child. The extremity of Krapp's isolation is a measure of how costly has been the threat his mother once posed (and, in his imagination, continues to pose). To protect himself from annihilation Krapp imposes on himself the boundaries that should have been the parent's responsibility. And sadly, he has no idea that he is safe now, that no one can hurt him anymore. He remains the helpless infant he once was, at the mercy of a dangerously seductive parent.

The parent who uses the child for his own sexual gratification costs that individual his childhood and, often, his

life. It falls upon a tiny child to be vigilant, to guard against his own feelings, and to protect himself from the danger of a parent who is out of control (and from the force of his own libidinal energy. Hence Krapp's obsession with being in control. When one sees Krapp in this light everything he does in the play begins to make sense.

In response to the second question--how does Krapp deal with a "real" woman?--the answer is that he doesn't. His fear of transgressing the boundary which keeps the maternal and the sexual separate causes him to deprive himself of intimacy and love with a woman. His most pressing need is to remain separate, not to merge with the (m)other. The sexual aspect of the maternal threatens to obliterate Krapp; he knows that he would lose himself entirely were he to abandon himself to the mother's sexual allure. And yet he is helpless against the forces which keep him, like Molloy, always returning to his mother.

Krapp comes close to transcending his (at one time necessary) self-imposed boundaries in one uncharacteristic relationship, as we shall see. Yet finally he abandons the possibility for love and returns to his habitual (and no longer necessary) solitary existence. Caught in a cycle of regression and repetition, Krapp never again comes that close to loving, afraid as he is to risk that much again. It is over the failure of this love relationship (suggested either by the fact that it actually existed and had to end or that it existed for Krapp only in fantasy) over which he seems to harbour the profoundest

regret, and as we have seen, Krapp is a man for whom regrets are in no short supply.

It is in this conflict between the need to connect and the terror of so doing that we can locate the source of the pain, anguish, and confusion which afflict Krapp so profoundly, rendering him emotionally and sexually paralyzed (or constipated) for life. Krapp's next allusion provides what might be taken as further evidence that his emotional and sexual paralysis are rooted in a transgression of the sexual boundaries between mother and son. It also provides insight into Krapp's pervasive terror and confusion. And it might also explain the power that the word "viduity" has over him. "Whenever I looked in her direction," Krapp on tape says of the nursemaid, "she had her eyes on me." Once again, a woman's eyes hold special significance for Krapp. "And yet," he continues, "when I was bold enough to speak to her--not having been introduced--she threatened to call a policeman." Who, one wonders, could possibly have introduced them? Again Krapp's concern with propriety here is similar to his claim to have gotten to know the park regulars "by appearance" only. That Krapp feels ashamed and guilt-ridden is suggested by his need to appeal to some external (and imagined) arbiter of propriety and appropriateness. Clearly the need has become internalized, for surely no one would consider it likely that anyone there would have been performing introductions. It is also significant that Krapp's "transgression" lies in his having been "bold enough to speak to her." Speaking is again

revealed as a decidedly sexual activity for Krapp, for it is this which prompts the nursemaid to summon a policeman, convinced that Krapp has "designs on her virtue." Next to the eating of bananas speaking is Krapp's primary source of (auto-) erotic pleasure.

Although the nursemaid is presumably staring at Krapp, when he responds by speaking to her she acts as if he has made the whole thing up, as if she had not been looking at him at all and he is merely a delusional liar. According to her version of reality Krapp becomes the guilty party from whom the nursemaid needs protection and to whom she responds by calling a policeman. In this psychodrama that Krapp plays out in the park while his mother lays dying on the other side of a window, we are presented with a disguised version of Krapp's personal history and of his relationship to his mother. If the nursemaid is a substitute for Krapp's mother then what we have here is a record of the maternal figure as an ambiguous presence, at once seductive and severe. She seduces the son and denies that she has done so, leaving him filled with shame and guilt for having had "designs on her virtue." Krapp concludes his anecdote about the "dark nurse" with a reference to "the face she had! The eyes! Like . . . (hesitates) . . . chrysolite!" The eyes that were fixed on Krapp earlier are figured here as a hard and impervious green. Moreover, the repeated use of archaic language suggests again the need Krapp feels to distance himself from the psychic material he is releasing in disguised form.

Krapp's dramatic re-enactment of this supremely important

experience has important representative significance. Thanks to the findings of Alice Miller, for example, we now know that it is commonplace for a child to be used to gratify the sexual needs of a parent. In most such instances, moreover, the child, like Krapp, is subsequently made to take the blame when the parent denies the abuse, either overtly through flat-out denial or implicitly, by acting as if nothing out of the ordinary has happened. The child, however, knows that something is wrong, but does not understand what it is. He feels overwhelmed by confusion, having been prematurely exposed to sexual feelings by a parent. He feels frustrated, helpless, and enraged. His innocencee and trust have been brutally betrayed by a parent for whose love he still longs. Such an individual, like Krapp, finds it difficult, if not impossible, to trust again. Having been over-stimulated as a child, and with no appropriate outlet, such an individual often resorts to excessive masturbation and tends to sexualize everything. As an adult such an individual's sexuality often becomes either auto-erotic or sado-masochistic. Krapp re-enacts his history of sexual violation (and may on some level be attempting to transcend it) by making and replaying his recorded tapes. But neither he nor anyone else can hear what he is saying. Thus, like so many other Beckett protagonists, Krapp fails to break the silence and thus to break free of the chains that bind him.

The final reference in the passage concerns Krapp's statement that he

was there when . . . the blind went down, one of those dirty brown roller affairs, throwing a ball for a little white dog, as chance would have it. I happened to look up and there it was. All over and done with, at last. I sat on for a few mwments with the ball in my hand and the dog yelping and pawing at me. (Pause.) Moments. Her moments, my moments. (Pause.) The dog's moments. (Pause.) In the end I held it out to him and he took it in his mouth, gently, gently. A small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball. (Pause.) I shall feel it, in my hand, until my dying day. (Pause.) I might have kept it. (Pause.) But I gave it to the dog.

Krapp's curious attention to detail, his intent focus on the window shade and his careful rendering of what it looks like, can be viewed as part of his sustained effort to divert his attention from the powerful feelings associated with his mother's death. Moreover, his "chance" activity with the ball and the dog as well as his claim that he "happened to look up" when the blind went down, would appear to be motivated by a wish to seem non-chalant when in reality he has been reacting to the matter at hand with extreme vigilance, deliberation, anxiety, and near despair. When viewed in light of Krapp's claim to be "wishing she were gone" such a casual stance seems designed to appease his own sense that the relationship between his mother's death and his wish for it is anything but accidental or coincidental. It is as if he perceives a causal connection; the wish equals the deed.

The window itself is an important image, thematically linked to the play's several references to women's eyes and similarly evocative of a boundary or threshold to be crossed or resisted. Moreover, the recurring use of the word "soul" throughout the play lends further emphasis to the connection between the window

and the eye references, joining them together in the cliche "the eyes are windows of the soul." The window, like the human eye, is both a potential entrance-way, a way into the soul of another, or a barrier which separates that which lies on either side. More specifically, the threshold situation is most typically associated with the leap into the world of another through sexual climax or with the leap into another world through death. In Krapp's experience, the association with sex and death is pervasive, due to the sexual dimension of his relationship with his mother. Thus the ambiguous ways in which Krapp's preoccupation with women's eyes is manifested become intelligible when viewed in light of the ambivalence they provoke; for on the one hand there is something intensely irresistable to Krapp in the notion of crossing the threshold the eyes (and the window) represent and, on the other, the notion also arouses his most profound fear. Would crossing that boundary be a birth into life for Krapp or, in a phrase that makes sense only within the Beckettian universe, would crossing it be a birth into death? When an unseen hand pulls the blind down over the window of the room where Krapp's mother is dying, it is a symbolic closing of the eyes, death's final sleep. With that simple gesture one feels that the son who still longs for but is afraid to enter the room and to merge with the figure of the mother has just been shut out forever. And yet when the play ends Krapp is no less plagued by his feelings of longing and dread; in death as in life the maternal presence maintains its power to haunt Krapp.

Thus we have another cluster of visual images--the house, the room, the death bed, the window, and the blind--which become symbols of Krapp's most deeply felt longings and fears. The threat of death implicit in Krapp's sexualized relationship with the maternal becomes more pronounced in this death-bed scene. This might account in part for the fact that Krapp remains outside of the house and, at the same time, close by enough to enable him to follow the events going on within it. The death bed of his mother symbolizes that which Krapp both longs for and dreads--to cross the threshold between mother and son through sexual union, an act which would also destroy him, returning him to the womb/tomb of she who holds over him the power of life and death.

That Krapp has failed so miserably to resolve this conflict is, on the one hand, an indicator of the potential hazards which all individuals face as they negotiate the transition from childhood to adulthood. On the other hand, the waste to which this conflict has reduced Krapp's life suggests a profound failure, not of Krapp but of Krapp's parents, to enforce appropriate sexual boundaries. A son's desire for his mother would pose such a terrible threat to his being only when the mother herself (often together with a complicit father) uses the son (consciously or not; in words, gestures, or actions) to gratify her own sexual needs. Had she not done so, the son, more likely than not, would have renounced his desire for his mother, overcome his guilt and his fear of trangression, and met with far

less internal resistance to his own need for human connection.

We need finally to consider in this passage Krapp's "chance" encounter with a white dog when the blind is lowered on the window signaling to Krapp that his mother is dead. Krapp considers, in a moment of mock solemnity, the "meaning" of his mother's death: "Moments," he claims. "Her moments, my moments. (Pause.) The dog's moments." The remark serves also to suggest both the separateness as well as the identification of his mother, himself, and the dog; it alludes, on the one hand, to simultaneity in time, and, on the other, to separation and differentiation in space. It also suggests that Krapp is grappling with an insight that he lacks the capacity to integrate--that it is possible to be both separate and bound at the same time.

When Krapp describes how he held out to the "small white dog" his "small, old, black, hard, solid rubber ball" and how the dog "took it in his mouth, gently, gently" he is describing a symbolic re-enactment of a most private and intense internal drama. It seems almost like a "wish-fulfillment" whereby in fantasy Krapp is accepted and nurtured as he has never been in reality. In Krapp's description of the black ball he makes it analogous to his stool and very much a symbol of his identity. Krapp's mother has died; he can finally let go--of his feces and of himself, giving himself to a dog who takes of him "gently." In another sense we might say that Krapp has, so to speak, unloaded his crap/Krapp. He has finally liberated himself. And

yet it is too late and not enough. The gesture finally strikes one as infinitely sad. For Krapp has given himself only to a dog, a dog with which Krapp identifies (implicit in his aforementioned "yelp" to Providence). Thus the gesture only appears to be a giving away of the self; upon closer inspection it seems only slightly less self-absorbed that Krapp's more blatantly auto-erotic activities. Moreover, the identification of Krapp and the dog with Krapp's mother has also been suggested here. In this surreal and almost Joycean scene there is a nightmarish and primal transgression of boundaries--between self and other, between mother and son, between human and animal--implicit in the violation of the incest taboo.

"I might have kept it," Krapp says, referring to the ball, "but I gave it to the dog." That Krapp claims he "will feel [the ball] in my hand, until my dying day" is a testament to the extremity of the feelings he experiences at the time of his mother's death, feelings which he fails to acknowledge even as he unwittingly discloses them. Krapp's ambivalence towards his mother, his attachment and his rage, keep him from ever being able to mourn his mother's death. Thus he is never able to separate from her. The apparent lack of affect in Krapp's description of this scene and again thirty years later when he listens to the tape becomes a measure of how intensely he feels; his failure to ever truly live is a testament to how profoundly he has suffered beneath the weight of his inability to acknowledge such feelings.

In between this account and the passage in which Krapp describes his experience with a lover on a boat, we have Krapp's record of an epiphany which Beckett himself is said to have experienced, a realization that "the dark I have struggled to keep under" is in reality the source of his creative inspiration (Bair). Krapp at thirty-nine describes

> [t]hat memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty, in the howling wind, never to be forgotten, when suddenly I saw the whole thing. The vision, at last. This I fancy is what I have chiefly to record this evening, against the day when my work will be done and perhaps no place left in my memory, warm or cold, for the miracle that . . . (hesitates) . . . for the fire that set it alight--(Krapp switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again)--great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-guage, spinning like a propeller, clear to me at last that the dark I have struggled to keep under is in reality my most--(Krapp curses, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again)--unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire--(Krapp curses louder, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again)

Throughout the re-playing of the passage we see the sixty-nine year old Krapp on stage curse at the voice of his earlier self and speed the tape forward when he can stand it no longer. He has no patience for the youthful exuberance of his younger self whose visions he now recognizes as more self-delusion. Without the reactions of the on-stage Krapp to guide us, however, even the audience might for a moment applaud Krapp's vision, particularly in its reconciliation of binary pairs--warm and cold, darkness and light, for example. Now, however, one sees that the "unshatterable association . . . of storm and night with

the light of the understanding and the fire" that will fuel Krapp's development as a writer will also provide him with an air-tight excuse to deprive himself of the human contact for which he yearns.

That Krapp has experienced (at least in his imagination) a sexual and spiritual union is suggested in a passage to which he listens with rapt attention and an almost childlike sense of wonder. He plays the passage over and over again, listening intently with his ear cupped against the speaker and his arms wrapped in a tight embrace around the tape recorder. The image is immensely sad; how far removed Krapp now seems to be from the scene he describes, 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.

Pause.

Past midnight. Never knew such silence. The earth might be uninhabited.

Realizing that he has caught the passage at its end Krapp rewinds the tape in order to capture the scene from the beginning:

--upper lake, with the punt, bathed off the bank, then pushed out into the stream and drifted. She lay stretched out on the floorboards with her hands under her head and her eyes closed. Sun blazing down, bit of a breeze, water nice and lively. I noticed a scratch on her thigh and asked her how she came by it. Picking gooseberries, she said. I said again I thought it was hopeless ging on, and she agreed, without opening her eyes. (Pause.) I asked her to look at me and after a few moments--(pause)--after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits,

because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened. (Pause. Low.) Let me in. (Pause.) We drifted in among the flags and stuck. The way they went down, sighing, before the stem! (Pause.) I lay 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.

Pause.

Past midnight. Never knew--

The passage is one of the most beautiful and evocative in all of Beckett's plays; its vision of human communion is consistent with its allusions to the harmony of the natural world. Krapp and his lover are outside in a boat on the water; the sun is hot and bright; the breeze is blowing gently. All of this stands in sharp contrast to the environment which Krapp more frequently inhabits--the inside of a dimly lit, musty room or outside in the biting late-autumn wind. There is not a trace of irony or self-mockery here; even the sixty-nine year old Krapp listens solemnly and seemingly in awe. Everything in the passage contributes to its impression of harmony and oneness--the lyrical intensity of its language; the play of light and shadow; the gentle breeze; the "nice and lively" water; the sun "blazing down," bright and hot; the stillness and motion; and the complete and utter silence--"the earth might be uninhabited." It is a vision that transcends the personal in an embrace that encompasses the entire universe. So completely at peace does Krapp seem to be that the universe itself is in tune with him and his lover. In this scene, moreover, contrasts are muted; binary opposites like light

and darkness, stillness and motion, silence and sound, and self and other, collapse into interpenetrating parts of a larger whole. Clear demarcations are lost in shadow. The choice of words here enhances this impression of harmony and oneness, words like "bathed," "stream," "drifted," "sighing," and "gently."

The eroticism here seems to grow out of a deeply felt union of two separate beings. Significantly, this is the only passage in the play during which we hear Krapp in conversation, talking and listening to someone other than himself! That Krapp is left finally with only a record of a conversation, a relic and a reminder of his one "chance for happiness," leaves the audience with a sense of how removed from this world of human connection is the solitary Krapp we have been watching on stage. Similarly, Krapp's description of the sexual encounter here--gentle, fluid, in harmony with nature--stands in contrast to the masturbatory or sado-masochistic sexuality that have otherwise predominated in his accounts.

The water imagery here is also important, as it has been throughout the play, as are references to the eyes of Krapp's lover. After bathing "off the bank" the lovers unite in a boat with water, womb-like, all around them. The eyes of the unnamed lover closed, Krapp asks her to look at him and she does so, "but the eyes just slits, because of the glare." When Krapp describes how he "bent over to get them in the shadow and they opened" it pierces the audience. "Let me in," Krapp implores of his lover, in a mournful cry that sums up his entire life's experience. And

she does let him in, for "we drifted in the flags and stuck. The way they went down, sighing, before the stem! . . . We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side."

We know, however, that this lovers' embrace is fleeting, that it will not endure, for already Krapp has "said again that it was hopeless and no good going on, and she agreed, without opening her eyes." Thus the spiritual and sexual union take place against a backdrop of doom, in the safety of the knowledge that it will not last. Krapp is unable to sustain the intimacy because he cannot separate it from his longing for the maternal embrace. When Krapp rewinds and replays the tape we hear on more than a few occasions the reference to Krapp's "face in her breasts." As we have seen, the female breasts evoke in Krapp's imagination fantasies of the sexual dimension of the maternal. Thus he fails to give himself over to his lover because the comfort and safety of her nurturing breasts feel too familiar, reminiscent of the deadly association between mother and lover which still looms large in his imagination. Krapp has devoted his life to keeping the two realms separate; it is no wonder, then, that he abandons this one possibility for love. It is, however, no less sad for its being predictable.

Having finally satisfied his compulsion to repeat the scenes from his past, Krapp commences with the making of the tape in honor of his 69th birthday. He begins by deriding the "stupid bastard" he claims to have been thirty years prior and proceeds

in a fit of violent rage to denounce himself for having been such a fool. He describes his visits with "Fanny . . . . Bony old ghost of a whore. Couldn't do much but I suppose better than a kick in the crutch. The last time wasn't so bad. 'How do you manage it,' she said, 'at your age?' I told her I'd been saving up for her all my life." He does not know how truly he speaks. His thoughts of Fanny lead him to ponder a series of childhood memories; what the connection is between the loathing of self and other implicit in Krapp's sadomasochistic union with Fanny and his sudden immersion in memories from his childhood is not entirely clear. The abrupt transition impresses upon the audience the deep chasm that separates the present Krapp from this almost unimaginable portrait of Krapp as a child. On another level, however, the transition serves not only to evoke a sense of innocence lost, but it also suggests that in the depths of his mind Fanny is associated with his experiences as a child. The juxtaposition suggests that something sinister in Krapp's early experience accounts for the transition within his imagination from a discussion of Fanny to a barely conscious reverie in which he lapses into the memories of his childhood. The use of the word "ghost," in "Fanny . . . bony old ghost of a whore" seems like a veiled reference to the ghost of Krapp's mother. It is the mother as whore for whom Krapp has in fact been saving up all of his life.

Of his childhood Krapp recalls when he "went to Vespers once, like when I was in short trousers . . . . Went to sleep and

fell off the pew." The juxtaposition of the weary old Krapp we see before us on stage and Krapp's memories of his boyhood is most wrenching and sad:

> Be again in the dingle on Christmas Eve, gathering holly, the red-berried. (Pause.) Be again on Croghan on a Sunday morning, in the haze, with the bitch, stop and listen to the bells. (Pause.) And so on. (Pause.) Be again, be again. (Pause.) Once wasn't enough for you. (Pause.) Lie down across her.

But Krapp cannot "be again" because he has never been able "to be" in the first place. Krapp returns again and again to the scenes of his past as if to convince himself that he was there, that it was him. In this effort he fails. Krapp has never been able to enter fully the world of the living. He remains always on the other side of a pane of glass, watching as an unseen hand lowers the blind and shuts him out for good. We never really know whether Krapp fantasizes or actually experiences the erotic encounter with the woman on the boat. If we imagine that he fantasizes it then the effect of listening to it described on tape becomes even more sad and wrenching, adding a deeper sense of sorrow to Krapp's unfulfilled yearning for human love and connection. It pains Krapp immensely to listen to this part of his account and yet he keeps returning to it. He is haunted by the memory. And he cannot let it go. As the play is about to end Krapp plays the passage once more. When it is finished we hear the voice of the thirty-nine-year-old Krapp: "Perhaps my best years are gone," he says. "When there was a chance of

happiness. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn't want them back." The audience, however, knows better.

Chapter IV:

Happy Days

When the curtain opens on Winnie in Samuel Beckett's Happy Days she is buried up to her waist in the "exact center" of a mound of scorched sand. When Act II begins Winnie is buried in the mound up to her neck; unable to raise, lower, or turn her head, her only bodily movement is a frantic darting about of the eyes. For the duration of the play the audience's attention is fixed on Winnie and on the mound of parched and barren earth, that "old extinguisher," which frightfully closes in on her. A "blaze of hellish light" is constant from the beginning of the play to the end. "With the sun blazing so much fiercer down, and hourly fiercer," the heat is extraordinary. Behind Winnie, out of her field of vision and on the other side of her mound, is her husband Willie, the back of his bald head "trickling blood." Willie spends most of his time crawling with difficulty on all fours into and out of the hole on his side of the mound. He's "not the crawler" he once was, according to Winnie, "not the crawler I gave my heart to" (46).

Like Waiting for Godot, Endgame, and Krapp's Last Tape, the emphasis of Happy Days is on human isolation, paralysis, and impotence. Like Vladimir and Estragon, Winnie suffers from a profound, viscerally felt existential anxiety. She needs to know that Willie is there in order to "go on, go on talking, that is"--a distinction which hardly seems worth making in Winnie's

case, in so far as her survival has come to depend on her ability to keep on talking. Thus to the extent that Winnie can convince herself that Willie might be listening to her, Willie provides her with a reflection of herself in much the same way that Vladimir and Estragon serve to validate each other's existence; again, to be is to be perceived. There is hardly a trace of tenderness here, however, only overt hostility and impotent rage. Like Endgame's Hamm, Winnie suffers from a paralysis that is at once a psychic as well as a bodily condition. Yet Winnie's immobility extends beyond even that of the crippled Hamm, who can still get about on stage with the help of Clov.

More notable than these similarities, however, is the common emphasis in Krapp's Last Tape and Happy Days on the sexual basis of their protagonists' anguish. Winnie can be seen as the female counterpart of Krapp, with whom she shares the same excruciating conflict between the longing for intimacy and the fear that it will kill her. Happy Days, like Krapp, calls attention to its main character's sexual rage and self-loathing. The play also suggests that Winnie is haunted by a buried memory of childhood sexual abuse which lies at the root of her extreme sexual and emotional ambivalence and pain.

In Happy Days Beckett is quite explicit in defining Winnie's condition in psychological terms and even more overt in locating the dramatic tension of the play in her sexual ambivalence, shame, terror, and self-hatred. Although Winnie's character finally resists a fixed psychological explanation--certain

aspects of her experience ramain necessarily vague and elusive (because they become, as functions of her own system of defenses, inaccessible to herself and thus to us in the audience as well)--a psychological approach to Winnie can best illuminate the source of her paralysis, the symbolic significance of the mound which contains her, and the basis of the impotence and hostility that define her relationship to Willie. To observe Winnie is to bear witness to the psychically and physically crippling effects of childhood sexual trauma and to understand how such an experience imprisons the adult survivor and permanently disfigures her (sexual) identity. Such a conclusion becomes inevitable once one makes the vital connection between Winnie's present condition and the story she tells in Act II of Milly and her Dolly. Winnie calls it "my story," suggesting that it is not merely a story that she has invented, but one that is, more importantly, her autobiography, disguised as fiction.[1] Winnie leaves her story

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[1]In Canters and Chronicles: The Use of Narrative in the Plays of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), Kristen Morrison explores the relationship between Winnie's "fictions" and her sexual disability, observing that Winnie's account of Milly and Dolly reveals that "something terrible has happened, something irrevocable." Morrison shows how Winnie's "extended narrative has allowed [her] to face and to re-experience a desire and a fear about which she feels ambivalent: romantic, erotic love is attractive . . . but it ought to fail, it ought to be frustrated. . . . [Winnie] feels like a little girl who has done something dangerous, something terrifying, all her own. . . something irrevocable." In making the vital connection between Winnie's disguised childhood memory and her present condition Morrison does much to further our understanding of the dramatic situation of Happy Days. However, Morrison's accont only touches on the possibilities for interpretaion raised by the relationship between the text of Winnie's story and the text of Happy Days. Therefore, I would like to explore more fully here the implications raised by Winnie's extended narratives to give the reader a sense

for last, for the time when "all else fails." I shall have occasion to return to it at length, but I would like before I do so to explore the prior action of the play and the concrete evidence in it on which I have based my conviction that Winnie's condition can be best understood as a response to an experience of childhood sexual trauma.

That something terrible happened to Winnie as a child, that it was sexual in nature, and that it was a violent transgression and threat to her survival, becomes indisputably clear as the play progresses. However, Beckett cautions the viewer against dismissing Winnie's condition as irrelevant to one's own. As we witness Winnie struggle through her day we are made to feel how terribly vulnerable is every human life to the threat of violence; how utterly helpless is the child within us all; and how experiences of sexual violence during childhood are common occurrences in family life. The danger as I see it would be to look upon Beckett's presentation of Winnie as a study in human psychopathology rather than as an exploration of the universally human, of what Alice Miller has called "society's betrayal of the child."

For Winnie, like all of Beckett's dramatic protagonists, is unmistakably human. To consider the evidence in the play that Winnie's suffering is the inevitable price she has had to pay as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse does not limit her

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of how complete and compelling is the picture the play presents of the lifelong effects of childhood sexual trauma.

representative significance. For as Alice Miller and others have pointed out, the use (or abuse) of children to satisfy the sexual needs of their parents is a common fact of family life. Winnie is no less representative than are Vladimir and Estragon, Hamm or Clov. Winnie too is "all of humanity." Martin Esslin's observations are illuminating in this regard:

> This is not to say that Beckett gives a clinical description of psychopathological states. His creative intuition explores the elements of experience and shows to what extent all human beings carry the seeds of such . . . disintegration within the deeper layers of their personality. If the prisoners of San Quentin responded to Waiting for Godot, it was because they were confronted with their own experience of time, waiting, hope, and despair; because they recognized the truth about their own human relationships in the sadomasochistic interdependence of Pozzo and Lucky and in the bickering love-hate between Vladimir and Estragon. This is also the key to the wide success of Beckett's play's: to be confronted with concrete projections of the deepest fears and anxieties, which have only been vaguely experienced at a half-conscious level, constitutes a process of catharsis and liberation . . . . (28-29)

The play itself contains an implicit warning to the audience against seeing Winnie's condition as abnormal, bizarre, or psychopathological. In Winnie's story of Mr. and Mrs. Shower (or Cooker, Winnie is unable to remember which is the correct name) we have the following exchange:

> Winnie: What's she doing? he says - What's the idea? he says - stuck up to her diddies in the bleeding ground - coarse fellow - What does it mean? he says - What's it meant to mean? - and so on - lot more stuff like that - usual drivel - Do you hear me? he says - I do, she says, God help me - What do you mean, he says, God help you? (Stops filing, raises head, gazes front.) And you, she says, what are you meant to mean? It is because you're still on your two flat feet, with your old ditty full of

> tinned muck and changes of underwear, dragging me up and down this fornicating wilderness, coarse creature, fit mate - (with sudden violence) - let go of my hand and drop for God's sake, she says, drop! (42-43)

Winnie has Mrs. Shower/Cooker react with violence and disgust to her husband's inability to comprehend that it is only as reasonable to ask what Winnie's condition is "meant to mean" as it is to ask the same question of his own condition. Thus Mrs. Shower/Cooker expresses a view which perhaps Beckett wishes his audience to understand (and which Winnie wishes us to see as well)--that her burial in the mound of barren earth is a metaphor for commonly shared condition. Moreover, that Mrs. Shower/Cooker's violent revulsion at her husband takes the form of physical withdrawal (she cannot tolerate his holding her hand), shows that her hostility has a sexual basis. Thus Mr. and Mrs. Shower/Cooker's relationship bears important similarities to that of Winnie and Willie; indeed, many critics have suggested that they are a version of Winnie and Willie at an earlier stage.

The language in the passage supports such an observation. Winnie herself uses the word "coarse" to describe Mr. Shower/Cooker, a word we hear Mrs. Shower/Cooker use moments later. Mrs. Shower/Cooker also uses the phrase "fornicating wilderness;" each of these words is repeated in different contexts in the play. Winnie repeatedly acknowledges that she fears having to confront "the wilderness" within herself when language fails or if Willie should "go off on [her]" and leave her alone. It is Willie who tries to use the word "fornication"

when referring to an emmet Winnie spots on the mound, only Willie significantly bungles the word, saying "formication" instead. Beckett's repetition of the same words in different contexts has a powerful subliminal effect on the audience, enriching and complicating the play's texture. By having Winnie give to her "fictional" creations words which both she and Willie use on other occasions in the play, Beckett blurs the distinction between the teller and the tale, raising important questions about the nature of fiction as a disguised (and therefore less threatening) form of self-revelation. Such suggestions at this stage of the play prepare us for the identification of Winnie with the characters she "invents" in her final narrative about Milly and her Dolly.

Thus the linguistic similarities between the text of the play and the texts of Winnie's narratives point to the vital connection between them. Precisely what the nature of that connection might be remains elusive; Beckett demands that each member of the audience decide for oneself. Though this may at fist seem to make for a frustrating and confusing theatrical experience, it is, finally, what makes audiences respond so deeply to this play (and to Beckett's other plays), for each viewer has had to (or has been granted the opportunity to) draw from one's own most deeply felt experiences to come to terms with the questions the play raises about Winnie's condition. What many have taken to be Beckett's deliberate withholding of information thus can be seen instead as a source of his dramatic

power and appeal.

The story of Milly and Dolly contains the play's most explicit references to Winnie's extreme childhood terror, a terror so profound that it has left her crippled for life. That the terror is a response to a sexual violation is also clear, both from the content of Winnie's "fiction" and from the action of the play. That, however, is where the clarity ends. For Winnie herself is unable to "break the silence" about her experience, despite her incessant talk (or perhaps because of it) and also despite her efforts to do so represented by the telling of her story. Although the full significance of Winnie's story remains elusive to the audience (and even more so to Winnie herself), Winnie's narrative is worthy of careful consideration because it raises important questions about everything in the play that preceeds and follows it:

Winnie: There is my story of course when all else fails. (Pause.) A life. (Smile.) A long life. (Smile off.) Beginning in the womb, where life used to begin. Mildred has memories, of the womb, before she dies, the mother's womb. (Pause.) She is now four or five already and has recently been given a big waxen dolly. (Pause.) Fully clothed, complete outfit. (Pause.) Shoes, socks, undies, complete set, friilly frock, gloves. (Pause.) White mesh. (Pause.) A little white hat with a chin elastic. (Pause.) Pearly necklet. (Pause.) A little picture-book with legends in real print to go under her arm when she takes her walk. (Pause.) China blue eyes that open and shut. (Pause. Narrative.) The sun was not well up when Milly rose, descended the steep . . . (pause) . . . slipped on her nightgown, descended all alone the steep wooden stairs, backwards on all fours, though she had been forbidden to do so, entered the . . . (pause) . . . tiptoed down the silent passage, entered the nursery and began to undress Dolly. (Pause.) Scolding her . . . the while. (Pause.) Suddenly a mouse - (Long pause.) Gently, Winnie. (Long pause. Calling.) Willie! (Pause. Louder.) Willie! (Beckett's ellipses) (54-55)

When she reaches this point in the narrative Winnie is unable to continue. Instead she interrupts her story with an extended digression in which she discusses the "sadness after song" and the parallel "sadness after intimate sexual intercourse" and then returns to her account of Mr. and Mrs. Shower/Cooker:

Winnie: Standing there gaping at me. (Pause.) Can't have been a bad bosom, he says, in its day. (Pause.) Seen worse shoulders, he says, in my time. (Pause.) Does she feel her legs? he says. (Pause.) Is there any life in her legs? he says. (Pause.) Has she anything on underneath? he says. (Pause.) Ask her, he says, I'm shy. (Pause.) Ask her what? she says. (Pause.) Is there any life in her legs. (Pause.) Has she anything on underneath. (Pause.) Ask her yourself, she says. (Pause. With sudden violence.) Let go of me for Christ sake and drop! (Pause. Do.) Drop dead! (58)

The digression serves to distract Winnie from her story, diverting her attention until she is able to withstand the pain involved in the process of regression, excavation, and release which the telling of the story entails. Yet the return to Mr. and Mrs. Shower/Cooker is more than just a distraction; it also functions to allow Winnie to say something important about the story she has just been telling, albeit cryptically and elliptically. She presents us again with Mr. and Mrs. Shower/Cooker in order to disguise as fiction important elements of her own experience. What is most telling is the voyeurism and vulgarity Mr. Shower/Cooker displays in his reaction to Winnie. Also significant is the violent rage his wife unleashes at him in response.

To Mr. Shower/Cooker Winnie is no more than an object; his comments all center around the status of the hidden parts of her body and in particular on her sexual organs - he persists in asking whether Winnie is wearing any underwear. In so doing he confirms that which Winnie most fears - that she needs to protect herself from exposure to the threat of a violent sexual invasion. This should come as no surprise, however, since the Shower/Cookers are Winnie's invention. Their exchange leaves us with a sense of Winnie's own inability to define herself in anything other than sexual terms, a common response to a premature and violent exposure to sex. Winnie's efforts to deny her sexuality have merely thwarted it and added to her shame, self-loathing, and paranoia. Earlier in the play Winnie describes her "strange feeling . . . strange feeling that someone is looking at me. I am clear, then dim, then gone, then dim again, then clear again, and so on, back and forth, in and out of someone's eye" (40). It is as if Winnie is imagining that she is being looked at through the lens of a camera, the object of someone's voyeuristic fantasies. And yet the voyeur is a part of herself, for this is Winnie's fantasy. Certainly to be perceived in this way does not offer the solace implicit in the Beckettian notion that "to be is to be perceived." Quite the contrary: For Winnie, to be perceived is to be looked upon as a sexual object or to be exposed to the threat of sexual violence. The alternative is represented in her choice of Willie whose indifference allows her hardly to be perceived at all and whose

impotence precludes the possibility of sex and therefore the threat of sexual violence. But the price she has had to pay for such a choice is her continued isolation and bondage.

Having completed her digression, Winnie is now ready to resume her narrative of Milly and Dolly. She picks it up at precisely the point at which she had previously left off:

> Winnie: Suddenly a mouse . . . (Pause.) Suddenly a mouse ran up her little thigh and Mildred, dropping Dolly in her fright, began to scream - (Winnie gives a sudden piercing scream) - and screamed and screamed - (Winnie screams twice) - screamed and screamed and screamed and screamed till all came running, in their night attire, papa, mama, Bibby and . . . old Annie, to see what was the matter . . . (pause) . . . what on earth could possibly be the matter. (Pause.) Too late. (Pause.) Too late. (59)

Now let us return to the beginning of Winnie's story. It is most helpful to approach Winnie's narrative as one would attempt to make sense of a dream or a nightmare, for it relies heavily on the the disguised language and the logic of the unconscious - displacement, condensation, projection, symbolism, gender reversal, and overdetermination. The account begins with the rather curious description of the womb as "the place where life used to begin." Although it is not clear what we are to make of this remark or of its relationship to the narrative that follows, what <u>is</u> clear is that from the beginning of her story Winnie is creating a world which can be seen as a projection of her own state; it is Winnie whose womb would seem to be incapable of generating life. The implicict association here between birth

and death is further reinforced when Winnie tells us that "Mildred has memories, of the womb, before she dies."

With each step in the narrative development Winnie descends more deeply into buried layers of her mind until by the end of the story the identification of Winnie with the child Milly is complete--when Milly cries out at the end of the story Winnie's on-stage screams pierce the silence of the theatre, sending waves of shock and terror through the audience. Winnie's metamorphosis into an earlier stage of development, her descent into the memories of her childhood, is signaled early on in her account when the narrative voice shifts from that of an adult, who calls the child "Mildred," to that of a child, who calls her "Milly." The archaeology of Winnie's inward and downward journey is further suggested by the use of such words as "descended the steep wooden stairs," "backward on all fours," "forbidden to do so," and "crept under the table;" the atmosphere is one of surreptitiousness, danger, and foreboding. That it is still dark - "the sun was not well up"--adds to the sense of doom. It is further reinforced by the peculiar pattern of Winnie's narration--Winnie follows each forward step in the narrative by taking a few steps backwards in order to correct something she has just said, or, more often, to add something to her initial account. Such backtracking not only reinforces the regressive quality of Winnie's story; it also serves to allow Winnie to forestall her arrival at the story's climax, the childhood terror and sexual violation of Milly and of Winnie herself.

As Winnie advances the narratvie and descends more deeply into herself, the complexities and ambiguities soon begin to multiply. With each new piece of information we are given we feel that we have entered a deeper, more complex, and more terrifying realm of Winnie's mind. What we find, indeed, is "the wilderness" Winnie claims to fear so greatly when she anticipates the time when "words fail" or when there is no one left to talk to. All is chaos and confusion here in the unconscious depths of Winnie's mind. And yet we feel that this same chaos and confusion reigns within the hidden depths of ourselves. That is why, as confused as Winnie's story becomes, it never seems as unintelligible as it should. For even if we are finally unable to articulate its message, we can still identify the childhood terrors it expresses and elicits.

Among the more curious features of Winnie's description of Milly and her dolly is that it contains references used earlier in the play to describe the physical appearances of both Winnie and Willie. Dolly's "pearly necklet" recalls the pearl necklace worn by Winnie. Her "china blue eyes that open and shut" recall both Winnie's earlier description of Willie's eyes, "china blue in their saucers," as well as her description of how her own eyes "open and close . . . open and close." Winnie describes Milly too in ways that resemble earlier descriptions, particularly those of Willie: Milly "crawls backwards on all fours," like Willie, whose "crawling backwards on all fours" Winnie alludes to on a number of occasions. This blurring of distinctions is most

obviously suggested in the similarity between the three names, Winnie, Willie, and Milly.

It is difficult to know what to make of this merging of identities, and yet one feels that they are important. From among the more plausible explanations, I offer these: that they reflect Winnie's absence of boundaries and inability to make distinctions -between self and other and between past and present - perhaps the result of the violation the story describes; that Winnie reverses the genders of the participants in her narrative re-enactment in order to protect the identity of the original perpetrator or out of fear of revealing directly an experience of which she has been forbidden to speak; that Willie's sexual dysfunction, like Winnie's, is rooted in a childhood experience of sexual violation. There are other plausible explanations, which can be neither confirmed nor denied. The "facts" can never be known. This disturbing inability to establish with any certainty the actual events behind Winnie's disguised presentation is an accurate reflection of experience. When individuals are prohibited from speaking about their experiences as sexually abuse children, and when no one but the perpetrator and victim are there to bear witness, it is often difficult if not imposible to fully "break the silence"; too often the truth will never come out. Yet one reliable measure if not of the details then at least of the quality of an early childhood trauma is a consideration of the (usually self-destructive) patterns one repeats in the present. Winnie's repeated patterns of behavior

are no exception.

In Winnie's description Dolly appears as a little person, much in the way that little children turn their dolls into tiny replicas or miniatures, usually of themselves at an earlier stage or sometimes of themselves projected into the future. Thus Winnie projects parts of herself onto both Milly and Dolly. Among the more striking features of Winnie's description is its precision, its attention to the minutest detail of Dolly's appearance, down to the "white mesh" gloves and the "little picture book with legends in real print to go under her arm when she takes her walk." This too is in keeping with the workings of memory; often in situations of extreme stress or incapacitating fear one fixates on the seemingly irrelevant detail in order to remove oneself mentally from one's pain.

After she begins her description of how "Milly rose, descended the steep . . . " Winnie cuts herself off in order to go back and tell us that before she descends, Milly "slipped on her nightgown." Winnie wants it to be clear to her audience that Milly is clothed when she begins her descent. And yet she also reveals, perhaps unwittingly, that initially Milly's nightgown was not on, that she was naked. Though this might seem a trifle irrelevant, I think it raises an important question - Why, if she has a nightgown, is Milly not wearing it in bed? Did she take it off herself? Did someone else remove it? The extremity of Winnie's present condition requires an extremely traumatic event to explain it. ~~different kind of explanation.~~ Indeed, Winnie's

story suggests that someone else exposed her to sex prematurely and violently, that she has never been able to tell anyone about it, and that ever since she has suffered the feelings of shame and self-loathing that should rightfully belong to the perpetrator. As Alice Miller explains in Thou Shalt Not be Aware and as Louise DeSalvo documents in her study of Virginia Woolf, this pattern is common in cases of childhood sexual abuse.

Winnie tells us that when Milly "began to undress Dolly" she is "scolding [Dolly] the while." The use of the word "scolding" is critical here, for it carries with it the association of parental disapproval. Milly is admonishing the passive, inert Dolly while she undresses her; the offender is blaming the victim. Winnie has become both the aggressor as well as the victim, Milly and Dolly. This phenomenon is well-documented in studies of both childhood victims as well as political prisoners: When it is too terrifying and dangerous to admit that one's life is in the hands of someone who is tormenting one and threatening one's life, the victim will identify with the oppressor as a means of survival. The drama Winnie has Milly and Dolly enact reflects her own internal drama, itself most likely a response to violence originally perpetrated on her by someone on whom she depended. That Winnie was blamed for her role as victim seems clear enough.

I have provided such a detailed interpretation of Winnie's narrative in order to show how important it is in relation to Winnie's present dramatic condition. It is a mark of Beckett's

artistic integrity that Happy Days raises more questions about Winnie's story and its implications regarding her childhood and subsequent experience than it answers. The ambiguity surrounding Beckett's presentation of Winnie and her fictionalized account of her past is consistent with life as it is lived and perfectly in keeping with the ways in which individuals respond to extreme pain or trauma during childhood: more often than not one remains haunted by the memory but unable to recover it from the depths of the unconscious. Such are the protective mechanisms that ensure the individual's survival at the same time as they exact an often tragic price. Winnie's dramatic condition--her frenzied and incessant chatter; her focus on the seemingly trivial; the hostility she displays toward the impotent, infantilized Willie, as she remains all the while dependent on his presence; the taking of her various props out of her black bag and putting them back in again; and, most importantly, the mound in which she is embedded - is a testament both to the human capacity to survive childhood sexual trauma and also to the tragic price the individual often must pay for that survival.

Winnie's survival is contingent upon finding enough distractions to pass the time "between the bell for waking and the bell for sleep" and to divert her attention from the terrible pain that she is *in*. Of Winnie's defenses the most important is talk. Like the mound which imprisons her, words function to protect and to shield Winnie from the forces she fears would otherwise overwhelm her from within and without. And yet words

are more than just a screen, for they also provide a measure of relief, allowing for a discharge of the tension which accompanies Winnie's mounting sexual frustration and rage:

> Winnie: Ah yes, if only I could bear to be alone, I mean prattle away without a soul to hear. (Pause.) Not that I flatter myself you hear much, no Willie, God forbid. (Pause.) Days perhaps when you hear nothing. (Pause.) But days too when you answer. (Pause.) So that I may say at all times even when you do not answer and perhaps hear nothing, something of this is being heard, I am not merely talking to myself, that is in the wilderness, a thing I could never bear to do - for any length of time. (Pause.) That is what enables me to go on, go on talking, that is. (Pause.) Whereas if you were to die - (smile) - to speak in the old style - (smile off) - or go away and leave me, then what would I do, what could I do, all day long, I mean between the bell for waking and the bell for sleep. (Pause.) Simply gaze before me with compressed lips. (Long pause while she does so. No more plucking.) Not another word as long as I drew breath, nothing to break the silence of this place. (Pause.) Save possibly, now and then, every now and then, a sigh into my looking glass. (Pause.) or a brief . . . gale of laughter, should I happen to see the old joke again. (20-21)

As long as Winnie can continue to talk she is able to deny her pain and to insist that this is yet another "happy day." The disparity between what Winnie says and what the audience sees suggests that the gulf between her determined optimism and the reality of her condition is deep and wide. Perhaps, however, the play's title is meant to be only partly ironic; to the extent that Winnie manages to avoid a recurrence of the violence in which her terror originated it is, after all, a relatively "happy day" for her. At times she falters, though; her guard drops and "sorrow keeps breaking in." That Winnie is in terrible pain is also suggested in her claim that "things have their life, that is

what I always say, things have a life. (Pause.) Take my looking glass, it doesn't need me. (Pause.) The bell. (Pause.) It hurts like a knife. (Pause.) A gouge" (54). Finally, the play's symbolic landscape is the most powerful barometer of Winnie's psychological state--the mound, the constant "blaze of hellish light," and the undying heat--symbols of Winnie's unfulfilled and buried sexual longings, her bodily shame, and her self-consuming rage.

Despite Winnie's constant chatter she is never able to "break the silence" about her childhood experience. It remains shrouded in mystery. Winnie cannot make the connection between the story she tells and her present condition because she is at once too close to the material in the story and, at the same time, at too great a remove from it. When Winnie tells her story she so fully identifies with the terrorized Milly and her dolly that she loses the conscious awareness needed to bridge the gap between the past and the present. Either she regresses completely into a state of childhood terror or she lapses into a state of such extreme denial that she remains completely out of touch with it.

Thus Winnie cannot become whole. She suffers from the kind of "splitting off" characteristic of victims of terrible psychic trauma, a protective mechanism effected to cut off from consciousness an experience of unbearable psychic and bodily pain. Winnie's entrappment in the mound is a metaphor for this condiditon; it is a concrete representation of how Winnie has cut

one part of herself off from the other in order to survive. It also represents the Winnie's bodily shame and self-loathing, common responses to the kind of sexual abuse she experienced as a child. And yet while it protects her from further threats of danger from outside of herself, such a defense also serves to sever Winnie's connections from others and it keeps her eternally divided within. Winnie is unable to bridge the chasm which separates her conscious awareness from her body and from the deeper regions of her mind. Thus she feels that she has no conscious control over her body:

> Winnie: To think there are times one cannot take off one's hat, not if one's life were at stake. Times one cannot put it on, times one cannot take it off. (Pause.) How often have I said, Put on your hat now, Winnie . . . take off your hat now, Winnie . . . and did not. (Pause.) Could not. (23)

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> Winnie: I am weary, holding [the parasol] up, and I cannot put it down. (Pause.) I am worse off with it up then down, and I cannot put it down. (Pause.) Reason says, put it down, Winnie, it is not helping you, put the thing down and get on with something else. (Pause.) I cannot. (Pause.) I cannot move. (36)

Winnie never recovers from her childhood experience in part because she is never able to bring it out of the darkness and into the light. It remains, quite literally, buried under ground. The *mound*, perhaps Beckett's most visually arresting stage image, is a powerful symbol of Winnie's psychic state. Though it is a painfully wrenching and profoundly disturbing sight, which perhaps seems at first incomprehensible and bizarre,

the mound which imprisons Winnie serves to make concrete a set of complex though not at all uncommon mental processes employed by victims of extreme trauma to cope with the pain and to prevent such an occurrence from threatening their survival again. That process involves an attempt to conceal and deny one's body and thus one's self. It does not work.

In his use of this radical stage image in Happy Days Beckett has again made of absence a palpable presence, but in this case the paradox centers around Winnie's sexual organs. As Kristen Morrison has observed, the fact that it is not merely Winnie's body, but that it is, more importantly, her sexual organs that the mound has buried, is confirmed in Winnie's story of Mr. and Mrs. Shower/Cooker: "Why doesn't he dig her out? he says - referring to you, my dear - what good is she to him like that? - What good is he to her like that?"

As a result of the sexual violation she experiences as a child and in order to protect herself from ever again having to undergo another such transgression of her psychic and sexual boundaries, Winnie encloses herself in a world that is destroying her from within even as it saves her from further threats of danger from without. A symbol of Winnie's now self-imposed exile, the mound is a function of her need to construct around herself a boundary as extreme and destructive to her as was the threat to her sense of boundaries that was originally imposed on her from without:

Winnie: Yes, the feeling more and more that if I were not held - (gesture) - in this way, I would simply float up into the blue. (Pause.) And that perhaps some day the earth will yield and let me go, the pull is so great, yes, crack all round me and let me out. (Pause.) Don't you ever have that feeling, Willie, of being sucked up? Don't you have to cling on sometimes, Willie? (33)

Thus Winnie acknowledges that she has a tremendous need to be contained and grounded in this way; sadly, however, she does not understand why. She never acquires the insight into herself which the audience is provided when Winnie tells her story; it is in this disparity that the play's irony resides.

The mound in which she is embedded not only represents Winnie's flight from her sexual self; it also suggests the way in which the body from which she seeks refuge returns to torture and control her. The stranglehold Winnie imposes on her body serves to intensify the rage with which her bodily needs clamour for expression. Winnie's identity is completely bound up with her thwarted sexuality as she remains paralyzed by her profound ambivalence, unable to escape the forces which she seeks to deny. Her reaction to Willie's pornographic postcard is a case in point:

Winnie: What is it you have there, Willie, may I see? (She reaches down with hand and Willie hands her card. The hairy forearm appears above the slope, raised in gesture of giving, the hand open to take it back, and remains in this position till card is returned. Winnie turns back front and examines card.) Heavens what are they up to! (She looks for spectacles, puts them on and examines card.) No but this is just genuine pure filth! (Examines card.) Make any nice-minded person want to vomit! (Impatience of Willie's fingers. She looks through glass, takes it up and examines card through glass. Long pause.)

> What does that creature in the background think he's doing? (Looks closer.) Oh no really! (Impatience of fingers. Last long look. She lays down glass, takes edge of card between right forefinger and thumb, averts head, takes nose between left forefinger and thumb.) Pah! (Drops card.) Take it away. (18-19)

Winnie's conscious revulsion stands in direct opposition to her voyeuristic curiosity and fascination.

The image of the mound reinforces this duality. For although it appears on one level to conceal Winnie's body from herself and from others, it also serves as a striking visual representation of how Winnie's hidden body has come to define her. The mound thus becomes a symbol of Winnie's distorted sexuality; as a number of critics have pointed out, it even looks like a huge, grotesque, and exposed vagina, barren and incapable of generating life. Winnie's organs of increase are identified with sterility and death. The mound is also visually evocative of a steadilty encroaching grave, as critics have also observed. Thus it comes to suggest at once both birth and death, the womb and the tomb, a recurring association in all of Beckett's works. At the center of this womb/tomb is Winnie.

A similar opposition is at the center of Winnie's relationship to the infantilized Willie, a marriage based as much on mutual dependency as it is on unfulfilled longing, sexual impotence, and hostility. It is almost a cliche, like so many loveless marriages in which each partner despises the other for failing so miserably to meet one's needs. The frustration and murderous rage that have come to define the marriage of Winnie

and Willie are undercurrents familiar to many in sterile, stifling relationships. Though they might be better off without each other, Winnie and Willie remain together, bound by hate, by a common history, by force of habit, and by need.

The sexual violence at the heart of Winnie's relationship to Willie, the association of sexual intimacy with violence and death, is pervasive in Happy Days. It is an association that runs deep throughout all of Beckett's work. Like the solitary voice in Text #3 of Beckett's Stories and Texts for Nothing, all of Beckett's lonely sojourners are haunted and paralyzed by the terror of violence at the heart of love and sexual intimacy:

> . . . no one's going to love you, don't be alarmed. No, not like that, too sudden, I gave myself a start. And to start with stop palpitating, no one's going to kill you, no one's going to love you and no one's going to kill you. (Stories and Texts for Nothing, 86)

In Happy Days the threat of murder that accompanies the suggestion of love or sexual intimacy is manifested on a number of occasions. Of these the final scene of the play is most disturbing and overt. Willie, "dressed to kill," advances towards Winnie "on all fours." As the two face each other for the first time during the play, Winnie, bitterly mocking Willie, says:

> Reminds me of the day you came whining for my hand. (Pause.) I worship you Winnie, be mine. (He looks up.) Life a mockery without Win . . . . I worship you Winnie be mine and then nothing from that day forth only tidbits from Reynolds' News. (61)

At first shocked by the expression she sees on Willie's face, Winnie then goads him:

> Come on, dear, put a bit of jizz into it, I'll cheer you on. (Pause.)[2] Is it me you're after, Willie . . . or is it something else? (Pause.) Do you want to touch my face . . . again? (Pause.) Is it a kiss you're after, Willie . . . or is it something else? (Pause.) There was a time when I could have given you a hand. (Pause.) And a time before that again when I did give you a hand. (Pause.) You were always in dire need of a hand, Willie. (Beckett's ellipses) (63)

Winnie is again terrified when she looks at Willie and says "Don't look at me like that! (Pause. Low.) Have you gone off your head, Willie? (Pause.) Out of your poor old wits, Willie?" The gun which rests conspicuously on the mound reinforces the suggestions of violence and murder that accompany the sexual innuendo and hostility here. Since Willie is facing Winnie the audience has only Winnie's reaction from which to guage Willie's intention. It is impossible to determine what Willie is looking for, whether it is sex or murder, love or death. In the suspension of any resolution the two sides of the equation merge, reinforcing the association rather than the distinction between sex and violence, love and death.

The images and language of the scene echo images and language used elsewhere in the play, adding to its visual and linguistic density and accumulating to suggest an archaological

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[2]As Kristen Morrision notes, jizz is sexual slang used here to suggest Willie's impotence.

descent at work in the play. It is this regressive development that gives to Happy Days its universal significance. For it includes an individual as well as a phylogenetic regression, a return to the infantile roots of the individual and to the primitive, animalistic origins of the race, both preserved in individual and collective consciousness. We have, for instance, the infantilization of Willie implicit in repeated phrases like "crawling on all fours" or "whining" here and elsewhere in the play; Winnie's repeated references to "the wilderness" within her; her use of the word "creature" in reference to Willie; and Willie's ""hairy forearm" that rises up from his side of the mound.

This archaeological descent accounts in part for the feeling one has when watching Happy Days that one is witnessing a scene that is at once extraordinarily strange and unfamiliar and, at the same time, utterly familiar and ordinary. For the play operates on more than one level. Certainly strange things happen throughout the course of the play - a woman is buried in a mound of earth, first up to her waist and then up to her neck; a parasol spontaneously combusts and then re-appears in tact the next day; a gun which should sink to the bottom of Winnie's bag of props always appears on top; the sun never goes down; the heat never abates. These are the play's concrete representations of the deepest layers of human consciousness. Juxtaposed with these seemingly inexplicable phenomena we have the familiar and the ordinary - a woman awakens to the piercing sound of a bell,

brushes her teeth, combs her hair, and applies fresh lipstick while glancing at herself in a mirror. She derives fleeting consolation from the gun with which she contemplates putting an end to her life, chatters on and on about nothing in particular, repeats her habitual daily rituals, and chides her apathetic and impotent husband.

It is in this yoking together of the familiar and the known with the strange and seemingly unknown that the impact of Happy Days is felt most powerfully. For it allows the audience to apprehend both the absurdity of the mundane and familiar as well as the deep psychological resonances of that which seems at first strange and incomprehensible. As the audience finds a context within which to integrate phenomena which it initially cannot comprehend, it discovers that what at first seemed strange is in fact familiar and known. The bizarre images and occurences in Happy Days begin to seem like remnants of some half-remembered nightmare; like the language and images of nightmares, they do, in fact, give concrete shape and form to repressed elements of the human unconscious. Once again Beckett has fashioned an art by excavating buried psychic material. The result is a disturbing yet ultimately liberating theatrical experience. The solace that so many in the audience derive from their contemplation of such a harrowing picture of human pain as Beckett has captured in the image of Winnie engulfed by the mound is due to the recognition they experience of their own most deeply felt terror and pain.

Chapter V:

Not I

It is difficult to formulate a coherent response to Not I, to give shape and form to the incoherent, inchoate utterances of the play's central image and "protagonist," a heavily-lipsticked, disembodied Mouth. And yet the viewer feels compelled to reconstruct Mouth's "story" and to endow her with an identity and with a history. One invariably fails in such endeavors to restore to Mouth what she is missing, not only because of Mouth's insistence that the "she" of whom she speaks is "not I," but also because "she" is never able to satisfy her own desparate need to "tell how it was . . . how it had been . . . how she survived." Mouth is finally unable to "hit on it in the end," despite the relentless barrage of words which issue from her lips. Mouth's "vehement refusal to relinquish third person" is only the most overt indicator of how irretrievably lost is the connection between the pieces of her fragmented self. It is also a testament to the harrowing pain and terror that constitute her life. For the viewer never really doubts that it is her own lost self of whom Mouth speaks. And yet Mouth never succeeds in "breaking the silence" about the tortures she has endured; she never begins the process of reintegration and re-constitution of self; she never gathers together the pieces of her broken self; and she never achieves the release for which she so desperately yearns.

By presenting us with just a disembodied Mouth that cannot control the words which come spewing forth from it, Beckett makes palpable and visible the complete obliteration of any coherent sense of self as well as the sense of physical dismemberment and psychic/bodily dissociation that afflict a woman who has been subjected to unspeakable horrors. In keeping with the critical discourse on Not I, and compelled by the play's internal logic, I have chosen to refer to Mouth in the third person feminine singular, as a "she," rather than as an "it," as she refers to herself. The implication throughout the play is that Mouth stands metonymically for a woman from whom it has been dismembered and whom the audience never sees. Moreover, the "she" whose story Mouth would disclaim as her own--the "not I" of the title--is, in fact, the being from which Mouth is severed and which has never been experienced as coherent or whole.

Beckett's radical use of a disembodied Mouth as the play's "protagonist" forces the realization upon the audience that problems of articulation and of utterance are central to Mouth's experience, at the heart of which is a woman's failed attempt to "break the silence" about her experience. And yet although Mouth is finally unable to tell her story, the story does get told, in a distinctly Beckettian language - a language of silence, of gesture, of rhythm, and of image. The audience comes to feel the power of what Mouth cannot say as it also comes to understand how profoundly devastating is the conflict between her need to say it and her inability to do so. Mouth's inability "to tell" deepens

her pain and suffering almost beyond the limits of human endurance. I would like to suggest that Mouth's suffering, including that caused by her inability to give utterance to her experiences, derives from her having been subjected to the most extreme forms of neglect and sexual abuse during infancy and childhood.

Both the 1972 stage play as well as the 1975 BBC teleplay of Samuel Beckett's Not I present a harrowing spectacle of a disembodied mouth from which an uncontrolled torrent of words comes pouring forth at "break-neck speed." As the metonymic Mouth unleashes its schizophrenic tirade, the viewer feels at once assaulted by the violent aggression and naked sexuality of the image and, at the same time, profoundly moved and disturbed by its wrenching suggestions of bodily torture and psychic/bodily disfigurement, dismemberment, and disintegration. In many respects Not I can be seen as a further development of the themes Beckett had explored more than ten years earlier in his dramatic presentation of Winnie in Happy Days--in Not I the fragmentation, mental/corporeal dissociation, and sexual dysfunction that had so profoundly afflicted the ever-optimistic Winnie reach a terrifying extreme. However much Winnie is taunted and teased by the remnants of a better time and however much she is eluded by a condition of psychic and bodily wholeness, Winnie is still more in tact than Mouth. In Not I Mouth is denied even the memory of a pre-cataclysmic condition. There are no references in Not I to an irrevocable past of harmony or wholeness. Birth itself is

figured as a violent and terrifying expulsion in Mouth's disguised autobiographical account of an infant, a "tiny little thing," thrust "out into this world," abandoned and orphaned at birth.

In pieces as fragmented and dismembered as the disembodied mouth that we see before us, Mouth tells the story of a woman so traumatized that with a few exceptions she could not or would not speak for the first seventy years of her life. Now, "comimg up to seventy," she cannot stop the "steady stream" of words from rushing through her mouth; with her "mouth on fire" the words come forth as if with a will of their own, but Mouth has "no idea what she's saying." As we listen to Mouth's account of the abandonment at birth, lifelong silence, sexual torment, preoccupation with sin and punishment, complete and utter aloneness, bodily insentience, and psychic/bodily dissociation that afflict the "she" of her story we soon experience the uncanny realization that we are bearing witness to the very condition Mouth is describing. This is most overtly the case when Mouth turns in her account to the physical apparatus of word-producing or when she describes her shift from terrified silence to tormented speech:

> Words were coming . . . imagine! . . words were coming . . . a voice she did not recognize . . . at first . . . so long since it had sounded . . . [. . .] and now this stream . . . not catching the half of it . . . not the quarter . . . no idea . . . what she was saying . . . imagine! . . no idea what she was saying ! . . till she began trying to delude herself . . . it was not hers at all . . . not her voice at all . . . and no soubt would have . . . vital she should . . . was on the point . . . after long

efforts . . . when suddenly she felt . . . gradually she felt . . . her lips moving . . . imagine! . . her lips moving! . . as of course till then she had not . . . and not alone the lips . . . the cheeks . . . the jaws . . . the whole face . . . all those - . . . what? . . the tongue? . . yes . . . the tongue in the mouth . . . all those contortions without which . . . no speech posible . . . and yet in the ordinary way . . . not felt at all . . . so intent one is . . . on what one is saying . . . the whole being . . . hanging on its words . . . so that not only she had . . . had she . . . not only had she . . . to give up . . . admit hers alone . . . her voice alone . . . but this other awful thought . . . oh long after . . . sudden flash . . . even more awful if possible . . . that feeling was coming back . . . imagine! . . feeling coming back! . . starting at the top . . . then working down . . . the whole machine . . .

As Katherine Kelly claims, "Mouth fails in her attempt to fictionalize herself by revealing . . . that her heroine's predicament is identical to her own as the audience perceives it . . . Mouth is describing from her side of the stage the image the audience sees before itself." In a similar vain, Keir Elam describes the "increasing attention" in Not I "to the sheer physical process of speech production . . . . Mouth . . . offers a clinical account of what she is currently having to go through in order to produce what the audience is currently receiving. . . she also describes . . . what the audience sees on stage," 'whole body like gone . . . just the mouth.'" Thus Not I is a self-reflexive dramatization with a stage image that concretizes the experience of psychic/bodily dismemberment and disintegration that is the subject matter of the play.

The preceeding passage is illuminating for several other reasons as well. Firstly, it reveals Mouth's fragmentation, her mental/corporeal dissociation, and how deeply severed is the

connection between Mouth's mind and her body. Her reference to her body as a "machine" calls attention to her own sense of dehumanization. It also suggests more subtly that there might be another way of thinking about the play's title: It is not entirely sufficient to claim that Mouth's refusal to shift from "she" to "I" is a defense against the pain that would accompany an acknowledgement that "she" is "I;" rather it might be said that Mouth persists so vehemently in her insistence that the "she" of whom she speaks is "not I" because she truly lacks the fundamental experience of herself as a subject and therefore as an "I." There is no I of whom to speak; there is only the she, the self from whom Mouth is cut off, the object. Mouth has never had the chance to experience herself as an "I." Thus on one level she is not being duplicitous when she challenges the voice urging her to speak in the first person. Nor is her insistence that "she" is "not I" an entirely self-protective mechanism.

In Not I Beckett once again makes of absence a palpable presence, but here he extends the paradox almost to its breaking point. The absence of a face, body, and psyche which the metonymic mouth implies so strongly, creates a profoundly disturbing impression of irrevocable loss, the loss of one's essential humanity. At the same time the image exerts a powerful hold on the viewer who remains simultaneously disturbed and transfixed by the image throughout the duration of the play. As Keir Elam claims, "Mouth's performance exercises an almost literally hypnotic hold on the beholder . . . the amoebic form

onstage offers its own enigmatic fascinations, inducing the perceiver more or less to abandon conscious cognitive toils and to surrender, intead, to the unconscious or pre-conscious pains, pleasures, speculations, and associations it provokes." That such associations will differ from viewer to viewer is inevitable; the likening of Beckett's work to the Rorschach blot is appropriate here. Yet here as always in Beckett the resonances of the play appeal not only to the separate unconsciouses of individual viewers, but also to the collective unconscious of all viewers.

The television version of Not I presents an even more disturbing and mesmerizing image than that which the audience witnesses in the stage play. In the televised version of Not I Beckett exploits his medium in a visual tour de force whose visceral impact can be felt long after the image has faded from the screen. One experiences the tremendous impact of the television play before one understands what one has just witnessed. Since Beckett himself is said to have preferred the television play, the observations here are made with that version in mind; most, however, should be relevant to a discussion of either production. At this juncture it is important to look at the differences between the two productions.

In the stage version of Not I the audience is presented with a small, disembodied mouth which hovers in the rear of the stage facing the audience, elevated eight feet from the stage floor. Nothing of the actress's face is visible except for her mouth,

which remains in the spotlight for the duration of the play. Downstage audience left is "the auditor," who is described in the stage directions as a being of indeterminate sex dressed in a loose black djellaba which envelopes him from head to foot. The auditor does not speak throughout the course of the play. Instead he merely listens and, on three distinct occasions, raises his arms "in a gesture of helpless compassion" as the audience's attention is directed at him. The role of the auditor has been much discussed in the critical commentary on Not I by critics who see him alternately as representing a kind of choral figure, the ideal viewer, and/or a projection of Mouth's psyche. In both the stage play and the teleplay Mouth interrupts her narrative in response to a voice the audience does not hear but which is clearly prodding her, among other things, to claim the story she tells as her own. On stage, the voice seems to emanate simultaneously from within Mouth and from the external auditor as well.

In the televised version of Not I the auditor is gone. The removal of the auditor changes the play in significant ways. Without the auditor the viewer's attention is much more intensely concentrated on Mouth; the audience is given no relief from the now close-up image of Mouth, nor is Mouth granted any relief from the camera's fixed gaze. Moreover, with the absence of the auditor, the impression is that Mouth's inner struggle is even more profound than it appeared to be when the auditor was present on stage; the conflicting voice that torments Mouth while trying

perhaps to help her by urging her to make the pronomial shift from "she" to "I," which in the stage version might have seemed to emanate from a being outside of Mouth, now can only be attributed to Mouth herself.

The other significant difference between the two versions of the play has to do with its visual and visceral impact. On the television screen the image of Mouth is magnified in a relentless close-up. No longer a small, innocuous shape hovering in the distance, Mouth becomes in the televised version a huge, gaping oriface, evoking other bodily orifaces, and taking up the entire screen. Even the drops of spittle and drool which accumulate on her lips seem larger-than-life. Many critics have observed that the visual effect of the television camera's gaze is to make Mouth look like a vagina, rendered out of proportion to the rest of the absent body, for which it stands and which it has metaphorically consumed or taken over. In his review of the BBC broadcast of Not I in the London Times (17 January 1973), Irving Wardle observed that " . . . Beckett displayed no trace of displeasure as, watching the BBC television version, he realized that Mouth had the appearance of a large, gaping vagina" (as reported in Knowlson and Pilling's, Frescoes of the Skull, 235, n. 13).

Among the many critics who have focused on the striking visual associations evoked by the close-up image of Mouth is Linda Ben-Zvi. In a feminist reading of the play, Ben-Zvi comments on the shift in the audience's perception of Mouth when

one moves from the original staged version of Not I to the televized version Beckett sanctioned later:

> Mouth now becomes not only grotesque in its all-consuming size, and less 'real'; it becomes more obviously a fragmented female body part used, as it so often is in a materialist society, not as signification of self but of non-being, an object, particularly on that most depersonalizing of all media, the TV. In close-up, Mouth on television resembles a vagina. A pulsating oriface attempting to give birth to the self, the image marks an elision of mouth and vagina, the female reduced to genital identification, more blatant but no less familiar than the use of female body parts in this and other consumer media. Since the auditor is also absent, the camera taking its place, compassion gives way to the stare, and the act becomes voyeuristic, the female as vagina reduced to a pornagraphic entertainment or hard sell . . . . Woman . . . is less heroic enunciator of her own hysteria and her own refusal than she is talking machine, already dismembered, taking up a familiar position on the tube: as object. The effect is to reinforce both the psychological dilemma of the female as Other, outside the symbolic order of the male, an absence, lacking a penis and a persona, and as materialist emblem, vagina cum mouth, served up, magnified, all-consuming to the all-consumer . . . just another genital display, reduced by the gaze of the camera into the very object whose tale she tells.

Ben-Zvi's account is illuminating with regard to the visual impact of the image of Mouth as seen on the television screen. Its description of how the television play implicates the viewer, who, in the very act of watching the screen, is forced to participate in an act of voyeurism analogous to the source of the objectification and dehumanization from which Mouth suffers, is also an important observation. Ben-zvi's insights, illuminating and valid though they may be, nevertheless tell an incomplete story. That the play makes a powerful argument against pornography and the media's objectification of woman is indeed the case.[1] However, Ben-Zvi's views take into account only one

aspect of the picture of Mouth Beckett paints. Moreover she tends to underestimate the empathic qualities of the spectator. The audience's response to Mouth might very well be more complex than Ben-Zvi's analysis would have us believe. Most viewers, while acknowledging the discomfort they experience in the act of watching Mouth, find in her tormented and frenzied tirade a desparate plea for help to which they wish they could respond. Thus even though the camera's gaze might be said to take the place of the auditor and so "compassion gives way to the stare" in a "voyeuristic" act, one might just as readily claim that the audience takes over the role of the auditor and that the compassion for Mouth he represented in the stage play is, in the televized production, experienced by the viewer. The ambivalent feelings that Not I evokes in the viewer must surely be an important consideration in any critical discussion of the play, yet to reduce the complexities of the audience's role as Ben-Zvi does in her account is to miss the play's richness and ambiguity.

Though Ben-Zvi locates a profoundly important aspect of Mouth's feelings of dehumanization, the extremes of human pain and suffering which Beckett dramatizes in Not I have other important implications as well. Like all of Beckett's plays, Not I is a product of an artistic process that Beckett himself has described as "excavatory" and is most fruitfully approached with this in mind.

The television camera's fixed gaze serves to reinforce formally Mouth's own sense of herself as exposed, on display,

revolting, and disfigured. Her tortured and distorted sexuality are magnified and concretized in the televised image of the close-up Mouth. As always, Beckett exploits his medium here, making it an integral part of his dramatic presentation. Beckett seizes upon the possibilities television provides, appropriating his medium to amplify and make visual feelings that are already present in Mouth when the play begins and which have only peripherally to do with the media's objectification of woman or with patriarchal domination. The bits and pieces of Mouth's "narrative" reveal a woman whose torment can be understood in relation to unspeakable horrors suffered in the earlist years of life. It is with these earliest years of life that the first part of Mouth's account is concerned and it is to this which I would like now to turn.

As the camera closes in on the image of Mouth when the television play begins, the voice that emanates from it gradually rises from a low murmer to an urgent, forceful cry; presumably the torrent of words has been flowing uncontrollably from Mouth before the play begins and will keep on flowing long after the spotlight dims and the camera is turned off. In the first part of her account Mouth describes the premature birth of an infant, thrust out into a loveless world, abandoned by her mother at birth, the father having left immediately after conception. Mouth's description of conception and birth is curiously presented as if it were a function of her memory (if, that is, we accept the play's "given" that the "she" of Mouth's narrative is

the "I" Mouth refuses to acknowledge), which of course it cannot be, though Beckett himself is said to have suffered from memories of life in the womb and of his painful delivery. It would seem futile to argue whether such memories are possible. In Mouth's case, however, the references to her conception and birth suggest the infantile origins of her suffering, in so far as they evoke experiences which would seem to reside outside of and prior to the reach of memory. Mouth's repeated return to the scene of her conception and birth marks the attempt to travel as far back in time as possible to the origins of life as if perhaps therein might be found the clue to the mystery of her pain and suffering. Such references also suggest that the source of Mouth's pain is buried in the pre-verbal memories of infancy and childhood.

Also worth noting is Mouth's use of the word "thing" rather than "girl" to describe the infant at birth, an imposition onto the past of the dehumanization from which Mouth presently suffers and from which she most likely suffered as an unloved infant as well. Moreover, Mouth's precisely detailed descriptions of the circumstances of her conception, particularly the image of an unknown father buttoning his breeches after sexual intercourse, call attention to the sexual preoccupations of Mouth's imagination. Such a reference might also be a disguised way that Mouth has found to speak the unspeakable and to "break the silence" about a sexual violation that has left her permanently shattered and literally in pieces. There is no way that Mouth can speak directly of what happened; there is thus no way of

repairing her broken self.

The mother hardly fares any better in Mouth's account, as she abandons the infant immediately after her premature birth. Thus the child is subsequently reared in an orphanage where she receives "no love . . . spared that . . . no love such as normally vented on the . . . speechless infant . . . in the home . . . no . . . nor indeed for that matter of any kind . . . no love of any kind . . . " The reference here to the infant's speechlessness is telling, in so far as Mouth's narrative is most self-consciously about the shift in her experience from the extreme of speechlessness and silence to the extreme of what some critics have termed "dialoggorhea," her inability to stop the "steady stream" of words from flowing through her mouth. The central image of the play, a disembodied mouth which looks like a huge, gaping vagina, visually reinforces as it puts on display the tremendous sense of deprivation and frustration of the infant's need for oral gratification caused by her abandonment at birth.

The "facts" of Mouth's conception and birth as she reports them seem to derive from the same need which prompts her on a number of subsequent occasions in the narrative to contemplate her "sins:" the need to make sense of the unmitigated suffering to which she has been subjected. It is clear that Mouth is racked with guilt; it is not quite as clear, but I think it extremely important, that Mouth has taken upon herself the blame which should rightfully belong to whomever perpetrated on her the

tortures from which she suffers so greatly. We saw this dynamic in Happy Days when Winnie revealed in her "story" how the victimized child is blamed for her role as victim and inevitably comes to blame herself. We see the crippling effects of this dynamic at work even more profoundly in Not I.

The first indication of Mouth's obsession with guilt, sin, and punishment occurs early in the play, immediately after she describes her conception, premature birth, and abandonment. Leaping across the years of her life, Mouth turns in her account to an aging woman, claiming that there was "nothing of any note till coming up to sixty when - . . . what? . . seventy? . . good God! . . coming up to seventy" when she is walking through a field and "suddenly . . . gradually . . . all went out . . . all that early April morning light . . . and she found herself in the - . . . what? . . who? . . no! . . she! . . . found herself in the dark . . . " Prior to commenting on the content of Mouth's account it is worth noting the significance of her abrupt shift from infancy to old age. The juxtaposition of infancy with old age in the early part of Mouth's account points to the parallel between these stages of life. The regression to the infantile in the aged is a commonly observed phenomenon and a recurring theme in Beckett's work. The infant's pre-linguistic, inarticulate yearnings and fears are most closely approximated in the aged's experience of impotence and helplessness. Here, the terror, absence of feeling, and confusion of the unloved, untouched, and traumatized infant are suggested in Mouth's description of the

aging woman's plunge into darkness and her almost complete lack of feeling:

> . . . and if not exactly insentient . . . for she could still hear the buzzing . . . so-called . . . in the ears . . . and a ray of light came and went . . . came and went . . . such as the moon might cast . . . drifting . . . in and out of cloud . . . but feeling so dulled . . . she did not know . . . what position she was in . . . imagine! . . what position she was in! . . whether standing . . . or sitting . . . but the brain - . . . what? . . kneeling? . . yes . . . whether standing . . . or sitting . . . or kneeling . . . but the brain - . . . what? . . lying? . . yes . . . whether standing . . . or sitting . . . or kneeling . . . or lying . . .

Even at this early stage of the play Mouth's description bears a resemblance to the image we see before us on stage - the dissociation of feeling, the buzzing of the brain, and the ray of light conform to our impression of Mouth as we watch her in fromt of us. The identification between Mouth and the woman she describes is felt most powerfully here when Mouth refuses to acknowledge it, when an internal voice questions her, causing her either to amend her account or to challenge it as it urges her to make the pronomial shift from "she" to "I." This internal voice would seem to derive from the same buzzing of the brain which Mouth has just described and which operates even when she loses all other feeling while wandering in the field,

> for her first thought was . . . oh long after . . . sudden flash brought up as she had been to believe . . . with the other waifs . . . in a merciful . . . [Brief laugh.] . . . God . . . [Good laugh.] first thought was . . . oh long after . . . sudden flash . . . she was being punished . . . for her sins . . . a number of which then . . . further proof if proof were needed . . . flashed

through her mind . . . one after another . . . then dismissed as foolish . . . oh long after . . . this thought dismissed . . . as she suddenly realized . . . gradually realized . . . she was not suffering . . . imagine! . . not suffering! . . indeed could not remember . . . off-hand . . . when she had suffered less . . . unless of course she was <u>meant</u> to be suffering . . . ha! . . <u>thought</u> to be suffering . . . just as the odd time . . . in her life . . . when clearly intended to be having pleasure . . . she was in fact having none . . . not the slightest . . .

Significantly Mouth's early revelations of her preoccupation with guilt, sin, and punishment conclude with a reference to a sexual experience. In subsequent references Mouth reinforces the connection between her haunting sense of guilt and her sexuality. Such references also allude to an even more compelling and perhaps rather curious connection between the act of speaking and the sexual act, between verbal and sexual discharge. Once again, this asssociation is most overtly manifested in the visual associations between the mouth we see before us and the female sexual organ. Although it remains unclear how this connection has been fostered in Mouth - how her inability to speak and her subsequent inability <u>not</u> to speak have come to be expressions of her tormented sexuality - what is clear, however, is that this is a connection which we are asked to make. Aside from the visual evidence we have also the
following:

tiny little thing . . . out before its time . . . godforsaken hole . . . no love . . . spared that . . . speechless all her days . . . practically speechless . . . even to herself . . . never out loud . . . but not completely . . . sometimes sudden urge . . . once or twice a year . . . always winter some strange reason . . . the long evenings . . . hours of darkness . . .

sudden urge to . . . tell . . . then rush out stop the first she saw . . . nearest lavatory . . . start pouring it out . . . steady stream . . . mad stuff . . . half the vowels wrong . . . no one could follow . . . till she saw the stare she was getting . . . then die of shame . . . crawl back in . . .

What is most wrenching about this part of Mouth's account are its suggestions of Mouth's tortured sexuality - her sexual shame and self-loathing. Many critics have noted that the image of the mouth in Not I evokes not only the oral and vaginal orifaces, but the anal oriface as well. They claim that the aforementioned scene reinforces this connection because it links the words which come pouring out of Mouth to excrement. What to make of this further association between mouth, vagina, and anus is not entirely clear. Keir Elam sees it as a rendering of the lack of distinction between bodily orifaces which characterizes infantile sexuality:

. . . it is as if the spectator himself were placed in the position of what [Melanie] Klein defines as 'early (infantile) confusion, which expresses itself in a blurring of the oral, anal, and genital impulses,' whereby Mouth becomes a kind of floating signifier between, and bringing together, the three Freudian phases of psychosexual development . . . . Mouth's lavatorial view of the auditorium transforms her own discursive performance into an altogether species of emission . . . . Her earlier anal-verbal retentiveness . . . gives way violently and publically to a kind of dia-logorrhea . . . . The great achievement of Not I is to free the spectator's imaginaire . . so as to operate the same kind of 'blurring of the anal, oral, and genital' aspects of the body in the body's very absence.

While I find Elam's views compelling, I am more inclined to see the rushing to the lavatory as an expression of an oral

rather than an anal need - the need to vomit. The connection between childhood sexual abuse and eating disorders, especially bulimia, has been fully documented in studies of childhood sexual abuse. More specifically, it is thought that the bulimic binges to appease an insatiable hunger for (emotional, physical, sexual) nourishment of which she has been deprived and throws up what she has eaten to punish herself for her indulgence. Bulimia is above all else an expression of the individual's self-hatred which is, in many instances, a redirection of an unacknowledged hatred of the abuser, unacknowledged because of the threat to one's life such an admission would entail. Though it may at first seem to be stretching things to identify Mouth's experience with that of the bulimic, I think that the text warrents such a view. Aside from the visual association of the image of Mouth and the female sexual organ and in addition to the references throughout the play to the sexual shame which accompanies the act of speaking, there is in Not I a curious reference to the contrast between the "steady stream" of words which Mouth cannot stop and

> she who had never . . . on the contrary . . . practically speechless all her days . . . how she survived! . . even shopping . . . out shopping . . . busy shopping centre . . . supermart . . . just hand in the list . . . with the bag . . . old black shopping bag . . . then stand there waiting . . . any length of time . . . middle of the throng . . . motionless . . . staring into space . . . mouth half open as usual . . . till it was back in her hand . . . the bag back in her hand . . . then pay and go . . . not as much as good-bye . . . how she survived!

In a play with so few concrete references to time or place, this

allusion to shopping for food seems especially striking and significant. That Mouth has chosen to include it in her account suggests its importance as perhaps a veiled reference to something else she cannot say, something having to do with the search for nourishment and the inability to articulate what she needs. That Mouth has survived under these conditions becomes even more shocking when we realize that they are the conditions of her infancy and early childhood.

Among the play's other rare references to a concrete time or place is the following disturbing scenario:

> that time in court . . . what had she to say for herself . . . guilty or not guilty . . . stand up woman . . . speak up woman . . . stood there staring into space . . . mouth half open as usual . . . waiting to be led away . . . glad of the hand on her arm . . . now this . . . something she had to tell . . . could that be it? . . something that would tell . . . how it was . . how she - . . . what? . . had been? . . yes . . . something that would tell how it had been . . . how she had lived . . . lived on and on . . . guilty or not . . .

Mouth's haunting sense of guilt is profoundly apparent in this courtroom scene. Whether this is a memory or a projection of Mouth's imagination is impossible to determine. In either case, the scene presents a harrowing image of the silent Mouth, unable to speak or to act on her own behalf. Moreover, that she is "glad of the hand" of a stranger "on her arm" suggests how terribly isolated and alone Mouth is as it also calls attention to the fact of her intensely physical deprivation.

The tension of Not I can be felt most strongly in Mouth's

desperate need to say something which she is unable to say; her years of silence attest to how deeply she felt the injunction not to speak; her present inability to stop the words seems curiously a function of that same sense of danger associated with "breaking the silence," for her words fall in on themselves as they become increasingly taken up with the act of speaking itself. Mouth cannot break out of the silence which entraps her; her words become similarly imprisoning. Thus Mouth does not succeed in telling "how it had been . . . how she had lived," at least not in so many words.

Mouth account begins and ends with the description of her conception, premature birth, and abandonment; when the image of Mouth fades from the screen and her voice trails off into silence, she is uttering the same words with which she began her narrative. Mouth's repeated references to her coming into the world begin to seem like a curious kind of acknowledgement, perhaps unwitting, that she did nothing wrong that would explain the severity of her pain and anguish. One is reminded of the moment in Waiting for Godot when Estragon claims that he was doing "nothing" that would explain his nightly beatings and Vladimir responds with "Ah yes, but it's the way of doing it that counts." Mouth also seems to share the realization of Godot's protagonists that there's nothing to repent but "our being born." As far back in time as Mouth is able to travel, she finds nothing there that can account for her lifelong "punishment." Repeated references to her conception and birth would seem to be Mouth's

way (and Beckett's way) of trying to speak the unspeakable, to "tell how it had been" (i.e., that she was innocent) under conditions which make it impossible for her to do so. For to admit her own innocence would be to acknowledge someone else's guilt and Mouth cannot do this for the same reason that she could hardly speak for the first seventy years of her life - her survival was contingent upon her silence, as it is for so many victims of childhood (sexual) abuse.

Mouth's obsession with the mechanics of moving the lips, tongue, and mouth while speaking, the corresponding attention the audience must pay to the visual image of the close-up mouth as it does exactly what Mouth describes, and the visual correspondences between the mouth on screen and other bodily orifaces, forces the audience to see, literally, an experience which Mouth cannot put into words. Precisely why the experience will not lend itself to language is, of course, never revealed, but I think that there are at least three very plausible explanations implied by the play, none of which are mutually exclusive. The first is that whatever was done to Mouth was so extreme and so painful that it had to be repressed; the memory has fallen into the depths of her unconscious from where it cannot be retreived. There is also the likelihood that Mouth's tormentor forbade her to speak of the harm he was inflicting and terrified her into a lifetime of silence and submission. And there is finally the possiblity that Mouth was an infant when she was victimized, that lacking then the power of language the experience does not come to her in

words, but rather in feelings and images. There is an interesting moment in the play when Mouth describes herself as "fixing with her eye a distant bell . . . as she hastened towards it . . . fixing it with her eye . . . lest it elude her . . . " The kind of synasthesia that Mouth is describing here is exactly what the audience must experience; we must hear with our eyes; we must see what Mouth is so tragically unable to say and understand that her not being able to tell of the unspeakable horrors of her life is a large part of what her suffering is about. When we see the twisted and tormented Mouth before us on screen we can help Mouth to speak the unspeakable by acknowledging and validating her pain.

The absence of a coherent self is felt more strongly in Not I than in any other Beckett stage play, and it is an absence stemming from infancy and early childhood deprivation and sexual abuse. Mouth has been deprived of love and of positive forms of physical contact. That she has also been subjected to unspeakable extremes of sexual violence is supported by the extremity of her symptoms, all of which conform to a pattern repeatedly documented in studies of survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Mouth can not remember the terrors she has had to endure - "nothing she could tell . . . nothing she could think." The source of her terrible pain remains inaccessible to her, buried in the hidden depths of her unconscious from where it exerts a terrifying hold over her. In so far as Mouth feels only that she lacks, but not what she lacks, and in so far as she

knows only <u>that</u> she suffers but not why, Mouth is condemned to a life of immense and unmitigated pain which the viewer's (or critic's) struggle to understand can be only partially satisfied and which Mouth's own desparate efforts to understand prove to be even more tragically doomed to failure.

Chapter VI:

All That Fall

The climactic moment of Beckett's radio play All That Fall (BBC 1957) occurs at the end of the play, in what some critics have referred to as its "punchline," though if the play is a joke it is a dark and sinister one indeed. Mr. and Mrs. Rooney, the play's central characters, have begun making their way home from the train station to where Mrs. Rooney has journeyed on foot to meet her blind husband. Maddy Rooney, Beckett's study in "aborted explosiveness," is in her late seventies, and, according to her husband, "two hundred pounds of unhealthy fat." Ordinarily Mrs. Rooney would have let Dan return home with his driver, especially since she has been released recently from the hospital following a long stay for some unspecified illness, but today is special--it is Dan Rooney's birthday, perhaps his hundredth. When Mrs. Rooney arrives at the station she is dismayed to learn that the train has been delayed for some fifteen minutes, quite an unusual occurance on a thirty minute run.

It is not until the final moments of the play that we learn that the train was delayed because a child had fallen from a train window onto the tracks below and was killed beneath the wheels of the train. When the play ends we are left haunted by this image of a child's violent death. Moreover, the exchanges leading up to this final revelation leave us with the impression

that the child has been murdered and that Dan Rooney is likely to have been the murderer.

In the following pages I would like to explore how the suggestion of infanticide at the end of All That Fall relates to and comments on the action of the play as a whole. I would like to suggest that the idea of infanticide is a metaphor for less overt but no less insidious impulses locked within the hearts and minds of all of the characters in the play. The revelation of a child's death and the intimations that the child was murdered bring to the play's surface undercurrents that dominate it and lurk in its shadows from the outset. These undercurrents include not only feelings of violent, impotent rage, but also profound grief and sorrow. The climax of the play is so effective not only because of its shock value, but also because it contains a truth about the characters which threatens the life of their community from the outset. All That Fall exposes the devestating consequences for the individual and for society as a whole that results from "society's betrayal of the child." The (symbolic or actual) murder of a child is also the logical culmination of the collective experiences of the characters in all of Beckett's ~~earlier~~ stage plays--Godot, Endgame, Krapp's Last Tape, Happy Days, and Not I.

Many critics have commented on the play's denoument, usually by acknowledging how inconsistent it is with Beckett's other plays, which hardly have a plot, not to mention a "climax." That Beckett saves it for the end has also prompted some

speculation. According to Kristen Morrison, for example,

> [t]hat the play has a climax is itself unusual in Beckett's drama. That the climax is delivered in a "punch line" at the end of the play is unusual for any kind of drama. And the fact that the punch line contains a miniature story quite strikingly emphasizes the issues of truth and falsity which the audience is left to ponder but can never quite resolve. (Canters and Chronicles, 73-74)

Most studies of All That Fall, like Morrison's, emphasize the unresolvable questions which linger in the audience's imagination after the play has ended--Did Dan Rooney murder the child? How is Mrs. Rooney's story of the loss of her "little Minnie" related to the suggestion of infanticide at the end of the play?

Charles Lyons comments on the "embedded narrative" in All That Fall, claiming that it "projects an image of extended suffering, marked at the beginning and end by the death of a child" (90). He also cites "the series of images of the death of children, childlessness and sterility which have accumulated" throughout the play. However, neither Morrison nor Lyons is able to get very far in their efforts to explain the significance of these references and images, even though the play itself, does, I believe, offer several possibilities for interpretation. Lyons provides an excellent description of the symptoms of the malady that afflicts Maddy Rooney, but I think it is possible to get closer to the source than he does.

Eugene Webb, on the other hand, does draw some conclusions about the spiritual ruin of the community at the center of All

That Fall when he claims that aside from "the failure of men to value natural life" and Maddy Rooney's failure to achieve "womanly fulfillment in motherhood," there is a deeper "source of the sickness of this world":

> The real problem with life, both for Maddy and for the other inhabitants of Boghill, is something much more fundamental and complex. One of Maddy's laments gives some indication of this: "Oh I am just a hysterical old hag I know, destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and church-going and rheumatism and childlessness" (37). It is significant that . . . gentility and church-going are among the forces that have destroyed her. (47)

Lyons goes on to explain that the real problem for the inhabitants of Boghill is "a failure . . . to live on a deeper level than that of shallow conventionality" (47). While Webb identifies an important aspect of the diseased spiritual landscape of All That Fall, it seems to me that he fails himself to get beyond a certain kind of superficiality in his analysis. He mistakes yet another symptom for a cause and reduces the very complexity he means to restore to the play by blaming the ills that afflict its characters to their conventional and shallow conception of the "religious life."

Most of the criticism of All That Fall is characterized by this kind of limited description; critics identify the various themes of the play and note the references to the deaths of children that frame the play. Their failure to go much further is probably due in part to the ambiguities of the action (and of the "embedded narratives" within the play, of which there are

several) which Beckett fails to resolve. However, a more complete picture emerges when one puts the pieces of this puzzle together by focusing more carefully on its symbolic or allegorical significance, which I would like now to do. I would like first to consider the last third of the play's action, including its shocking denoument, and then to explore how these closing moments illuminate and clarify the prior action of the play.

As Mr. and Mrs. Rooney reach the end of their journey home, Mr. Rooney thinks he hears noises, footsteps perhaps. It is Jerry, Mr. Rooney's driver, who has come panting up the hill behind the Rooneys to deliver to Dan something he has left on the train--an object resembling a child's ball (and which recalls the ball in Krapp's Last Tape). Mr. Rooney, not wanting his wife to know that the ball belongs to him, pretends not to recognize it. But Jerry insists on returning the ball to its rightful owner, Mr. Rooney. Meanwhile Mrs. Rooney siezes this opportunity to question Jerry about the train's delay, certain that he must know the cause. "Leave the boy alone," Mr. Rooney exclaims, "he knows nothing!" Yet his wife persists: "What was it, Jerry?" she asks. "It was a little child Ma'am," Jerry explains. Mr. Rooney lets out a groan. "What do you mean, it was a little child?" Mrs. Rooney asks. Jerry continues, "It was a little child fell out of the carriage, Ma'am. [Pause.] On to the line, Ma'am. [Pause.] Under the wheels, Ma'am." The tempest of wind and rain continues unabated as the curtain closes and the play is over.

This is the astonishing climax of All That Fall. No sooner is the revelation made than the listening audience begins searching for clues with which to solve the mystery of how the death occurred. It would seem that Beckett has made the task a rather simple one by offering such an abundance of evidence that points to Dan Rooney as the murderer of the child: What was Dan doing with a child's ball? Did it belong to the child? Did Dan use it to lure the child? Also suspicious is Mr. Rooney's concern that Jerry not reveal the cause of the train's delay and the groan he lets out when Jerry does so anyway. More incriminating still is a comment Dan makes just prior to Jerry's arrival on the scene. Having been taunted and jeered at by a small group of children, Mr. Rooney says, "Did you ever wish to kill a child? [Pause.] Nip some young doom in the bud. [Pause.] Many a time at night, in winter, on the black road home, I nearly attacked the boy. [Pause.] Poor Jerry! [Pause.] What restrained me then? [Pause.] Not fear of man." Was it, one wonders, fear of God, perhaps, that restrained Dan Rooney? Or is it something else, an injunction not to kill arising from within himself? In Rooney's claim that what restrained him was "not fear of man," "man" seems to be the operative word; it is fear that restrained him, but he knows not what it is he fears. Perhaps it is the voice of the child buried within him, the part of himself that identifies with the very thing he would destroy, that restrains Dan. Moreover, earlier, alluding to himself as a "caged animal," Dan claims to have made "no effort to restrain"

himself while alone in his compartment on the train. Such references seem menacing in light of the aforementioned disclosures. In an earlier manuscript Dan states his infanticidal intentions even more directly: "I should like to kill a child before I die. A little girl."

In light of such revelations most critics have speculated that Dan Rooney must have murdered the child who fell beneath the wheels of the train, perhaps by pushing the child out of the window of his compartment. Yet they also agree that the question of Dan Rooney's guilt or innocence finally cannot be settled. It is conceivable, for instance, that Dan Rooney attempts to keep the facts hidden from his wife out of compassion, knowing how upsetting a reminder this child's death would be of the death of her own "little Minnie," to which Mrs. Rooney refers on several occasions throughout the play, and to which I shall return at length.

Moreover, earlier during their journey homeward Dan Rooney had uttered a remark which seemed baffling at the time, but which would seem at this juncture to support the claim that he can not be implicated in the death of the child on the train. Rooney asks his wife about the weather--"what is the day doing?"--and she responds with a characteristic "shrouding, shrouding, the best of it is past . . . . Soon the first great drops will fall splashing in the dust." Then, seemingly from out of nowhere, Mr. Rooney says "and yet the glass was firm" (29). A complete non-sequitor, the reference is striking because it is so distinctly

unrelated to the exchange preceding and following it. Grammatically, the transitional words "and yet" should establish a contrast between what comes before and after them; here, however, Dan says the words without giving any indication of what they follow. Thus we are left to assume that Dan utters the remark in response to a thought that exists solely in his own imagination. Similarly, no one but Dan himself could possibly know at this juncture what "the glass was firm" refers to. Reconsidering the utterance in light of the play's climax, however, we might interpret it as an indication of the shock or dismay that Dan feels upon learning (or if he has witnessed) that a child has fallen from a window to its death, perhaps the window of Dan's own compartment. If Dan were the murderer he would hardly be likely to utter such a remark, especially since he seems to be talking to himself.

Thus it is impossible to resolve the question of Dan Rooney's guilt or innocence. However, what actually happened on the train to cause the child's death becomes an increasingly less important question, as Beckett instead seems to ask that we locate the play's dramatic center, it's "meaning," if you will, in the metaphorical and allegorical significance both of this child's death and of the related death of Mrs. Rooney's "little Minnie." The play remains "closed" to us, we fail to enter its world, unless we proceed from our efforts to establish Rooney's guilt or innocence to a consideration of the symbolic associations between the suggestion of infanticide at the end of

the play and all of the action leading up to it.

When we reconsider the entire play in light of its shocking denoument, we realize that the suggestion of Dan Rooney's infanticidal fantasies or actions cannot be viewed as aberrant or psychopathological; instead they can be seen as the logical expressions of the barely suppressed hatred of procreation and of children and of the thwarted sexuality, barrenness, and sterility that define the life of the community of which he is a member. Infanticide represents the logical end, the explosion in action, of the suppressed feelings which all of the characters unwittingly exhibit throughout the course of the play. The idea of infanticide also becomes a metaphor for the fate of the lost child which haunts each character in the play, who cannot mourn the loss because he is not conscious of it, yet whose words and actions belie the absence at his core. As the play shatters the mythical ideal of childhood innocence and bliss so too does it demonstrate how profoundly lost each character is as a result of having been robbed of his or her childhood, deprived of the very foundation for love, growth, and creativity.

Infanticide also becomes a metaphor for the destruction and dehumanization that result when the human animal attempts to harness the forces of non-human and animal nature to suit its own needs. It represents what happens when people deny their own basic animal instincts in service of some "higher" ideal--whether religious, social, or economic: the natural sources of human vitality dry up, generation and creativity cease, and one grows

increasingly more alienated from others and from oneself.

From the outset of the play a cluster of related references and ideas emerge and accumulate to form the play's thematic touchstones--barrenness and sterility; childlessness; suppressed and thwarted erotic impulses; violent rage; sexual impotence; the loss of a child through death; the hatred, fear, resentment, or absence of all that is procreative in human experience; the rupture between human and non-human nature; and infanticide. The central issues of the play inform and are informed by the suggestion of Dan Rooney's infanticidal behavior, but they reside essentially outside of the question of his guilt or innocence. The play's final revelation is a metaphor for and statement about the suppressed emotions and inner lives of the Rooneys and of all of the characters in the play.

Mrs. Rooney is the most obvious embodiment of the anxieties which afflict all of the characters in All That Fall and she is the play's most important figure. All of the play's action is filtered through Mrs. Rooney's perception. Hers are the eyes through which we "see" the play; her voice gives to Beckett's vision a striking concreteness and reality. In an irony that has not been lost on critics, Beckett creates his most visually complex dramatic work, and the one most localized in time and place, in a play written for the radio. Working witin a medium which relies solely on the actor's voice (or on sound effects) and on the ear and imagination of the listener, Beckett devises his most particularized Irish characters and his most realistic

and familiar Irish locales. Yet Beckett still manages to endow All That Fall with the mythical and allegorical dimensions that one perceives more readily in his stage plays. Beckett's ingenious use of his medium gives to this radio play a richness and scope that would seem to be incompatible with the specificity with which he renders its characters and setting.

Beckett exploits and calls attention to his medium in several ways in All That Fall, expanding the boundaries of radio drama as he had already begun to redefine the boundaries of the stage. Here, as in every form for which he writes, Beckett makes his medium an integral part of the work's impact. Beckett repeatedly reminds us of the play's many contrivances, for instance by calling our attention to the fact that the "rural sounds" we hear so often in the play have been recorded and are being transmitted from a small room in a radio station. Thus when one listens to the play the imagination conjurs a scene as rich in physical detail as the one Mrs. Rooney describes--we "see" a dusty country road running through a small Irish village inhabited by people who all know one another. Animals roam freely there; the flowers are in bloom; the wind blows steadily; the sun shines until the afternoon clouds roll in and the rain begins to fall.

And yet the listener is simultaneously aware that these phenomena are all being electronically produced and transmitted from a radio station where there are neither animals, nor flowers, nor wind and rain. In one particularly masterful

stroke, Beckett reverses the natural order of things by having Mrs. Rooney mention the name of an animal and then having the animal's cry waft over the airwaves. Mrs. Rooney says the name of an animal and only then does the lamb "baah," the bird chirp, or the cow "moo." Ordinarily one would hear the animal first and then proceed to identify it. Thus does Beckett mock the conventions of naturalism, calling attention to the artiface at its heart. Such a strategy is so effective in All That Fall because among the play's predominant themes is the human perversion of and disconnection from non-human nature. Thus do the medium of the play and its message dovetail.

I would like now to return to the events leading up to the play's denoument and to offer a view of how this shocking climax clarifies and illuminates the otherwise inscrutable maladies that afflict the community at the center of All That Fall.

On their walk home from the train station, amidst a tempest of wind and rain and conversation that grows increasingly bleak and moribund, Mrs. Rooney tries to find out from Dan the reason for the train's delay. Rather than responding directly to his wife's agonized pleas for an explanation, Mr. Rooney instead proceeds in a lengthy digression to ruminate on other seemingly unrelated matters. These include how much money his wife failed to save by neglecting to cancel his driver when she'd decided to meet him, as well as the ill-state of his own health:

Mr. Rooney: The day you proposed to me the doctors gave me up . . . The night you married me they came for me with an ambulance .

. . The loss of my sight was a great fillip. If I could go deaf and dumb I think I might pant on to be a hundred. Or have I done so?

That Mrs. Rooney proposes to her husband is one of several curious references in the play to a reversal of conventional gender-roles. Mrs. Rooney assumes the traditionally male role, while her husband plays no active role at all. Far from being a celebration of a newly-defined model for male-female relations, however, it would seem that Beckett is painting a picture here of something having gone terribly awry in human sexual affairs. Indeed, Mr. Rooney is at death's door when Maddy proposes and practically dead on their wedding night. His condition holds but little promise of a night of matrimonial bliss.

Further, the phrase "pant on" here is the first of several linguistic indicators of an intrusion of non-human nature into human experience; in All That Fall Beckett stresses the uneasy kinship between the human animal and the non-human animal lying dormant within it. Moreover, Dan's ironic gratitude that he has been deprived of sight and his hope that he will soon go deaf and dumb is consistent with the play's overall emphasis on the entropy which threatens the individual from within. This progressive dissolution also afflicts the community as a whole.

Mr. Rooney is not the only character in the play who is physically ailing; the play is dominated by references to the illness or disability of practically all of its characters and/or their relatives. For example, having been recently released from

the hospital, Mrs. Rooney longs for the sick-bed as preferable to the pain of what passes for health and life in her community. "Would I were still in bed," she says to Mr. Barrel, the station master,

> would I were lying stretched out in my comfortable bed, Mr. Barrell, just wasting slowly, painlessly away . . . till in the end you wouldn't see me under the blankets any more than a board. [Pause.] Oh no coughing or spitting or bleeding or vomitting, just drifting gently down into the higher life, and remembering, remembering . . . [The voice breaks.] . . . all the silly unhappiness . . . as though . . . it had never happened. (20-21)

The oxymoronic reference here by Mrs. Rooney to her desire to be "drifting gently down into the higher life" underscores the repeated emphasis in the play on images of rising and falling. These allusions, in turn, accumulate and take on added significance in light of the play's more direct Biblical allusions and references to religion. Of these, the most obvious is the passage from which the title of the play is derived, Psalm 145, which Maddy Rooney quotes towards the end of the play. I shall return to the significance of this and to the other religious references throughout the play at length.

Mrs. Rooney expresses a similar yearning for the painlessness of death in an earlier exchange with Mr. Tyler, a retired bill-broker:

> What have I done to deserve all of this, what, what? . . . So long ago . . . No! No! How can I go on, I cannot. Oh let me just flop down flat on the road like a big fat jelly out of a bowl and never move again! A great big slop thick with grit and

dust and flies, they would have to scoop me up with a shovel . . . . Oh I am just a hysterical old hag I know, destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and fat and rheumatism and childlessness. [Pause. Brokenly.] Minnie! Little Minnie!

Several important strands of the play emerge here. The first can be noted in Mrs. Rooney's imagined metamorphosis into a mound of horse dung. In this analogy between herself and animal excrement one senses the depths of Maddy Rooney's (bodily) self-loathing. The allusion to horse dung also serves to extend one of the play's most predominant metaphors, its repeated references to the symbolic significance of horses and to the role they play in Maddy Rooney's imagination. I shall return to this matter at length. Moreover, this is Mrs. Rooney's first reference to "little Minnie," and to the loss which is the most persistent source of her anguish.

Perhaps because of her own bereavement over the loss of "little Minnie," Mrs. Rooney is in the habit of beginning each exchange with a character she meets on her way to the train station with a question about his or her ailing family member. An important part of Mrs. Rooney's (unconscious) agenda seems to be to remind others of their own sorrow and grief. However, this is not merely a case of an individual trying to seek comfort in the fact that there are others as miserable as her self; rather it is also Mrs. Rooney's way of attempting to get her fellow community members to look at some of the ugly truths which afflict them all. In other words, as Mrs. Rooney herself struggles with becoming conscious so too does she attempt to

enlighten others. She is asking her acquaintances to awaken to the fact that they all suffer from the spiritual illness she feels from within and sees all around her. Although one could argue that Mrs. Rooney projects onto the external world the physical and spiritual affliction from which she suffers, I believe that one proposition does not negate the other; i.e., the illness Mrs. Rooney feels and sees is both within her and without. Thus the repeated references to illness throughout the play take on symbolic significance, becoming a metaphor for the diseased human landscape of All That Fall.

Having himself revealed the diseased state of his own physical and spiritual condition, Dan "clears his throat and begins . . . in a narrative tone" to relate the story of the train's delay:

Mr. Rooney: We drew out in the nick of time, I can vouch for that. I was--
Mrs. Rooney: How can you vouch for it?
Mr. Rooney: [Normal tone, angrily.] I can vouch for it, I tell you! Do you want my relation or don't you? [Pause. Narrative tone.] On the tick of time. I had the compartment to myself, as usual. At least I hope so, for I made no attempt to restrain myself, My mind--

Mr. Rooney's claim to have made no effort "to restrain myself" calls to mind his earlier reference to "pant on" because it too suggests the human embodiment of the non-human animal. The reference also recalls his earlier question of "what restrained me then" from acting on his infanticidal impulses. The symbolic geography of the scene is significant with respect to the

dichotomy the play presents between civilized restraint, on the one hand, and animal instinct, on the other. The juxtapositioning of the image of Dan trapped within the walls of his compartment together with the reference to his unrestraint, becomes symbolic of the precarious and potentially explosive co-existence of the animal within the "civilized" human being.

That Dan is not certain whether he "had the compartment to myself" (he adds, almost as an afterthought, "at least I hope so") seems curious indeed. One would think that whether or not Dan was alone is not, as he puts it, a matter of hope, but rather an easily verified fact. If we imagine that there was no one with Dan in the compartment, then we must attribute his uncertainty to an internal presence that he perceives and externalizes. Many of Beckett's protagonists express this sense that they are being hounded by an external force, usually referred to as an anonymous "they." In such instances "they" lacks a grammatical antecedant. Instead "they" are the projections of voices which haunt the character from within, voices which originated outside of himself but which he has first had to internalize and then later re-externalizes. However, lacking conscious awareness of who "they" were that originally tyranized him from without (i.e., having buried the memory of parental tyranny), the typical lost soul in Beckett's world experiences the persecuting "they" as a vague rather than a concrete presence. In his presentation of such haunted and hounded characters Beckett does much to expand our understanding

of the childhood roots of adult shame and paranoia.

In Dan's case, the only other possibility, an unlikely one to be sure, would be that on account of his blindness Dan cannot see whoever else might be in the compartment with him. What is most important here is that according to his "relation," Dan first makes no effort to restrain himself and subsequently begins to worry that someone is watching him. The scene operates on two levels: on one hand, the presentation of Dan as such an ambigous figure enriches the dramatic tension of the play. On the other hand, the scene works powerfully as metaphor, so that what actually happened in Dan's compartment becomes less important than the questions about character the mounting ambiguities generate. Our attention shifts from event to character, from speculation about what happened on the train to deeper concerns about the character at its center.

Following yet another interruption, Mr. Rooney proceeds to recount his thoughts while (supposedly) alone in his compartment. Although one suspects that his digression is in some way connected to the matter of the train's delay, it seems on the surface merely to beg the question. Sitting in his compartment, considering the pros and cons of retirement, Dan explains, he realized that " . . . by lying at home in bed, day and night, winter and summer, with a change of pyjamas once a fortnight, you would add very considerably to your income." After a brief interruption by the sound of a human cry, that of "Mrs. Tully," Mrs. Rooney explains, whose "poor husband beats her

unmercifully," Mr. Rooney continues:

Mr. Rooney: [Narrative tone.] On the other hand, I said, there are the horrors of home life . . . . And the brats, the happy little, healthy little howling neighbors' brats."

Mr. Rooney's professed hatred for children is expressed in terms which reveal his contempt and envy. The "little . . . brats" are "happy" and "healthy;" moreover, they belong to the neighbors and not to Dan. Dan envies the children their health and happiness, not with the wistful nostalgia of the aged, but rather with the resentment and anger of one who has enjoyed neither health nor happiness. Moreover, the children are not "screaming" or "crying;" rather they are "howling," an allusion, perhaps, to the unsocialized children whose animal natures have yet to be tamed and who are, Dan imagines, free to express their primitive impulses without inhibition. The use of the word "howling" might also suggest extremes of pain and lack. Dan idealizes the children at the same time as he derides them.

Moreover, Dan's words suggest that his hatred is an expression of complicated and quite painful buried feelings and memories. Perhaps he feels regret over not having had any children of his own and envy of those who do; perhaps, even more importantly, his contempt reflects a deeper sense of loss over a childhood he has never had: The suffering masked by Dan's expressed hatred of children is due not so much to the fact that he has no children as it is to his sense of having lost or been

deprived of his own childhood. In both The Drama of the Gifted Child and Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child, Alice Miller describes adults who speak of children with contempt and disdain. She explains how such an attitude serves to protect adults against the shame, humiliation, and pain that they themselves once felt as children and which they still feel now as adults. According to Miller, "contempt for those who are smaller and weaker . . . is the best defense against the breakthrough of one's own feelings of helplessness" (Drama 67). Miller goes on to assert that

> [c]ontempt is the weapon of the weak against one's own despised and unwanted feelings. And the fountainhead of all contempt, all discrimination, is the more or less conscious, uncontrolled, and secret exercise of power over the child by the adult . . . . (Drama 69)

The quality of Dan Rooney's anger, derision, and disdain is consistent with Miller's examples of adults who never had the chance to be "happy little, healthy little howling . . . brats."

Rooney's contempt also parallels the attitude towards children of the narrator and protagonist of Beckett's short story, "The Expelled" (In Stories and Texts for Nothing, 9-25). Like Mr. Rooney, this unnamed character expresses bitterly ironic contempt and derision for the little children he sees when out walking. After a two-page (hilarious) description of his ungainly walk, the narrator explains that

I had to fling myself to the ground to avoid crushing a child. He was wearing a little harness, I remember, with little bells, he must have taken himself for a pony, or a Clydesdale, why not. I would have crushed him gladly, I loathe children, and it would have been doing him a service, but I was afraid of reprisals. Everyone is a parent, that is what keeps you from hoping. One should reserve, on bust streets, special tracks for these nasty little creatures, their prams, hopes, sweets, scooters, skates, grandpas, grandmas, nannies, balloons and balls, all their foul little happiness in a word. (15)

Dan Rooney and his narrative counterpart would seem to share not only their views about children, but also, and more importantly, the longing and pain underlying them. Moreover, the narrative version, more humorous and also more elaborate, offers some insight into Rooney's character: In the story Beckett has the luxury of endowing his character with a personal history so that we know whence the narrator's disdain originated--in the pain and terror of his own childhood. As a dramatist Beckett could not provide such information (without having the character himself speak of it, a highly unlikely scenario given his conception of Dan Rooney); however, another way of understanding Rooney's infanticidal tendencies is to consider them from the perspective of what we know of the character so like him in Beckett's fiction.

Having determined that the "horrors of home life" would indeed be more than he could bear, Dan

fell to thinking of my silent, backstreet, basement office, with its obliterated plate, rest-couch and velvet hangings, and what it means to be buried there alive, if only from ten to five, with convenient to the one hand a bottle of light pale ale and to the other a long ice-cold fillet of hake. Nothing I said, not even

fully-certified death, can ever take the place of that. It was then that I noticed that we were at a standstill.

Following several further interruptions, Mr. Rooney brings his narrative to a close:

I did not care what was amiss. No, I just sat on saying, if this train were never to move again I should not greatly mind. Then gradually a--how shall I say--a growing desire to--er--you know--welled up within me. Nervous probably. In fact now I'm sure. You know, the feeling of being confined . . . . If we sit here much longer, I said, I really do not know what I shall do. I got up, and paced to and fro, between the seats, like a caged beast. . . . After what seemed an eternity we simply moved off.

Thus concludes Mr. Rooney's account. Precisely what he means when referring to his "growing desire to--er--you know--welled up inside me" is elusive. Perhaps his wife knows, but the listener can only presume: Is Dan referring to a desire to urinate? Or is he alluding to a desire to satisfy some other forbidden need? That he "paced to and fro . . . like a caged beast" gives the impression that his urge is primal and that he finds his inability to satisfy it painfully frustrating. Yet the description seems inconsistent with Dan's earlier claim to have made "no effort to restrain" himself. Here all of his effort seems directed at self-restraint. Moreover, Mr. Rooney's closing remarks would seem to shed little if any light on what caused the train's delay.

Mrs. Rooney's reaction throughout her husband's narrative, on the other hand, suggests that in it, in its gaps and

omissions, he has in fact communicated something profoundly disturbing. One is reminded of Beckett's own assertion in "A Dream of Fair to Midling Women" that the most important information in his work is contained in the pauses and spaces between the words, in the gaps and omissions in the text. Twice Mrs. Rooney complains of feeling faint, cold, and weak; something about her husband's "relation" frightens her: "I feel very cold and faint. The wind--[Whistling wind.]--is whistling through my summer frock as if I had nothing on over my bloomers." One wonders what in Dan Rooney's account has caused his wife to feel so vulnerable and exposed. That Dan Rooney fears that his wife has understood something which he hadn't (consciously) intended to reveal is also suggested by his own desparate plea to his wife upon concluding his account: "Say something, Maddy, say you believe me," he cries.

Mrs. Rooney's language here is also telling; not only does it suggest that her feelings of exposure have a sexual component (she feels "as if [she] had nothing on over [her] bloomers"), but words like "frock" and "bloomers" seem peculiar in this context, as if they belong to another place and time. Indeed on several occasions throughout the play both Maddy Rooney and her husband claim to be puzzled by the words which issue from their mouths. As they speak they are aware that they have no vital connection to the language that they use. Early in the play, for example, Mrs. Rooney meets Christy, a carter, on her way to the train station. When Christy asks Mrs. Rooney whether she would be in

need of a load of horse dung, she responds by saying "I'll ask the master." Surprised by her own utterance she wonders aloud:

> Do you find anything . . . bizarre about my way of speaking? [Pause.] I do not mean the voice. [Pause.] No, I mean the words. [Pause. More to herself.] I use none but the simplest words, I hope, and yet I sometimes find my way of speaking very . . . bizarre. (Beckett's ellipses) (13)

Similarly, when she later assures her husband that "we shall press on and never pause, never pause, till we come safe to haven," Dan replies, "Never pause . . . safe to haven. Do you know, Maddy, sometimes one would think you were struggling with a dead language." "Yes indeed, Dan," Mrs. Rooney agrees, "I know full well what you mean, I often have that feeling, it is unspeakably excruciating." To this Dan replies, "I confess I have it sometimes myself, when I happen to overhear what I am saying." Both Mr. and Mrs. Rooney attest to the excruciating pain caused by their loss of any meaningful connection between language and being. Their alienation from the words that they use seems to intensify their feelings of destitution. As words have been emptied of meaning so too does their hope diminish and their despair mount. There is no way to communicate, no way to connect with another human being and in so doing to alleviate one's sense of emptiness and abandonment. Language is dead, a relic from a bygone era. Words, like manure, belong to the dung-heap of a civilization that has lost its way.

Finally, Maddy Rooney's reference here to the sensation that

she is naked except for her bloomers recalls an earlier incident that occurs while she is journeying to the train station. Mr. Tyler, a retired bill-broker, approaches Mrs. Rooney from behind on his bicycle. The sexual innuendo and sub-text of their exchange calls attention to the sense of sexual impotence and rage that dominate the psychological landscape of All That Fall. Maddy Rooney's slips of tongue, moreover, reveal elements of her feelings of resentment towards her husband (and towards men in general) and of her sexual ambivalence. Twice during their exchange Mrs. Rooney inadvertently calls Mr. Tyler "Mr. Rooney."

Mrs. Rooney: Gracious how you wobble! Dismount, for mercy's sake, or ride on.
Mr. Tyler: Perhaps if I were to lay my hand lightly on your shoulder, Mrs. Rooney, how would that be? [Pause.] Would you permit that?
Mrs. Rooney: No, Mr. Rooney, Mr. Tyler I mean, I am tired of light old hands on my shoulders and other senseless places, sick and tired of them.

In the not very hidden subtext here Mr. Tyler expresses his sexual anxiety and impotence and Mrs. Rooney the disgust she feels on account of both his and her husband's sexual inadequacy. Then after Mr. Tyler narrowly averts being hit by a van, Mrs. Rooney exclaims:

It is suicide to be abroad. But what is it to be at home, Mr. Tyler, what is it to be at home? A lingering dissolution. . . . I beg your pardon?

Mr. Tyler: Nothing, Mrs. Rooney, nothing, I was merely cursing,

under my breath, God and man, under my breath, and the wet Saturday afternoon of my conception. My back tyre has gone down again. I pumped it hard as iron before I set out. And now I am on the rim.

Mr. Tyler: What sky! What light! Ah in spite of all it is a blessed thing to be alive in such weather, and out of hospital.

Mrs. Rooney: Alive?

Mr. Tyler: Well half alive shall we say?

Mrs. Rooney: Speak for yourself, Mr. Tyler. I am not half alive nor anything approaching it.

Bicycle tires inflating and deflating, Christy's inability to get his once frisky horse to move, Mr. Slocum (whom we shall meet shortly) and his car that won't start, and finally, the train that is delayed (because a child has been killed beneath its wheels)--images such as these recur on numerous occasions throughout the play and contribute to its overall emphasis on things running down, on misdirected energy, on a rupture in the natural flow of nature. We move from a horse, to a bicycle, to an automobile, to a train, and finally, back to a horse again in Mrs. Rooney's preoccupation with horses' buttocks and in her concern over whether Christ rode a (sterile) hinny into Jerusalem. The precarious state of Mr. Tyler's bicycle wheel that deflates almost immediately after having been inflated, also carries further the sexual implications of his exchange with Mrs. Rooney.

Moreover, throughout these exchanges Mr. Tyler urges Mrs. Rooney to "come . . . just take my free arm and we'll be there with time to spare." Following his third attempt at coaxing her

with the same words, Mrs. Rooney bursts out "sobbing:" "What? What's all this now? [Calmer.] Can't you see I'm in trouble? [With anger.] Have you no respect for misery? [Sobbing.] Minnie! Little Minnie!" Then, in her most extended reference to the loss of her child, Mrs. Rooney explains that Minnie would be about forty or fifty now and "girding up her pretty little loins, getting ready for the change." In this reference to "little Minnie" Mrs. Rooney acknowledges that if she were alive today Minnie would be going through menopause. This wryly ironic touch by Beckett contributes to the overall comic effect of the play and helps to make All That Fall seem like a testament to Nell's claim in Endgame that "nothing is funnier than unhappiness." The comment also reinforces the play's thematic focus on barrenness, sterility, and the end of generation and procreation.

Likewise, when Mrs. Rooney first meets Mr. Tyler she greets him with a question: "What news of your poor daughter?." To this Mr. Tyler replies, "They removed everything, you know, the whole . . . er . . . bag of tricks. Now I am grandchildless." (Beckett's ellipses) The divorce from and discomfort associated with woman's sexuality and procreative power is implicit in Mr. Tyler's vain groping for words. That all he can come up with is "the whole . . . bag of tricks" is a bitter commentary on how removed Mr. Tyler is from the natural sources of human life and (re)generation.

When Mr. Tyler tries for the fourth time to get Mrs. Rooney to come along with him to the train station Mrs. Rooney suddenly

explodes:

Mrs. Rooney: [Exploding.] Will you get along with you Mr. Rooney, Mr. Tyler I mean, will you get along with you now and cease molesting me? What kind of country is this where a woman can't weep her heart out on the highways and byways without being tormented by retired bill-brokers? [Mr. Tyler proceeds to mount his bicycle.] Heavens you're not going to ride her flat! [Mr. Tyler mounts.] You'll tear your tube to ribbons! [Mr. Tyler rides off. Receding sound of bumping bicycle. Silence. Cooing.] Venus birds! Billing in the woods all the summer long. [Pause.] Oh cursed corset! If I could let it out without indecent exposure. Mr. Tyler! Mr. Tyler! Come back and unlace me behind the hedge! [She laughs wildly, ceases.] What's wrong with me, what's wrong with me, never tranquil, seething out of my dirty old pelt, out of my skull, oh to be in atoms, in atoms! [Frenziedly.] ATOMS!

Several elements of Mrs. Rooney's outburst are worth commenting on here. That the stage directions describe her as "exploding" reveals the simmering rage she feels. Moreover, such an explosion of violent, pent-up anger suggests that Mrs. Rooney's terrible feelings of worthlessness, invisibility, and despair can be attributed in part to suppressed anger turned inward against herself. The use of the word "molesting" here is also important, even more so because it is Mr. Rooney whose name she inadvertently utters when urging Mr. Tyler to "cease molesting me." The extremity of her outburst and her use of the word "molesting" imply that Mrs. Rooney suffers deeply and bodily from a feeling of being invaded or abused. That Mr. Tyler provokes such outrage in Mrs. Rooney seems appropriate, not only from the perspective of what she may herself have experienced in the form of molestation, but also in terms of the surreptitiousness and

guile implicit in the indirect sexual innuendo and misogynist proclivities inherent in his words and actions.

At this juncture it is also important to recall that the scene, characters, and action of the play are all being filtered through Mrs. Rooney's perception. Thus in each of her exchanges we are provided with a glimpse into dimensions of her psychic state. The accumulated references to Mrs. Rooney's bodily self-loathing, her feelings of invisibility, her sexual rage and hostility, her sense of sexual exposure, her accusing Mr. Tyler of "molestating" her, and the tremendous guilt she feels over the supposed death of "little Minnie," paint a picture of a woman in torment. Her feeling sexually exposed throughout her husband's "relation" (which may or may not be a cover-up for the crime of infanticide); her use of the word "molestation"; her disconnection from language; her periodic slips into grief-stricken and sorrowful reverie; and the entire picture she paints of "little Minnie," who would now be menopausal if she were alive, begin to form an intricate web of menacing associations with a strong undercurrent of buried terror and sadness. All of these elements of Mrs. Rooney's character and behavior suggest that her profound terror and sadness can be traced to an experience of childhood sexual abuse. Having established that Mrs. Rooney is a scapegoat and spokesperson for her entire community, one must acknowledge that she is probably not alone in this experience, that most if not all of the characters in the play also have been the victims of some form of childhood trauma.

Finally, having vented some of her (sexual) rage and hostility, Mrs. Rooney's tone changes. The sounds of birds "cooing" turns Mrs. Rooney's thoughts to her own sexual needs and to her excruciating feelings of sexual frustration. She "laughs wildly," is "seething" out of her "pelt," and cries for Mr. Tyler (once he is safely gone) to "unlace me behind the hedge!" "Oh to be in atoms, in atoms!" she cries, and then "frenziedly" she screams, "ATOMS!" Mrs. Rooney is destroyed by her extreme sexual ambivalence. The symbol of her self-destruction (which is also the destruction of her sexual self) is the dead "little Minnie."

Mrs. Rooney's subsequent encounter with Mr. Slocum, the Clerk of the Racecourse, takes the sexual innuendo of her previous exchanges and carries it to an extreme so great that were it not for Beckett's acute sensitivity to the possibilities and limitations of his medium, it would never have worked. On one hand, the scene features an unremarkable, even typical affair--a too large woman experiencing embarrassing difficulties getting into and then extricating herself from an automobile. On the other hand, however, the "fundamental sounds" emitted by Mrs. Rooney and the others throughout the scene create a startling subtext. Beckett once remarked that his plays were a matter of "fundamental sounds." Here these sounds leave little doubt that we are listening first to a symbolic sexual encounter and then to Mrs. Rooney's mock (in both senses of the word) birth.

Even before he utters a word the name Slocum prepares the listener for an exchange with sexual innuendo and double

entendres. "May I offer you a lift, Mrs. Rooney?" he asks, "Are you going in my direction?" "I am, Mr Slocum," Mrs. Rooney lugubriously replies, "we all are." After inquiring about Mr. Slocum's ill mother Mrs. Rooney agrees to a lift to the train station:

Mrs. Rooney: [With exaggerated enthusiasm.] Oh that would be heavenly, Mr. Slocum, just simply heavenly. [Dubiously.] But would I ever get in, you look very high off the ground today, these new balloon tyres I presume. [Sound of door opening and Mrs. Rooney trying to get in.] Does this roof never come off? No? [Efforts of Mrs. Rooney.] No . . . . I'll never do it . . . you'll have to get me down, Mr. Slocum, and help me from the rear. . . .

Mr. Slocum: [Switching off engine.] I'm coming, give me time, I'm as stiff as yourself. [Sound of Mr. Slocum extricating himself from driver's seat.]

Mrs. Rooney: Stiff! Well I like that! And me heaving all over back and front. [To herself.] The dry old retrobate!

Mr. Slocum: [In position behind her.] Now, Mrs. Rooney, how shall we do this?

Mrs. Rooney: As if I were a bale, Mr. Slocum, don't be afraid. [Pause. Sounds of effort.] That's the way! [Effort.] Lower! [Effort.] Wait! [Pause.] No, don't let go! [Pause.] Suppose I do get up, will I ever get down?

Mr. Slocum: [Breathing hard.] You'll get down, Mrs. Rooney, you'll get down. We may not get you up, but I warrent you we'll get you down.

In his study of "Religious Imagery in the Plays of Samuel Beckett" (in Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Criticism ed. Ruby Cohn, 85-94), Hersh Zeifman claims that "the passage describing Maddy Rooney's actions as she enters Mr. Slocum's car," though seemingly a "most trivial and mundane" passage, "turns out to be

commenting negatively on the chance for salvation" (89).

According to Zeifman,

> [o]n the most immediate level, Maddy appears simply to be taking a seat in Mr. Slocum's automobile, obviously with some difficulty. It is well to remember, however, that the road on which Maddy is traveling is both geographically and metaphorically symbolic--both the road that leads to the train station at Boghill and the road of life that leads to death and, possibly, salvation. (When Mr. Slocum stops to offer her a lift, he enquires, "Are you going in my direction?" to which Maddy replies, "I am Mr. Slocum, we all are . . . . ") On another level, then, Maddy's entering Mr. Slocum's car to travel along the road evokes the act of entering heaven. Maddy finds the entry arduous, the struggle is clearly an ascent ("Up! Up!"), she comments ambiguously "Oh glory!" and she wonders if, in fact she will be able to get in.
>
> But the hope of salvation is deflated by the deliberately mocking manner in which the ascent is parodied. For, on still another level, the ascent is ridiculed and vulgarized by being assimilated with the act of sexual intercourse. While Maddy is "heaving all over back and front," "dry" Mr. Slocum (the name is surely significant) tries his best, "I'm coming, Mrs. Rooney, I'm coming, give me time, I'm stiff as yourself, and the consummation of their efforts is described by Maddy in deliciously ambiguous terms. The dream of paradise is thus exploded in outrageous burlesque. If salvation is doubtful, death and destruction are certain: "You'll get down, Mrs. Rooney, you'll get down. We may not get you up, but I warrent you we'll get you down." (90)

The mock sexual encounter is extended even further once Mr.

Slocum has succeeded in getting Maddy into his car:

> Mrs. Rooney: Oh! . . . Lower! . . . Don't be afraid! . . . We're past the age when . . . . There! . . . Now! . . . Get your shoulder under it . . . . Oh! . . . [Giggles.] Oh glory! . . . Up! Up! . . . Ah! . . . I'm in! [Panting of Mr. Slocum. He slams the door. In a scream.] My frock! You've nipped my frock! [Mr. Slocum opens the door. Mrs. Rooney frees her frock. Mr. Slocum slams the door. His violent unintelligible muttering as he walks round to the other door. Tearfully.] My nice frock! Look what you've done to my nice frock! [Mr. Slocum gets into his seat, slams driver's door, presses starter. The engine does not start. He releases starter.] What will Dan say when he sees

me?

Mr. Slocum: Has he then recovered his sight?

Mrs. Rooney: No, I mean when he knows, what will he say when he feels the hole? [Mr. Slocum presses the starter. As before. Silence.] What are you doing, Mr. Slocum?

Mr. Slocum: Gazing straight before me, Mrs. Rooney, through the windscreem, into the void.

This part of the mock sex scene is characterized by the same kind of inverted roles that I noted earlier when remarking on the change in gender roles implicit in Maddy Roony's proposal to her husband. Here, Mrs. Rooney shouts "I'm in!" during the episode's climactic moment which occurs only after much coaxing and some girlish giggles on her part. What to make of the inversion here is not entirely clear, though it seems to be consistent with the play's emphasis on sexual dysfunction and on the thwarting of life's natural processes.

Moreover, once Mr. Slocum has finally succeeded in getting Mrs. Rooney into the car, she suddenly begins to panic about her "frock." When Mrs. Rooney uses the word "see" in reference to Dan's discovery that her frock has been "nipped," the literal Mr. Slocum wonders if Dan has "recovered his sight." It is a very funny moment, hardly worth a comment from Mrs. Rooney, but Mrs. Rooney explains anyway, "No, I mean when he knows . . . when he feels the hole." Maddy Rooney fears that her husband will know that she has been sexually violated. One must imagine that the entire scene and the feelings it arouses in Mrs. Rooney are symbolic re-enactments of an earlier and quite painful experience

of sexual molestation. Several references throughout the play confirm that in Dan she has chosen a husband unlikely to threaten her again in this way. She has also assured herself of a lifetime of sexual frustration and resentment. In these respects the marriage of Dan and Maddy Rooney is much the same as that of Winnie and Willie in Happy Days.

Significantly, Mr. Slocum can't get his car started. When he finally does and the two arrive at the train station, the next ordeal begins--how to get Mrs. Rooney out of the car. This too Beckett turns into a symbolic re-enactment, but in this case it is a birth scene to which we bear witness with our ears. Mr. Slocum asks Tommy, the porter, to help Mrs. Rooney out of the car:

Tommy: Crouch down, Mrs. Rooney, crouch down, and get your head in the open.
Mrs. Rooney: Crouch down! At my time of life! This is lunacy!
Tommy: Press her down, sir. [Sounds of combined efforts.]
Mrs. Rooney: Pity!
Tommy: Now! She's coming! Straighten up, Ma'am! There! [Mr. Slocum slams the door.]
Mrs. Rooney: Am I out?

Mrs. Rooney has just participated in her own mock birth.

Let us return now to Mr. Rooney's account. Although her husband's narrative bears no apparent relationship to the matter of the train's delay, Mrs. Rooney is struck by something about it to which she reacts at first with frightened vulnerability and subsequently by falling into a state akin to a hypnotic trance. Either Mrs. Rooney does not notice that Dan has failed to answer

her initial question, immersed as she is by now in her own reverie, or, what is more likely, she has understood him all too well. Perhaps Dan's elusive account is symptomatic of the way in which the two are used to (not) communicating, of the Rooneys' reliance on words to conceal rather than to reveal an unpalatable truth. In any case, instead of questioning her husband further about the cause of the train's delay, Mrs. Rooney responds to Dan's account by offering her own rather cryptic narrative which would seem to bear no relationship at all to the story she has just heard or, for that matter, to the question of the train's delay:

Mrs. Rooney: I remember once attending a lecture by one of those new mind doctors. I forget what you call them. He spoke--
Mr. Rooney: A lunatic specialist?
Mrs. Rooney: No, no, just the troubled mind. I was hoping he might shed a little light on my lifelong preoccupation with horses' buttocks.
Mr. Rooney: A neurologist.
Mrs. Rooney: No, no, just mental distress, the name will come to me in the night. I remember his telling us the story of a little girl, very strange and unhappy in her ways, and how he treated her unsuccessfully over a period of years and was finally obliged to give up the case. He could find nothing wrong with her, he said. The only thing wrong with her as far as he could see was that she was dying. And she did in fact die, shortly after he had washed his hands of her.
Mr. Rooney: Well? What is there so wonderful about that?
Mrs. Rooney: No, it was just something he said, and the way he said it, that have haunted me ever since.
Mr. Rooney: You lie awake at night, tossing to and fro and brooding on it.
Mrs. Rooney: On it and other . . . wretchedness. [Pause.] When he had done with the little girl he stood there motionless for quite some time, some two minutes I should say, looking down at his table. Then he suddenly raised his head and exclaimed, as if he had had a revelation, The trouble with her was that she had

never really been born![1] [Pause.] He spoke throughout without notes. [Pause.] I left before the end.
Mr. Rooney: Nothing about your buttocks? [Mrs. Rooney weeps. In affectionate remonstrance.] Maddy!
Mrs. Rooney: There is nothing to be done for those people!
Mr. Rooney: For which is there? [Pause.] That does not sound right somehow.

Maddy Rooney's account of the "mind doctor" and his dying patient who "had never really been born," elusive and ambiguous though it may seem, plays a central role in clarifying and developing the play's dominant themes.

The language of this exchange, for example, reveals something about its wider application to the play as a whole. That Mr. Rooney is preoccupied with language here, as he is on several other important occasions in the play, is suggested by his insistence upon finding the right term for the kind of doctor to which Mrs. Rooney is referring--he is a "lunatic specialist," Mr. Rooney posits, or a "neurologist." It would seem that his focus on finding the precise term diverts Mr. Rooney's attention from the content of his wife's words and prevents him from having to consider the relevance of her account to his own or to her condition. Similarly, at the end of their exchange, Mr. Rooney

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[1]Mrs. Rooney's account of the "mind doctor" is taken directly from Beckett's own experience, as Deirdre Bair has explained. In 1937, when Beckett was undergoing psychoanalysis at the Tavistock Clinic in London, he attended a lecture there given by Carl Jung. According to Bair, Jung's anecdote about the dead girl, and particularly his claim that she had "never been born entirely," struck Beckett as a revelation. Beckett embraced the idea that he himself had not been born entirely and used it to explain his lifelong depression, his suicidal thoughts, and, most importantly, his tortured relationship with his mother.

observes of his rhetorical question "[f]or which [people] is there [something to be done]?" that his language "does not sound right somehow." And indeed something about his response is troubling; it is not, however, its grammatical clumsiness that "does not sound right," as Mr. Rooney implies, but rather the hollowness of his observation and the way in which he manages not to respond to the implications of the story he has just heard his wife tell.

In addition, Mr. Rooney's elison of the word "horses'" before "buttocks" and his use of the phrase "your buttocks" instead, is a subtle linguistic shift which serves to suggest an identification between Maddy Rooney and the horses on whose buttocks she is fixated. Indeed, from the outset of the play horses play a predominant role in Maddy Rooney's imagination. The first reference to horses occurs when Christy, riding atop of his horse, asks Mrs. Rooney whether she might "be in need of a small load of dung." Mrs. Rooney initially responds with "Dung? What would we want with dung, at our time of life?" There is no longer any need for fertilizer. Procreation and generation have ceased. The relationship between the natural processes of life and death has been lost--the connection between excrement, or dung, and fertilizer, or sustenance, has been severed.

As Christy tries without much success to get his horse to move Mrs. Rooney, looking on, says:

Give her a good welt on the rump. [Sound of welt. Pause.] Well! If someone were to do that for me I should not dally.

[Pause.] How she gazes at me to be sure, with her great moist cleg-tormented eyes! Perhaps if I were to move on, down the road, out of her field of vision . . . . [Sound of welt.] No, no, enough! Take her by the snaffle and pull her eyes away from me. Oh this is awful!

Here Maddy Rooney feels accosted by the horse; in particular she is troubled by the horse's relentless and, in her mind, accusing gaze. The torment of feeling herself watched by the horse is unbearable. Mrs. Rooney also identifies with the horse here, imagining what she would do if it were she who was getting the welt on the rump. She has projected onto the horse a conflict at the root of her own deepest anxieties; the horse comes at once to symbolize the violent sexual impulses hidden deep inside of her as well as her anxiety over having harnessed and thwarted these energies. The image of the harnessed horse standing before her is a fitting representation of Mrs. Rooney's sexual conflict and ambivalence. Both extremes--her violent sexual impulses and her need to repress them--might be taken as evidence of early sexual abuse.

Moreover, behind the train tracks, forming a limit to the play's imagined space, is the race-track. On the day that the play takes place, we learn, there is to be a horse race. It is difficult to imagine a more apt way of calling attention to the human effort to harness animal nature and to put all other forms of nature into its service. The juxtapositioning of the train tracks where a child has been killed and the race tracks calls attention to the failure of the human to overcome (its own)

nature. Thus in her preoccupation with horses Mrs. Rooney also becomes something of a scapegoat for the entire community. The horse motif is more than a barometer of Mrs. Rooney's psychological state; it also serves as a way to measure the pulse of her community.

Aside from Mrs. Rooney's revelation that she went to see the "mind doctor" in the hope that he might shed some light on her "lifelong pre-occupation with horses' buttocks," there is one final reference to horses which extends their symbolic significance. Mrs. Rooney asks Dan, "Can hinnies procreate, I wonder?"

Mr. Rooney: Say that again.
Mrs. Rooney: Come on, dear, don't mind me, we are getting drenched.
Mr. Rooney: [Forcibly.] Can what what?
Mrs. Rooney: Hinnies procreate. [Silence.] You know, hinnies, or jinnies, aren't they barren, or sterile, or whatever it is? [Pause.] It wasn't an ass's colt at all, you know, I asked the Regius Professor. [Pause.]
Mr. Rooney: He should know.
Mrs. Rooney: Yes, it was a hinny, he rode into Jerusalem or wherever it was on a hinny. [Pause.] That must mean something. [Pause.] It's like the sparrows, than many of which we are of more value, they weren't sparrows at all.[2]
Mr. Rooney: Than many of which! . . . You exaggerate, Maddy.
Mrs. Rooney: [With emotion.] They weren't sparrows at all!
Mr. Rooney: Does that put our price up?
Mrs. Rooney: Do you want some dung?

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[2]The allusion is to the following New Testament parable: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:29-31; see also Luke 12:67).

In her vehement determination to establish the truth about the horse which Christ rode into Jerusalem, Mrs. Rooney reveals several aspects of her psychic state--the deep need she has to unleash her feelings of betrayal, the desire to undo a lie, and perhaps her longing to alleviate the shame and humiliation she feels in connection with her own barrenness and sterility. The exchange also brings the play's religious underpinnings to its surface. Kristen Morrison's observations concerning the significance of the two biblical allusions contained in the preceeding passage are also illuminating. Maddy Rooney, according to Morrison, "finding factual innacuracies in both[,] implies that they are thus unreliable. There may have been no messianic triumph; man may not be of special worth, object of special care . . . " (80-81).

The failure of religion to help people in their suffering and need is most directly expressed in an exchange that reveals the source for the play's title. As they approach the end of their journey they hear the music of "Death and the Maiden" emanating from the house of a neighbor. The play comes full circle, bringing us back to its opening moments when Mrs. Rooney alighted on her journey. The music of "Death and the Maiden" was playing then too from the same house and Mrs. Rooney responds, "Poor woman. All alone in that ruinous old house." Now it is Mr. Rooney who comments:

Mr. Rooney: [Indistinctly.] Death and the Maiden. [Silence.]
Mrs. Rooney: You are crying. [Pause.] Are you crying?

Mr. Rooney: [Violently.] Yes! [They move on. Wind and rain. Dragging feet, etc. They halt. They move on. Wind and rain. Dragging feet, etc. They halt.] Who is the preacher tomorrow? The incumbent?
Mrs. Rooney: No.
Mr. Rooney: Who?
Mrs. Rooney: Hardy.
Mr. Rooney: "How to be Happy though Married?"
Mrs. Rooney: No no, he died, you remember. No connexion.
Mr. Rooney: Has he announced his text?
Mrs. Rooney: "The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed down." [Silence.] They join in wild laughter. They move on. Wind and rain. Dragging feet, etc.] Hold me tighter, Dan. [Pause.] Oh yes!

The sadness here is palpable. Dan has been crying. Both "laugh wildly" at the mere mention of a benevolent God. "The Lord," they know, does not "upholdeth all that fall." Nor does he "raiseth up all those that be bowed down." The entire play makes a mockery of such notions. The wind will continue to chill them, the rain will continue to fall, but no one will come to their aid as with heavy hearts and heads bowed down they make their "long day's journey into night."

The significance of the psalm which is to be the text of the preacher's sermon (and which is the source of the play's title) resonates on every level of the play, most overtly in all of its references to images of falling. Of particular importance is the suggestion throughout the play that birth itself is a kind of falling, a process to be hated, and that death is a kind of rising or ascension, devoutly to be desired. On the road of life the Rooneys and all human beings have lost their way and religion seems merely to mock their suffering. The child falls from the train and is killed; "little Minnie" falls from the womb and

dies; the rain falls without ceasing; the girl in the "mind doctor's" story has never begun the process of living--the Christian myth of the Fall is perfectly suited to capture the despair at the heart of All That Fall, which attests to the fact that there was nothing fortunate about it at all.

Much of the play's dark humor emerges in Beckett's depiction of the "religious life" as embodied by one Miss Fitt, a character whom Mrs. Rooney meets when she has arrived at the station and is awaiting the arrival of Dan's train. As the name suggests, she is both a misfit, someone who does not fit in, as well Miss Fit, one who is perfectly fitted for her role. Mrs. Rooney sees Miss Fitt and realizes that Miss Fitt fails to notice her. "Look closely," Mrs. Rooney urges Miss Fitt, "and you will finally distinguish a once female shape." When Mrs. Rooney reminds Miss Fitt that they "worshipped together" last Sunday, the startled Miss Fitt explains:

> Oh but in church, Mrs. Rooney, in church I am alone with my Maker. Are not you? [Pause.] Why even the sexton himself, you know, when he takes up the collection, knows it is useless to pause before me. I simply do not see the plate, or bag, whatever it is they use, how could I? [Pause.] Why even when all is over and I go out into the sweet fresh air, why even then for the first furlong or so I stumble in a kind of daze as you might say, oblivious to my co-religionists . . . . So if you think I could you now, Mrs. Rooney, you do me an injustice. All I saw was a big pale blur . . . .
>
> Mrs. Rooney: [Ruefully.] Maddy Rooney, nee Dunne, the big pale blur. [Pause.] You have piercing sight, Miss Fitt, if only you knew it, literally piercing. (It cuts right through her)

So much for the virtues of the religious life! As Miss Fitt

experiences it, religion becomes an excuse for completely withdrawing from and abdicating responsibility for one's fellow human beings--one's "co-religionists," as she puts it. Her absorption in the sermon prevents Miss Fitt from "seeing" Mrs. Rooney. This, in turn, reinforces Mrs. Rooney's feelings of insignificance and invisibility, feelings which Dan, in his blindness, can hardly have helped to remedy. Because she has spent so much time "alone with my Maker," Miss Fitt fails to hear Mrs. Rooney when stumbling, she asks for Miss Fitt's arm to lean on. "Your arm!" Mrs. Rooney explodes, "Any arm! A helping hand! For five seconds! Christ what a planet!"

Let us now return to Mrs. Rooney's narrative about the "mind doctor." Maddy Rooney's language throughout this passage is significant. Having explained that the "mind doctor" was finally obliged to "give up the case" of this young girl, Mrs. Rooney describes how his patient died shortly after the doctor "had washed his hands of her." The language here is illuminating on several levels. Not only do Mrs. Rooney's words suggest her impression of a cruel doctor who is ready, waiting, and relieved to have no more to do with his dying patient, but in the context of the rest of the account the expression acquires other unsettling associations as well. These associations parallel in some ways Vladimir's "grave speech" in Waiting for Godot: Like Godot's grave-digger, "down in the hole lingeringly," putting on "his forceps," the impression here is of the association between birth and death. That the doctor had "washed his hands" of the

dying child elicits an image of hands stained with the blood of a new-born baby. The doctor here becomes an obstetrician and a murderer, washing his hands of his guilt and of the blood of the new-born/murdered infant. This, then, is what is represented by the allegory here of the child, now dead, who had "never been entirely born"--another variation on the "womb/tomb" theme that we find in all of Beckett's plays. Yet here the association of birth and death is overtly presented as a result of violent human intervention. In Beckett's other plays, however, the dichotomy maintains the quality of a philosphical abstraction, a weighty one to be sure, infused with psychological implications, but still less concretely psychological and human than it is in All That Fall.

These associations bring us back to the one most persistent source of Mrs. Rooney's grief and sorrow: her memory of the loss of her own child, perhaps during childbirth. The death of "poor little Minnie" haunts Mrs. Rooney throughout the duration of the play. Yet it is impossible to know whether this admittedly terrible loss actually occurred (i.e., whether Mrs. Rooney ever had a "little Minnie"), or whether Mrs. Rooney's grief is instead an indirect expression of a more primitive and basic feeling of deprivation that she herself suffers. Mrs. Rooney is in a state of perpetual mourning and despair over the grievous loss of Minnie, but her anguish seems to reach into and grow out of an earlier experience of even more devestating anguish over the loss of her very self; in grieving over the loss of her dead child

Mrs. Rooney mourns the loss of that part of herself wherein resides the source of her own energy, vitality, and creativity. Just as her husband's envy and resentment of the little children expressed not a wistful longing for his own lost childhood but rather a rage at having never been a "happy little, healthy little" child, so too does the quality of Mrs. Rooney's deep and abiding sorrow express the painful absence within her where a presence should have been, the presence of a nurtured child. Mrs. Rooney acts like one who feels she has been dying all of her life, as if she herself had "never really been born."

That critics have questioned the very existence of Mrs. Rooney's child and have speculated that the child is instead a product of Mrs. Rooney's fantasy life lends credibility to this view. For if Mrs. Rooney never had a "little Minnie" (a hypothesis which it is impossible either to confirm or to refute), then the (real or fantasized) death of a child becomes a metaphor for, a way of thinking about, and a way of mourning the death of the child within Mrs. Rooney (and within every other character in the play as well). Once again Beckett has made of absence a palpable presence. Mrs. Rooney mourns the loss of a dead child in order to mourn the loss of her own childhood. The sense of absence at the heart of All That Fall is due to the lack at the core of every character in the play; it is the same void which pushes Vladimir and Estragon to such extremes of anguish and despair, the same excruciating feelings of deprivation that drive Hamm, Clov, Nagg, and Nell to such violent explosions of

hatred and rage.

That Mrs. Rooney is so captivated and haunted by the "mind doctor's" lecture also lends credibility to the view that it is her own lost childhood which she mourns. She clearly seems to find in it a key to her own condition, for it is she who uses the word "revelation" to describe the doctor's pronouncement that "the trouble with [the sick and dying child] was she had never really been born." The doctor's diagnosis also applies to the conditions which define the collective consciousness of the entire community.

Also significant here is the ironic juxtapositioning of Mrs. Rooney's statement that the doctor claimed "he could find nothing wrong with [the sick child]" with her reference to his assertion that "[t]he only thing wrong with her . . . was that she was dying." The doctor's claim that the girl was "dying" would hardly seem consistent with his claim that he could find nothing wrong with her, unless, that is, there is nothing "wrong" (or unusual) about one who is dying at such a young age. This is precisely what is implied by the fact that that the two comments do not cancel each other out. Indeed, from the perspective of a "mind doctor," as Mrs. Rooney reports it, there is nothing "wrong" with someone who is dying.

And yet if we were to diagnose the ills which afflict Mrs. Rooney and the other members of her community, we would be hard-pressed to say anthing more than that they too are dying. Beckett leaves it up to the listener to discern what makes one

notion of "dying" different from another, i.e., what makes the dying that is happening in this allegorical narrative and in the community at the center of All That Fall distinct from and of greater concern than the fact that, from a philosophical perspective, from birth we all are dying. Ironically, the "mind doctor" fails to see the distinction but we cannot afford to miss it.

The fact that Mrs. Rooney claims to have left the lecture "before the end" seems odd, given how enthralled by it she seems to have been. From a thematic perspective the gesture is consistent with the feeling of incompletion implicit in the premature death of the little girl who "had never really been born" and in the stifling sense of lifelessness and thwarted creativity which permeates the play as a whole. In terms of Mrs. Rooney's psychology, however, the gesture is somewhat more ambiguous. Perhaps, one might speculate, the lecture has hit Mrs. Rooney too close to home--the extent of her identification with the girl in the doctor's story makes it unbearable to stay and listen. Or perhaps she has heard enough to satisfy her need to understand, not, as she had originally intended, her "lifelong preoccupation with horses' buttocks," but rather the anxiety and sorrow which lie beneath it. When Mrs. Rooney asserts that "there is nothing to be done for those people" it is not at all clear to whom she is referring. But Mr. Rooney's response, "for which is there?," implies that it is all of humanity for whom there is finally "nothing to be done": the loss at the center is

irrevocable; all that is left to do is to finish the slow process of dissolution.

If there is a glimmer of hope in All That Fall that life might begin anew, it is to be found in the depths of Mrs. Rooney's despair. For in clinging so tenaciously to the loss of the life within her, and in refusing to give up her mourning, Mrs. Rooney is, in a sense, refusing to let go of life. As long as she persists in her mourning, that which she has lost can never be fully destroyed. And in its dying embers lie the seeds of regeneration and hope.

EPILOGUE

Samuel Beckett's death on December 22, 1989 at the age of eighty-three ended the career of one of the world's greatest playwrights. Translated into over thirty-five different languages, and performed in countries in every corner of the world, the plays of Samuel Beckett have been embraced by the hearts and minds of people from every walk of life. In 1969 Samuel Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for "a body of work that, in new forms of fiction and the theatre, has transmuted the destitution of modern man into his exaltation" (qtd. in Bair). Though Beckett accepted the award graciously, he regarded as absurd the choice of himself as recipient, claiming that the award was intended to go to elevating work. "Mine is hardly elevating," he said.

And yet in whatever language they speak, Beckett's cast of solitary survivors express something fundamental and profound about the human spirit. Without a trace of sentimentality Beckett presents us with a procession of dramatic characters at the extreme limits of human suffering and endurance who manage somehow to go on even as they say they cannot. And yet no matter how destitute and pained they may be, no matter how desparately they hunger for human nurturance, these characters continue both

to move us and to make us laugh. As John Peter puts in in the London Sunday Times (December 24, 1989):

> All Beckett's writing is haunted by the feeling most of us have experienced, but fortunately only rarely and usually not for long: the feeling that we are totally alone in the world, unprotected by higher beings, and not deserted only because we have never really been accompanied; that our past is inexplicable and our future unknowable, and that the dingy body we inhabit is probably all there is. It would be unendurable if it were not so grotesquely laughable, no? To anyone who has ever felt this, a voice that can speak coherently about such things is a consolation and a reassurance.

Among the many great travesties of this century one which has only in recent years been brought to public awareness is the tragic plight of children across the world. In the images, movement, and gestures of his plays and in the poetry of his words and silences, Beckett gives shape and and voice to the inchoate longings of childhood. Beckett's dramatic landscapes evoke the range and depth of the child's emotional life and capture the suffering of adults who are haunted and hounded by buried childhood memories. The voices of childhood terror and loss that fill the air in Beckett's theatre speak to the buried child within us all; by awakening us to its cry and freeing it from its oppressive constraints, Beckett has restored to us our capacity for regeneration and hope.

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