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The Stirrings Still of Popular Forms of Entertainment in
Samuel Beckett's First Published Play:
Examining the Influences of the Music-Hall, Vaudeville, Circus and
Early Screen Comedy on *Waiting for Godot*

Lisa Gorecki

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

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ABSTRACT

The Stirrings Still of Popular Forms of Entertainment in
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Lisa Gorecki

The Irish playwright Samuel Beckett has long been known for his indefatigable spirit of irreverence in the face of many of Western society's most cherished institutions and hallowed belief systems. Yet his consistent reverence for one particular bastion of Western culture remains a lesser known fact: that of popular stage and screen entertainment. This thesis explores the ways in which Beckett interlards *Waiting for Godot* with a selection of thematic motifs and comic conventions culled from the English music-hall, American vaudeville, circus clowning and, finally, early screen comedy in order to present us with a vision of the human condition that is as universal as it is devastatingly comical or, for that matter, comically devastating. Special attention is paid to Beckett's deployment and/or adaptation of: a) the "multi-sensory" language of the clown of 'low' comedy; b) vaudeville and the music-hall's self-referential stage and stage-world; c) the popular, "shifty" tramp-clown figure of stage and screen, and d) the comic 'double-act' of the music-hall, vaudeville and circus -- each of which serves to underline the bafflingly complex nature of human experience in a universe characterized by radical indeterminacy.

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INTRODUCTION

In *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, James Knowlson recounts how Samuel Beckett would supplement his more formal education as an undergraduate student in modern languages at Trinity College with a secret passion for popular art forms that included a 'lighter kind of theatre' that grew out of old music-hall and circus skits.¹ In addition to his often solitary excursions to The Gaiety, the Olympia and the Theatre Royal, where Beckett was to develop his "lifelong fascination with pratfalls and slapstick,"² he paid regular visits to Dublin's movie houses to catch the latest feature films of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, and, in subsequent years, Laurel and Hardy and the Marx Brothers. Deirdre Bair, another of Beckett's chief biographers, remarks on how his critical appreciation of these forms of popular entertainment would often translate the next day into "detailed, technical discussions of the dramatic unities -- of 'how it worked.'"³ Beckett would later credit the comic conventions of the "illegitimate" theatre (out of which early comic cinema essentially sprang⁴) with helping him to instill a "circus-cum-vaudeville atmosphere"⁵ into his 1954 play, *Waiting for Godot*.

It will be the purpose of my thesis, firstly, to pinpoint or at times suggest which of the comic techniques and/or themes of each of these three genres of demotic entertainment (i.e. vaudeville or the music-hall, circus clowning, and early screen comedy) have been incorporated into the dramatic world of Beckett's first published and performed play, *Waiting for Godot*. The predominant focus of my paper, however, will centre on Beckett's precise modifications and adaptations of these well-worn conventions to suit the requirements of an accurate presentation of the play's unique tragicomic vision of human existence. My discussion of the influences of these

traditional entertainments on *Godot* will be broken up into three main parts, followed by my conclusion. The first chapter, entitled “Some Initial Considerations,” looks at how Beckett’s “essentialist” art makes use of the universal figure of the clown (an “Everyman” archetype central to all the mass mediums of entertainment being examined here) in terms of both his ability to communicate in the multi-sensory field of the image, and his comic knack for foregrounding the prevalence of human misfortune while simultaneously making light of it. The second chapter of my thesis (“The ‘Staged’ Stage”) analyses the various ways in which Beckett deploys the open, or self-referential, stage of popular comedy to concretize and thereby underscore the “reality of unreality” -- in respect to a) the outward contents of our daily lives, and b) the underlying metaphysical nothingness which our daily activities and conversations attempt, ever more unsuccessfully, to “gloss over.” This section also considers Beckett as dramatist in light of the distinctly clown-or-jester-like figure of the spiritual guru. Succeeding this is “. . . This Great Stage of Fools,” a chapter that deals with the respective influences of the rich and complex tramp-clown tradition of stage and screen, and the tightly unified “double-act” of stage and circus-ring comedy, on the construction of character in *Godot*. My conclusion attempts to accomplish two interrelated ends. In looking ahead to how Beckett’s use of popular comic conventions and effects undergoes significant changes in the subsequent “couple-oriented” plays of *Endgame* (1958) and *Happy Days* (1961), I also reiterate the reasons why *Godot*’s particular vision of the human situation is able to accommodate such a sprawling substructure of various features of popular entertainment.

Throughout my thesis I have chosen to refer to the various performers and comedians gracing the stages or screens of demotic comedy as “clowns.” I do so in acknowledgement, firstly, of the public’s own propensity for viewing these “symbolic

figures of loneliness and alienation”⁶ as clowns and, secondly, of the well-established fact that stock clown routines from both past and more contemporary comic traditions consistently resurface on the stages of the music-hall and vaudeville, in the “haywire” scenarios of early silent and “talkie” movies and, of course, in the circus ring. Moreover, each of these unpretentious, “low” genres of entertainment honour the standard “clowning” tenet of displaying (at least at times) a marked disregard for propriety and gentility, as well as aim, in the words of Chaplin describing his own clowning art, “at burlesquing, [or] satirizing, the human race. . . .”⁷ While each of these media -- and artists working within them -- parody slightly different domains of human experience, Beckett’s truly eclectic clown-construct absorbs into it diverse elements from each of these strains of popular buffoonery.

At various points throughout my thesis one may get the odd impression that the clowning traits of Beckett’s characters are at thematic loggerheads with one another. For instance, I proceed to demonstrate in Chapter III how Beckett uses the tramp-clown tradition to suggest *the difficulty of two people (or parties) staying together*, only to show in the latter half of this section how he utilises the clowning routines of the comic “double-act” to connote *the impossibility of their parting ways*. From this issues the Beckettian concept of man’s being separate from, yet still “one” with his fellow man. These confusingly contradictory effects are probably deliberate for a number of good reasons. Beckett did not, after all, intend his theatre-going audiences to identify *Godot’s* personae with simply one highly recognizable clown or type of clown. Given that the playwright has elected to portray *Godot’s* universe as a wildly disorienting place where little is clear in any logically straightforward sense, it follows that even the formation of its fictional inhabitants will be made to conform to Beckett’s express wish that the play strive at all times to avoid definition. Another

probable rationale for why his clowns turned out the chimerically “hybridized” way they did, may be traced to Beckett’s firmly held and cogently dramatized belief that our deepest revelations about ourselves and our world express themselves in largely contradictory forms.⁸ These ideas will become clearer in the pages that follow.

For the purposes of keeping my thesis predominantly focussed on Beckett, and his specific reworking of antique stage and screen routines of mass comedy, I have chosen (for the most part) to regard the English music-hall and American vaudeville in terms of their many similarities rather than differences. In this way, I avoid unnecessarily diluting the main focus of my paper with tangential discussions revolving around the often subtle distinctions existing between these more-or-less equivalent,⁹ though admittedly not identical, art forms. To begin to differentiate in detail between these two complex and dynamic forms of live entertainment could prove a thesis in itself. It would probably also entail the drawing of sub-distinctions between the pre-and-post-1914 music-hall and the pre-and-post-1890’s vaudeville, for both traditions went on to acquire a greater bourgeois respectability and moral conservatism by the time they passed into their latter, respective phases of ultimate decline.¹⁰ So as not to ignore their differences altogether, I will take a moment to sum up briefly the areas in which the music-hall and vaudeville most saliently differed from one another.

In his famous essay “Marie Lloyd,” T. S. Eliot indirectly touches on what is perhaps the major difference between these two theatrical traditions, when he lauds the impersonal art of the great music-hall artist Marie Lloyd for its rare capacity to express the life and soul of the music-hall audiences.¹¹ As reflectors of the social conditions and national sensibilities of their (at least initially) lower-class audiences, these popular entertainments presented “quintessential” renditions of social types unique to urban life *as experienced within their respective countries*. Though the

comic devices and forms upon which both traditions drew were roughly the same, their specific targets for on-stage parody were not. Much of vaudeville's subject-matter was connected in one way or another with the uniquely American "immigrant experience." Since vaudeville (in its prime in the late nineteenth century) aimed at satisfying the needs of first-generation Americans -- as well as the the country's steady influx of racial and ethnic "outsiders" who turned to its humour as a means of gaining a sense of community through shared laughter and a recognizable commonality of experience -- it was *their* emotions, hardships, and dreams of happiness and success that were being largely mirrored on stage.¹²

In terms of constituting a "psychic profile of American mass man in the moment of his greatest trial,"¹³ vaudeville most differed from the music-hall in a) its tendency to create "stock" comic characters based on immigrant stereotypes (i.e. the Irishman, the Jew, the black-faced coon, the Wop, etc.); b) its greater alignment with a middle-class ethos steeped in the highly materialistic values and goals of "The American Dream"; c) its relatively speedy supplanting of its "bawdier" roots with family-oriented entertainment and, finally, d) its greater reliance on predominantly verbal humour, especially that of the "two-act," which often featured two men whose only recourse to communication with each other is through the perilous byways of urban slang, pidgin English and difficult-to-understand dialects.

The English music-hall, on the other hand, reflected (in its Edwardian heyday) the tastes and caricatured the lives of patrons whose sensibilities, if not actual class positionings, tended to be more those of the working class -- though a good number of middle class males were also drawn to the low comedy of the shows.¹⁴ The music-hall's objective differed from the group-solidarity-fostering one of vaudeville in that its goal -- at least on a socio-historical level -- was to provide the English people

with the direly needed opportunity to laugh and so temporarily lay to rest their fear of approaching war. Although I explore the singularly British flavour of music-hall fare in Chapter II, I will complete my comparison between these two strains of “early” variety by saying that the music-hall’s targets for parody (ie. mothers-in-law, jilted lovers, egg salesmen, urban dandies, etc.) were of a more general, and often domestic nature than those of vaudeville. Satiric treatments of weddings, wash day, pastry-making and sea-side holidays displayed the music-hall’s greater concern with the comic banalities of household and everyday affairs. In comparison with late nineteenth and early twentieth-century vaudeville, the pre-1912 music-hall’s brand of humour was the coarser and more sexually risqué of the two. It reflected what W. MacQueen-Pope terms “that full-bodied vulgar humour which has been part of the British national make-up since the days of Chaucer through those of Shakespeare and Dickens.”¹⁵ Finally, the comic resources of pantomime and physical slapstick (in conjunction with verbal humour) figured more in music-hall than vaudeville acts -- a reality partly attributable to the capricious and eccentric antics of comedians hell-bent on getting as much laughter out of audiences as possible.

Having outlined some of the more obvious differences between two popular forms of entertainment whose impact on *Waiting for Godot* is unmistakable, I will now proceed with Chapter I of my thesis.

CHAPTER I
SOME INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

During one of Beckett's strolls through the meandering, populous streets of central Dublin in the Winter of 1935, he found himself particularly moved by the kaleidoscopic vignette of bustling human activity that he encountered on Dominic Street. Beckett was immediately inspired to perceive the raw, unembellished image of the men and women before him as one of "human comedians."¹⁶ It would take the young Irishman seventeen more years before he would thoroughly flesh out (in his 1952 play, *En attendant Godot*) this idea of humanity as achieving its most authentic, essential expression in the figure and antics of the most universal and enduring of all comedic entertainers: the clown. Before embarking on a textual analysis of Beckett's unique deployment of the clowning conventions of the music-hall, vaudeville, circus and popular screen comedy in *Waiting for Godot*, I will offer some preliminary remarks on the clown's intimate relationship to the Beckettian dramatic image that is so central to our apprehension of the nature of the tragicomic vision being bodied forth on Beckett's stage.

In Beckett's 1931 *Proust* monograph, which would in time be reread critically as constituting his own "unwitting" literary manifesto, Beckett prognosticates the future course of his own aesthetic essentialism when he identifies the artistic goal as "excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent."¹⁷ His *Proust*-articulated desire that the work of art mine as deeply as possible into the quintessence of "the Idea, the concrete"¹⁸ -- in other words, of what is *actually* there -- encompasses reality both within and external to the human being. The traditional naturalist school of representation, which was "content to transcribe the surface, the

façade, behind which the Idea is prisoner,”¹⁹ is rejected by Beckett for its slavish devotion to the reality-reordering operations of human memory and habit. As attributes of a reason-imposing consciousness, they are akin to an indefatigable team of “cleaning” staff who keep the chaotic mess of a total and complex reality hidden from the proprietorial eyes of a mind which, as Bruce Kavin describes, “arranges experience into cause and effect, perception into logic, time into clocktime, life into personality -- defensively, as a way of controlling or defining territory.”²⁰ Significantly, it is the clown, in his artful propensity for stirring up confusion and chaos, who is most glaringly deficient in these capacities.

If, as Beckett argues in *Proust*, the world as most people consciously know it is nothing more than the projection of the individual’s consciousness that is itself enthralled in a radical subjectivism grounded in “the impenetrability (isolation) of all that is not ‘costa mentale,’”²¹ then *actual* or pre-existent reality would have to lie in the truth of unconscious or pre-conscious experience. Beckett, like Proust, turns to the faculty of intuition or ‘inspired perception’ as a means of sidestepping our rationally-conditioned ways of viewing the world and human experience. Both suffering (attendant upon habit’s periodic failure to ensure one’s blind adjustment to the chaotic conditions of the world) and what Proust calls “involuntary memory”²² could provide -- through their closer links to emotion and imagination over that of reason -- unexpected flashes of insight into the human condition. These could then be encapsulated in the kind of concentrated images or, as Beckett calls them in *Proust*, poetic “hieroglyphics”²³ that so boldly confront us, in their wealth of hermeneutical possibilities, on his stage.²⁴

The art work’s depth-plumbing reductionism in thematic content and form could exfoliate our familiar, ultimately self-conjured surface impressions of the world by

removing this “obfuscating veil and transport[ing] the reader or viewer to a vision hitherto strange to him.”²⁵ As David Hesla states:

His [Beckett’s] mission as prophet has been to set before those who will attend to him images of human existence which will not yield to our habitual patterns and procedures of analysis and evaluation -- images which rather will shock, insult, mystify, and will work upon us in such a way that ‘the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being.’²⁶

Hesla’s remarks underscore a pivotal secondary meaning of the term ‘hieroglyphic’ used earlier by Beckett: that of something *difficult* to read. In this instance, the illegibility of the outlandish image or accumulation of images snowballs as one increasingly labours to decipher “meaning” via a reasoning process that attempts to fritter an already substantially reduced reality down to manageable, coherent, and mutually-exclusive categories of experience. For Beckett, the intelligibility which is sought after in his plays -- and which one would claim permeates everyday life -- has its real locus in the cranium-encased confines of dialectical or binaried thinking which dissects experiences too innately complex and contradictory to be understood in their entirety into only those limited parts that it can try to make some sense of.

Once we grasp this truth, it becomes easier to see how the “comprehensibility” of human experience makes its sole (if illusory) worldly appearance in what Beckett calls “that terrible materiality of the word surface.”²⁷ In referring to the word surface’s seeming “materiality,” Beckett is addressing the way in which language tends to be mistaken for the concrete *thing* (or observable phenomena) for which it is only an insubstantial, inaccurate referent. It is language as understood in this sense through which Beckett as dramatist will “bore one hole after another . . . until what lurks behind it -- be it something or nothing -- begins to seep through.”²⁸

Upstaging and highlighting language’s own spurious materiality will be the greater

corporeality of a confoundingly multidimensional stage image that can be experienced without being logically explained away. In *Care of the Soul*, archetypal psychologist Thomas Moore explains how these images exact of the viewer a new kind of reception:

We . . . realize that the images of dreams and art are not puzzles to be solved, and that imagination hides its meaningfulness as much as it reveals it. In order to be affected by a dream, it isn't necessary to understand it or even to mine it for meanings. Merely giving our attention to such imagery, granting its autonomy and mystery, goes a long way toward shifting the center of consciousness from understanding to response.²⁹

Since Beckett intended us to see what the confusingly “dreamlike” human situation consisted of *before* the mind had a chance to “work” on it, he naturally gravitated toward the relative objectivity of the dramatic medium. Charles L. Lyons notes that this objectivity “demands that the space which the spectator sees and the characters who inhabit it be separate,”³⁰ permitting the theatre-goer “to observe the processes in which [the *Waiting for Godot* characters of] Vladimir and Estragon perceive and mediate the details of the scene.”³¹ Attendant upon this bifurcation of stage space is the realization that the characters’ dialogue cannot truly make sense of, nor can their remembrances and fictions jibe with the incomprehensible experiences that befall them on stage. Language subsequently emerges as a vehicle for communicating only the full extent of its impotence in expressing the true nature of the human situation.

One way in which Beckett maximizes within *Godot* this tension between what is *actually* there (or not there) and what the characters *pretend* is there in the verbal and gestural playground of their exchanges, is by furnishing the audience with a plethora of objectively perceptible physical, sensory details. These serve to contribute to the power of the overall dramatic image (including speech as part of its “sound” component) to eclipse whatever sense of overriding authority we might be tempted to ascribe to the near-relentless word in his plays.³² In other words, if, as

Camus argues, the absurd is “that divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints, my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together,”³³ then Beckett will orchestrate his welter of visual, aural and olfactory³⁴ effects in such a way as to accentuate the “disappointing” second term of Camus’ equation (i.e. the non-ideal disposition of the world, including humanity itself).

Beckett’s application of what Martin Esslin identifies as his “essentially polyphonic”³⁵ method -- wherein the playwright juxtaposes two or more sign systems whose messages, often in jarring counterpoint to one another, synergistically interpenetrate to present his intuition of reality -- makes brilliant use of a medium so brimming with non-verbal signification. Nowhere is this more in evidence than in Beckett’s creation of what Andrew Kennedy deems

a new type of *dramatis personae* specifically for the theatre, acting like once-popular stage characters [who are] embodied figures, both personal and universal, who *interact* with each other, and who have distinct theatrical features: bodies, costumes, gestures, movements, noises, cries, smells and speech styles.³⁶

Overstatedly endowed with the “normal” outlets for a human expressivity that is vividly immediate and non-intellectual, these almost preternaturally corporeal creatures suggest, through their mere stage presence, what we cannot ignore about ourselves and our daily experiences in the world.³⁷ Kennedy’s telling insertion of the ‘once-popular’ qualifier denotes that Beckett’s stage clowns are unique in that they are in the process of winding down or petering out as performers before our very eyes. Their more economical and tensely concentrated use of words and gestures forces us all the more to focus on, and thereby respond to, whatever *is* still left on stage. With our experience of stage life now embracing only the barest bones of theatre, it will be the

totality of the Beckettian dramatic image (which may also include decor, props, sound or light emanating from an external source, and silence) that will impact itself upon our senses.

When Beckett averred in 1932 that “the experience of my reader shall be between the phrases, in the silence communicated by the intervals, not the terms of the statement,”³⁸ he might just as well have been describing the pantomimic nature of the clown act, where, as John Townsen writes, “What happens between the lines gives life to a scenario.”³⁹ Above all, it is the clown’s physical routines -- ones typically in sharp defiance of the realism-based strictures of a literary, “legitimate” drama -- that affirm Raymond Durnat’s Aristotelian-derived observation that “comedy deals with people below the level of our conscious image of ourselves.”⁴⁰ As the most readily understood and accurate communicator of the more difficult truths about what it means to be human, this universal language of the body (or pantomime) is co-opted by Beckett as a constant counterpoint to the more self-aggrandizing deceptions of language. To intensify the disjunctive relation between the two, he has his personae perform their actions (or inactions) in silence before or after they have uttered their dialogue, with a pause frequently separating word from gesture.

One of Beckett’s favourite ways of revealing the “thornier” reality that lies behind language is through a presentation of what he sees as the gaping disjunction often existing between the Cartesian components of mind and matter. For example, after the two tramp-protagonists of *Waiting for Godot* announce with distinct decisiveness and resolution that they will depart from their appointed meeting-place (i.e. the stage) now that their evening of vainly waiting for the mysterious Godot to arrive is over, a silence ensues in which neither moves, leaving the curtain to descend on this scene of visible indecisiveness and irresolution. Comprised of an aural and now visual

dimension, this stage image relays a message much closer to the problematical and humbling truth of things than mere language can convey: that the articulated and firm decision to do something need not be in any way connected to our ability to act on that decision. Whatever ideals we may cherish about the perfected power of the human will (i.e. to decide to do something is tantamount to doing it) collapse before this image of the less-than-simple connection between mind and body.

In her article, "The Clown's Function," Lucile Hoerr Charles alludes to how the advances of intellect and worldly power have abetted our (somewhat pretentious) tendency to cast ourselves as highly civilized beings within our own conscious minds, at the cost of losing sight of our fundamentally "clownish" natures. She writes:

In his race-long effort to achieve his full stature, to become more conscious, to come to grips with his own real potentialities, mankind frequently has become too absorbed in fine and high flights of intellect and power, and has neglected the humdrum, humble, and everyday, earthy side of life. Such neglect is true of very primitive man as well as of so-called civilized man. He pushes too hard in one direction or another.⁴¹

Her comments illuminate Beckett's own efforts to redress the balance, articulated in his now infamous admission: "I am working with impotence and ignorance,"⁴² a notion that would naturally extend to his clownish characters.

In essence, our own pre-verbalized, unconscious experience of the human condition could be experienced within the context of the immediate stage presence of the clown, whose gestures and language become parodies of the "normal" actions and speech of everyday life, now rendered "unreal" by the effects of exaggeration. Beckett could efficiently crystallize the truth about the essential self and world condition using a method of defamiliarization in which his characters simultaneously become performing clowns, their daily rituals now doubling seamlessly as well-worn stage gags and routines whose obvious artifice underscored Beckett's "feeling that what is

called 'real life' is as much an illusion as anything on his stage."⁴³

Herbert Blau describes this aspect of Beckett's stagecraft as "the effort . . . to extend the natural into the unnatural . . . to make the theatrical real and the real theatrical."⁴⁴ Behind this need to express the pervasive "reality of unreality" is what Beckett perceives as the primordial confusion ("not my invention"⁴⁵) which envelops us, prevents us from achieving any secure measure of epistemological and, as we will see, phenomenological certainty, and which ultimately must be acknowledged for humanity to evolve effective strategies for coping with "the mess."⁴⁶ In accord with film critic Roger Ebert's assertion that "No worlds are more real than the clown-worlds of *Waiting for Godot* or Chaplin's early shorts,"⁴⁷ Beckett selectively draws on genres of demotic entertainment whose comic conventions expose a whirlwind of internal irrationality and external confusion. Expressed in theatrical, stylized and comically exaggerated forms, these two staples of popular clowning always remain palpable to the viewer. For a playwright intent on dramatizing the "non-logical statement of phenomena in the order and exactitude of their perception,"⁴⁸ the stringing together of clowning skits and set pieces from the music-hall, vaudeville, circus and early comic film could provide a means of debunking the illusion that all sequences of events -- if subjected to careful enough scrutiny -- yield a coherent pattern of logic discernable to all.

With the help of the popular clown's acts of consummate chaos and inconsequence, the here-and-now reality of the stage moment is deployed by Beckett to subvert the man-made law of causality by demonstrating that "an event can be an event without being a cause, [that] it can exist on its own and be read or observed for what it is in itself in its own space and time. Each unit is complete regardless of that to which it looks back or forward."⁴⁹ *Godot's* central act of waiting (for anyone or anything that

we feel will give our lives meaning) affords the perfect vehicle for vivisectioning life into its “non sequitured” moment-by-moment parts. As Esslin avows, “Waiting is to experience the action of time, which is constant change. And yet, as nothing real ever happens, that change is in itself an illusion.”⁵⁰ Nowhere is the play’s inconclusive pseudo-action more visible than in its humour of mechanized or automatized man. In his celebrated essay entitled “Laughter,” Henri Bergson describes this genus of comedy as one in which “The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine.”⁵¹ Expanding this concept to include the mechanical or absent-minded use of language, Bergson lays special emphasis on the comical repetitiveness of “habit that has been contracted and maintained,”⁵² despite its inappropriate timing and sheer futility.

Among *Godot*’s numerous instances of this type of humour, it is the two-man hat-passing number -- a favourite and much-produced *lazzo* within stage and screen clowning⁵³ -- that provides the best example of what Jane Alison Hale identifies as a “theatrical image of the ‘plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose’ theme. . . .”⁵⁴ She explains:

. . . the three hats change hands and heads in a dazzling series of mechanical movements that could be repeated infinitely, and although the result involves a change -- Vladimir now wears Lucky’s hat instead of his own -- nothing is really different. . . . Such permutations games occur throughout Beckett’s work, and no matter how elaborately they are played and described, they always end by returning more or less to the initial situation. . . . Movement is circular, repetitive, and insignificant.⁵⁵

The repercussions of this bowler exchange are virtually nil, as Vladimir neither inherits (through his wearing of the mind-emblemizing hat) Lucky’s gift for abstract logorrhea, nor does he acquire headgear that looks any “more or less”⁵⁶ unsightly than usual. In suggesting the tramps’ dehumanizing transformation into

automatons that repeat the same mindless motions over and over, this hat-juggling routine catapults the pair's behaviour beyond the reaches of a linear – and so temporally based – logic into a more timeless realm where action fails to have any real bearing on future events, since illusory notions like past, present and future no longer apply. In this way, Beckett uses a familiar image of the clown's (who parodically represents those less-than-flattering sides of ourselves) alliance with irrationality to dispense with one of the main principles of rationality: that of causality.

The popular clown's propensity for physical slapstick – with its deflation of human activity (including the operations of consciousness) to the level of absolute absurdity – could also supply one key facet of the Beckettian image so intent on expressing the depths we are unaccustomed to seeing: the recurring spectacle of failure, clumsiness, the constant running up against goal-thwarting obstacles, and the seeming refusal of objects to accommodate man's needs, all of which characterize human life at its simplest, most basic level. I will now turn to a scene in *Waiting for Godot* which illustrates this and many of the principles I have outlined in my foregoing discussion. It will also help wrap up my opening analysis of the clown's pivotal connection to the Beckettian image by acting as a pithy introduction to the way in which clowning humour informs Beckett's brand of "grotesque" tragicomedy. We should pay special attention to how the personae's laughably farcical behaviour becomes a kind of window onto the truly lamentable nature of their metaphysical condition. Again, the "strangeness" of the image will be felt as the playwright deftly dramatizes his belief that "The spirit of the play, to the extent to which it has one, is that nothing is more grotesque than the tragic."⁵⁷

It is only *after* Estragon has failed in Act II of *Godot* to pull his tumbled friend to his

feet -- ironically toppling *him* from his own "superior" stance of the dignified vertical -- and has likewise joined the farcical ranks of the collapsed heap of humanity that now comprises the characters on stage, that the playwright has the blind Pozzo ask of the pair the "simple" question of who they are. With a seasoned vaudevillian ear for recognizing a choice double-edged statement when he hears one, the limb-splayed Vladimir replies (with a solemn note of dignity), "We are men."⁵⁸ The playful ambiguity of his own reply, with its ability to signify different things to different people, openly draws on the music-hall and vaudeville's clowning technique of using words or phrases (often suggestively vulgar) with double-meanings. In the end, the unexpected humour of the bittersweet punch-line, flanked by the standard clowning "bits" of the burlesque plunge and subsequent protracted "lazy sprawl," both heightens and lightens the pathetic picture of what Beckettian humanity has been reduced to. Tied to Vladimir's attempt to appear dignified amid a humiliating situation, the line's comedy heightens the scene's pathetic aspect by introducing the kind of irony wherein the words spoken by a character imply a deeper meaning or truth than that which the speaker consciously intended them to convey.

In this case, the juxtaposing of the "We are men" line with the scene's visual language entails that we broaden our semantic definition of "man" (with its cultural assumptions of a "bipedal" respectability and cognitive superiority) to include the realization that mankind has degenerated into inertia-laden beings powerless to assume any mastery over or even understanding of the things and events of the physical world -- symbolized in this instance by the body's incomprehensible resistance to the will's feeble wishes to rise from the ground. Nor does man, as represented by these somewhat stale, bowler-hatted "left-overs," evince any real inclination to engage in efficient, goal-oriented action (like getting up) while the seductive passivity of

hopeful waiting (to get up) beckons on. In effect, the punchline serves to deepen the pathetic nature of the sight before us by bringing into focus the vast rift that exists between the conscious image we have of ourselves and the profounder reality of who or what we actually are. Yet as Valerie Topsfield points out, the genuine comedy inherent in even Beckett's most astringent clownery also "distances what he [i.e. Beckett] finds painful, and keeps painful themes in perspective,"⁵⁹ ideas to which I will return shortly.

This sequence of stage turns rivets our attention onto the infinitely-less-than-ideal character of human life by using a technique of defamiliarization in which the absurdity of our bumbling attempts at usefulness, clear and unambiguous communication, and efficiency is made obvious through a trenchant magnification of the "painful" funniness that is already there to begin with.⁶⁰ Not surprisingly, Beckett seizes upon the clowning conventions of mass entertainment as "ready-made" foregroundings of our own entertaining idiocies. In this way, he makes his dark -- and sometimes unbearable -- revelations bearable through a "lightly" humorous presentation of them. His earlier use of the term "grotesque" to characterize the tragic in *Godot* comes to signify that which is pathetically laughable, presaging, in effect, Nell's later proclamation in *Endgame* that "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness."⁶¹

In *Understanding Samuel Beckett*, Alan Astro deciphers the central Beckettian paradox of tragedy being most effectively expressed *through* comedy to the point where both are made manifest in essentially the same moment (with occasional time lapses between them), when he writes, "The meaninglessness of life is so grave as to require that we divert our attention from it; our diversions are so frivolous that they only deepen our awareness of life's meaninglessness."⁶² (In *Godot*, these temporarily

diverting pastimes, drawn largely from clown acts, include the incessant putting on and pulling off of boots and hats, the swearing-match, the open-mouthed chewing, the pressing of hands to foreheads to denote thinking, the punning word games, the 'tar-baby' or 'stickfast' sequences of a chaotic melee involving numerous participants, the trouser-dropping accompanied by one clown's failure to grasp his partner's urgings to pull them back up, etc.) This endless circularity – where, in our efforts to avoid confronting a painful reality we are always brought back to the very thing that we are trying to elude, which in turn generates the need to begin the futile, ludicrous process of evasion all over again *ad infinitum* – is even evidenced in Vladimir's ironic music-hall-like "quip" (i.e. "We are men"). As one frivolous item in a colourful grab-bag of self-distracting games that he and Estragon urgently ransack to circumvent contemplating the crude inconsequentiality of their own lives, it epitomizes Irish actor Jack MacGowran's observation that Beckett's lines have the ability to contain laughter and tragedy in the same breath.⁶³

To short-circuit the finality of despair that may result from comedy's trumpeting of a tragic message, Beckett's drama whisks us back to the realization that all tragedy is comic too. Watson's observation that "[*Waiting for Godot*] carries its own devices for puncturing any kinds of philosophic pomposity or portentousness,"⁶⁴ underscores the fact that any critical (and hence abstract) attempt to shrink Beckett's vision down to one of philosophical miserabilism or pessimism is thwarted by a dramatic method that implicitly asks *not* to be taken too seriously. The thematic weightiness in *Godot* is, in effect, offset by a light-hearted theatrical experience so rife with "interpretation-foiling" empty ritual, nonsense and meaninglessness that it resists, disrupts and makes obsolete any fixed world view or closed philosophical system that would attempt to wrench content from form. Thus the theatrical arena of Beckett's clowns ensures

that we also confront what is simply *there*. Since what is presented is a comically absurd “spectacle” of irrational beings trying to behave rationally in an irrational universe, despair *does* give way to laughter. But such laughter, argues Ruby Cohn, is only a mask for despair, “defy[ing] no one and transcend[ing] nothing.”⁶⁵ Despite this laughter being “as automatic and anguished as a response to tickling,”⁶⁶ it allows us (as does all “gallows humour”) to survive the senseless horrors of life. The function of such humour is eloquently described by Eric Bentley as “the easing of the burden of existence to the point that it may be borne.”⁶⁷ Though monumentally helpless in most respects, Beckett did believe that we could master how we coped: with large doses of humour and grace.

Through its concrete images, each reflective of Beckett’s art of contracted expressiveness, *Godot* clearly demonstrates the idea of the inseparability and “oneness” of tears and laughter in the face of the human predicament. This kind of insight, arising out of our ambivalent response to the wreathing together of the “non-serious” and “serious” into one arresting, ambiguous image, ultimately serves to detonate what is, along with the law of causality, another major cornerstone of conventional rationality: the belief that truth can only be conveyed through an opposition-predicated, non-contradictory mode of expression. Thomas Cousineau explains why the disclosing of the indivisibility of tragedy and comedy in human life is so threatening from a rationalist perspective:

The law of contradiction is the most fundamental of all logical propositions because its violation, whereby something could simultaneously be “A” and “not A,” effectively paralyzes the act of thinking. It would be impossible to distinguish truth from falsehood, the essential ambition of rational thought, if the boundary between the two were to become blurred.⁶⁸

Essentially, Beckett invokes the power of emotion – with its link to unconscious

experience and the apprehension of the problematical wholeness of experience (including the inextricability of truth and untruth) permeating all levels of existence – to reveal inward and outward life locked in a perfectly balanced stalemate of “light” and “dark.” Hesla traces this systematic synthesizing of positive and negative to Beckett’s partial alignment with “aesthetic scepticism.”⁶⁹ According to this perspective, any clear-cut conclusion that we may be tempted to draw about something is nullified by existing counter-evidence in support of a contrary view. Hesla remarks that for the aesthetic sceptic the “nihilitating power of the dialectic leads logically to the conclusion that it all comes to nothing, or amounts to nothing more than a grand hoax.”⁷⁰ But Beckett’s closing verdict on the essential human situation is still more inconclusive, for while his clowns – and we – reside uneasily amidst an arid nothingness that negates all Absolutes, it also remains true that our endless moments bountifully swell with the riotous potential for bearing “all” at once. That is the true depth of the Beckettian confusion.

Having provided the “slim” beginnings of a theoretical context by which to understand Beckett’s complex deployment of the clown figure of popular comedy in relation to an “art [that] has nothing to do with clarity,”⁷¹ I will now begin my detailed analysis of the influences of the music-hall, vaudeville, circus and early screen comedy on *Waiting for Godot*. The emphasis will fall on the ways in which this caravan of vital clownery is made to follow suit with Beckett’s own dramatic ends.

CHAPTER II
THE "STAGED" STAGE

(i) Recognizing the Human Situation Cast in Theatrical Terms

Even before desecrating the derbied tramp who opens *Waiting for Godot* locked in titanic battle with a toe-pinching boot that refuses to be pulled off, the spectator is struck by the stark emptiness of his setting. The official *mise en scène* of the play reads "A country road. A tree."⁷² The indeterminate bareness of the locale -- one in which nature appears, at first glance, to evade utter barrenness by means of a single tree-like structure -- is left sufficiently ambiguous to house another identity: that of stage as near-empty stage. In keeping with *Godot's* presentation of human life as a seemingly interminable performance, this "staged" stage component of the play instantly calls to mind the open performance spaces of the music-hall, vaudeville and circus. In my forthcoming analysis of the ways in which these traditional performance arenas both inform, and become apt vehicles for the dissemination of *Godot's* tragicomic vision of life, I will, on occasion, group these respective playing spaces under the common heading of "the undisguised stage of popular theatre." This decision may raise one or two objections to which I will respond and dispel at the outset.

Firstly, though hardly a "stage" in the conventional sense of the word, the sawdust-lined circus ring is widely thought of (among circus pundits) as constituting a more mundane, "brought-back-down-to-earth" variety of stage that guards against injuries that may result from the gauntlet of "aerial" tumbles, pummelings and scuffles that the circus clown must endure as quintessential knockabout comedian. Secondly, though it could be argued that the music-hall stage conceals its status as an undisguised stage by means of a traditional backcloth of flat canvas (usually depicting a

realistically-painted vista of an outdoors scene) hung on its rear wall, music-hall historian D. F. Chesire reminds us that it remained “a stock drop-scene used at random throughout the show – little attempt being made to match the scene with the act.”⁷³ Ironically, stage “scenery,” in the form of this glaringly incongruous backdrop, serves to remind the music-hall audience that there is an obvious stage before them that has failed to be transformed into a plausibly realistic fictional world. In this sense, the poorly or unsuccessfully disguised stage becomes tantamount to the undisguised stage whose theatrical artifice becomes its predominant reality. In the hope of having adequately vindicated my decision to refer to the music-hall, vaudeville and circus performance spaces as unconcealed stages of mass entertainment, I will now take a moment to underline the importance of *Godot* as *staged* entertainment. A brief summation of some of the play’s key themes – and its interrelated use of metaphor – will mark my starting point.

During the vaudevillesque sequence of cross-talk in Act I of *Waiting for Godot* in which Vladimir and Estragon strive to articulate in reassuring maxims the reasons why neither character appears able to change his respective tolerance or intolerance for the stubbed remains of a carrot (or of life in general), the former suggests that “The essential doesn’t change.”⁷⁴ The broader implications of the phrase also encompass the playwright’s own artistic aim of dramatizing that which most immutably and essentially characterizes the human condition. That Beckett originally intended to call the play simply *En Attendant*,⁷⁵ indicates that it is about the lifelong act (and fact) of waiting.

The “voided” stage of *Godot* is consequently made to serve the play’s initial, paramount intent: to dramatize the precise *nature* of this waiting. Given that Beckett’s dramatic universe is an absurd and meaningless one, the perennial waiting is for

someone or something that will endow the long, painful procession towards increasing debilitation and death that *is* human life with a redemptive sense of purpose. The central metaphorical image into which this universal waiting is theatrically transcribed – in the spirit of contracted expressiveness described in Chapter I – is the interminable, though not entirely insipid wait undergone by both the character/actors and the audience for that dramatic *something* to happen that will put an end to the “void-like” stage conditions that necessitate the waiting, and the eventless continuum that the tramps’ repetitive, inconsequential stage numbers give rise to: namely, the “top-of-the-bill” climactic appearance of Godot. In *The Long Sonata of the Dead*, Michael Robinson locates the conceptual linchpin that secures into place the vital connection between waiting and theatre in Beckett’s art, when he states, “Both parties [audience and characters] are confined in the wooden O of theatricality which relies upon expectation. The theatre is an acute reflection of Beckett’s obsession with waiting for an end, or perhaps for an event. . . .”⁷⁶

In its sustained imagistic presentation of theatre as metaphor for the world, *Waiting for Godot* arguably secures for its author membership into the often uncannily “clownish” or “court-foolish” ranks of the spiritual guru.⁷⁷ As radical and frequently charismatic disseminator of indirect, nondogmatic teachings, the guru understands that “knowing metaphorically implies grasping a situation intuitively, in its many interplays of multiple meanings, from the concrete to the symbolic.”⁷⁸ In *If You Meet The Buddha on the Road, Kill Him!*, Sheldon B. Kopp cites the figure of the Zen Master as one such spiritual guide who limpidly couches truth in metaphor in order to “lead the pilgrim to turn back to the here-and-now moments of his everyday life, to learn that there is no truth that is not already apparent to everyone.”⁷⁹

Hesla’s earlier reference to Beckett as a “prophet” (i.e. a form of guru) of the

sagely nonsensical stage pictogram, as well as the playwright's own accrediting of intuition as gracing us with the more complexly layered perceptions of daily life, would seem to imply that Beckett's empty stage is indeed a classroom for the grasping of *what we always already knew, and what was always already there* – before the mandates of rational thought were set. Thus the guru (or Beckett) eschews an authoritative didacticism and indoctrination of the spectator into the belief system of a tendentious world-view by paradoxically “offer[ing] the seeker only what he already possesses, taking from him that which he never had.”⁸⁰ Though *Godot* casts an unwavering spotlight on characters so radically divided in their perceptions of “reality” that they cannot even come to an agreement on whether “anything out of the ordinary”⁸¹ occurred in the “yesterday” of Act I, all stage business mirrors only that domain of human life that is immediately and *experientially* verifiable. As Beckett notes, “I think anyone nowadays, who pays the slightest attention to his own experience finds it the experience of a non-knower, a non-can-er.”⁸² His incorporation of the empty “comic” stage of the music-hall, vaudeville and circus consistently retains what Kenneth Burke deems “the comic frame [that] makes man the student of himself,”⁸³ offering up a broad spectrum of opportunity for critical scrutiny. In the end, it befalls the Beckettian theatre-goer (with some help from the play's metatheatrical touches) to recognize his or her own situation in the immediacy of a stage situation that is at once all too familiar and yet never before seen.

By couching the human condition in terms whose strangeness keeps our attention rivetted on the scene before us, Beckett's drama succeeds in intensifying the presence of the world so that we also find ourselves subjectively responding to it. Accordingly, the Beckettian audience is constrained to experience *for itself* the same heavily contradiction-laden intellectual and emotional confusion that it witnesses the dramatis

personae undergo as each party scrabbles equally to make sense of what's *actually* before it in all its deceptive simplicity. And, like the eternally quarreling tramps, no common consensus of opinion regarding the play's curious happenings can be reached among theatre-goers: the world premiere of *Godot* in 1953 was met with an extended round of critical fanfare that included "fistfights in the bistros and verbal repartee in the drawing rooms."⁸⁴ Underpinning this paralleling of actor/audience fates is Beckett's deeply held conviction -- summed up here by Esslin -- that "the only thing we can know for sure is our own experience."⁸⁵ Beckett's method of writing was to sit down and closely tap into whatever feelings or thoughts were streaming through his consciousness at the time. His own seated spectator-pilgrims are similarly left to become self-conscious "students of themselves" as they become more conversant with the tortuous pathways and impasses of the human condition through the inroads of their own self-perception.

Having suggested how *Godot* as theatrical experience opens us up to the realization that (to use Kenneth Tynan's expression) life, as well as drama, is about "passing time in the dark,"⁸⁶ I will now examine what draws Beckett, whose theatrical concerns are of an eminently serious cast, to this curious manner of staging. Firstly, in making *Godot's* fictional setting easily double as a vaudevillesque or circus-like stage notable for its non-realistic setting, Beckett eschews the contextually-circumscribing pitfalls of the naturalistic or realistic "slice of life" set. Unlike late nineteenth-century dramatists like Strindberg, Ibsen and Chekhov, whose plays feature minutely detailed outward environments that exert a strong deterministic influence over the dramatis personae who people them, Beckett is at loathe to include on his stage set any exclusionary, particularizing details that would limit the play's vision or "message" to the extent of pertaining only to the characters and events of that *specific* dramatic

world. Like the popular dramatic forms whose conventions Beckett draws on in order to ensure that his plays cast out to the more universal context of the human condition, *Godot* deploys the indeterminacy of the bare or near-bare stage to guarantee that no one is left out of the playing area's unspecified, and so ecumenical, frame of reference. As a possible (loose) "theatricalization" of the snow-bound "featureless white wastes"⁸⁷ showcased in Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* (1925), *Godot's* universally indefinite landscape also points to the larger metaphysical and moral void that is "home" to us all.

Even the potentially limiting factor of the stage's one tree, constituting a "skeletal" signpost to a degenerating world condition, "moonlights" as a patently artificial prop or "non-tree." Ironically, it is equally indefinite and unbelievable in both these capacities. As a prop, the suggestive abstractness of the structure prompts Estragon to ask "What is it?"⁸⁸ at least once daily. In the original 1953 Paris production of *En Attendant Godot*, the tree was comprised of "long coat-hanger wires covered with dark crepe paper; in the second act, bits of bright green paper were added to represent the leaves."⁸⁹ As a possible marker for the place where Vladimir and Estragon are to rendez-vous with Godot, the nominal "tree" is sufficiently indistinct to be classified as a "tree," "willow," "bush," and "shrub" by the tramps (who in some productions even tower over the "tree"). As a powerful magnet for uncertainty, the "tree" is tentatively pronounced by Vladimir either dead or temporarily defoliated because "it's not the season."⁹⁰ Though called by the name "tree," it does none of the practical things that a tree is, by definition, supposed to do. It fails to offer valuable protection for those (like Estragon) seeking cover from potential threats (like the bullying Pozzo and maniacally kicking Lucky); nor does it act as a reliable source of solidity and stability. Too flimsily branched, in all likelihood, to support the weight of either "noosed" tramp, the "tree" also falls short of furnishing the pair with an

inspirational image of stability on which to model their balancing exercise known as 'the tree.' All attempts to master this yogic posture end in a farcical fit of one-legged hopping.

In addition to being divested of its specific material being as a tree "proper," *Godot's* "tree" is gutted of all credible symbolic substance. This is accomplished by demonstrating how the overly "significance"-burdened "tree" is actually a blank, passive receptacle for the imposition of antithetical mythological interpretations which collectively disqualify one another as purveyors of absolute metaphysical truth. Consequently, Beckett has Vladimir view it more from the Christian perspective of the resurrection-connoting "Tree of Life" (whose former "Tree of Knowledge" incarnation supplied the wood for Christ's cross), while Estragon opts for the ancient Mediterranean reading of it as a sorrowful symbol of sterility and death. It is the more transcendently-minded Vladimir who spies the first signs of life in the newly leafed "tree," thus inducing us to hark back to his earlier fragmentary recital (i.e. "Hope deferred maketh the something sick, who said that?"⁹¹) of the first portion of the biblical proverb, which reads 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick. . . .' But as Beckett has proclaimed on several occasions, it is the second, *suggested* part of the biblical quotation (i.e. ' . . . but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life. ') that is of greater significance to the play. Yet it is Estragon who sees in the "tree" the potential scaffolding for a suicide attempt, and who rejects Vladimir's claim to its being a "shrub"⁹² or perennial, whose life is repeatedly renewed in springtime (an implicit metaphor for Christ's own resurrection).

The play ultimately presents both the "prop-tree" and "tree" as inherent "nothings" bereft of precise identities, meanings and even detailed physical traits. As a paradoxically tangible image of innate "lack" or "absence," this "tree" fails to

challenge the deep sense of physical and metaphysical emptiness that the dramatic world of *Godot's* open stage projects. Indeed, its tenuous physical presence on stage may be said to intensify the impression of the stage's bareness in the same way that the sporting of a pair of socks emphasizes an otherwise naked person's nakedness to an even greater degree than if he wore nothing at all; in other words, its inclusion forces us to take notice of just how much is otherwise *missing or excluded* from the scene before us.

The play's swiftly rising moon also poses little threat to the anti-realist indeterminacy of the play's universal or cosmic setting. Adhering to the same parodic principle that simultaneously makes the nominal country-road-bordering "tree" a prop or artificial "non-tree," the ascending moon featured in the 1953 Paris première of *Godot* was comically effected using a hand-held "projector" consisting of a large light-bulb-housing oil can whose beam of light was made to scale instantaneously (albeit jerkily) the stage's back wall.⁹³ S. E. Gontarski describes the incongruously comic effect of this accelerated silent-film-like movement in terms of "night falling as abruptly as a guillotine blade"⁹⁴ In respect to its potential status as one of the play's particularizing scenic details, this most "unmoon" moon can hardly be taken seriously. This overt attempt on the part of the playwright to (as Gontarski states) "free himself from theatrical realism and its concomitant obligation to explain and make plausible,"⁹⁵ represents his desire to mirror on his stage the same qualities of irresolvable ambiguity and senselessness that define the events within our own "realism-defying" universe.

Beckett's attempt to "capture" on stage the irrational character of the world through a shattering of the standard conventions of the medium in which he is working is doubtlessly influenced by the films of the Marx Brothers. To recreate cinematically

the madness and meaninglessness of a world viewed from the perspective of the outsider experiencing it for the first time, the Marxes simply overturned almost all the established rules of conventional film-making. Richard F. Shepard recalls that this included refusing to follow scripts and insisting on interpolating their own lines into the dialogue.⁹⁶ The end-product was a body of movies famous for the same “life-like” features of unresolved endings, inconsequential “plot twists,” nonsensical dialogue and pointless, fantastical and/or contrived action that we find reproduced in *Godot*. It hardly comes as a surprise when we realize that the films’ and play’s lack of clarity and believability constitute perhaps their strongest claims to universality.

Even stage lighting is used to induce the audience to locate its own immediate situation of escalating mental disorientation (as confused viewers of a confusing play), and impatient waiting for the dramatically eventful “star-turn” of Godot, within the *terra incognita* of the play. In *Samuel Beckett’s Self-Referential Drama*, Shimon Levy remarks of *Godot’s* hazy stage lighting: “Dusk light, half way between day and night . . . indicates uncertainty in time and space,”⁹⁷ engendering a sense of heightened insecurity and expectation within its twilight denizens.⁹⁸ The dissolving of spacial and now temporal parameters on stage makes it increasingly more difficult to differentiate between the realms of character and audience. In aspiring to this even greater universality of vision, *Godot* compels both parties to acknowledge the impossibility of discerning what is real within the larger spacial and temporal world represented by the play’s dramatic universe. This, in turn, strongly suggests that the sensory world, in all its underlying indistinctness, is ultimately illusory.

Hugh Kenner points out that the dimming light of evening “means that the illumination on stage is not much brighter than in the auditorium.”⁹⁹ Consonant with the stage’s dual identity as both country road and stage, this crepuscular illumination

-- one which, at times, enables the tramps to discern clearly and acknowledge the "bog"/audience before it -- also doubles seamlessly as the lighting required for the open stage shows of the circus, vaudeville and music-hall. Each of these entertainments featured interludes of bantering exchange between the on-stage or "in-ring" performers and certain (often haplessly) singled out audience members; these "tart" interactions hinged upon both parties' "squirming" visibility. In the same way that this dim stage lighting is initially conceived to equalize the degree of illumination extant on stage and in the audience, so the atmosphere of theatrical artifice (generated by this stage lighting of comedy acts) noticeably transgresses beyond the physical periphery of the stage to spill into the space occupied by the spectators. In this way, the "two" worlds of *Godot* fuse, with the entire theatre being transmogrified into a stage.¹⁰⁰ This "meta-stage lighting" (or stage lighting recalling stage lighting) becomes another of Beckett's metatheatrical devices which dissolves the rationally-conceived dichotomy between life and art that fosters our presumptuous belief in the comparatively more substantive reality of *our* respective environments, personalities and interactions with the external world.

Another aspect of the undisguised stage of popular theatre that appeals to Beckett is its effortless securing of what has come to be known as the alienation or distancing effect. Perfected by the German playwright-director Bertolt Brecht for his 'epic theatre' of the '20's, the alienation effect is achieved through the use of staging and lighting techniques that keep the spectators "disbelieving" in the play's events by reminding them that they are in a theatre watching a play. (Brecht hoped that by encouraging the audience to maintain a critical distance from the dramatic action, it would recognize its own social realities and ills being represented on stage, and subsequently take the necessary steps to overthrow the larger social order of its day.)

Although Brecht intended these theatrical techniques to appeal to the audience's reason over that of its emotions, Beckett's own motives for employing these devices serve, as I will illustrate, ends quite antithetical to Brecht's.

In the end, it is the music-hall, vaudeville and circus stages' high degree of internal theatricality -- occasioning in the viewer an attitude of detachment ensuring an ongoing awareness of the "make-believe" nature of what (s)he beholds -- that is appropriated by Beckett to suggest (as Jacques Guicharnaud notes) that "life is no more than the comedy of life, no more than an attempt to play at living. . . ."101 For if the action on *Godot's* stage reflects the ways in which we pass our own lives, then we too are part of a cast of clowning actors simulating the spectacle of lives being lived. To suggest this idea theatrically, Beckett has his tramps adopt the acting technique of directly addressing the audience that is also part of the alienation effects of Brecht's theatre. As the buffoons of the music-hall, vaudeville and circus share the same will to explode traditional stage illusions of reality as Brecht's actors, they too speak and sing directly to the spectators. But given the clown's age-old delight in confounding (comic) art and life, the object is now to encourage them to feel a part of the stage proceedings. Beckett also makes theatre-goers feel a part of *Godot's* peculiar type of clowndom, but the sensation is one that hardly precipitates a lusty "sing-along" with Vladimir to the repetitive strains of the "dead-dog" round-song (the feisty audience "sing-along" being a once-big attraction in traditional singing clown acts). The direct clown/audience interactions that formerly established the traditional performer's blatant theatricality and the audience's *eager* complicity in it have now been replaced by what Jerry Aline Flieger identifies as the humour, serving as "an added obstacle to belief,"102 of *Godot's* clowns. Unlike these earlier exchanges, it works on the assumption that the audience will not voluntarily step into the world of *Godot's*

“entertainers” if it can help it .

This special kind of metatheatrical humour tends to assume the form of the tramps’ music-hall-like joking about the audience. It too reminds us that the characters are performers and the audience a part of the larger performance (of life) enacted on the play’s stage. These characteristically insulting quips constrain theatre-goers to feel entangled in Vladimir and Estragon’s own immediate and not-so-agreeable circumstances. For instance, when Estragon asks who it is that believes the only Evangelist to claim that one of the crucified thieves alongside Christ was saved, Vladimir replies “Everybody. It’s the only version they know.”¹⁰³ Estragon rejoins with “People are bloody ignorant apes.”¹⁰⁴ It is common to see actors portraying Vladimir (including Bud Thorpe in the 1988 San Quentin Drama Workshop television production) punctuate the “Everybody” reference with a pointing gesture that sweepingly takes in the whole audience, signalling their kindred participation in, and need for, the reassuring deceptions of an unreflecting optimism. The same desire to make theatre-goers feel like a part of the evening’s half-pathetic clowning fuels Estragon’s caustic appraisal (i.e. “Inspiring prospects. . . . Let’s go.”¹⁰⁵) of their own sorry pretences. In regard to Vladimir’s subsequent “We can’t. . . . We’re waiting for Godot,”¹⁰⁶ Michael Robinson has this to say: “Vladimir’s ‘We’ applies to audience and actors alike (in the French text the sentence ‘On attend Godot’ is more inclusive) and establishes them both, at the beginning, in the same anguished condition [of waiting].”¹⁰⁷ Clearly, this is a “show” that most spectators would prefer not to be associated with, but as Valerie Topsfield reminds us, “Life is theatre . . . [and] we have paid our money so we have to watch the show.”¹⁰⁸

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(ii) Our Tragicomic Response to *Godot's* Only Half-Comic Theatrics

While reviving the self-referential stage of traditional variety acts, Beckett introduces an important modification into the nature of the bald theatrics that unfold on it. Before we can fully grasp how *Godot's* more tempered or “grayish”¹⁰⁹ stage histrionics disconcertingly lead theatre-goers back to the truth of their lives, we must first apprehend how the more unrestrained stage routines of the music-hall and circus comfortably distance spectators from the truth of their existences. I will, for the moment, exclude the component of American vaudeville from my discussion, since its connection to this particular point is less emphatically established than that of these other two mediums.

Though the music-hall drew audiences from all classes, much of its burlesque humour -- which often took the form of ‘character studies’ that were partly sung, spoken and pantomimed by popular comics -- was rooted in the daily lives and general mindset of the working classes. As J. B. Priestley observes: “It was a humour, vulgar but healthily coarse, coming from and going to the workers.”¹¹⁰ Implicitly embedded in this art form was the belief that the “earthier” life of the lower classes reflected human nature in its plainest, most truthful aspect; this assumption also informed the decision to convert the Victorian “little man” designation for the lower classes into the permanent moniker for Chaplin’s universal “Everyman” tramp-character.¹¹¹ Alongside the music-hall acts that rebelled against Victorian or middle-class respectability by scathingly caricaturing stereotypical (bourgeois or bourgeois “wannabe”) figures of “authority, pomposity, conventional morality, humbug and wealth,”¹¹² were numerous parodies of the “more human,” cruder side of working class, or “common” man. Music-hall’s championing of all that was unsophisticated

and unpretentious in humankind allowed for a greater sympathy and forgiveness in the face of the ordinary man's abject weaknesses, failures and troubles; it was generally thought that they were brought on or exacerbated by the hard times in which he seemed always to be mired.

Music-hall responded, in part, by making light of the common hardships of the period in highly exaggerated ways that would elicit from audiences as much laughter as possible. As a result, much of the appeal of the music-hall's top comedians lay in their ability to unearth the unexpectedly humorous sides of the more squalid aspects of lower-class life, turning the stuff of poverty, bitter marital rows, crime, hunger, and even the odd suicide attempt into "the most suitable, the gayest joke."¹¹³ This tone of unrestrained gaiety is entirely in accord with *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre's* delineation of the music-hall in its heyday as ". . . all high spirits, and everyday was a Bank Holiday."¹¹⁴ Besides the music-hall's deceptive presentation -- much to the delight of the downtrodden and/or guilty-conscienced masses -- of the grittier side of working-class life as so innocuous and droll as to be heartily "laughed off" in the end, it tended to glamorize or transfigure it into something that must have been barely recognizable to those actually living it. Lauding the prodigious talents of star music-hall impersonator Dan Leno, Max Beerbohm states, "All that trite and unlovely material, how new and beautiful it became for us through Dan Leno's genius."¹¹⁵ Swallowed up in the lavishly ostentatious surroundings of the music-hall theatre, audiences were treated to an evening of escapist entertainment which downplayed its potentially painful connection to actual life and the authentic suffering it engenders. P. H. Davison remarks that the music-hall "Drunk Ole Pals Act" could generally retain its hilarity with audiences without having the more sombre considerations of real-life alcoholism creep in.¹¹⁶ The fact that the music-hall's clowning performers

appeared so physically indestructible in the face of the most extravagant blows, falls and kicks leads into my discussion of the traditional stage clown's "trademark" invulnerability to pain. A brief examination of the more rough-and-tumble buffoonery of the big top will better illustrate this point.

The showcasing of violence without pain was one of the central ways in which circus-clown acts effected an apparent splitting off of the stage "spectacle" of human life from reality. For in addition to sharing the music-hall's ability to counterbalance its predilection for parodying the life of the common man with acts that still managed to compare it favourably with that of the more pretentious, seemingly "well-bred" sectors of society,¹¹⁷ American circus clownery also found itself in the position of having to cater to the escapist-entertainment-seeking needs of the masses. As Townsen states of the nineteenth-century American circus's mainly unsophisticated audiences: "Except for an occasional hanging, hard-working Americans had little else in the way of diversion."¹¹⁸ Responding to this hunger for a new type of entertainment that mixed the fantasy of escapism with the reality of victimization, American circus clowning -- and the physicality of circus clowning in general -- served up an aggressive, sadistic form of visual comedy that featured the funny man (who represents the average man) "as Victim -- of the bully, of the unexpected, of his own over-reaching, of Fate."¹¹⁹ Though the basic situations were all-too-familiar to audiences, the clowning mayhem was too farcically exaggerated and "over the top" to be taken as real, or as the more understated stuff of *their* lives. The same was true of the broad slapstick routines of the music-hall. Tony Staveacre helpfully reminds us that "The original 'slapstick' -- a sword-shaped wooden bat -- was devised on the principle of creating the maximum amount of noise with the minimum injury."¹²⁰ Hence the greater the injury inflicted on the stage clown, the greater his immunity to pain and the threat of annihilation.

This oftentimes suggestive presentation of violence as a “make-believe” game with rules (crystallized into near-perfection in the ‘tit-for-tat’ sequences of reciprocal destruction in the films of Laurel and Hardy) is exemplified in the Victorian writer Jerome K. Jerome’s following description of the kind of typical clown routine that is still witnessed in present-day circus-clowns acts. Recording his one-time “brush” with the seeming perils of live clowning, Jerome writes:

I pretend to go to sleep, and then the clown, who plays another clerk, catches me over the head with a clapper, and then I wake up and catch him over the head with a clapper, and then he rushes at me and hits me, and I take the nap [i.e. facial slap] from him, and then he takes a nap from me . . . , after which, we both have a grand struggle with the cat.¹²¹

As we might infer from this passage, audiences were free to laugh at the stage buffoon’s misfortunes, knowing that he wasn’t really hurt. Made similarly “unreal” in his inability to feel pain, the stage clown came to be seen as “not all there,” another reality enabling spectators to downplay (when convenient) their own connection to the ill-starred experiences of such a thoroughgoing “half-wit.” Though most circus clown and music-hall audiences *did* recognize aspects of themselves and their lives being wryly “sent up” on stage, it was -- perhaps wisely -- left to the discretion of each spectator to decide on *just* how much of his or her own experiences *were* being grotesquely mirrored back through the onstage clowning. In this way, the audience was given the choice of laughing solely at the clowning performer(s), or at both the performer(s) and itself.

As a general rule, these shows strived to ensure that any *poignant* visceral involvement (on the part of the audience) in these burlesque proceedings was kept to a minimum, as any commiserative sentiment towards the clowns tended to shortcircuit laugh-time. The one notable exception lay in the spectators’ immediate emotional

identification with the more sentimental, “sad-sack” strain of clown. The music-hall’s Dan Leno and George Formby, and the American circus ring’s national emblem of pathos, tramp-clown Emmett Kelly, epitomized this vulnerable “down-at-heels” type. While audience empathy was genuine enough, all feeling remained directed towards the uncommonly hapless figure on stage who dwelt, as it were, in a fictive world even more inhospitable than their own.

Particularly in the case of the music-hall, which now exaggerated the trials of the common man into something *worse* than what they were to start with, even temporary escape into the tragicomic vicissitudes of a more execrable life could provide welcome asylum from the contemplation of one’s own “sorry” lot. In fact, after soaking up enough humorously exaggerated tales of hen-pecked husbands, overdue rent, persistently unrequited love and “poorhouse” living – interspersed with comic instances of dropped trousers, repeated botched attempts to retrieve fallen hats, spectacular tumbles, canings and total manic “break-downs,” whose overall tone was summed up in comedian Tommy Foy’s catchphrase “Eee, I am a fool”¹²² -- one’s estimation of oneself and one’s life tended to grow or lighten considerably. In this regard, the music-hall achieved at least one of its prior objectives. As Beerbohm explains: “The aim of the Music Hall is, in fact, to cheer the lower classes up by showing them a life uglier and more sordid than your own. . . . Just as I used to go to the Music Halls that I might feel my superiority to the audience, so does the audience go that it may compare itself favourably with the debased rascallions of the songs”¹²³ The supreme irony was that the lowly wretches who music-hall patrons felt “superior to” were none other than themselves -- once their own setback-riddled lives had been comically magnified into full view.

Though Beckett uses the “staged” stage of traditional clowning to underline the

illusory nature of certain aspects of *Godot's* characters and events, a viewing of the play fails to offer the "temporary escape from fear, anxiety and pain"¹²⁴ that was synonymous with the music-hall and circus clown "experiences." *Godot's* adamant refusal to pander to our potentially escapism-seeking desires and/or expectations is, of course, deliberate. In fact, rather than concealing from us its nexus to actual life and suffering, Beckett's open-stage histrionics reintroduce the pain of real life *into* our lives. Instead of simply commiserating (in a personally distancing way) with the stage clown's distress over his bewildering vicissitudes of fate, we are plunged into our *own* analogous stew of conflicting emotions where, as Cohn remarks, "we alternate between panic and hilarity, as we anxiously watch the tottering of subject and object, of world and self, of *our* world and *our* self."¹²⁵ This significant adjustment in dramatic effect is linked to the broader scope of human "reality" that is being addressed and mirrored within the clownery of *Godot's* play-world. Not content simply to mimic isolated instances of human affectation, folly and adversity, the play's theatrics "mimic mimicry" itself -- in the sense of parodying lives whose every outward act is already an imitation or absurd "spectacle" of life.

As it is the basic contents of *our* lives that are being so thoroughly parodied, even our immediate "reality" as spectators at a theatrical event (assuming we are attending a performance of *Godot*) is being dramatically played out before us. If we recall, Vladimir and Estragon frequently disengage themselves from the play's action, either to act (like us) as viewers or critics of it. Their transparently insincere, hyperbolic and/or disdainful stock comments like Estragon's "I find this really most extraordinarily interesting,"¹²⁶ and the pair's respective "Oh tray bong, tray tray tray bong,"¹²⁷ and "I've been better entertained"¹²⁸ replies to Pozzo's request for a critique of his histrionic speech-making, all suggest the high level of pre-scripted

posturing that is involved in being “the audience” for an evening. Since the idea was to have theatre-goers painfully see the *unreality* of their own lives reflected in those of the stage performers, the clowning character/audience equivalences and parallelings of experiences remain strong and constant throughout the entire duration of *Godot*. Given that one of Beckett’s major dramatic premises is that we can only know what is unreal by knowing what *is* real, the personae must also be real in the ways that we are real. Accordingly, the areas (i.e. overblown stage antics and clowns insusceptible to pain) in which music-hall and circus clowning provided potential leeway for spectators to distance themselves personally from the onstage fools and their foolery are eradicated through Beckett’s clever application of more subdued tones to his stage business. Now *Godot*’s audience has little choice but to see itself mirrored in the stage players.

In describing the only half-comic nature of Beckettian clowning, Jonathan Kalb effectively conveys how it manages to retain shades of normal, everyday experiences. Though his observations centre on the distinctive walk created by Peter Evans for the servant-character of Clov in Alvin Epstein’s 1984 production of *Endgame*, their emphasis on how the physical characterization is meant to work on several different and equally important levels at once to suggest meaning extends as well to *Godot*’s physical stage ‘turns.’ Kalb writes:

. . . with knees bent and legs apart, he shuffles rhythmically on tip-toe in a very practiced movement that manages to convey the idea of pain without resembling any familiar type of limp. It is like a danced abstraction of cripplehood, and thus appears simultaneously presentational and representational.¹²⁹

Like Vladimir’s stiffly bow-legged walk, this Clov’s semi-farcical gait is both funny as a stylized form of incongruous movement, and serious in its suggestive undertones of genuine physical discomfort -- of the kind that accompanies an underlying illness or deformity of the body. In this case, Clov suffers from ‘*acathisia*,’ or the inability to sit

down. The offsetting of the comic effect of the “eccentric” walk of the illegitimate theatre with the tragic sense of the cruelty of unmerited, randomly meted out suffering (physical deformity constituting the very image of victimization at the hands of an inexplicably malign Creator) necessarily results in a ‘grayer’ tone of stage antic. This imagistic blending of comedy and pathos is Beckett’s way of presenting human pain as more inhuman and less comprehensible than that of classical tragedy, for, in the words of Gontarski, “it is punishment without justice.”¹³⁰

In failing to create the impression of being something entirely “put-on” or “pretended,” the ubiquitous “distinctive” walk of Beckett’s early drama breaks with standard comic convention. For, in Bergson’s words, “A deformity that may become comic is a deformity that a normally built person could successfully imitate.”¹³¹ Examples of this more spurious, “pain-free” type of comic deformity or abnormality are Chaplin’s bandy legs, Groucho Marxes’ hunched-over lope, and music-hall comedian Albert Chevalier’s robotically stiff walk. For Beckett, any attempt to deploy comic exaggeration to demonstrate the *illusory* nature of life’s horrors runs counter to the rationale behind his own use of comic stylization, which is to force theatre-goers to confront indirectly those tragic truths about human existence considered too painful to face in their unmitigatedly grim aspect. While *Godot*’s clowning resembles that of the music-hall and circus in helping us to “lighten up” about our lives, it ironically does so largely to aid us in coping (in advance) with the deeply “shadowing” effect it will also have on our conception of our lives.

The tendency among the play’s actors and directors¹³² to have the personae’s unusual movements implicitly grow out of their respective bodily afflictions -- be it a bladder-bursting prostate condition, sore feet, a pronounced tremor suggesting Parkinson’s disease, or heart problems -- indicates that real pain or discomfort

levels still dictate the precise nature of stage movement. That its clowns can suffer firmly places *Godot* in the tradition of 'dark comedy' as defined by J. L. Styan in *The Dark Comedy: The Development of Modern Comic Tragedy*. According to Styan, the modern clown of dark comedy is finally made to suffer the "pains which would not have mattered to him or us in his artificial character."¹³³ Katherine Worth's concise analysis of Vladimir's urgent dashes to the wings to urinate appears to bear out the truth of *Godot*'s affiliation with dark comedy. She writes of this music-hall-derived 'turn': "Those hasty exits for a necessary purpose were funny but not so funny that they prevented us from remembering they were necessary. Gogo's 'End of the corridor, on the left' got its laugh but there was no pressure to go on laughing when Didi came back, '*sombre*', as the text requires."¹³⁴ Another bit of stage business that quickly turns into a testament to the authentic pain behind the farcical stage behaviour is Lucky's slapstick-like kick of Estragon after he tries to dry the menial's tears. Though we laugh when Estragon clownishly "*staggers about the stage, howling with pain*,"¹³⁵ the promptly ensuing announcement that he is bleeding has an immediately sobering effect, as we are now being made to see Lucky's violent act for what it *actually* is: an irrational gesture of wanton cruelty toward another. Disturbingly sadistic 'turns' like the foregoing one ensure that we no longer remain blind to the part that humanity plays in the senseless infliction of suffering in the world.

Expressions of the personae's real mental anguish over the apparent inescapability of their predicaments also adheres, to a certain extent, to the standard clowning convention of transposing all thoughts and feelings (as well as actions) into the "bold-stroked" language of pantomime. Only, as with the instances of physical affliction in *Godot*, the visual idiom is one of semi-muted "spectacle." By "spectacle" -- particularly in the sense of the "spectacle" of suffering -- I mean behaviour of the

kind that external witnesses can only view with a mixture of “tickled” curiosity and puzzlement, but whose core emotion cannot be *directly* entered into by onlookers; hence the deeply isolating effects that human suffering, and its various manifestations, have on all of Beckett’s people. One example of this “spectacle” of mental suffering occurs in Act I when Estragon, unable to bear the mental strain of the prolonged waiting for Godot, buries his face in his hands. This implied “return to the skull,” or to the sphere of one’s inviolable subjectivity, suggests the idea of the extreme privatization of suffering. Reinforcing this notion is Vladimir’s uncomprehending and impatient “What’s the matter with you?”¹³⁶ and, worse yet, *our* laughter in the near distance. Estragon’s clownlike gesture of lugubriousness (one commonly used by circus clowns to wheedle forth our sympathies) *is* funny, though its humour drains away when we glimpse a moment later his genuinely “convulsed” face and realize that his dolorousness is not “an act.”

What we quickly recognize in this – and the play’s numerous other semi-comic renderings of human suffering – are the still-familiar signs of our bodies’ and minds’ own quite ordinary succumbings to the “wear and tear” effects of time. These “signs” all-too-often *do* include uncontrollable bladders, increased susceptibilities to bodily injuries that (like Estragon’s festering wound of Act II) refuse to heal and, finally, the despondent holding of our heads as we each feel ourselves getting closer to being “at the end of our rope.” This discerning of our own infirmities and enfeeblements in those of the characters evokes in us (among other responses) sadness and apprehension over the thought of the further stages of suffering, and finally death, through which they, and alas we, must pass, and to which these common deteriorations seem ultimately to point. In their vulnerability, *Godot’s* clowns, unlike those of the music-hall and circus, force us to experience the real pain of our own ill-boding

frailties.

The play's contrasting reenactment of the myriad ways in which our lives are so mechanically repetitive as to be unreal must necessarily encompass all types of everyday experiences. Beckett consequently turns to the "variety-style" format of the music-hall and circus to supply the wide range of recurring activities (including joke-telling, juggling, singing, mime, prop-handlings, a "dumb show," muscular exercises, self-referential monologues, dancing, two-person dialogues based on sharp character contrasts, acrobatics, etc.) that we similarly occupy ourselves with in "real" life, though in a less overtly theatricalized mode. Although *Godot's* stage 'numbers' are derived from traditional variety bills, their tone is distinctly Beckettian. By cutting down on the humour and high-spiritedness which, particularly for the music-hall, transmogrified the true character of quotidian life -- with its disappointment, inanity, monotony, vulgarity, bodily discomfort, mediocrity, and bumbling -- into what Peter Bailey refers to as "a man-made fantasy world of amusement and leisure,"¹³⁷ Beckett's clownery allows for a broader range of emotional response than simply (or primarily) mirthful pleasure.

In fact, theatre-goers generally respond to *Godot's* reenactment of the human situation as a second-rate or dated variety show with a kaleidoscopic play of variegated yet recurrent emotions echoing the tramps' own reactions. Some of the more commonplace responses of both characters and audience include boredom, despair, anxiety, amusement, exasperation and revulsion. Through this farrago of conflicting, vacillating feelings that unfolds like a comprehensive "run-through" of our own basic reactions to the "uneven" drama of our lives, we come to intuit that our *own* lives are comprised of the same endless cycles of mindless, dehumanizing ritual that characterize the kind of repetitive public performance engaged in by the tramps.

This mysterious passage into a renewed acquaintance with our own “suffering of being” (the Beckettian corollary of instinctually apprehending the wretchedness of one’s condition) becomes an exceedingly paradoxical one. For the artifice pervading all dramatic action on the “staged” stage now becomes capable of inducing that most terribly authentic of all human experiences within the Beckettian cosmology: the deep agony of feeling that can fire into being our most lucid, “poetically” universal testimonies to the insignificance of human life in a deity-absent universe, and which must be (as with the Beckettian personae) borne out within the succourless reaches of each man and woman’s unknowable solitude. Pozzo’s epiphanic peroration on “giving birth astride of a grave,”¹³⁸ uttered after he has been melodramatically stricken with blindness, exemplifies this process. His ensuing suffering yields a lyrically abridged image of human existence which is to Pozzo what *Waiting for Godot*, on a larger scale, is to Beckett. Having been brought back to the constricting realities of our lives, we discover, like the crucified Chaplinesque Christ Beckett once sketched, that there is a steep price to be paid for all laughter.

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(iii) Upstaged by the Silence and Stillness: Rendering Metaphysical Nothingness Real On the Self-Referential Stage

Another facet of the bare stage of popular entertainment that informs the dramatic presentation of *Godot* is the way in which the performers have only their bodies, a few handy objects, and the occasional kindred “have-not” of a partner with which to entertain themselves and an assembled audience. Beckett is drawn to this more pared-down playing space for the situational immediacy and dramatic simplicity that it

affords him in his efforts to whittle human existence down to its inalienable essentials. In capitalizing upon this stage's unique capacity for unveiling the full contents of its perpetually unfurling present moment, he is, of course, not alone. For the circus, music-hall, and (as it pertains to this portion of my argument) vaudeville had, by the turn-of-the-century, already galvanized into being a type of broad, "tight" slapstick that, as Townsen remarks, "had to be motivated in terms of the here-and-now-reality"¹³⁹ of the performance space.

While the pacing of *Godot* strives, at times unsuccessfully, to emulate the brisk momentum of the typically linear, climax-driven 'numbers' of these other variety-style mediums, the "key act" (or eventuality) towards which it both points and builds is radically different from that of these other entertainments. It is helpful to recall that the music-hall and vaudeville acts which define the "here and-now-reality" of the stage-world are often fashioned to anticipate and work up to the almost orgasmic tone of the "top-of-the-bill" act or acts that cap the evening's program of festivities. In *Male-Female Comedy Teams in American Vaudeville (1865-1932)*, Shirley Staples delineates the highly charged atmosphere that is a hallmark of vaudeville. In terms that also largely apply to the music-hall, she writes:

Indeed, after two hours of entertainment featuring ever bigger stars, ever more exciting numbers, the audience needed the climax of the star turn. . . . Now it was time for the comedy knock-out of the evening, an act that would have the audience roaring until the tears came, and leave them exhausted, exhilarated, and well-satisfied with the evening's entertainment.¹⁴⁰

The movement here is clearly towards having performers succeed in providing entertainment so richly and unrelentingly engaging as to transcend utterly the seeming limitations imposed upon them by the stripped-down milieu in which they found themselves. The theme of surmounting the difficulties that stand in the way of personal

success was especially embedded in the music-hall and vaudeville, whose performers often came from poor backgrounds only to work their way up diligently to stardom and its attendant riches. The myth of the “self-made man” was most prevalent in American vaudeville where, as John E. DiMeglio points out, “Vaudevillians symbolized what could be achieved in a land of opportunity.”¹⁴¹ This accent on the fruits of creative enterprise would even leave its mark on the ostensibly chaotic clowning of the music-hall and circus.

Like these other traditional mediums, *Waiting for Godot* ends with or (more accurately) presages a final scenario that colours the overall tone and shape of much of what precedes it. Assisting each of these universal forms of divertissement in mounting to the “grand finale” that represents the clearest picture of the world-view it is attempting to embody on stage, is the near-vacant stage – and the challenges its dearth of theatrical resources pose for performers. Since Beckett’s vision is more ambiguously ‘tragicomic’ than these other mainly ‘comic’ traditions, it will be his modifications of some of the standard conceptions and practices surrounding “open-staged” clowning that I will focus on in these pages. I will begin by contending that the crucial difference between *Godot*’s playing area and those of its jesting antecedents is to be found in their respective assignments of an overriding “core” reality to disparate characterizing factors of the human condition. A brief discussion of the traditional entertainer’s propensity for presenting the “alternative” world of a richly diverting creativity as more substantially “real” than the defining features of the empty stage will shed light on Beckett’s innovative use of the open stage.

That the clowning performers of the music-hall* and circus could dexterously spin worlds of entertainment out of practically nothing signals their common status as *typical* stage clown who, as Kalb maintains, “loves nothing better than dramatic freedom, the opportunity to hold an audience with nothing but a few props and his trusted charisma, on an empty stage.”¹⁴² Significantly, the term “charisma” derives from the Greek word *kharism*, meaning “divine favour.”¹⁴³ This grace-imparted power to accomplish divine or miraculous deeds may underlie the traditional stage clown’s unique knack for transforming external limitations into opportunities for self-empowerment. Richard Pearce elucidates this remarkable phenomenon when he writes, “the worse the situation, the greater the [clown’s] inventiveness and creative energy. . . . The more terrifying the landscape, the more vital the clown.”¹⁴⁴

The standard clown’s powers of prop-transformation embody many of these ideas. To transcend the poverty of amusement-generating resources at hand, he makes a single physical object assume more than one function as he mines its comic potential to the fullest. In *Circus and Culture: A Semiotic Approach*, Paul Bouissac explains that by refusing to be limited by “the system of objects, [which] in all cultures . . . is governed by rules of shape and proportion, collocation, use and function,”¹⁴⁵ the traditional clown is able, for example, to open an umbrella and (due to a built-in device) have rain sporadically pour onto him from *under* it. In his infinite resourcefulness, he has “miraculously” elicited its capacity to keep him *wet* as well as *dry*, essentially creating two stage objects out of one. These same powers to endow a commonplace prop with hitherto-unimagined comic life enable the stage clown to

*To avoid unnecessary verbosity, I will, from now until the end of this section, primarily use the terms “music-hall” and “vaudeville” interchangeably, as the subsequent critical points I make concerning them apply more or less equally to both. Thus the appearance of one of these terms metonymically implies the other.

“stand a broom upright, fix a tin-lid to the pole, grasp a brush and ladle – and become a one-man band.”¹⁴⁶ Even less adept prop-transformers like the Swiss clown Grock, who is famous for *not* being able to make even “normal” use of the sole prop before him, succeeds in fashioning an *extended* comic routine of out his brilliantly inventive *non-playing* of the piano or violin, before actually succeeding in playing it. Thus the instrument assumes two identities as that which can and cannot be played – making the clown’s interactions with it doubly entertaining.

Construed along the lines of Pearce’s earlier remarks, the vacant or near-vacant arena of mass entertainment -- on which Beckett partially modelled his own -- seemingly assumes the formidable character of a metaphysical vacuum in need of the linguistically and/or gesturally forged definition that the boundless creative freedom of the traditional clown could amply supply. While summoning and, at times, even substantiating the associations of inexhaustible creativity and unstoppable entertainment that typically define the stage clown in the popular mind, *Godot* also briskly dispels and undermines these time-honoured expectations. Its clearly *atypical* clowns not only fail to “pull off” the typical clown’s astoundingly creative successes, but his remarkably creative debacles as well. The subtle distinction between the two classes of foolery is confounded by circus clown exegetes (including Hugh Kenner in *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study*) who have long portrayed the stage clown as the antithetical foil and arch-foe to the high-wire acrobat who, in an inhumanly perfect way, mechanically imitates all other triumphal acrobats in his progressive inching along “the dreary road of the possible.”¹⁴⁷

According to this reasoning, it is the consummately impotent clown who is left to the task of breaking through the showy world of illusory appearances represented by the sure-footed funambulist. This feat is frequently “accomplished” through the clown’s

own humorously shoddy imitation of the acrobat, which invariably results in much comic wobbling or even a spectacular pratfall. Yet even the most cursory juxtaposing of the traditional circus clown alongside *Godot's* authentically faltering *clochards* reveals that the former is as much an impresario of seamless illusion as his trapezed cohorts. D. C. Muecke touches on the irony inherent in associating this acrobat-aping clown with the heights of human failure, when he writes:

. . . but all the time [the clown is seen staggering about on the stage] he is much more skillful than his fellow acrobat. He has raised tight-rope walking to a higher power, in that he is performing at two levels simultaneously – as a clown and as a tightrope walker, and demonstrating at the same time both the possibility of tightrope walking and its sheer impossibility.¹⁴⁸

Muecke's acutely insightful comments embrace the whole spectrum of professional clowning that tries to make art out of highly skilled – and imaginative – forms of human ineptitude.

That *Godot's* action unfolds on the instantly recognizable stage of popular theatre invites and nurtures within the theatre-goer's mind an ongoing comparison between the successful (or proficiently incompetent) buffoons of vaudeville and the circus, and the play's more unsuccessful (or incompetently incompetent) clowns. A pithy account of the high degree of self-empowering professionalism crowning the best of the American and British clowning acts of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries will underscore this point. It will also demythify the common assumption that the open playing arena is for the traditional clown a "terrifying" or alien landscape.

Vaudevillian and circus clowns reacted to being abandoned to their own devices on stage by becoming their own playwrighting bosses, pre-casting themselves in their own coveted, often highly individualized roles. The music-hall comedian only-too-

happily assumed the offices of actor, writer, director and producer of his or her own show. Entree (or extended-skit) clowns were, in the meantime, free to evolve free-wheeling repertoires of zaniness or draw on more timeworn clown routines, which disgruntled circus managers were often helpless to “bung up,” and which, in the former case, an outside script-writer’s structured suggestions could never succeed in “taming.”¹⁴⁹ Though the capricious antics of the vaudevillian and circus buffoons seemed the stuff of inspired improvisation, the “impromptu” work of these stage professionals was, for the most part, fastidiously choreographed and rehearsed prior to any appearance before a live audience.¹⁵⁰ The extent to which their escapades were tightly controlled is noted by Wes McVicar in *Clown Act Omnibus*. He writes:

The amateur clown finds it difficult to realize that all action is *planned* action. Even the professional clown does not leave laughs to chance. It is sound advice to be seen only when there is something specific to do. Hence all clown acts should be written out in full detail and should be rehearsed until action (and words) are exact.¹⁵¹

But it is the variety ‘spots’ of vaudeville¹⁵² that truly epitomized the type of entertainment that had almost a mortal fear of wasting the audience’s time with displays of indecisiveness and/or inactivity on the part of its performers. These rigorously timed performances slots gave each comedian (in the memorable words of Graham Noun) “only minutes in which to hook and reel . . . in [a full house], like an angler playing an unpredictable pike.”¹⁵³ Failure to engage at once the spectators’ interest could, and often did, entail cancellation of an act. For the conventional clown – whose routines were ruthlessly stripped down to what had already been proven successful with the masses – the empty stage was (and still is) a familiar, relatively safe haven for the unmasking of his talents. In their ability to invent a new world inhabited by a vividly drawn character involved in equally elaborate adventures or misadventures, the traditional buffoon’s creative powers counterpoise or eclipse the

power of the void that Pearce sees as operating within his stark environment.

While the clowns of the music-hall and circus use the open stage as the necessary backdrop for showcasing their compelling stage presence, Beckett's tramps must conversely confront a stage setting whose stillness and silence consistently "upstage" them. The telling set design featured in the 1996 summer revival of *Waiting for Godot* at Stratford, Ontario offers some clues as to why the sputtering creativity of its *clochards* contains enough glaring "holes" to preclude the play's being billed as the unequivocally "sensory"¹⁵⁴ and "psychically satisfying"¹⁵⁵ diversions that (arguably) were vaudeville and circus clowning in their respective heydays. Theatre critic Jamie Portman reports that designer Ming Cho Lee's potent set "evokes the decaying interior of a music hall, complete with dusty curtain at the far end of the stage and ghostly carvings around the edges of the playing area."¹⁵⁶

If the farcical horseplay of *Godot's* tramps has moldered over time into a pale shadow or "palsied" travesty of the frenetic wall-to-wall inventiveness that a number of their clowning forebears were once hugely famous for, it is because, as Francis Doherty explains, "[Vladimir and Estragon] are forced to the roles of entertainers."¹⁵⁷ In other words, they are not trained professionals who choose to entertain others for brief intervals of time cordoned off from the rest of their lives; rather, they are human-being-based characters who find themselves compelled to entertain each other all lifelong -- in order to combat the gnawing boredom inherent in their dull wait for Godot. While it may be possible to devise, either in advance or extemporaneously, a series of well-executed, amusing routines with which to fill up a two or two-and-a-half-hour time span (the standard duration of a performance of *Godot*) before an audience, Vladimir and Estragon have a seeming *infinity* of recurrent hours, or shows, to beguile away. As a result, their "stabs" at being amusing will be

more like the average person's often fumbling attempts to inject some levity into the affairs of daily life, though in exaggerated form; as in "real" life, their success will matter less than the satisfying of the need for them. Moreover, the tramps' physical and psychic energies must befit their dual-status as aging characters/performers. Their senescence is significant, for as Kennedy explains, "It is an early example of Beckett using 'ordinary' images of aging and impotence as pointers to man's decay."¹⁵⁸

Part of this mental impotence — reflecting, among other things, twentieth-century man's failure to alter the bleak conditions of his existence despite an assortment of new anodynes for numbing the pain and tedium of living (the 'strides' of alimentation, sports, medicine, etc., mentioned in Lucky's speech) — includes the loss of the standard clown's prop-transforming faculties, once a vital resource for staving off audience boredom. As Kenner states: "Like the elements at the beginning of a mathematical problem, the bowler hats, the boots, . . . the tree are simply *given*, and the operations that are performed on them do not modify them (as, at the end of the most prolonged computation, x is still x)."¹⁵⁹ Moreover, the contortionist-like displays of physical exertion once engaged in by trend-setting music-hall and circus artists like Little Tich, Max Wall and the Hanlon Lees to fill in stage time and space have now mellowed into the uneventful likes of a few steps of walking at a time (after which the Estragon-clown proclaims his fatigue), and several-second "dances" so effete as to draw a shocked "Is that all?"¹⁶⁰ from the onlooking Vladimir. Plainly, the self-empowerment that attends the traditional stage clown's assumption of the role of surrogate-Creator in charge of animatedly filling in the void is here undermined by the inevitability of bodies breaking down, voices trailing off, and creative powers ebbing. These dilapidations — and the gaps that they leave in the sensory-grounded entertainment dimension of *Godot* — assist the void in making itself felt, as I will

demonstrate.

Another way in which *Godot's* non-professional clownery aligns itself with the forces of impotence over those of creativity lies in the nature of the practitioners themselves. Though the characters' absurd behaviour produces, in a more low-key fashion, the comic effects of professional foolery, they remain "natural" rather than "artificial" fools. The professional "feigned" fool reproduces *voluntarily* the dazzling permutations of ineptitude in those around them. Beckett's "natural" or "legitimate" fools, on the other hand, are *involuntarily* incompetent, even when trying to make their daily lives together entertaining. But then the very *awfulness* of their routines can become laughable, as when Vladimir adopts the novel approach of lullabying his partner to sleep with a nonsensical comic song that fails to progress beyond the first syllable (i.e. "Bye bye bye bye bye . . . etc."¹⁶¹). Unlike the artificial fools whose consummate skill is always visible behind the façade of failure, this legitimate fool evokes the sense that this feeble 'turn' is the best he can manage under the onerous circumstances. As "born" clowns, the characters are funny even when they don't mean to be. Their physical deformity or debility-impaired movement is a prime example of this. In this respect, they hail from the older comic tradition of what John S. Clarke describes as the "misshapen ones who begot laughter, often born of cruelty,"¹⁶² a class of natural fool that flourished in ancient Greece, and which, after the fall of the Roman Empire, grew to include paralytics, cripples, amputees and the blind.¹⁶³ To many (including possibly Beckett), these individuals are the very image of existence as a cruel joke.

Perhaps the surest sign that Vladimir and Estragon have been "forced to the roles of entertainers" is the obviously *unplanned* nature of some of their stage activity.¹⁶⁴ Examples of the kind of stage business that is unexpectedly "tacked on" to the rest, and

which must be first suggested by one of the tramps to the other, include their comic dialogue that centres on whether a *black* radish is still a “radish” (with its conventional connotations of “pinkness”), and their mock-romantic “making up” sequence. ‘Turns’ of this sort tend to follow lines like Estragon’s oft-repeated “What do we do now?”¹⁶⁵ and Vladimir’s post-“canter” declaration that “now we’ll have to find something else.”¹⁶⁶ These very “un-clownlike” intervals of genuine indecisiveness and inactivity suggest that the *clochards’* true, underlying condition consists of *not* knowing what they are supposed to do with themselves. Fittingly, the play opens with Estragon stoutly concluding that there is “Nothing to be done,”¹⁶⁷ a phrase fated to be mouthed repeatedly within the echo-chamber of *Godot’s* abyss. Though they are often able to “toss off” lines that are a part of their comic routines in ways that resemble professional talking clowns (with their memorized riddles and jokes carefully woven into their acts), they also frequently run out of things to say. Bereft of instantly retrievable material from the past to fall back on to pass the time, each must resort to imploring the other to “Say anything at all!”¹⁶⁸ At these times, we sense how randomly strung together their various activities are, and how the tramps will say or do anything that leaps to mind to pass the time.

The reality of their being given – prior to ever having arrived in the playing area – nothing specific to say or do on stage is addressed by Alain Robbe-Grillet in his penetrating essay entitled “Samuel Beckett, or Presence on the Stage.” In it, he asserts that Vladimir and Estragon are on stage simply to *be there*. In this way, theatre, itself reduced to its essence, is made to reproduce our universal predicament of merely *being* in the world by “show[ing] of what the fact of *being there* consists.”¹⁶⁹ That the tramps’ one inherent purpose for being on stage is to *remain* on stage explains their inability to leave the performance space (or enter into any clear-

cut state of non-being), unlike the Pozzo and Lucky duo who appear on the stage only to cross it dawdlingly and then disappear into the opposite wing (off-stage) from whence they came. In their inability to extricate their lives as human beings from their stage presence, Renée Riese Hubert writes, "Estragon and Vladimir can no more be divested of their role than a Rouault clown can be stripped of his tunic and dressed in city clothing."¹⁷⁰

The reality of repeatedly finding themselves with nothing to say and do on stage consequently translates into their often having nothing to say and do all lifelong. Because it is lived and not merely "acted," theirs becomes the genuinely desperate situation of gross privation delineated earlier by Pearce. For the Beckett clown, true dramatic (or, in the broader sense, personal) freedom is terrifying since, as Vladimir remarks near the beginning of the second act, you frequently have to *decide* on the spot what to do next. The implicit Sartrean motif of being "condemned" to choose freely a course of action that others will judge you by transmutes *Godot's* stage into a terrifying landscape, one described as an inescapable "hell"¹⁷¹ by Estragon at that time when he most strongly senses the audience's menacing, hell-is-other-people presence.

It is not simply those moments when *literally* nothing is happening on stage that inspire thoughts like Estragon's stage-scanning "I hear nothing,"¹⁷² and his later "I see nothing"¹⁷³ to pass through our minds as we consider the dismal extent to which this stage void remains *unfilled* by a "richly diverting creativity." In one of the tramps' many self-reflexive commentaries on the play that give voice to the unspoken thoughts of the audience "proper," Estragon concedes that, barring the Pozzo-Lucky diversions, nothing happens. A few minutes later, he is heard relegating even their act to the "nothing happens" category of entertainment. It is clear that even the characters' laboured "tricks" to conceal the fact that they really saying and doing

nothing on stage founder miserably. Even by the opening of Act II, the metaphysical vacuum represented by the open stage remains sufficiently ill-defined and consequently untransformed to have Estragon once again fail to recognize the spot at which they stood waiting the previous evening.

Unlike the music-hall and circus, whose mass-audience-oriented “gaming” is flanked (either in a sequentially temporal or spatially adjacent sense) by other clamorous clown acts, Beckett’s dramatic buffoonery – with its connection to actual life – “plays” to silence. John Fletcher hints at this notion in his analysis of the interval of silence capping the lengthy bit of cross-talk in Act I of *Godot* that centres on Godot’s vast arsenal of prayer-answering delay tactics. He remarks, “The direction ‘silence’ is significant here, for it suggests that all this is the dialogue of two comedians facing each other on a music-hall stage and pausing here for laughter.”¹⁷⁴ That the end of Vladimir and Estragon’s droll skit is instead greeted by the proverbial sound of one hand clapping, or silence, connotes that the Beckettian clown is denied the certainty of even knowing whether he *has* an assembled audience, particularly a consistently attentive one. His is, after all, a *bad* show, which even his fellow performers express the occasional desire to walk out on; Pozzo’s tediously self-absorbed monologues, in particular, have each tramp wanting to bolt at several points in Act I.

Nor can the Beckett clown – who lacks the strong personality that is one of the creative feats of the more celebrated clowns of popular entertainment – be entirely counted on to (in the earlier words of Kalb) “hold an audience with nothing but a few props and his trusted charisma.” The more limited nature of Vladimir and Estragon’s inventiveness results in an overdependence on the same few prop-routines to pass the time. Eventually their repetitiveness grows so palling as to educe from the *clochards*

criticisms such as “Anyway you overdo it with your carrots”¹⁷⁵ and “That’s enough about these boots,”¹⁷⁶ opinions probably echoing those of the paying theatre-goers. It is also safe to assume that if the characters are seen, in their audience-mirroring roles, frequently “tuning out” to one another, so too will the minds of theatre-goers occasionally wander when faced with the less interesting ‘bits’ in the play. As for derisive audience laughter, it *is* certainly audible from the vantage point of the paying theatre-goer. But unlike circus and vaudeville performers, the frequently imperceptive and so sensory-doubting tramps cannot (or do not) directly acknowledge it in the sense of overtly building it into their act like the music-hall’s George Robey, whose signature “staged tantrum” could be triggered by a single, assumedly misplaced laugh¹⁷⁷; nor can (or do) they choose to interact verbally with a select guffawer or heckler, as is the convention in these other theatrical mediums.

Since self-validation in this Beckettian cosmos is nevertheless contingent upon having another act as an external witness to your existence, each *clochard* chooses to play to the ostensibly more tangible and *responsive* presence of his partner (whose laughter, censure and stichomythic ripostes are patently elicited, heard and/or acknowledged by him). This banked-on “certainty,” however, proves time and again to be illusory. That Beckett’s “people” are increasingly paired with the more real “mute” and “unwitnessing” nothingness that only confirms their *unreality* (or absence of a fixed, objectively autonomous self) is corroborated by Sharon K. O’Dair, when she states that in “denying again the apparent ‘truth’ suggested in his own exposures [i.e. the seeming “fact” of each tramp’s concrete being],”¹⁷⁸ Beckett insinuates that “the only ‘truth’ can be a void and subsequent silence.”¹⁷⁹ For Beckett, the metaphysical vacuum is made most palpable by the host of conspicuous pauses and silences -- transfixing all stage movement -- that progressively close in

on the tramps as their interactional skills deteriorate over time.

In *Just Play: Beckett's Theatre*, Cohn is not content simply to acknowledge the impossibility of fully covering over the silence and stillness of the Beckettian stage circumstance. Intimating that the void's presence is always making itself felt in one way or another, she suggests that even stage sound and action emanate *from* it – as opposed to originating in, and being bodied forth by the assumedly more vividly *real* (and realized) characters. Among her list of basic tensions feeding the plays of Beckett are “words wrung from silence”¹⁸⁰ and “gestures wrested from inertia.”¹⁸¹ The following sequence of patter-like dialogue from Act I suggests how the ever-intruding silence is responsible for the production of language as an attempt to assert objectifiably one's “being” in the midst of “non-being” (symbolized by the silence):

POZZO: I must go.

ESTRAGON: And your half-hunter?

POZZO: I must have left it at the manor.

Silence.

ESTRAGON: Then adieu.

POZZO: Adieu.

VLADIMIR: Adieu.

POZZO: Adieu.

Silence. No one moves.

VLADIMIR: Adieu.

POZZO: Adieu.

ESTRAGON: Adieu.

Silence.

POZZO: And thank you.

VLADIMIR: Thank *you*.

POZZO: Not at all.

ESTRAGON: Yes yes.

POZZO: No no.

VLADIMIR: Yes yes.

ESTRAGON: No no.

Silence.

POZZO: I don't seem to be able . . . (*long hesitation*) . . . to depart.

ESTRAGON: Such is life.¹⁸²

As this passage indicates, words are also shown to return to the silence in *Godot*. The *clochards'* bursts of stichomythic dialogue that end in anxious silence are particularly effective at catapulting us back into the nothingness, now concretized in that inescapable situation of wretched limitation in which (as Beckett informed Georges Duthuit in 1949) “. . . there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.”¹⁸³

Pierre Chabert also appears to support the notion that everything within the phenomenal world of *Godot* is an extension or by-product of the void. In his article “The body in Beckett’s theatre,” Chabert foregrounds the prime importance of the ailing or partially immobilized body in Beckett’s early drama when he characterizes it as a pared-down, energy-saving instrument concerned only with the indispensable essentials of expressive communication.¹⁸⁴ But (as with Cohn) the humanistic primacy of this corporeal presence is repeatedly displaced by a total stillness that is one of the chief hallmarks of the empty stage and even stationary actor as symbol and “mortality-smacking” reminder of the metaphysical nothingness suffusing all. As Chabert states: “[The Beckettian actor’s] gestures and movements must always be seen to arise out of immobility and to return to it.”¹⁸⁵ Pozzo’s sudden (pain-induced) rearing up from his prostrate position in Act II only to collapse back into a state of listless inertia, and Estragon’s escalating “boot-inflicted” difficulties in walking concretely convey the idea of this inexorable pull toward a rigor mortis-like immobility. If we similarly experience the pause -- with its suggestive connection to sleep, paralysis and death -- as repeatedly “render[ing] eternity in one of its minor variants,”¹⁸⁶ then the tramps’ spirited sprees of chatter and bustle, flanked by motionless silence, become a kind of “resistance movement” against the advancing

nothingness.

In the end, it becomes difficult to separate Vladimir and Estragon's animated routines from the very thing that they are trying to stave off or deny (i.e. the void and their awareness of it) because their acts are so obviously constructed *in reaction to it*. I have already discussed how the *clochards'* frivolous rituals become ironic expressions of what they were initially meant to belie or shut out: the meaninglessness and absurdity of human life. This phase of my argument also sees the tramps' habitual clowning as being an ironic expression of the metaphysical vacuum surrounding them. Only now it is the "intimate" rhythmic interplay between the manifestations of the void and the characters' reactive clownery that underscores their inextricability.

Penelope Gilliat is helpful in shedding light on this Beckettian paradox. She observes that "like most people in real life, [Vladimir and Estragon] are capable of feeling at one and the same time that existence is both insupportable and indispensable, and that they are both dying and also amazingly well."¹⁸⁷ Gilliat is addressing the fact that it is the *clochards'* grievous entrapment in the life-sapping nothingness and their agonizing recognition of it, that results in their most buoyant (albeit illusory) "shows" of being alive or vitally *there*. Grounded in the false assumption that our corporeal existence is the greatest proof that we exist, Vladimir and Estragon's preternaturally somatic clowning is made to serve these deceptive ends. Even Pozzo can be seen "*Drawing himself up, [and] striking his chest*"¹⁸⁸ to reassert his "being" after having confronted, in chokingly elliptical moments of insight, how he exists only as an illusory "master" to a "slave" who is, in actuality, 'killing' *him*. Acting out of a similar sense of *their* unreality, the tramps forge anew (after each silence) an imaginary level of reality meant to project the semblance of their incontestable real-

ness. In the process, the pair see-saw ambiguously between the possibilities of denying or conceding its counterfeit status. That *Godot's* clowns must settle for creating the *impression* of being over that of creatively *bringing themselves* into being in the manner of most standard clowns suggests the monumental power of the void against which they are unfairly pitted.

In this latter sense, Vladimir and Estragon embody aspects of silent film comedian Buster Keaton's archetypal "Everyman" clown, who is repeatedly caught up in an epic struggle against vast, impersonal forces that displays what Gerald Mast calls "a comic insufficiency in the protagonist and a disproportion between his powers and the task he is asked to accomplish."¹⁸⁹ In Keaton's films, the screen character typically runs up against the immense problems posed by his head-on encounters with either prodigious natural forces, huge mechanical objects, or large human collectives,¹⁹⁰ each of which must be eventually "conquered" for him to emerge unscathed -- and victorious.¹⁹¹ Though *Godot's* tramps do not share in this silent hero's ability to succeed at achieving the virtually impossible -- largely by dint of a sensible pragmatism comically absurd in view of the senselessly chaotic surroundings in which he finds himself -- they do frequently exhibit his "never-say-die" perseverance in their task in the face of one inevitable setback after another. In their case, it is the rising tide of silences which repeatedly break like ravaging waves upon their frangible constructions of being. As Vladimir remarks when he notices that an opportunity to perform an overt act of existence (i.e. helping a fallen man get to his feet) is going unseized, "Come, let's get to work! . . . In an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness!"¹⁹²

In their tenacious clinging to a continuity that is at the best of times precarious, the *clochards* are often heir to the Keaton protagonist's stoic facility for going about his

business – admittedly one geared toward securing his end – as if there was nothing at all unusual about his larger circumstances. The Keaton clown’s imperviousness to the apparent threat of calamity and possibly death, symbolized in his unweaving deadpan expression, can be credited to another quality which clearly influences the characterization of *Godot*’s buffoons. Bernard Stora identifies this trait as the Keatonian will “to reduce life to a structure of habits,”¹⁹³ so as to be too mechanically and devotedly engaged in the smaller matters at hand to consider one’s dismal relation to the “larger picture” of an almost certain defeat. Vladimir and Estragon’s kindred immersion in the nugatory rituals of existence is also meant to inch them closer to attaining their goal (i.e. the semblance of their existence), while heading off the feelings of panic that a broader knowledge of their situation may occasion. This point is illustrated in Vladimir’s countering of Estragon’s distraught “What’ll we do, what’ll we do!”¹⁹⁴ with his automatic inquiry into whether his partner would like to eat a radish. Besides affording the pair an opportunity to reenact a new routine of daily living, this comforting and absorbing food ritual boasts enough anxiety-deflecting properties to provide at least as much instantaneous relief as the hunger-appeasing repast itself. Full spectrum “radish-involvement” -- which may include retrieving the radish, eating or not eating the radish, talking about eating or not eating the radish, and offering reasons as to why the radish should or should not be eaten -- is only one of several dozen of the tramps’ habitual pastimes that support Harold Clurman’s claim that it is humanity’s mediocrity, or “stupid appetite for life,”¹⁹⁵ that ‘saves’ it from despairing over its larger condition insofar as it promotes a wholehearted involvement in the paltry concerns of day-to-day life (especially those pertaining to the needs of the body).

The main difference between Keaton’s and Beckett’s respective treatments of these

themes lies in the Keaton hero's status as perhaps the most logical and so competent of the clowns of early cinema. As such, the Keaton protagonist's laughably mundane and even trivial rituals or habits end up securing the step-by-step goals needed to achieve his desired end. With *Godot*, we have what Beckett calls the tragicomic "combination of the strange and the practical, the mysterious and the factual,"¹⁹⁶ but the emphasis has now shifted onto how chaotic reality *resists* being neutralized by, or made to "share the stage with," man's warring will to *disregard* it; of the two bodies of work being compared here, it is only in Keaton's films that this traditional clowning stance results in a reality that, as Daniel Moews phrases it, "always acquiesces to the heart's desires, and [where] what should be immediately is."¹⁹⁷

For the audience at least, *Godot's* "staged" stage, and virtually all the dramatic action (including dialogue) unfolding on it, remain cogent reminders of the stage-world's tenacious *unreality*. When the blind Pozzo tries to elicit from Vladimir a description of the place where he stands in Act II of *Godot*, Vladimir, after a brief survey of the scene, declares, "It's like nothing. There's nothing."¹⁹⁸ A close survey of what *happens* on this stage compels even Robbe-Grillet to conclude that the performative level of human existence that appeals to the senses is not where the Beckettian personae's true reality or "presence" is to be found. According to Robbe-Grillet, "The stage, privileged site of *presence*, has not resisted the contagion for long. . . . Didi was only an illusion, that is doubtless what gave him that dancing gait, swaying from one leg to the other, that slightly clownlike costume. . . ."¹⁹⁹ As that which underlies everything and can never be phased out, the nothingness becomes – over that of the play's disintegrating façade of ritualized activity – the deeper, more authentic stratum of "reality," or what is *actually* out there. That the irreducible presence of the void emerges as the one "truth" here is far from crushing, since for

Beckett, the body (with its seeming manifestations of existence) is *not* the true site of man's "being." *This* particular battle for ontological supremacy turns out to be only "round one" in an extended two-round match. For though the void and human life lived at its performance level constitute two distinct layers of "reality" (or "unreality") within *Godot's* multi-levelled dramatic world, they are -- as in actual life -- red herrings that sidetrack us from seeing where the dialectical forces of presence/absence, being/non-being, life/death and even wakefulness/sleep are *really* being played out.

The play's final and perhaps true theatrical war zone, wherein each of these states is pictured in a constant power-shifting battle for ascendancy over its antithetical state, *are the tramps themselves*. As the recipients of varying gradations of presence (or lesser degrees of absence), Vladimir and Estragon intermittently challenge the nothingness' claim to being the most ineffaceable "reality" within *Godot*. Unlike most clowns, the *clochards* embrace *two* different modes of human experience, thus interpolating a third, "intermediary" tier of reality into the play. This last one is also superimposed over the void, but is a plane of reality more tenacious and profound than that of the tramps' stage activity, which is devised to cover over (and up) both this reality and the ambient nothingness. That "something" to which Hesla refers when he exalts Beckett to the ranks of "ontological funambulist, . . . [who] knows just how far he can lean toward the dark of Nothing before he must right himself toward the light of Something"²⁰⁰ pertains to this one site of genuine "being" in *Godot's* universe. This true, potent counterpoint to the nothingness within and external to the characters is what we might call our closest approximation to a soulful or soulful-like presence in the world -- perhaps in the sense in which the stance of a Buddhist mindfulness opens us up to the world.

Moore stresses that in this particular context, “‘Soul’ is not a thing, but a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart, and personal substance.”²⁰¹ His emphasis on the *affective* quality of soulfulness, or the practice of living fully in the present moment, corresponds to Beckett’s championing of suffering as that which “opens a window on the real.”²⁰² For Beckett, the “real” encompasses not simply the actual character of the human condition, but the experience of suffering itself. It is when his characters suffer that they are most real and therefore “un-clownlike.” Vladimir and Estragon’s deepest, “soulful” involvement in the stage-world occurs during the play’s transfixed silences, when the senselessly tragic (or pathetic) dimension of their serio-comic condition is most acutely felt. This more openly receptive mode of being correlates with what Moore calls soulfulness’ profounder reverence for what *is*, as opposed to what *should be*, beginning with a full acknowledgement of human fallibility and failure.

Linda Ben-Zvi agrees that rivalrous tensions between the forces of “absence” and “presence” peak during the silences when “the habits slip or fail . . . [and] the characters are most painfully ‘there.’”²⁰³ This notion accords with Beckett’s own *Proust*-articulated conviction that habit severs us from our feelings and the painful insights they may yield. Embedded in these “void-exposing” silences is the underlying reality of the tramps’ fruitless waiting, boredom, glaring “disconnections” of communication, and the anguish that such awareness generates. In the wake of one such silence, Estragon admits that “Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it’s awful!”²⁰⁴ The metatheatrical commentaries of this harrowingly lucid type -- including each partner’s admission that he “can’t go on like this”²⁰⁵ -- tend to succeed these intervals of silence. The full contents of these “eye-opening” moments conspire to rouse the tramps to a crucial awareness of their *choosing* to play the “make-

believe” parts of men leading eventful lives defined by meaningful relationships in a human-need-accommodating universe. For example, one such silence immediately “triggers” Vladimir’s suggestion that he and Estragon “play at Pozzo and Lucky.”²⁰⁶ This recommendation issues from the silence-grounded recognition that to live is to engage in voluntary role-playing, a truth confirmed by the fact that the tramps have just chosen to resume their playful impersonations to pass the time. Over time, the tramps grow so self-conscious about their participation in illusions that each, upon sighting the messenger boy with his false assurances of Godot’s imminent arrival, exclaims: “Off we go again.”²⁰⁷ This “tag-line” signals, in an analogous “gag” format, how exasperating these delusory, repetitive “games” have become to them.

Beckett conspicuously bars the life of the body from any involvement in the silent interims of “presence.” He accomplishes this end by inserting between dialogue segments highly artificial “tableaux” that implicitly embody this idea. Fletcher details Beckett’s technique:

In the recent London Royal Court Theatre production, supervised by the author, the actors maintained during pauses the stance and attitude which they had adopted as the last words were being uttered: they did not fidget or budge, but stared before them, until the time allowed for the pause had elapsed.²⁰⁸

For Moore, these attention-arresting interstices of inactivity represent an important deviation from the hurried routines of existence that throttle soul, which “cannot thrive in a fast-paced life because being affected, taking things in and chewing on them, requires time.”²⁰⁹ While the mental and bodily sufferings referred to earlier do provide ingress into the tragic dimension of experience, they tend to be too “pauselessly” or swiftly followed up by the resumption of old habits to allow the tramps time to appropriate fully the revelations of the mindfully-lived moment. The contrasting experiencing of the silences, sometimes “lengthened to the point of

embarrassment before being broken,”²¹⁰ as Knowlson points out, is also the experiencing of time to dwell unwaveringly on the true character of human life. The process is in some ways analogous to the lenthily bedridden individual’s unavoidable brooding over life’s bleaker truths.

To safeguard against being given too much time to “take things in,” Estragon and Vladimir administer prophylactic doses of briskly-paced stage ‘turns’ which significantly derive from the music-hall’s own rapid-fire succession of acts that “run on a non-stop diet of giggles and rumbustious fun,”²¹¹ the objective being to ensure that one does *not* have time to think about life’s unpleasant realities. Yet with the introduction of the tramps’ idler, more pared-down mode of existence (which casts back to man’s ineluctable waiting, ennui and isolation), both characters and audience are able to view and place the “lively” rituals of daily life at a still farther remove from “reality,” or what apparently cannot or will not go away.

Infinitely more grim-faced than Moore’s life-enriching brand of soulfulness, the tramps’ vigilant immersion in “raw,” unadorned life floods them with a sense of its emptiness. Part of this emptiness includes the reality of being cut off from any ascertainable connection to a godhead and, consequently, their own “essential,” in the sense of permanent, selves. The play offers compelling evidence for both these points. After the light-hearted bit of cross-talk in which the tramps sketch a comical portrait of Godot as an independent entrepreneurial-type who refuses any direct dealings with them, a marked silence ensues. Exposure to the “nothing” that is out there prompts a now anxious Estragon to question the viability of a “partnership” with a figure who refuses to make himself directly known to them. This strongly hints at his dawning awareness of their actual estrangement from Godot. The reality of being severed from one’s immutable self is suggested at (though not limited to) the close of Act II. After

having actively listened to the silence around him, Vladimir expresses a sense of being watched by another. Ben-Zvi ascribes this feeling to a perceived disjunction between one's inner (or essential) and outer selves, wherein the latter is aware of, but cut off from, the "unseen, unheard"²¹² inner self.

Moore's own citing of a handful of traditional spiritual teachings that illustrate that "it is the life-embedded soul, not soaring spirit, that defines humanity,"²¹³ could ironically include *Godot's* own dramatized lesson that in "losing" our ideal selves, we rediscover our actual, more humanized selves. It is when Vladimir and Estragon's attempts at finding permanent selves (through impersonation) *fail* that they are most able to "be themselves"; I mean this in the paradoxical sense of being men who are condemned to live the lives of being inherently no one and, in their rampant role-playing, extrinsically everyone. Another central paradox sharpens into focus here: that the Beckett hero and, by extension, each of us, comes closest to apprehending what the true nature of self (and, by extension, "being") consists of when we cease *consciously* seeking it, in this case through our own self-willed and so fanciful formulations of it (etched through word and gesture). Vladimir appears to underscore this point when he tells his partner that "When you seek you hear. . . . That prevents you from finding."²¹⁴ The theatre-goer or reader may interpret his cryptic shorthand to signify that our deliberate attempts to attain the object of our quest are forever thwarted by the circulating discourses of consciousness. For they preclude the possibility of our ever seeing or recognizing a thing for what it is *in itself* – in this case the essential self as something unknowable. These "voices" prefer to render it the readiest of palimpsests upon which they inscribe their own systemic conceptions and meanings.²¹⁵

Beckett may have the ironic productiveness of goal-less passivity in mind when he

has Arsene (the disillusioned ex-servant from his third novel *Watt*) assert that “to do nothing exclusively would be an act of the highest value, and significance.”²¹⁶ This statement recalls Beckett’s earlier mention of the experience of silence as being of paramount importance in our response to his art. It is here that we switch, as viewers or readers of *Godot*, from the *active* to the *reactive* mode. Michael Worton explains how in having to react to these silences, we find ourselves in the same position as the characters: “. . . such pauses leave the reader-spectator space and time to explore the blank spaces between the words and thus intervene creatively -- and individually -- in the establishment of the play’s meaning.”²¹⁷ Evidence of this lies in the fact that I have largely had to intuit the meaning that these “blank spaces” hold for Vladimir and Estragon through my own visceral reaction to them -- though admittedly the lines of dialogue that succeed them suggest what *particular* aspect of the silence’s significance is being felt by the *clochards* at any given time. In effect, the lulls in *Godot*’s action yield a greater import and insight than the clowns’ innately nonsensical foolery that, even by Vladimir’s estimation, “is becoming really insignificant.”²¹⁸ In almost diametrical opposition to this is vaudeville and the circus’ assertion of the primacy of action over inactivity.²¹⁹

It is the passage of time that will ultimately erode the deadlock of ontological equality that arguably exists between the void and Vladimir and Estragon. Despite the “timelessness” of the tramps’ mechanically repeated actions, time’s onward movement -- evidenced in the sprouting of a few leaves on the tree and Pozzo and Lucky’s “overnight” physical and mental deteriorations -- is seen (in another of *Godot*’s contradictory truths) to underlie the whole of the play. Kennedy touches on another way in which *Godot* emphasizes its entrapment in time. He maintains that in its insistence that we regard it as a “performance,” the play establishes itself as “an

occasion here and now that passes the time for the audience, and which must be brought to an end.”²²⁰ A play’s termination point, as well as its characters’, is marked by lasting on-stage silence and stillness. This end is prefigured in the progressive shortening of acts in *Godot*, and more importantly, in its ever-increasing and lengthening periods of silence and motionlessness.

In *Beckett: A Study of His Plays*, John Fletcher and John Spurling expound on *Godot*’s unique technique for suggesting the silence’s ever-increasing consumption of not only the “play-time,” but of the *clochards*’ own potential for living soulfully in the “voided” present. Their analysis of the play’s use of ‘repetition-with-a-difference,’ a structural device in which nearly every aspect of the play is duplicated, with a slight variation or two, over the course of two acts, alights on the tramps’ closing exchange at the end of each section:

. . . the wording [of the “Well? Shall we go?” . . . “Yes, let’s go.” interchange] is identical, the punctuation varied only slightly to slow down delivery the second time, but the roles reversed: in Act One Estragon asks the question, but Act Two gives it to Vladimir The first time around, these two sentences can be delivered at more or less normal speed, but on the second occasion they should be drawn out, with three-to-six-second pauses between their constituent phrases. When this is done, the intense emotion generated in the auditorium as the last curtain falls is redolent of great sadness.²²¹

The ominous prolonging of this, and other silences in the play’s second act, suggests two possibilities, each of which are applicable at different points in Act II. The first, associated with Vladimir and Estragon’s mental deteriorations, is the pair’s diminishing abilities to “be” where they really are. Since their attentive acknowledgement of the void is what provides the impetus for *immediately* “jump-starting” their momentarily halted play-mode, we can surmise from the play’s lengthening intervals of suspended activity that even *this* humanizing capacity is (at

times) falling prey to the ravaging effects of time. The tramps' increasing tendency towards the end of Act II to replace dialogic interaction with solitary, self-absorbed pursuits (like sleeping or compulsive monologuing) is another sign that their ability to tune in to what is going on -- or *not* going on -- around them is waning.

The second reason for many of the play's protracted silences pertains to the erosions of fortitude already witnessed in the *clochards*. If Vladimir and Estragon's verbal and physical clowning constitutes a vital survival tool that promptly routs the despondency and sense of defeat ushered in by the revelations of silence, then any delay in the clowning may signal their growing powerlessness to shake off a despair that has deepened over time. As I've mentioned, the end of the second act sees each partner acknowledging that he cannot endure the strain of the useless waiting much longer. In addition to Vladimir and Estragon's routines becoming more desperate in Act II, the pair inch closer to an actual suicide attempt (by hanging) this time around. Passing beyond the earlier enthusiasm of suicidal ideations, a suicide instrument -- in the form of the cord holding up Estragon's pants -- is now produced. Though it snaps during the tramps' manual "trial-run," we are left pondering what will happen if the rope supporting his trousers *tomorrow* proves more durable; for if Lucky is able to acquire a new hat to replace his trampled one in the apparent course of one day, so Estragon can procure a new belt in time for the next act. In the end, we are forced to conclude that the now more "despair-stranded" Vladimir and Estragon's continuity is, at best, dubious and, at worst, an impossibility. As time passes and the *clochards'* varying degrees of "non-being" and "being" reach perilous extremes, it would seem that their total and unflagging "commitment" to nothingness is inevitable. The void would appear to be the "ontological victor" after all.

But, as the narrative voice in *The Unnamable* obliquely reminds us, even utter

certainty *in these matters* is presumptuous. When the faintly exasperated Unnamable says, "This silence they are always talking about, from which supposedly he [read: the Beckett protagonist] came, to which he will return when his act is over,"²²² he is insinuating that all talk of the precise nature of ultimate endings must remain *just* talk, aimlessly orbiting around a hypothetical event that has yet to be experientially verified (Beckett only strongly hints at its approach). The playwright even ensures that the characters' reactions to the more than likely prospect that "nothing" *awaits them* in the end, cast doubt on the "fact" that it is certainties regarding our lives that we most pine for. At the close of Act I, Estragon envisions himself as a still unredeemed Christ figure whose crucifixion is ongoing despite there being "nothing more to do here"²²³ (prayers and supplications for mercy having led nowhere). Before the full, direful implications of the image have a chance to make themselves felt, Vladimir steps in with the hopeful "Ah Gogo, don't go on like that. To-morrow everything will be better."²²⁴ Harking back to what Enid Welsford identifies as the traditional fool's capacity for "throwing doubt on the finality of fact,"²²⁵ this refusal to acknowledge defeat falls within the more modern-day, fool-descended tradition of the optimistic clown who, like Emmett Kelly, remains hopeful of having even the most futile of tasks "pay off" in the end.

For Beckett, even our deepest prescience of the wretched circumstances of our undoing (and the suicidal impulses it may precipitate) must be held in check, for we can never be certain that the solution to our problems won't come to us tomorrow, or the next day, or even the one after that. At one point, Estragon belies his own stabbingly trenchant conclusion that he and his partner "weren't meant for the same road,"²²⁶ with the more anodyne ". . . nothing is certain."²²⁷ This oft-spoken play-on-words crystallizes our cosmic predicament lucently: while the larger Nothing is

certain, it is also true that *no thing* (pertaining to “specifics” within the sensory world) is certain. Seen from this perspective, the rampant uncertainty that was once so harrowing now becomes our secularized “saving grace”; conversely, our approximations (or forays in the direction) of certainty are what threaten to crush us.

In summary, Beckett uses the open stage of the circus and vaudeville to concretize and so bring to our notice a metaphysical condition that in “real” life is too often ignored on account of its being commonly considered too grim and impalpable to dwell on. *Waiting for Godot*, of course, refutes both these views. While leaving some margin for hope that humankind’s situation will improve, the play’s vision *is* a difficult one. It initiates us into the knowledge that we are less “there” than we think, and the nothingness more in evidence than we may care to admit. In the final analysis, neither the music-hall nor the circus truly honours or develops to the extent that Beckett does the premise implicitly embodied on its metatheatrical stage: that everything that you *hear* and *see* here is unreal. Unlike the practitioners of these earlier forms of stage comedy, Beckett seems to know that the effacement of everything that is *not* a part of the performance dimension of the show leaves the stage-world defined by one reality alone: the undisturbed, seamless reign of human performance. When this occurs, the clowns and their clowning begin to appear “real” simply by virtue of the fact that there is nothing else (i.e. more real) with which to compare them. As the ambiance of unreality created by the vacant stages of vaudeville and the circus becomes less noticeable as the performers and their rituals become, for the most part, more phenomenally and vividly “real” to us, *Godot’s* vacuum becomes *more* sensuously real as the personae and their playful habits increasingly dissolve into the very conditions of unreality (i.e. the silence and stillness) that characterize their metaphysical milieu. In comparing Beckett’s play to the traditional forms that it both draws upon

and subverts, we come to understand what Knowlson means when he suggests that *Godot* may have sprung “from a philosophical meditation as to how Democritus’ ‘nothing is more real than nothing’ could be rendered in the theatre.”²²⁸

Beckett’s revised approach to “meta-staging” is rooted in the pivotal fact that *Godot*’s universe has a distinct moral dimension that is contingent upon the pain of self-knowledge. Unlike the traditional clown who appears not to understand the terrible things that are happening to him, Beckett’s buffoons are horribly aware of what is overtaking them. As Leonard Pronko explains: “This is why they must talk, find a sounding board in someone, or at least monologue endlessly, to prevent the discourse from coming to an end.”²²⁹ When Beckett refers to the scene transpiring on *Godot*’s stage as a “soul-landscape,”²³⁰ we may be sure that the play’s dramatic events are resonating on deeper levels within the personae because Beckett has made them (like us) genuinely responsive to pain. It is because the impinging nothingness is so agonizingly *felt* (and not simply blindly experienced) that the tramps’ doomed efforts to fill the stilled silence are not only laughably comic, but ineffably tragic too.

CHAPTER III

“. . . THIS GREAT STAGE OF FOOLS.”

King Lear (4.6.183).²³¹

(i) The Reconfiguration of the Tramp-Clown of Popular Entertainment in *Godot*

In Act I of *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon fondly relates (in comically idyllic travelogue terms) his unrealized dream of honeymooning with Vladimir along the shores of the thirst-inspiring Dead Sea. When Vladimir dryly replies that he should have been a poet, Estragon rejoins: “I was. (*Gesture towards his rags.*) Isn’t that obvious?”²³² Stage direction is used here not only to draw closer attention to the tattered, hand-me-down quality of the characters’ clothing, but also to enforce Beckett’s desire that their stage costume loosely or suggestively correspond to the prescribed garb of the classic “hobo” or “tramp” clown of popular entertainment. This specific type of clown – who, by the end of the nineteenth century, was already a familiar sight on the vaudeville stage as the “tramp-juggler” or “tramp-philosopher” before making his successful cross-over into the circus and early comic film where the breath of his complexities and contradictions expanded considerably – embodies, perhaps more than any other class of clown, the deep ambiguities of identity and quality of keen self-awareness that Beckett brings to bear on the characterizations of Estragon and Vladimir, the two central vagabonds of *Godot*. This opening portion of the third chapter of my thesis will centre first on the ways in which the defining traits of the “slippery” hobo-clown of stage and early screen comedy are effectively mirrored in his distinctive dress-code. I will subsequently examine how the tramp-clown’s costume (and attendant themes) resurface, in revitalized form, on *Godot*’s stage.

In *The Clown and the Crocodile*, Joseph C. McLelland notes that in the clown's "outlandish" appearance, we find "an exaggeration of ourselves."²³³ The vestimentary hallmarks of the traditional "tramp" attire are themselves a study in excess, the better to reflect back to us our universal "extremes" of being. They include worn-out, ill-fitting (usually oversized) footwear with hole-riddled soles; dark, baggy pants supported by a necktie or other humorously makeshift item; a shabby coat with myriad large pockets to hold the "goods" procured in his occasional stints as thief, beggar and/or swindler; and genteel derby.²³⁴

The element of exaggeration that dictates this curious configuration of garments expresses and emphasizes the human being's capacity to have his or her fundamental nature and situation both fully exposed and hidden from view at one and the same time. Jean-Jacques Mayoux explains: "The clown is the perfect actor. . . . He is naked man who has happened not upon his own clothing but upon cast-off garments, in which he masquerades, disguises himself, absurdly and grotesquely, as do children."²³⁵ What is unique about the tramp-clown is that certain aspects of his hand-me-down attire *do* express his "naked" or essential self in that they point to his mysterious, contradictory "otherness," while other elements that make up his ragtag assemblage of coverings and protective layers fail to express who he is in trying to posit a fixed identity for him. In dealing with the problematics of identity as one inescapable facet of the human condition, the archetypal tramp figure becomes a symbol within Western art (and certainly within *Godot*) of "humanity considered as residue, stripped of its function and plans for [Marxist] transformations, and left face to face with itself . . . the image of our condition laid bare. . . ." ²³⁶

What makes the standard hobo-clown the apotheosis of the clown-actor adumbrated by Mayoux is the abject extremity of his situation as *literal* and -- particularly in the

case of Chaplin's 'Tramp' – *metaphysical* social outcast. The tramp-clown's primary need simply to survive compels him to shuttle back and forth between a state of impoverished solitude and vulnerability (he is, by definition, jobless, homeless and without family), and one of shrewd and polished social role-playing, geared towards securing from others the bare necessities of food, shelter and/or warm clothing that will guarantee his continuity from one day to the next.²³⁷ The tramp-actor's apparent indestructibility in the face of constant near-extinction stems, in fact, from his performance-based-and-honed instincts for survival. Chaplin's 'Tramp' character is the most famous, developed and unsentimentalized example of this type of clown. With unrivalled comic brilliance, he repeatedly demonstrates the customary "vagabond" conduct and consciousness delineated below by Townsen:

To coax a free meal from a housewife, the tramp not only had to be an accomplished actor, he had to know precisely which act to perform. For some prospects, he might play the role of the abject tramp, for others the jolly tramp, the respectable tramp, or perhaps the scholarly tramp who likes to be called "professor." . . . Although few [actual] tramps had anything to do with show business, they were all acutely aware of the necessity of being performers in their own lives.²³⁸

The solo and less evolved, and so more sentimentalized, tramp-performer of the circus also leads the "brain-working life"²³⁹ of having to cull from his bag of manipulative ploys for holding audience attention the routine(s) most likely to evoke the spectators' laughter or tears. (Professional "survival" for the stage-clown depends, after all, on the audience's being "with him" in the sense of its responding demonstrably to his act; as Ruth Manning-Sanders comments, "[The clown act] is a two-partner business; and the one partner is helpless if the other partner fails him."²⁴⁰) An embryonic incarnation of the hobo-clown in the American circus ring appeared in 1882, when circus clown Charles Burke recited "The Tramp," a heart-

rending and sympathy-eliciting vignette of life as a despised, reviled vagrant. It began: “Lemme sit down a minute, a stone’s got in my shoe. . . .”²⁴¹ This self-consciously pathos-laden line and image are uncannily reminiscent of Estragon’s constant harping on his painful boot to solicit his partner’s (unforthcoming) commiserative attention, and assistance in extracting it.

In *The Silent Clowns*, Walter Kerr observes that as a consummately adaptable impersonator-tramp, Chaplin’s ‘Little Fellow’ is endowed with a ‘devastating’ capacity to *see through* the artifice of his roles – and everyone else’s. Behind the pretence lies a chilling view of both his inability to remain any *one* person (or type of person) for any length of time, and the unreality that underlies a world chiefly peopled by fraudulent posturers. According to Kerr, there is “nothing, no way of life, no permanent commitment [left] in which such a [knowledge-possessed] man can possibly believe.”²⁴² As viewers, we are expected to undergo (to some degree) the same “negative” epiphanies as Chaplin’s tramp-protagonist. For those who have achieved this level of awareness

The tramp . . . [becomes] a philosophical, not a social, statement. And it was a conclusion to which Chaplin came, not a choice he imposed from the outset. The tramp is the residue of all the bricklayers and householders and *bon vivants* and women and fiddlers and floorwalkers and drunks and ministers Chaplin had played so well, too well. The tramp was all that was left. Sometimes the dark pain filling Chaplin’s eyes is in excess of the situation at hand. It comes from the hopeless limitation of having no limitations.²⁴³

The “image of our condition laid bare” consequently embraces a two-fold mode of being upon which our very survival and continuity rest: that of being able to assume the identity (where there is a perceived need) of virtually anyone while remaining, on a deeper ontological level, innately no one – once the superficial, ephemeral and illusory overlays of precise social and historical roles have been stripped from us.

It may be helpful to remember that the hobo-clown's early theatrical and historical predecessor is the professional or court fool, particularly in his "feigned" rather than "biological" idiot form. The degree to which the Elizabethan jester of stage and court is linked to the tramp-clown's (loosely inspired by an actual tramp's) own primordial solitude and "otherness" in terms of asocial lifestyle, historical rootlessness and unconventional use of language (where applicable) is indicated in the fool's singular placement in the Tarot card deck. J. E. Cirlot deems the fool

The final enigma of the Tarot, distinguished from the others because it is un-numbered -- all the rest are given numbers from 1 to 21; the significance of this is that the Fool is to be found on the fringe of all orders and systems in the same way as the Centre of the Wheel of Transformations is 'outside' movement, becoming and change.²⁴⁴

The fool's positioning on the remote borders of his society gives him licence to ape amusingly, but always within reason, its follies and pretensions without his being subject to the usual societal or kingly reprisals for effrontery of one's social "superiors." Yet as Welsford points out, the jester remains "in the paradoxical position of virtual outlawry combined with utter dependence on the support of the social group to which he belongs."²⁴⁵ As "actors" whose respective livelihoods hinge on the delivery of a pleasing and well-rewarded performance, both professional fool and tramp-clown are at the mercy of the attentiveness and generosity of others to "go on," each in his own predominantly solitary and lonely way.

This dialectic of being (i.e. alone *and* enmeshed in society) is reified in a costume whose fusion of visually contradictory items of attire represents a blunt repudiation of comedy's standard use of costume as a transparent index to an identity that is precisely and unambiguously expressed through details of dress as markers of class, occupation, social role(s), sensibility, etc. On the one hand, the tramp-clown's ill-fitting vestments establish him as an incorrigible "misfit," whose conspicuous and grotesque

separateness from the rest of a normally-dressed, conformist society prevents him from ever achieving a sense of belonging to it. As well as not exactly looking the part of a “society man,” he is eventually thwarted from acting the part by his recalcitrant clothes. Fred Miller Robinson maintains that grossly outsized shoes and pants function “like drunkenness, to subvert fastidiousness, dreams, aspiration.”²⁴⁶ The sight of our awkwardly stumbling over our own unwieldy footwear, or of having our trouser seat accidentally snag or tear on a projecting object ousts us from the pretence and respectability-pillared ranks of society, re-acquainting us, in effect, with our more “undisguised” self – in the form of an unruly body that betrays us as the socially maladjusted outsider that we, at bottom, are. For a hobo-clown like Chaplin’s, the body, in its least affected and most potentially alienating gestures and movements, offers the truest expression of the underlyingly “outcast” self.

The hobo-clown’s frayed and battered appearance also suggests the tramp as scorned pariah within a society that frequently perceives he and his mates as “pathetic bums and winos,”²⁴⁷ and which teems with “cops, bullies, [and] all the gutter bestiary”²⁴⁸ who see fit to beat, incarcerate and generally threaten them with annihilation. The comic duo of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy has been described as creating film characters who are “in-between tramps and working men.”²⁴⁹ Their unmistakable tramp-status is evidenced in *Scram* (1932) and *Another Fine Mess* (1930). The former opens with a courtroom scene in which the pair narrowly escape receiving disproportionately heavy jail sentences for vagrancy (they were previously found sleeping on a park bench). In the latter movie, we first spy Laurel and Hardy fleeing from policemen hotly pursuing them with truncheons in hand; since we never learn what provoked the chase, we assume that their current status as vagabonds who look manifestly different from most people is sufficient cause for punishment.

In summary, as a semiotic index to the tramp's relative positioning outside of society, the hobo costume hints at its wearer's isolated "otherness" and hapless, scapegoat-like openness to the maleficent blows of his fellow human beings and fate itself -- for having singled him out for the "beggarly" life of extreme deprivation. On the more basic level of essential being, the tramp-clown's baggy, amorphous garb connotes a "lumpishness" which William Willeford contends "suggests chaos registered by consciousness as a mere, crude fact. . . ."250 This lumpishness, writes Willeford, presents the audience "with something relatively shapeless, yet material -- there, with a human presence."²⁵¹ The etymological origins of the English word "clown" -- which can be traced back to the Teutonic or Scandinavian word for "clod," denoting a "coarse or boorish fellow, a lout"²⁵² -- accord perfectly with his observations. Significantly, a "clod" also means a lump or chunk. Thus the chaos occasioned by the individual whose unpredictable and uncontrollable conduct is judged unseemly because it cannot be hemmed in by rigid notions of social decorum (like Harpo's mercurial, insane tramp in the early Marx Brothers pictures), finds bodily expression in a costume defined by its very lack of clear-cut definition. Someone who cannot be "pinned down" logically and conceptually is simply unknowable.²⁵³ So like the humanity-representing "blobs of color and form"²⁵⁴ that graced the canvasses of some of the more avante-garde painters of Beckett's day, the tramp's lumpish appearance emphasizes each man and woman's ineluctable hermeticism and aloneness.²⁵⁵

The tramp-clown's ambiguity of identity is also reflected in his costume's yoking together of visually incongruous articles of dress. A sloppy piece of clothing will often appear alongside a fastidiously prim one, like a bow-tie or accessorised walking stick; or, as in the case of the Stratford Vladimir's "boast[ing] a waistcoat . . . improperly

buttoned,”²⁵⁶ one item of attire will combine within it qualities of both elegance and slovenliness. The resulting uncertainty as to which social class the hobo-clown hails from impels audiences to participate in the kind of conflicting guesswork that (especially in the case of Chaplin’s ‘Tramp’) sees the derelict as either an uncouth “social nobody” aspiring to a respectability that is not his, or a one-time gentleman now fallen on hard times. It is the bowler hat, more than any other component of the tramp outfit, that corroborates Maurice Charney’s characterization of disguise as “a form of play”²⁵⁷ or overt pretence, and which activates the practicality/respectability and individual/collective dialectics expounded on by Fred Miller Robinson in “The History and Significance of the Bowler Hat: Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, Beckett, Magritte and Kundera.”

Because the bowler doubles as proper headwear within cosmopolitan Britain *and* the comic entertainment circuit of the Western world, it becomes a sign of the “sedate conformist”²⁵⁸ and “comic individualist.”²⁵⁹ Robinson remarks that as the English middle-class business man’s headgear of choice from the mid-nineteenth-century onward, the derby was associated with the industrial age -- its unvarying uniformity of design, which bore the stamp of mass manufacturing, ultimately reinforcing this connection.²⁶⁰ By the time the bowler graced the head of Chaplin’s tramp-character in 1914, it had already traversed social boundaries, and was being donned en masse by an English lower middle class intent on slavishly imitating the genteel appearance and manners of its middle class. In *Chaplin. Genesis of a Clown*, Raoul Sobel and David Francis state that Chaplin’s tramp-hero always has this lower-middle class as his point of departure.²⁶¹ Yet Chaplin and myriad other derby-topped comedians (including Laurel and Hardy) initially exploit class associations only, in the end, to confound class distinctions. Robinson reminds us that as a symbolic extension of the

mind beneath it, the hat, and in particular the derby, signifies something both intimate and abstract (or stereotyping), suggesting that consciousness is something “our own and yet not our own.”²⁶² Consciousness isn’t “our own” in that it is externally bequeathed to us – as a deeply-instilled knowledge of proper social conduct – and is infinitely reproducible, like the bowler. (A highly class-conscious society like the English would, of course, look to its middle and upper classes for imitable models of exemplary conduct.)

On the level of gestural signification, the polite and well-mannered removal and tipping of the bowler (especially at the most chaotic and so comically inappropriate of times) betrays its wearer as someone “unintentionally habituated to social forms, to what is not native to [him].”²⁶³ The derby thus becomes for Robinson a universal emblem of “an aspiring mind and a sense of decorum in difficult situations.”²⁶⁴ In this way, the comic individualist and sedate conformist are conflated into the figure of the bowler-hatted comedian who “makes personally expressive the commonplace struggles of the middle-class man, or of men in general.”²⁶⁵

In the end, the tramp costume’s capacity for disguising the fundamental nature and situation of its wearer resides in its inclusion of one or more faintly dignity-conferring items of attire. Although a travesty of the elegantly-worn trappings of respectable society, these small “touches of class” (and their corresponding mannerisms) hew sufficiently to social form to act as a pass-key through which to infiltrate society until that time when a) the tramp-clown’s pragmatic ends have been attained and his “loner” status resumed, or b) his true *unconscious* nature (as suggested in the rest of his costume) has betrayed him as the less socially adroit and ingratiating, and more “loutish” vagabond-outcast that he really is. As a facilitator of absurd masquerades, the comically contrasting costume enables the vagabond-clown to

enact as wide a range of social stereotypes – each a tenuous amalgam of surface impressions – as the class-sweeping coordinates of his outfit can accommodate. Ironically, even when he elects to remain a vagabond in the company of potential benefactors, he must overstatedly play “the one-dimensional tramp” that most people want him to be so as to move them to sympathy for his plight, which is manifestly quite bleak to begin with. For the tramp-clown, basic survival necessitates suppressing the true limitless “nothingness” of self.

In fashioning the *clochard*-characters of Vladimir and Estragon, Beckett borrowed extensively from these many features of the classic tramp-clown. The first striking carry-over from the popular to the absurdist arena is costume.²⁶⁶ The play’s scenic directions and text explicitly require that Estragon sport a pair of old boots that alternate between being too wide and too narrow for his feet (presumably in some sort of sync with the progressive swelling of his unsocked, uncomfortably boot-bound feet); one boot seems to harbour a smarting foreign body that is never found. The broad “fallen-trousers” stage gag at the end of *Godot* entails that Estragon be dressed in overly capacious trousers kept in place by a moldering bit of cord. As the couple’s self-appointed gastronomic “provider” and official recorder of appointments, Vladimir dons a coat whose pockets swell with the looted spoils of turnips, carrots and radishes, and “burst” with the kind of office-supply “miscellaneous rubbish”²⁶⁷ that is supposed to assist us (and never does) in organizing and recording the details of our important engagements of the week. With the exception of the solitary messenger boy, all of the on-stage characters wear bowlers, allowing for the elaborate hat-exchanging *lazzo* of Act II. Vladimir’s repeatedly peering into and palpating the inside of his hat to try to ascertain why it “irks” and/or “itches” him suggests that its fit is poor and its condition “flea-bitten.”

Kalb points out that Estragon and Vladimir's unmistakably clownish guise precludes the possibility of envisioning real-life histories for them.²⁶⁸ With their greater links to a universality transcending all historical particulars, *Godot's* ahistorical and (consequently) "unreal" clowns come to stand for what is "unreal" in each of us. Since *Godot's* audience is meant to recognize with minimal intellectual analysis its own comically familiar and frequently devastating situation behind the play's unusual stage imagery, the highly exaggerated and frequently cartoonish contradictions of the traditional tramp costume (including hugely varying sizes of clothing) are now more muted so as to mirror better the faintly or flagrantly "gentility-aping" evening dress of at least a sizeable contingent of *Godot's* own widely class-ranging audiences. Fred Miller Robinson remarks that by having the theatre-goers blend into the on-stage performance ambiance, "The proprieties of class [maintained by both groups] were both affirmed and deranged."²⁶⁹ Anticipating some of the ideas I will explore in the following pages, both actors and spectators are largely pretending to be what they are not in accordance with the culturally-scripted terms (i.e. proper dress code and corresponding conduct) of this relationship. Both are trying to do what is expected of them before falling short of their mark -- in the sense of "entertainers" frequently failing to entertain (even in comic costume), and audience members often failing to show all the correct signs (including emitting laughter and/or applause at appropriate times) of being an audience. As will also be the case with the *clochards* of *Godot*, the emphasis is on the faltering connection between the two parties.

Like the popular hobo-clown described earlier, *Godot's* tramps wear clothing that -- in suggesting their dual-positioning outside of and within the confines of a rigorously decorum-bound social milieu -- simultaneously discloses and veils humankind's essential condition. Even more than Chaplin's indigent, loner 'Tramp,'

whose brushes with near-starvation and hapless efforts to fit into new social settings were perhaps more closely identified with by the socially marginalized sectors of his audience (i.e., the poor and newly arrived immigrants in America), the tramp-clown becomes, in Beckett's hands, what Guicharnaud calls "the modern metaphor for universal man."²⁷⁰ Though incorporating many of the traditional features that characterize the hobo-actor's "bare-essentials-only" existence, the Beckettian tramp-hero's plight has been expanded to include his *mental* struggles as aspiring rationalist. According to the Unnamable, this Everyman is "the prey of a genuine preoccupation, of a need to know . . .,"²⁷¹ an obsession that begins with his need to know his inner or essential self. Given the implicit framework of tramp-clown motifs that permeate *Godot*, even this type of struggling will prove unmanageable on one's own.

From this perspective, the play's almost non-stop stage activity (be it physical or verbal) becomes the concrete corollary of what Rosette Lamont calls the characters' joint decision to "contract in an infinite quest of their inner essence,"²⁷² by immersing themselves in the domain of make-believe. Here the inner self can be fictively imagined into "mock-being" by willing players who find value in a mental game whose winning point is one of self-deception. By supplanting the traditional hobo-clown's vacillating movements in the world with a dramatization of the inward motions of the human psyche (and imagination) at intermittent "play" with another, *Godot* both revives and rewrites another central tramp-clown theme: that *even in the presence of another person*

Man's situation should be defined not by his communion with others, nor by an absolute absence of relations with others, but by a fluctuation between the two extremes, by his attempts at communion that are perpetually broken off, by a shifting synthesis of permanent solitude and the effort made to emerge from it.²⁷³

To pass through the stages whereby the universality of this revelation becomes

apparent to us entails a journey wherein we attempt to understand how this situation comes to pass, and why it becomes a permanent feature of *Godot's* vision of the human condition.

The play begins by taking from the often starkly precarious “life on the edge” scenarios of beleaguered tramp-clowns like Chaplin’s ‘Little Fellow’ and Laurel and Hardy’s ‘Stan and Ollie’ the lesson that life is too difficult for *anyone* to endure entirely on their own, and that some arrangement of mutual assistance and interdependence between two parties must be struck up in order to lessen life’s struggles. *Godot's* clearly degenerating world is now one in which man’s basic “creaturely” needs – for edible food and protective clothing, for a day without unprovoked beatings, for benevolent assistance from an outside party in times of hardship or unmitigated struggling – are being met less and less. Therefore rather than looking simply to fiscal and/or material inequities as providing the basis for these life-sustaining unions, Beckett looks at how we are all *equally* in dire need of each other’s services, or willingness to serve *our* needs. The situation of severe privation thrust upon the traditional tramp-outcast is now globalized and intensified, forcing the characters to endure in conditions that MacGowran concedes “normally would lead any man to commit suicide – where death would be a welcome relief.”²⁷⁴ Vladimir and Estragon’s daily “attempted” attempts at suicide attest to this fact.

Mary Bryden informs us that behind this common razing of fates is Beckett’s “subverting theatre technique, which tends to disband concepts of privilege and of predictable subject/object hierarchies,”²⁷⁵ making of the concept of power “a tenuous, even laughable, notion. . . .”²⁷⁶ Beckett is drawn to the disenfranchised figure of the tramp-clown precisely because it represents the very apotheosis of undisguised powerlessness and blatant “neediness,” qualities which Beckett perceives as

omnipresent in our lives (though typically ignored or hidden from view). Cirlot writes that on a mythic level, the clown is “the inversion of the king . . . [who is] the possessor of supreme powers.”²⁷⁷ *Godot*’s opening image of Estragon undignifiedly sitting on a low mound of earth or stone establishes him from the outset as a “low” character; his trivial preoccupation with his footwear (shoes symbolizing a “lowly nature”²⁷⁸) further characterizes him in opposition to the heroic, “high” character (often a king) of tragedy or historical epic. Estragon’s lowly seat is the antithesis of the consecrated, monarchical throne, whose physical elevation symbolizes its occupant’s superior position in the social hierarchy. When Vladimir proceeds to address Estragon, who is in a mood of aloof irritability, as royalty (i.e. “May one inquire where His Highness spent the night?”²⁷⁹), we know by the brief reference to his partner’s homelessness that Vladimir is being sarcastic, and that his words ironically point to Estragon’s very lack of regal prerogative -- such as having a fortified roof over one’s head.

Estragon and Vladimir later admit to having forfeited all their rights in exchange for having a proverbial “saviour” to wait on slavishly. The *clochards* subsequent “arms dangling, heads sunk”²⁸⁰ stage tableau, featuring an open-handed gesture of utter destitution, suggests that the arrangement has left them “empty-handed” as beggars. As tramps, they must *openly* become the needy paupers which the play more subtly portrays all humanity as. One could object, at this point, to Beckett’s presentation of the socially debased vagrant-clown as *classless*. Yet we must bear in mind that *Godot* operates, much of the time, within the conventions of comedy. And one rule governing most comic action is that it is bred by low characters -- including tramps and clowns -- who are usually perceived as classless or universal in their common portrayal of the human being’s “all too human” vulnerabilities and

weaknesses.

It is because the “beggarly” dimension of Beckett’s tramps is made so comically explicit -- through Estragon’s insistent begging for chicken bones and francs from Pozzo, and his unflagging requests that Pozzo stop to rest a minute more (i.e. “Be seated, Sir, I beg of you.”²⁸¹) -- that we begin to detect signs of the rest of humanity’s (i.e. Pozzo and Lucky’s) more implicit, though unmistakable status as fellow beggars in this moral vacuum of mostly unforthcoming charity. The fallen Pozzo of Act II is heard repeatedly (and ineffectually) beseeching the tramps for assistance in getting up, while Lucky’s weeping upon hearing Pozzo’s plans to sell or kill him suggests an extended, anguished imploring to be kept on in his master’s service. Vladimir’s scandalized reproach to Estragon, “We are not beggars!”²⁸² ironically reminds us (as part of Vladimir’s all-inclusive “we”) that we are *all* beggars, since words -- especially those tied to a respectable façade -- have been shown to convey the very opposite of “reality” in *Godot*.

According to Beckett, it is this primordial “neediness” that leaves us ever-poised to slip into the kind of time-honoured social (or occupational) roles that are purportedly geared towards attending to the needs of another, *if* it means having the favour returned in kind, and our aching awareness of our desperate situation momentarily put to rest. Just as the beggar needs someone to play “the benefactor” to help save him in this world, so the benefactor requires that someone enact the part of “the beggar” to provide him with an opportunity to practice charity to help save him (from damnation) in the next world. In this respect, Beckett derives from the classic tramp-performer the idea that temporary observance of some *semblance* of socially prescribed and so acceptable conduct is vital to reaping from the (putative) bounty of one’s fellow man or woman the rudimentary requirements of existence. The sartorial

sign for each paired character's involvement in these complex social arrangements with another is, of course, his *comme il faut* sporting of a derby.

I apply this idea of a reciprocal, mutually-beneficial social role-playing with due caution, for we only see the vagabond-clowns of Vladimir and Estragon in their "waiting" mode, which is to say outside society "proper," with *its* apparent allocation of rigid, often predetermined social roles that at least tell us who we are superficially, if not actually furnishing the blueprints for the (stereotypical) "characters" we become to suit the demands of our respective stations in life.²⁸³ *Godot*, however, peers beyond the assumption that our societal positioning is what "chooses" our identities for us. For Beckett, two people are all the "society" we require for the acquisition of an identity. For as ditch-sleeping outcasts, Vladimir and Estragon are clearly in the heart of a "social environment" in so much (as Lyons points out) as "The combination of their failing memory and bare environment forces these two characters to focus upon their basic human processes,"²⁸⁴ the fastidious maintenance of their relationship being their overriding preoccupation. The audience, similarly bereft of much else to concentrate on, is left to remark on *how* the pair's relationship has been constructed and eked out over time. In the process, the ways in which a relationship wrought outside of society "proper" compares or contrasts with one forged within it (represented by the Pozzo-Lucky union) become salient.

Though my exploration of *Godot's* tramp-themes tends to home in on the Estragon-Vladimir tie, in whom they are more transparently embodied, my findings also largely apply to the Pozzo-Lucky duo, though in far less obvious ways. In lacking the traditional tramp-actor self-awareness of the *clochards*, this master and his servant remain simply performers who never doubt the "reality" of their play-acting, since this is all they know. Ironically, the many aspects of their relationship that are

consequently concealed from the audience receive blinding exposure through the Estragon-Vladimir tie, which contains enough embedded parallels to serve as a commentary on the similarly complicit nature of the Pozzo-Lucky bond.²⁸⁵ Thus in making the two tramps my focal point, I indirectly illumine what is, for Beckett, the *actual* nature of all human relationships.

Like the unexplained origins (typical of trampdom) of the partnership formed by the characters played by Laurel and Hardy, 50-year rapport between Beckett's *clochards* is devoid of a history whose chronicling could shed light on the rationale behind their union, and how they came to arrive at the curious point at which we see them on stage. Lyons remarks that this "missing" exposition of background information on the characters "makes the audience alert to each signifying detail of their immediate behavior, their complex pattern of dominance and submission, complicity and independence."²⁸⁶ The ahistorical quality of Estragon and Vladimir's bond also chips away at its plausibility, rendering it less realistic and more spurious -- like the contrived simulations of theatre.

Vladimir and Estragon's seedy, misfitting attire is perhaps the first significant detail about the pair to attract our attention. Their "rags" suggest that each possesses the classic "tramp" trait of being grimly separated from one's fellow human beings, including each other. The play appropriately opens with a misunderstanding in which Vladimir takes Estragon's conclusion that there is "Nothing to be done"²⁸⁷ (about boots that refuse to be taken off) to be a commentary on life in general, thereby highlighting the characters' *mental* alienation from each other. That they can be essentially estranged while dressed the same indicates that their mysterious, contradictory "otherness" as tramps (and ensuing mutual isolation) are more rooted in internal "character" inconsistencies and instabilities²⁸⁸ than external differences

and abnormalities – like being the *only* one in a world of conventional dressers emblazoned in outlandish attire. Vladimir and Estragon’s slightly “lumpish” garb, indicative of the profound mutability of the inner self, lends support to this notion. I should add that in exploring how certain aspects of the traditional hobo-clown have informed *Godot*’s conception of character, this section of my thesis develops a particular point addressed in “The ‘Staged’ Stage” chapter of this work: namely, that Vladimir and Estragon find themselves to be cut off from an essential self that is stable and permanent. Taking as my point of departure the idea that we can really find no *fixed* inner self, I proceed in this section to examine how we discover only an *unfixity* of inner self whenever we try to make the effort to know ourselves.

As I have said, stage dress helps to illumine this reality. The fact that the tramp-clown’s signature derby is donned by all four characters preempts the stage or screen costume’s ability to make the performer stand out as a distinct “personality” through his or her sporting of an individualized costume. Esslin explains: “Characters presuppose that human nature, the diversity of personality and individuality, is real and matters. . . .”²⁸⁹ The extent to which Vladimir and Estragon as “almost-persons and near-characters”²⁹⁰ innately lack clearly defined personalities is evinced in the other personae’s consistent failure to recognize them even as acquaintances, though they encounter the pair daily. Even Lucky, as the personification of canine instinct, viciously lashes out at the approaching Estragon as though he were a stranger boldly accosting him for the first time.

Here costume reflects the play’s aim of delving into the “reality” of the essential self until “character” itself vanishes. The innermost “protean inconsistency”²⁹¹ of Chaplin’s ‘Tramp’ is now transplanted onto new dramatic soil, though not without Beckett first attempting to uncover the deep roots of its being in *Proust*. Early in the

essay, the playwright attributes the dilemma of the changeable nature of the self, or our discontinuous subjectivity, to there being

. . . 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 irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous. We are not merely more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday.²⁹²

Beckett goes on to assert that our being irresistibly swept up in the flow of time and the inevitable changes that it wreaks results “in an unceasing modification of [the subject’s] personality, whose permanent reality, if any, can only be apprehended as a retrospective hypothesis.”²⁹³ This reality of “the individual [being] a succession of individuals”²⁹⁴ is reflected in the multiplicity of names -- Gogo, Didi, Mr. Albert, Adam, “pig,” “hog,” and the litany of pejorative epithets with which the two studiously christen each other during the cursing match of Act II -- bestowed upon the tramps at various points throughout the play. In light of these facts, it should come as no surprise that Beckett finds in the figure of the popular tramp-clown -- with his inability to remain any one person (or type of person) for any extended period of time -- a compelling antecedent for his own slippery stage vagrants.²⁹⁵

Edith Kern writes of Beckett’s disjointed characters: “[Beckettian] man is basically alone, . . . even his *I* is a stranger, a *me*, to his consciousness. . . .”²⁹⁶ This idea of an elusive primary self underlying the illusory scaffolding of “character” or ego in Beckett’s art gives us a sense of how separated we are from our deeper selves. As Fred Miller Robinson writes in “‘An Art of Superior Tramps’: Beckett and Giacometti,” “What we feel about Beckett’s and Giacometti’s tramps is that our distance from them is the space between our perceiving selves and our inmost selves,

and this feeling disquiets and strengthens us.”²⁹⁷ This unsettling sense of beholding spectral dimensions of ourselves whose existence was hitherto unknown to us, attests to Beckett’s talent for creating stage characters whose mystery both reflects and calls forth our own.

Cursed with the uncertainty of identity characteristic of the traditional tramp-clown, Vladimir and Estragon must face the harrowing solitude that awaits one who is inherently unrecognizable, even to himself. Two principal factors prevent the heroes of Beckett’s early drama from being able to brook their aloneness. The first can be traced to Beckett’s early intellectual alignment with the French philosopher Blaise Pascal’s theories on the agony of the unoccupied individual who, left face to face with himself, confronts “his nothingness, his loneliness, his insufficiency, his dependence, his powerlessness, his emptiness,”²⁹⁸ after which arises “from the depths of his soul boredom, blackness, sadness, chagrin, vexation, despair.”²⁹⁹ Act II aptly opens with a solitary Vladimir desperately seeking to keep himself occupied by “feverishly”³⁰⁰ pacing the stage in the manner of the standard circus clown “walkaround” (or a ring-spanning promenade designed to fill in time between circus acts). Fred Miller Robinson writes that, for Beckett, to walk is “to initiate an activity that defines the space around his characters as something other than void.”³⁰¹ Vladimir’s desire to fill in the outer void betokens his need to fill the inner void -- as an extension of the larger void -- with a temporary purpose in life: to walk or “go on.” Upon halting, Vladimir (as Pascal anticipates) lapses into a state of deep apprehension and dolour over his nothingness and meaninglessness, expressed in his own-life-reflecting song about an imaginary dog who will meet with a cruelly senseless death.

Reinforcing this imperative need to be in the “thought-diverting” company of others are the Cartesian-based-or-adapted notions (held by Beckett) that the senses as

instruments of self-validation are untrustworthy and ill-equipped to differentiate between dreaming and waking states, and that even if one accurately knows oneself to be thinking, it does not necessarily follow that one exists, or that one can know with certainty that one exists. These concerns are addressed in Vladimir's soliloquy on the impossibility of knowing whether he is wakefully living his days or merely dazedly participating in a dream being watched by someone more real and conscious than himself. Vladimir's doubts are tortuously compounded by Estragon's "bent" for dismissing his partner's remembrances of the previous day's activities as mere dreams or nightmares. The unanswerable question of how much of human experience is dreamed (or imagined) and how much is actually lived tacitly resounds throughout *Godot*.

The impossibility of "self-certifying" one's being is the second reason for relinquishing the torments of solitude in favour of human companionship. For we must now resort to reposing within our fellow human beings our final hope for physical (in the sense of warding off despair-induced suicide) and now ontological survival. The tramp-clown "theme" of being impelled to rely upon another to try to guarantee one's continuity would appear to inform this facet of *Godot's* rendering of the human condition. From the famous doctrine of Bishop Berkeley, "Esse est percipi" (or "to be is to be perceived"), Beckett appropriates the notion that, in the absence of their being a God in whose mind our being is harboured as an idea, we must turn to another witnessing subject, who in perceiving us as an objective entity, safeguards our continued existence. The fact that Beckett's characters often cling to this reasoning as a "last-ditch" strategem for saving themselves from the feeling that they are not *really* there bespeaks a kind of wishful thinking in the face of the increasing incidence of physical deterioration and mental "absenteeism" dogging perceived and perceiver

alike. *Godot* opens all the same with Estragon affirming that in Vladimir's absence, he too thought he was "gone for ever."³⁰² The seeming indubitableness of his existence is instantaneously restored by Vladimir's perception and reassuring acknowledgment of his partner's "being there" (i.e. "So there you are again."³⁰³). Because the early Beckett hero, in the manner of all tramp-clowns, finds himself at the mercy of the attentiveness of others to "go on," his behaviour often reflects his consequent need to have the "spotlight on him" – as we saw earlier in Estragon's and Charles Burke's tramp's flagrantly histrionic attempts to elicit sympathy (an intense form of attentiveness) for their boot troubles. This critical need to be the object of another's attention is similarly evidenced in the flamboyantly show-offish Pozzo's queries "Is everybody looking at me?"³⁰⁴ and "Is everybody listening?"³⁰⁵

Godot's dramatized probings into what enables people to "go on" with life touches centrally on how humankind has concocted – largely unconsciously – its own dubious, home-spun "remedy" (or consciousness-numbing "cover-up") for treating these universal, abiding and grave problems surrounding questions of identity and existence. The "home-spun" adjective is apt when it comes to characterizing this particular elixir vitae. In the case of a disjointed subjectivity that threatens the constancy of one's very being on a day-to-day basis, any kind of remedial action would have to take place practically at a *domestic* level for most people to have the necessary regular and dependable access to it. As *Godot* and subsequent plays like *Endgame*³⁰⁶ and *Happy Days* imply, the domestic or pseudo-matrimonial sphere *is* exactly where many of us have looked to execute these seemingly corrective measures. While preserving the traditional hobo-clown's alternating rhythms of being primordially alone and in the convention-ridden company of others, *Godot* transfers the role formerly played by an alms-giving society to one's partner in that most interminable, static and

indissoluble of relationships known as “the couple.”

Though parodically modelled on the generic husband/wife marriage “knot,” the archetypal couple which Vladimir and Estragon represent is sexless. In a relationship chiefly defined by its masculine/feminine principle-based breakdown of attributes, Vladimir plays the cerebral, practical and spiritual partner in charge of overseeing the well-being of the ostensibly more helpless Estragon, who enacts the part of the emotional, poetic and sensual partner. Interestingly, their underlyingly friendly bond affords a broad-enough range for non-biology-grounded role-playing for the couple to engage in parent/child and older/younger brother-like relations as well.³⁰⁷

Vladimir’s parentally singing his foetal-positioned friend to sleep with a lullaby, and his older-sibling-like offerings of “wise” advice to his (seemingly) less worldly-wise sidekick attests to the tramps’ capacity to cover what Claudia Clausius calls an array of “recognizable ‘types’ -- of behavior, of people [and] of thinking,”³⁰⁸ within their relationship. Their comically hybrid hobo-clown costumes are, if we recall, the vestimentary signs of this.

Though Beckett’s *clochards* demonstrate the ‘Tramp’'s knack for appropriating at will the identity of almost anyone, their multiple role-playing must at least aim at conforming to the original partitionings of personalities and roles within their relationship. The internal make-up of their bond appears to be a variant of the complex of interrelationships found in what have been referred to as Laurel and Hardy’s “domestic comedies.”³⁰⁹ Over the years, Stan and Ollie’s demi-tramp; have comically squared off in prototypical (asexual) husband/wife, big/small brother, domineering/submissive friend, parent/infant, father/son, and uncle/nephew pairings. Yet each time Laurel -- fed up with Hardy’s bullying -- suddenly steps out of the role of the passive, defenseless partner to retaliate with resolute, violent

counter-slugs of his own, our attention is brought back to the fact that these are stereotypical roles which the two choose, at least in part, to enact as a means of cementing their relationship. For Beckett, as for Laurel and Hardy, the cornerstone of the “significant” (in the sense of interdependent) human relationship is always one of a union of opposites -- even a patently contrived one. From this, we can infer that Pearce is correct in maintaining that “identity [in Beckett’s universe] requires definition, requires that one discover the differtia between himself and the rest of the world.”³¹⁰ Much of the appeal of the structural unit of the couple can therefore be traced to its meting out of oppositional though complementary roles, from which identities can be carved.

Having discounted societal positioning and gender as the determinant factors in who plays which part in *Waiting for Godot*, the roles that comprise the symbiotic couple are now more or less “up for grabs.”³¹¹ I say “more or less” because the tramps are *to a certain degree only* temperamentally predisposed to adopt the roles they do. MacGowran routs out what may be *the* true kernel of distinction between their respective needs, from which subsequent critical conceptions of Vladimir as the inherently “mental” one and Estragon as the inherently “emotional” or “bodily” one probably grew. He states: “Estragon has so many nightmares, and must have someone to talk to. And Vladimir could not bear to be alone, because he cannot find any answers to the questions he is seeking. He hopes Estragon will provide the answers.”³¹² The play’s larger focus, however, is on how socially pre-ordained (as ossified stereotypes) the tramps’ roles actually are -- and how little they have to do with genuine self-expression.

The “tattered” respectability of their tramp-clown derbies suggests, of course, the couple’s lingering conversancy with social conventions (including those that foster

Didi-and-Gogo-like groupings). Vladimir makes it clear in the opening scene that he and Estragon were once situated in respectable society, in what may have been Paris, judging from his allusion to their former access to the Eiffel Tower. Given that Vladimir and Estragon are literary, latin-spouting derelicts who still, as Fred Miller Robinson remarks, “ineffectually aspire to a thinking or reasoning that is allied to their aspiration to be ‘saved’ by Godot,”³¹³ left-over traces of intellectual thought and pretence also appear to be symbolically nesting (like tenacious fleas) in their hats. In essence, the parts of *Godot’s* tramp-clowns moored in what Estragon calls “All the dead voices”³¹⁴ re-echoing the social and intellectual indoctrination of the past, carry step-by-step instructions on how to go through the “proper” motions of living. Obvious trappings of this cultural inheritance are Estragon’s genteel “table manners” (he gingerly buffs his carrot before eating it³¹⁵), and the tramps’ deferential addressing of Pozzo and Lucky as “Mister” and “Sir”; these affectations derive from the ludicrously mannered and ingratiating comportment of the tramp-clown fully immersed in his polished and canny social role-playing. The *clochards’* conversations that bespeak what Clausius terms “ritualized thought and consciousness”³¹⁶ are also a significant part of this cultural legacy. She lists the “corpsed” worlds of “religion, language, love, logic, philosophy, [and] science”³¹⁷ as constituting Beckett’s principal targets for demythification.

One old “teaching” that is indelibly stamped on the personae as “diehard” rationalists is the idea that two people can play at the game of knowing or understanding (that which ultimately cannot be known or understood) better than one. Lucky’s “think” tirade -- parodying, in part, our Western world’s “unstanchable” thinktank of theories trying to demonstrate the existence of God through reason -- imputes many of its unsubstantiated and incomplete propositions to the joint labours of

paired men. References to the “public works”³¹⁸ of Puncher and Wattmann, Fartov and Belcher, Fulham and Clapham, Testew and Cunard and Steinman and Peterman abound. The biting satirical clown-names belonging to the first three teams of thinkers recall the clownish appellations of the Pozzo-Lucky and Didi-Gogo duos in particular, and comic duos in general. In examining what all clowning “double-acts” have in common, we discover that each comic pairing consists (as Scott Allen Nollen remarks) of two people “each of whom cannot function without the other,”³¹⁹ but who, as a unit, cannot actually accomplish anything together. Beckett translates this sprawling ineptitude in the outer world of practical affairs and adult responsibilities -- one so gloriously embodied in the bungling slapstick antics of Laurel and Hardy -- into predominantly intellectual terms.

This shift in focus is pointed to in the “think”’s highlighting of the tendency for ambitious, though bumbling, minds to unite in the two-man enterprise of theory-building. Man’s penchant for forming these “coalitions” suggests that the illusion of having pinned down the inexorably elusive is more easily achieved within the context of the credulity -- however fleeting -- and complicity of two minds, each reassuringly reinforcing the other in its beliefs. (Who *hasn’t* experienced that fugitive sense of relief and intellectual infallibility upon hearing a colleague or mate say “exactly” in response to something we’ve said? Vladimir and Estragon use this line frequently with each other, though ironically only in reply to the most strikingly incorrect or vague of statements). The fact that Lucky -- as over-intellectualized, brain-scrambled Man -- parrots snippets of the celebrated theories of these abstract-minded twosomes indicates that their empirically-unconfirmed suppositions have become *our* unquestioned convictions. Beckett’s point is that two imaginations fully committed to their conspiracy of dissimulation can elaborate on the content of a surface

lie until its accrual of corroborating or merely graphic detail seems ample proof of its own truth.

The rhetorical collaborations of the Puncher-Wattmann duo are a perfect example of this. Their biographical account of “a personal God”³²⁰ consists of a nine-attribute “pile-up” of contradictory details which, under the influence of Lucky’s (i.e. Intellectual Man’s) “telegraphic” memory and delivery, read like the “hard” data of an important telegram. The pair’s elaborate claims -- including the detail of their divinity’s white beard -- have apparently gained sufficient credence and currency in the minds of posterity to induce Vladimir to ask the messenger boy whether the beard of *his* personal “God” or Saviour (i.e. Godot) is “Fair or . . . black?”³²¹ The boy, also passively “weaned” on Western mythologies, predictably replies that he thinks that it is white. It is significant that the only character (in a play “packed” with liars) who is accused *in full* of telling “a pack of lies”³²² is the messenger boy. His vulnerability in *not* having a partner to back up and/or expand on his allegations of inhabiting the same heathscape as the tramps, leaves him open to a hostile attack on “his word.”

In the universal quest for inner essence and a substantiation of one’s existence, this two-person system for illusorily “knowing the unknowable” assumes its proper social form in the institutionalized couple.³²³ As an ideological hand-me-down rustling us into teams almost as soon as we could talk -- like Estragon and Vladimir, Pozzo and Lucky have been together for as long as they can remember -- “the couple” affords its members a means, albeit illusory, of self-invention or self-conceptualization. Now the mere opportunity to (role-)play the same parts over and over with a corroborating partner becomes, not so much a means to an end (such as a free meal), as a tirelessly sought after end-in-itself. “Proper decorum” now means keeping strictly within the bounds of one’s persona(s) within the pairing; for neither

partner can play unless the other agrees to play back, or “return the ball,”³²⁴ as Vladimir calls it. In having Vladimir repeatedly ask Estragon why he keeps coming back to him even though Estragon “feels better alone,”³²⁵ Beckett makes the point that the tramps *do* keep returning, if not exactly to each other, then to the same comforting routines day after day, beginning with the query into Estragon’s beatings. As tedious as the question and entirely predicable answer (sometimes already contained in the question) may be, each “experiences” himself as either protectively solicitous or pitifully defenceless. In time, verbalisms are transubstantiated into putative “realities.” For Beckett, just having the chance to reprise a role until it appears to take on a life or reality of its own – as the actor’s *own* pre-existing fixed identity or “personality” – justifies, in part, one’s voluntary involvement in *any* relationship of marked interdependence, “no matter how awful.”³²⁶

While this dependence, as Lyons notes, ensnares us in forms of habitual behaviour from which it is difficult to break free,³²⁷ it also promotes the kind of psychological inseparability between partners (who each act as a witness to the other’s existence) that is required to “pull off” the daily impression of being alive. As Estragon exclaims during the sequence in which Vladimir parentally helps him on with his boots, “We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?”³²⁸ This simulacrum of being depends on having at one’s disposal a sprawling repertoire of activities (like the above one) that necessarily involve two people. That “identity [has] to be rehearsed into being,”³²⁹ as Blau puts it, and existence diligently “worked at” daily underscores the Beckett protagonist’s even more elemental need to prove to himself that he even *has* a self to keep alive, before going about the usual tramp business of ministering to the basic physical and occasionally emotional wants of this self.

Though the Beckett personae's "playfulness" serves ends different from those of the traditional tramp-clown, it retains the same undertones of seriousness that distinguish the latter's gaming from the solely recreational, "fun" forms of make-believe or "unserious mimicry"³³⁰ that Erving Goffman describes in *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Citing the examples of two boxers facetiously pretending to exchange blows for the camera, or two unacquainted individuals (both travelling in different trains going in opposite directions) suddenly waving familiarly as they pass each other, Goffman characterizes these capricious "switchings into playfulness"³³¹ as done when "free of pressing needs"³³² and posing only a "relatively brief intrusion"³³³ on actual life. Apprehended by Beckett as "a game in order to survive,"³³⁴ *Godot's* "urgent" brand of pretence-laden interaction (based on the tramp-clown's life-sustaining forays into society) spans the vast majority of time spent with one's partner. Like the standard tramp-actor's "perform-a-day" existence, the "scripted" lives of *Godot's* characters -- which collectively read like "an improvised text that [has gotten] fixed"³³⁵ -- repudiate the commonsensical assumption that "play" is an ideal or illusory sphere of imaginative activity wholly distinct from ordinary or "real" life. Johan Huizinga reiterates this culturally entrenched and largely unscrutinized assumption in his comprehensive and oft-quoted *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*.

In almost caustic response to those who would distinguish play -- with its ability to impart among its participants "the feeling of being 'apart together' in an exceptional situation, of sharing the world and rejecting the usual norms"³³⁶ -- from actual life, *Godot* demonstrates at every "turn" that ordinary life is indeed one elaborate, highly exclusive, and even bizarre exercise in pretending, along with at least one other willing player, to be what we are not so as to escape being the "nobody" that we are.

Echoes of Chaplin's committed circumvention of his own haunting nothingness reverberate here. The play's confounding of fact and fiction remains substantially indebted to the anti-naturalistic world of Chaplin's early cinema, where inner and outer life interpenetrate to the extent that both the envisioned and the actual, the invisible and the visible, and the surreal and the commonplace become real -- or unreal -- in equal shares.³³⁷

Kennedy sees "the fusion of ordinary and extraordinary elements"³³⁸ in *Godot's* paired characters as contributing to each couple's comprehensibility and status-quo "normalcy" on the one hand, and complete incomprehensibility and disturbing strangeness on the other hand.³³⁹ Kennedy, for instance, describes Pozzo as "both landlord and 'Lord of the Void,' a petty but conceited squire . . . gradually heightened to suggest the worst of all tyrants: one who owns the mind of his servile servant, and totally dehumanizes him."³⁴⁰ Social positions like that of landowner and serf are traditionally seen as inexorable "givens" in life. But when extraneous, fanciful and especially grotesque elaborations on social roles and relations -- like those fuelled by Pozzo's megalomania and sadism -- are phased in which we are free to resist but instead choose to "play" along with (like Lucky), most, if not all, of the relationship is revealed as being freely embraced by both parties. Significantly, the central defining factor of "play" or make-believe is that it is *voluntarily* enacted.³⁴¹ This is especially evident when Lucky persists in Act II at playing the oppressed slave to a now blind and largely impotent master, going so far as retrieving for Pozzo the whip with which he is lashed (the implication being that fidelity to one duties yields a "mock" purpose in life).

For Beckett, consciousness -- as something "social" *and* enchained to our inner compulsions -- has invented almost everything that we consider "real" and a part of

quotidian life, including all institutionalized forms of social organization and ritual. Apart from our sudden “acquaintances” with nothingness, any alternative dimension of experience outside this cosmic “play” can only lie in our being conscious of the seminal operations of consciousness, and experiencing the emotions that such awareness evokes. This is the natural habitat of the self-reflexive tramp-clown, who recognizes his own necessary complicity in humanity’s grand-scale posturing.

The fact that Vladimir and Estragon opt for the more stationary or sedentary couple paradigm through which to mould identities for themselves over that of the more itinerant, action-oriented master/slave one represented by Pozzo and Lucky, relates to their common status as idle “waiters” for the coming of Godot. As Gerhard Hauck remarks, “waiting is doing nothing, and man reduced to waiting is reduced to non-action.”³⁴² The *clochards’* shared condition leads to their common need to engage in that one relatively painless “non-action” known to fill up busily and even disguise a whole lifetime of doing nothing: talking. The conditions conducive to producing this life and ultimately theatre-sustaining dialogue translate into the conjoining of ostensibly temperamentally-contrasting interlocutors who are able to play opposite (and the opposite of) one another in the kind of quasi-conjugal pairing seen in the Estragon-Vladimir union. In having agreed mostly to disagree, the *clochards* paradoxically seal the illusion of a sustained connection between them through their seemingly endless flow of interlocking words and harmonious conversational rhythms. (The general rule for Beckett’s early drama is that while there is a finite number of things that can be agreed upon, there is an infinite number of things that can be disagreed upon.) But as the tramps, as Kennedy states, “go on ‘making words’ together as . . . a couple might make love,”³⁴³ we are reminded that costume (as an index of the characters’ underlying disconnectedness from each other) can transmit a meaning in

striking counterpoint to that conveyed by words alone. Forever lurking behind language, which Beckett perceives as a dead habit,³⁴⁴ is the racking sense of each character's irremediable isolation and unknowability.

If habit amounts to an intricate superstructure of social and intellectual decorum overlaying the inner chaos of being, then language (as Richard Coe writes) forms "that impenetrable barrier . . . which forever keeps us from knowing who we are, what we are."³⁴⁵ In other words, as a false stabilizer of identity, language shields us from the knowledge that we are essentially unknowable. *Godot* foregrounds language's general inability to express *this* truth about ourselves by repeatedly casting it in the exaggeratedly mechanical cadences of the "canter,"³⁴⁶ as Estragon astutely dubs it. As an easy gallop of interlocution whose ritualized automatism is brought into even sharper relief by the fact that the homonymic "cantor" signifies a chanter of liturgical song, the "canter" of Estragon and Vladimir recalls (among other things) the "cant" or whine of beggars or vagrants. This "cant" denotes the standard "line," often plaintive and/or pleading in tone, used by the mendicant or tramp on passersby to inveigle handouts from them. *Godot's* modified "two-man" usage of cant-like dialogue accents the automatic "singsong" quality of words born out of fraudulent ends. This paradoxical yoking of the manipulative with the mindless can only highlight language's failure to express "reality," as the *clochards'* cantering hymn to their being "happy" individuals illustrates:

VLADIMIR: You must be happy too, deep down, if you only knew it.
 ESTRAGON: Happy about what?
 VLADIMIR: To be back with me again.
 ESTRAGON: Would you say so?
 VLADIMIR: Say you are, even if it's not true.
 ESTRAGON: What am I to say?
 VLADIMIR: Say, I am happy.
 ESTRAGON: I am happy.

VLADIMIR: So am I.
 ESTRAGON: So am I.
 VLADIMIR: We are happy.
 ESTRAGON: We are happy. (*Silence.*) What do we do now, now that we are happy?
 VLADIMIR: Wait for Godot. (*Estragon groans. Silence.*)³⁴⁷

In addition to the successive repetitions of the word “say,” which establish the tramps’ professions of happiness as mere rhetoric, Beckett precedes this dialogue with a scene in Act I in which Estragon contradictorily admits to being ‘unhappy’ for as long as he can remember. But as culturally received words with even less “definition” than the characters themselves (both Vladimir and the messenger boy avow to not even knowing themselves well enough to ascertain whether they are unhappy), “happiness” and “unhappiness” -- and their presence or absence in the lives of the personae -- become impossible to gauge. Any absolute statement on the subject, especially one for which there is the *least* textual evidence (i.e. the affirmation of happiness), can therefore only be reality-falsifying.

Vladimir’s attempts to coax Estragon into testifying to their happiness together suggest the traditional “tramp-clown” aptitude for swindling, or manipulatively extracting from another that which one needs to have or hear, in this case, some definite or specific fact about oneself and/or one’s companion.³⁴⁸ The canter form of dialogue reproduced in the foregoing passage offers the most fertile stamping-ground for the kind of “high-pressure,” rapid-fire hammering out of deceptions that can be practiced by *and on* two people partaking of the same needed illusion. The quoted excerpt indeed suggests that Vladimir and Estragon are willing to be duped by their own trickeries. In actuality, the quest for self-knowledge through words that are not our own, that add up to a voice which (as the Unnamable states) “. . . issues from me, . . . fills me, . . . clamours against my walls, [yet] it is not mine, I can’t stop it . . . from

tearing me, racking me, assailing me,"³⁴⁹ leads us even *farther* away from gaining any insight into the nature of the inner self, since it represents other people's "ancient," imprecise attempts to define something that has never been experienced by them. The presence of a garrulous "other" -- as a forceful medium through which society continues to disseminate and imprint upon us its tired lies -- ultimately multiplies the obstacles that stand in the way of our simply "being ourselves," the sovereign prerequisite for "knowing" ourselves. For paradoxically, we are "ourselves" when we are that "no one at all" who exists outside of language, in the stillness of the silence.

Besides the "canters," to which I will return in my analysis of the influence of music-hall and vaudeville cross-talk on *Waiting for Godot*, there are at least three other ways in which the play amplifies the overtones of factitiousness already extant in each couple's personal conventions of interaction. The first pertains to the tramps' forgetfulness, and the relative freedom of movement that exists outside of the recollection of and subsequent conformity to cultural expectations. As Blau maintains: "Unimpeded by custom, form, tradition, ceremony, canon, and code, all the restrictive appurtenances of the past, behavior becomes vital, improvisational, with a childlike sense of wonder, a thing unto itself."³⁵⁰ Though still a part of Vladimir and Estragon's regimen of daily habits, these graceful, highly stylized modes of physical interaction comprise, in large part, the co-participant scripted, and more enjoyable aspect of their bond. Kalb recounts how "At one point [the actors in the 1975 German Schiller Theatre production] walk arm in arm across the vast stage, which takes at least fifteen seconds, keeping in perfect step the whole time, only to turn around when they reach the other side and return."³⁵¹ He continues: "And at another point Bollman [who plays Estragon] travels toward Wigger [as Vladimir] by means of a standing broad

jump, after which they clasp hands and broad jump together in another direction.”³⁵² Walter D. Asmus’s comic account of the fallen tramps’ intricate joint efforts to hoist themselves off the ground³⁵³ similarly underscores how these often symmetrical and/or synchronized movements act as a “shared code”³⁵⁴ with which the tramps entertain each other.

These ‘balletic’ motions, as Beckett calls them, borrow heavily from the “transparent” theatricality of Chaplin’s greatest bits of pantomime, wherein, as American film theorist Michael Roemer writes, “action resolves into dance, and movement is so harmonized that it comes close to music.”³⁵⁵ These “solo ballets”³⁵⁶ -- which appear in the rhythmic milk shake-mixing sequence in *The Rink* (1916) and the wresting-move “dance” with ‘Charlie’'s masseur in *The Cure* (1917) -- reflect the ‘Little Fellow’'s predilection for transmuting any situation into a game. Beckett has admitted to wanting a “Chaplinesque”³⁵⁷ *Godot*, in the sense in which Esslin applies the term to the aforementioned Bollman/Wigger production; for Esslin, its masterly use of *verfremdet* or “alienation effect” acting makes it “wholly Chaplinesque in concept.”³⁵⁸ Beckett would also have been attracted to Chaplin’s early films for the kinesthetic enjoyment that is derived both from watching and (from the point-of-view of the frolicsome tramp-hero) performing in them. Both qualities appear to have found their way into *Godot*, with its *clochard*-characters who take a kindred pleasure in their choreographed “quicksteps,” as do their audiences.

By calling attention to their unmistakable status as “play,” these Chaplinesque motions of life-affirming friendship obliquely direct our attention onto the “play” motif meandering through the whole of their relationship, including the more wearisome and even “abusive” parts.³⁵⁹ For in the end, *Godot*’s more rhythmic interludes of childlike gaming ultimately appear not *that* significantly different from

the day's worth of back-and-forth "adult" games: the tramps' childish bickering, their juvenile quibbling over the exact meaning of inexact words (i.e. "nightfall," "friend"), their infantile suggestions to part ways when one can't get his way, etc. As with the films of Chaplin, it is the body that offers the truest possible expression of the "make-believe" character of so much of daily life.

For those who still haven't figured out that the Vladimir-Estragon connection is forged mainly through a series of clichéd social gestures (each promoting an apocryphal sense of a mutually-attentive "togetherness"), Beckett has his vagabond-clowns virtually spell out the fact in what becomes his second method of foregrounding the artifice pervading human relations. Bequeathing the traditional tramp-clown's awareness of the necessity of being a versatile posturer in his own life onto *Godot's* tramps, the playwright has Estragon repeatedly announce the pair's latest stratagem for playing at being "a couple." The self-conscious commentaries that begin with "That's the idea, let's . . ." and variously propose making a little conversation, contradicting each other, asking each other questions, abusing each other, making up, etc., seriously undermine the plausibility and authenticity of the familiarly "domestic," everyday scenes before us. Estragon's terrible need to preserve his and his companion's *outward appearance* of closeness -- which is perhaps the best we can hope for from any longstanding partnership -- is movingly expressed at the start of Act II. Rebuffing Vladimir's foredoomed attempts to establish a "meeting of minds" with him through a tactical broaching of one of Estragon's favourite subjects (i.e. his pitiful daily beatings), the sullen Estragon exclaims, "Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me!"³⁶⁰ Yet even this elemental need to stave off the dread reality and feeling of being alone with one's nothingness cannot be satisfied indefinitely.

Roemer has ultimately concluded that Chaplin's 'Tramp' is a man "dreaming of some simple happiness that is forever out of reach."³⁶¹ Willeford situates his hapless fate within the context of the inevitable downfall of all silent film clowns, whose "fool-ish" natures prevail over the waggery of social pretense to reinstate their primal status as outsiders.³⁶² Beckett's personae are also inveterate re-activators of the first term of in each of Fred Miller Robinson's aforementioned dialectics of being (i.e. reality/fantasy, limitation/ambition and individual/collective). Like the 'Little Fellow,' *Godot's* vagrant-clowns are first and always tramp-outcasts who, even in the company of each other, repeatedly find themselves ensnared in the miseries of Pascal's solitary man. Vladimir intimates the inevitability of and suffering inherent in being cast back into one's solitude, when he greets Estragon in Act II with ". . . (*Joyous.*) There you are again . . . (*Indifferent.*) There we are again . . . (*Gloomy.*) There I am again."³⁶³ In "Figures of Golgotha: Beckett's Pinioned People," Mary Bryden examines how the "complicated and arbitrary intimac[ies]"³⁶⁴ in Beckett's early drama fail to offer their participants consistent levels of comfort and succour, since "supportiveness is not a given in this relationship."³⁶⁵ She writes that dealing with difficulties of their own, the "attending" partners are inclined "to be spasmodic in attendance and/or laconic or ineffective in bringing assuagement."³⁶⁶ While Vladimir as the couple's self-appointed senior partner is the obvious attendant (or comforter) figure in Bryden's sufferer/attendant equation, Estragon is also *his* attendant in that he is expected to minister to Vladimir's need to play the supportive role by playing the distressed partner in plain need of help.

Godot repeatedly draws our attention back to the fact that the tramps are not *really* there for each other *that* often. Vladimir's refusals to hear Estragon's nightmares, and Estragon's unwillingness to take Vladimir's abstract theological debates seriously (a

stance in conflict with his pseudo-wifely duties as supportive “sounding-board”) make this reality obvious. Moreover, each tramp must resort to yelling “Help me!”³⁶⁷ to his unresponsive “helpmate” in what is likely an abridged carry-over of the “Why don’t you do something to *help* me?”³⁶⁸ tag-line from the talkies of Laurel and Hardy. Not coincidentally, this similarly “needy” twosome is notorious for being unable to aid each other in any sustained way.³⁶⁹ Vladimir’s proclamation at the close of Act II that “The air is full of our cries”³⁷⁰ pertains as much to the human being’s deep, oftentimes articulated sense of abandonment by his fellow man as by the absent Godot, whose “truant” ways vis-à-vis his devotees are intermittently replicated in the play in man’s relations with his own kind. Durgnat’s assertion that “comedy is based on contradiction as much as on consistency”³⁷¹ reassures us, however, that even the disconcerting vicissitudes inherent within relationships can yield enough humour to enable those *outside* of them to weather the “improprieties.” Yet, unlike *Godot*’s audiences, the tramps find in these small treacheries precious little to be amused by. In contrast to the Laurel and Hardy duo, they react with genuine anger and pain expressive of the tragic vision of life.

The “difficulties” alluded to by Bryden that prevent the *clochards* from fulfilling the terms of their original arrangement of mutual assistance consist by and large of unexpected visitations from each character’s complex of unruly selves (each harbouring its own desires). Irrepressibly putting in “regular” appearances of their own, they account for each tramp’s “selfish” obsession with and pursuit of personal needs inimical to his relationship with another. The “interloping” instabilities of this splintered inner self (or selves) account for what Worth refers to as the “Contradictions, [and] disconcerting twists and turns [that] are part of Beckett’s technique for maintaining a suggestive ambiguity about the connectedness or otherwise

of the separate personae and of the pairs.”³⁷² Vladimir and Estragon’s frequent “playings against type” constitute the third way in which Beckett unmask the affected portion of their bond. This essentially asocial side of the tramps corresponds with startling exactitude to the traditional hobo-clown’s fundamentally “cloddish” nature, which proves too unpredictable and ungovernable to be circumscribed for any length of time by established notions of proper conduct. *Godot*’s most consistent method of dramatizing Vladimir and Estragon’s propensity for “resum[ing] the skull”³⁷³ (as Lucky phrases it), or the “reckless” solipsism of subjectivity, lies in their hat and boot fiddlings. Here rapt excavations of objects symbolize the tramps’ respective delvings into private fixations. The part of Vladimir that compulsively craves intellectual certainty is expressed in his hat (as an emblem of knowledge) probings, while Estragon’s intense preoccupation with bodily discomfort is dramatized through his boot rummagings.

This “self-centred” stage business enables each tramp to tune out to everything and *everyone* around him in a manner reminiscent of the early Beckett hero Murphy’s desertion of the “big world”³⁷⁴ in favour of “the little”³⁷⁵ one of his mind. During these times, each partner can hardly be said to be acting as a witness to *anyone*. Even Pozzo must resort to cracking his whip loudly to divert the *clochards* attention away from their engrossing “accessories,” and onto the speech he is in the process of delivering. The tramps’ frequent habit of pursuing disparate, obsessive trains of thought within conversations in which neither interlocutor registers the “contributions” of the other also comes perilously close to depriving each of the impression of existence.³⁷⁶ Other instances in which the characters neglect to take into account each other’s needs -- and hence hew to their self-assigned social roles -- include Vladimir’s selfish refusals to let Estragon slip into (the sometimes)

comforting oblivion of sleep due to that intractable part of his nature that remains fearful at the prospect of being left alone. Estragon, conversely, displays a “transgressive” autonomy in preferring on several occasions to retire to his mound to pass the time sleeping or toying with his footwear rather than speak to (the temporarily unneeded) Vladimir.

Beckett “uneasily” integrates these multifarious and sometimes warring facets of inner being into personae who are “sketchy” at best. But the even more pathological divisiveness of this schizoid-like condition is outlined in Bair’s brief description of the 1935 Tavistock lecture that made such a lasting impression on Beckett. There, she states, “[Psychologist Carl] Jung spoke of the complexes that form personalities of themselves, appear as visions and speak in voices which are as the voices of real, definite people.”³⁷⁷ According to Bair, these concepts resurface in Beckett’s trilogy of novels as “characters [who] speak with different voices, [and] sometimes assume different names and identities. . . .”³⁷⁸ *Waiting for Godot* transposes these themes – with a decidedly “lighter” touch – into characters with multiple names who are purported to hear imaginary voices (as when Vladimir hears distant shouts unheard by anyone else), have ‘visions’ (as when Estragon imagines himself ‘surrounded’ by adversaries) and, finally, undergo spontaneous and unconscious tonal changes of voice.

As evidence for this last point, the habitually “manly” Vladimir may be heard commencing his solitary singing of Act II in an unusually high voice, signalling his alarm at confronting his own solitude. His own Estragon-like emotionalism, evinced as well in his panic-attack-like response (i.e. “Don’t leave me! They’ll kill me!”³⁷⁹) to Estragon’s threat of leaving him, is, in the end, too thinly disguised to prevent G. C. Barnard from concluding: “Vladimir is more emotional, more easily hurt, and more dependent on friendship than is Estragon.”³⁸⁰ Mi-yae Kim even detects an

undercurrent of anti-intellectualism in Vladimir. In "The Use of Stage-Comedy in *Waiting for Godot* and *The Bald Soprano*," Kim remarks that Vladimir, in fact, does *not* like to think, as we see in his refusal even to address Estragon's thoughtful question about what they should be repenting, a query that might inspire in him the thought that their punishment is wholly unmerited.³⁸¹

For his part, Estragon usurps Vladimir's role as the sententious partner by becoming "*aphoristic for once*,"³⁸² pronouncing in the coolly measured cadences of authority that all mankind is born mad -- a declamation (and role-reversal) to which Vladimir predictably objects. Alice and Kenneth Hamilton also discern an ambiguity within Estragon's nature that challenges the customary assumption of his intellectual subordination to Vladimir. In comparing himself to Christ -- and implying that life is a slow crucifixion -- they judge Estragon to be the more clear-visioned, while the conventionally pious Vladimir is deemed "self-deceived."³⁸³ MacGowran alludes to how the rigid -- and quite superficial -- distinctions of temperament between the tramps break down under closer scrutiny:

I think sometimes the roles are reversed. I think Estragon is the one who has read and known everything and thrown it away and become completely cynical. Vladimir, who appears to be the brighter of the two, is in fact the half-schooled one, madly trying to find out answers and pestering Estragon the whole time. Otherwise, Estragon couldn't quote Shelley as he does and misquote him deliberately.³⁸⁴

In her article, "The Transformational Grammar of Gender in Beckett's Drama," Shari Benstock advises against effecting "a simple turning of the tables"³⁸⁵ when charting Beckett's less-than-black-and-white reversals of cultural expectations regarding the nature of male/female relations within the marital couple. Her analysis of the character of Winnie in *Happy Days* reveals that "Winnie speaks [in the idiom of the domestic] from her position as female and wife, but her ['overwhelmingly']

philosophic] questions and comments dislodge the assumptions that inform that positioning.”³⁸⁶ Benstock’s remarks alert us to the fact that Beckett’s paired people are a complex admixture of predictable and unpredictable behavior, never one thing or the other. As such, we must resist the counter-temptation to view Estragon as the astute one, and Vladimir the obtuse one. For as Bennett Simon declares, “The self portrayed in Beckett is at once punning, clever, reconditely erudite, and stupid, retarded, virtually incapable of connected logical and symbolic thought.”³⁸⁷ This aspect of Beckett’s characters hails from Chaplin’s rendition of the tramp-actor, whose internalized contradictions are now deepened to embrace the polarities of human nature. Nowhere is the ‘Tramp’³⁸⁸’s many-sidedness more apparent than in William F. Fry, Jr.’s comparison of Chaplin’s own paradoxical nature to that of his bow-legged film creation. Each, Fry states, has been seen

as being brilliant, and naïve; as compassionate, and cruel; as sensitive, and selfish; as generous, and penurious; as comical, and boring; as spontaneous, and compulsive; as empathetic, and sadistic; as playful, and carefully and methodically organized; as humanistic, and cynically tough; as self-sacrificing, and self-serving; as sweet, and bitter; as jaunty, and mordant; as instinctively ingenious and inventive, and as labored, agonizedly thinking in depth and with deliberation.³⁸⁸

Not surprisingly, Cohn’s own detailing in *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut* of the antipodal traits that make up each tramp closely resembles Fry’s cubistic portrait of Chaplin/Charlie.³⁸⁹

In perusing the tramp-clown profiles of both writers, we are struck by the fact that the clear-cut dualisms aspired to by the interdependent couple are to be found less in the union than in the individual members themselves. It is Vladimir and Estragon’s deep-seated interchangeability in terms of their “twin” paradoxical natures that effects the slow disintegration of a compact founded on each partner’s ability to tell

himself apart from the other. Precise identities crystallized through habit and the forms it assumes repeatedly implode back into the reality of our ignorance of the essence of things. The sum total of what at least one tramp has fathomed about himself (and his shadowing intimate) shrinks down to Estragon's blunt realization that "It's never the same pus from one second to the next."³⁹⁰ The unceasing flux of self, as of life, keeps Pozzo from understanding Lucky (and why he doesn't put down his bags), and Estragon from including Vladimir in his prayers for salvation in a spirit of rank disregard for the latter in his unhelpful mode. Immediately preceding this, Vladimir imparts less-than-salutary counsel: after suggesting that the single-leg-balancing Estragon close his eyes (to the physical world) to facilitate spiritual communion with God, Estragon "staggers worse,"³⁹¹ in effect, keeping his concentration more rivetted on proper contact with the ground than with God. The tramps' uncircumventable separateness would seem to imply that, despite their acute aversion to solitary living, they do *not* belong together. Beckett may have arrived at this disconcerting conclusion with some help from Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), which similarly suggests that while human life is untenable on one's own, "human society and human existence [remain] mutually exclusive."³⁹²

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(ii) Passing the Time with *Godot's* Double-Acts

As always with Beckett, the contrapuntal recognition that Vladimir and Estragon *do* belong together follows close on the heels of any indications to the contrary, as I will now demonstrate. The sum of *both* realizations generates, in effect, a more complex

and comprehensive truth about the human condition: that while we are profoundly separate from our fellow human beings, we are also joined in an equally profound sense of “oneness” with them.

We have seen how Vladimir and Estragon are somewhat justified in wanting to separate from one another since life together is often unsatisfactory for both of them. But an equally forceful thematic cross-current runs through *Godot* that suggests that as difficult as it is for the tramps to stay unified, it is still more difficult, if not impossible, for them to part. This reality is reinforced by the fact that their relationship is an essentially *unchanging* one in that neither partner actively initiates any movement towards permanent separation. This interpersonal stasis reflects Beckett's expressly stated conviction that Vladimir and Estragon are, in fact, inseparable.³⁹³ Beckett's mobilization of various components of the tramp-clown tradition only goes so far as alluding to the extreme inadvisability of their parting ways. The author must now turn to new theatrical forms that suggest the *impossibility* of the characters' leading lives independently of one another.

To dramatize concretely the idea that neither of the paired personae can exist without the other, Beckett presents *Godot* as a kind of attenuated monodrama in which the members of each couple, as Kern explains, can be construed as “the mirror reflection of a ‘one’ . . . perhaps two aspects of the same individual, in motion and at rest.”³⁹⁴ While preserving monodrama's unified and interdependent character relationships, the play features characters who, as one half of a divided self, sporadically exchange “parts” while the original terms of the single self's many bifurcations (another departure from orthodox monodrama) remain intact. Convincing testimony of *Godot*'s refusal to be synecdochically reduced to any one set of contrasting terms lies with the critics, who cannot agree on exactly what the fundamental halves of

the “split self” are. This in itself indicates that the play steers clear of the imposition of any allegorical “truths” that would grossly limit each character to meaning only one thing, or representing only one principle. I have already demonstrated how each personae’s innate unfixity of inner self precludes this possibility. Critical thought on the nature of the basic divisions within Beckettian man nevertheless argues in favour of either a Cartesian bifurcation into mind (or soul) and body, or a more psychological, personality-based division. Proponents of this second view have represented the *clochards* as imagination and intellect,³⁹⁵ the withdrawn inner and the worldly pseudo-self,³⁹⁶ the power of unconsciousness and the impotence of consciousness,³⁹⁷ and the ego and id,³⁹⁸ to cite just a few examples.

Both critical factions concur that though the constituent selves are made known to each other through an interrelationship that is at times incomprehensible, ambivalent, downright belligerent or even momentarily ruptured, they *do* belong together, in that they co-exist within the same skull³⁹⁹ or human entity. But proof of the paired personae’s belonging together does not end here. Rather, it carries over to our recognition as viewers or readers of *Godot* that they *do* have their moments of working surprising well together at achieving a common end. It is these instances of “rhythmic” harmony between the monodramatic-like aspects of the split self that I will focus on in this portion of my thesis, for they constitute the kind of interconnectedness that sustains a human life whose viability depends upon the “smoothly” interactional co-existence of *all* its vital parts. (As in life, different sides of ourselves must be brought into play to temper the pathological and often destructive or self-destructive extremities of thought and behavior found in the individual with the virtually “one-sided” nature.) We must remember that what appears on Beckett’s essentialist stage is no less than what is absolutely needed to carry on in an inscrutable

universe characterized by the omnipresence of suffering and death. *Godot's* vision of life as a faltering performance with occasional flickers of comic brilliance is not so much a reform-demanding critique of the status quo, as a grave acceptance of the fact that it *must* be so.

In order to honour both the play's metaphor of life as performance *and* its suggestively monodramatic framework of character development, Beckett naturally gravitates to the tradition of the "double-act" of the music-hall, circus clowns and early screen "talkies." T. G. A. Nelson traces the origins of the comic two-act to the single figure of the fool, in whom resides the contrasting traits of "dignity and indignity, earthiness and sacredness, [and] wisdom and folly."⁴⁰⁰ He remarks that "The strain involved in maintaining the paradoxical character of the fool often results in a splitting of the archetypal figure,"⁴⁰¹ from which issues the archetypal couple who collectively represents spirit and body.⁴⁰² The partnerships of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Lear and his Fool, and Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Fin are classic instances of this phenomenon. The more simplified, modern-day descendants of these early fool pairings are found in the contrasting "slapstick" twosomes of vaudeville, circus clownery and early film comedy. Though late nineteenth and twentieth-century clown acts (particularly of the circus) have tended to supplant the original spirit/body split with a culture/anticulture or nature bisection of self, Bouissac reminds us that two clowns are free to represent *any* kind of interactional situation providing they acquire the appropriate accoutrements and mannerisms for illuminating the parts they are playing.⁴⁰³ It is the double-act's infinite capacity for externalizing through its interpersonal dynamics all possible areas of *internalized* discord and harmony within the human being that makes it (for Beckett) the ideal domain for dramatizing the complex connections existing between our many contrasting

sides.

The live double-act's past associations with filling in time between the "legitimate" or serious acts of either the early nineteenth-century French opera⁴⁰⁴ or the nineteenth-century English circus⁴⁰⁵ also appeal to Beckett's interest in our more successful methods of "time-passing" (an interest mirrored in Vladimir's own tendency to single out a particularly effective episode of time-passing). As a prelude to "official" events that have been delayed, this diverting interplay between seemingly mismatched "halves" becomes a vital weapon against boredom should we discover that the next "big event" (like the advent of Godot or the next leg of a long journey) has been deferred indefinitely. In loosely monodramatic terms, Beckett implies that this knack for keeping ourselves amused or distracted by granting our different sides free reign with which to pursue their needs is a survival skill that keeps the torments of human life at a bearable distance. In this regard, *Waiting for Godot* anticipates the lonelier encounters between various versions or facets of the self-involved self dramatized in *Krapp's Last Tape* and (the figure of Winnie in) *Happy Days*.

Even on a first viewing, *Godot's* archetypal couples suggest performing comic duos. On the immediate level of physical appearance, each couple baldly incorporates within it the fat/thin and/or short/tall visual contrasts commonly found in the traditional double-acts of stage and screen. Consequently, Vladimir is characteristically tall and lean, while Estragon is short and stout. The original French manuscript of *Godot* also features a "very large"⁴⁰⁶ Pozzo and small Lucky. Because the unified twosome of popular comedy also features monodramatic-like characters whose destinies are interrelated and who cannot exist outside of the context of their partnership, it becomes for Beckett the natural vehicle through which to convey his personae's own deep-rooted inseparability.

The matrix of the traditional two-act also serves as the model for the delicate balance of interrelational stasis and tension found in *Godot's* twosomes. As J. P. Lebel observes of the comic character, "His rapport with the world, dynamic as it may be, once established is established forever; he has no psychological development."⁴⁰⁷ He adds that "unlike the dramatic character, he is not in a state of crisis, or, rather, he is in a perpetual state of crisis."⁴⁰⁸ In the context of the double-act, the 'world' comes to include the comic character's partner, with whom he remains in an almost incessant, though meticulously perfected, state of conflict. This artful management of complex and/or chaotic affairs frequently extends to the rhythmic aspect of their interactions as well, the performers almost decorously taking turns perpetuating their foolery. The traditional comic duo's capacity for revealing the unity that paradoxically exists at the heart of all interrelational divisiveness returns us to Beckett's own designs for *Godot*. By setting his paired personae's interplay in the mould of the two-act, their "back and forth" routines reach -- to varying degrees of success -- a level of well-rehearsed smoothness and virtuoso timing that enables us to apprehend the two partners' fundamental oneness. At these times, we feel that the Pozzo and Lucky, and especially Vladimir and Estragon "halves" of the split self, are truly meant to be together.

Given the radically disparate types of relations embodied in the Didi/Gogo and Pozzo/Lucky pairings, each finds its comic expression in a different kind of two-act. The equality or inequality of roles that exists within the couples in their human-based lives as either tramps or master and slave must be mirrored in their simultaneous roles as paired performers. The visibly disproportionate allotments of power within the latter couple⁴⁰⁹ finds its approximate equivalent in the traditional circus teams. More than any other type of double-act, the performing duos of the circus ring

specialize in parodying the often brutal relations between those who have power and those who lack it. While knockabout two-acts in any medium of popular entertainment commonly feature the funny man as the target of the bully's abuse, it is the often unconscionably cruel and quasi-violent circus pairings that deepen the rift between the divided self to that of torturer and victim or 'assassin' and 'assassiné'⁴¹⁰; these latter terms were figuratively used to adumbrate the kind of sado-masochistic relationship epitomized in the famous clown-auguste team of Footit (1864-1921) and Chocolat (died 1917). This travelling Parisian duo incarnates to the extreme what Geneviève Serreau identifies as the outwardly "petulant and active"⁴¹¹ and "horrified and passive"⁴¹² temperamental contrasts upon which many traditional circus pairings are based, and which are most certainly transposed, in large part, into the Pozzo and Lucky partnership.

Esslin's description of the Pozzo-Lucky couple as a living image of "intellect [represented by Lucky] subordinate to the appetites of the body [represented by Pozzo],"⁴¹³ also focuses our attention on the irreparably damaged nature of Lucky, whose overuse as a "spectacular" public thinker appears to have left him too run-down to initiate any discussion or course of action.⁴¹⁴ Even his atypically aggressive act of kicking Estragon is *in reaction* to the latter's having drawn too near to Lucky, whose habitual maltreatment evokes in him an automatic response of savage defensiveness at the sudden approach of any "stranger." Beckett takes the bleak reality of Lucky's apparent capacity only for obeying the tyrannical Pozzo's orders and implicitly casts it in the lighter shades of another relationship in which one partner is the acknowledged, unquestioned master: that of the circus animal (often a horse) and its trainer, who may double as circus ringmaster or equestrian director.⁴¹⁵ This comic configuring of their master-slave relations is presaged in Vladimir's insistence

that he heard Godot -- another despot-figure who Pozzo is consistently mistaken for and associated with -- shouting in the distance at his horse. Soon after, an imperious cry is heard, followed by a baggage-laden Lucky as the quintessential "beast of burden" leading his whip-wielding overlord by a rope tied around his neck. The couple's ostentatious entrance, succeeded almost immediately by Lucky's slapstick fall, also borrows from the circus tradition of having its clowning performers burst onto the scene with a skilled feat of physical daring leading up to the inevitable comic pratfall.

The circus animal/trainer double-act is the circus' greatest (if not most ignominious) example of unequal power relations between performers. This is true in two senses, both of which are reproduced in the Pozzo and Lucky interactions. Firstly, one partner has all the "dialogue" with the exception of the other partner's occasional aural outburst -- be it an unceasingly angry roar or protesting neigh -- that must be silenced and for which the offender is unduly punished. The second sense in which the relations between trainer and animal are flagrantly unequal is that one partner is armed with an ever-present weapon of punishment (i.e. a whip) while the other is largely defenceless and must obey its master's commands or face instant reprisal. The fact that this portrayal of the forces of culture or intellect's (i.e. the ringmaster's) enslavement of those of nature or the body (i.e. the circus animal) clearly does *not* correspond with Pozzo and Lucky's implicit imaging of the body's subjugation of intellect is of no great concern to Beckett. The point is that both acts share in the two types of power discrepancies mentioned above. For it is the adroit physical slapstick -- grounded in one partner's disempowerment of the other -- and the quick-fire responsiveness characteristic of the most polished bits of trainer/animal interplay that must, in part, be integrated into the Pozzo and Lucky interactions.

The first of these qualities is present in the characters' farcical attempts -- under Pozzo's peremptory instruction -- to silence the unstoppably ranting Lucky by first pouncing on him and then snatching and trampling on his hat (and, by extension, the remains of his intellect), leaving him mute. The second appears in the physical stage routines in which Lucky becomes a mere physical extension of Pozzo's will, instantaneously and robotically fulfilling his master's bidding to hand him the picnic basket, retrieve his whip, take a step back, etc. At these times, the power-greedy Pozzo almost appears to be *both* body, in that it is his sensual needs dictating much of the action, and will-imposing mind; meanwhile, the more cipher-like Lucky, taking his cues from his partner, slips into the merely appendage-like position of functioning as Pozzo's "extended" arms and/or legs.⁴¹⁶ This interpretation-destabilizing suggestion that the individual's various sides can intermittently exchange, or at least redefine, their duties underscores the often ambiguous nature of their interrelationship, one fathomable to us -- given our limited intellectual resources -- only up to a certain point.

Nevertheless, as sources of mild amusement to us, and as a valuable though vaguely unpleasant (as the two "participants" do not enjoy each other's company) time-and-space-fillers for the human being suggestively comprised of these slippery "body" and "mind" character-components, these "vintage" Pozzo-Lucky interactions do triumph. Though body and mind (or whatever other aspects of the self we wish to attribute to the pair) are *concretely* shown; through these well-coordinated skits to belong together, we sense that this composite person who caters to serving his basest, unconscious desires is a truly pleasure-impooverished, benighted one. His will have been a life more superficially passed than deeply lived.

The same cannot be said of the "whole" comprised of the Vladimir and Estragon

parts, where relations of far greater parity exist. The fact that their lives as tramp-companions disarms each character's potential will to dominate the other translates into another genus of double-act in which to cast them. Like the Didi-Gogo duo, this one is of a distinctly less primitive and more humanely "evolved" nature. The evolution is also chronological: over time the clown-auguste pairings (apotheosized in the Footit and Chocolat union) developed into a more equalized partnership featuring "two identical comics in different costumes,"⁴¹⁷ namely the music-hall or vaudeville "cross-talk" act. The British team of Flanagan and Allen was the most famous, best, and long-lived of the patter-acts of the inter-war era. As a likely antecedent for the Estragon-Vladimir tie, their partnership was a palpably affectionate one in which, as Roger Wilmut informs us, "no matter how irritated Allen seemed by Flanagan's daftness, the audience could feel that he still liked the man."⁴¹⁸

Generally speaking, cross-talk partners are 'identical' in regard to their comic gestural and verbal mirrorings, the latter and more important of which I will examine shortly. As for stage dress, productions of *Godot* more often than not dispense with the conventional costume variations between "cross-talkers" as a means of eliminating some of the more superficial discrepancies between its tramps -- who are essentially similar. In this way, the Pozzo-Lucky duo's greater visual contrasts -- symptomatic of this pair's more pronounced interpersonal differences mired in class and "species" of temperament (Pozzo mainly indulges his sadistic side, Lucky his masochistic one) -- become comparatively more striking. With a play like *Waiting for Godot*, the nature of each archetypal pairing can only be understood in relation to that of the other. Hence the need for *two* on-stage couples.

Certain aspects of the traditional cross-talk act are well suited to expressing how Vladimir and Estragon "in regard to attitude, role or fate . . . so closely resemble each

other that they become almost identical.”⁴¹⁹ They become almost mirror images of one another due to their common need, and subsequent agreement, to beguile the hours by engaging in the kind of “tight,” briskly paced interactions ideally designed to honour their status as equal partners while affording them hardly a moment’s pause for rest. (As we have seen, however, even this ideal gives way to the more realistic intrusion of the uncomfortable pauses needed to refuel their -- and, in the more universal sense, our -- energies for the performance of the next “act.”) Though demanding and even exhausting, this strain of interplay lacks a real beginning and especially ending -- another prize feature that discourages the act’s coming to a full stop. It is, of course, none other than what Northrop Frye describes as “the act that killed vaudeville, the weary dialogue of two faceless figure who will say anything to put off leaving the stage.”⁴²⁰ Only now the open-ended (cross-talk) dialogue is intended to “put off” the on-stage silence during which thoughts of one’s larger metaphysical predicament are unavoidable. Both the traditional and Beckettian “patter” comedians’ ends are thus served through cross-talk’s wealth of circumlocution, repetitions, interruptions, and doubled-edged language spawning endless misunderstandings; for they represent the interlocutors’ concerted efforts to delay their dialogue’s coming to an end by, as Ronald Hayman states, “never go[ing] straight to a point if you can possibly miss it [or] evade it. . . .”⁴²¹

One also intuits that like all cross-talk partners, Vladimir and Estragon take a certain delight in continuing to do what they do best: extract from the absurd and spontaneous exchanges of everyday life an unbreakable bond of fellowship. Alan Schneider’s acclaimed 1961 television production of *Waiting for Godot* is particularly effective at bringing out the affectionate playfulness underlying even the *clochards’* outwardly contentious exchanges.⁴²² As an important way of keeping the conversation

flowing, these pattering sequences of “conflict” assume, quite rightly, a harmless air of “polished” predictability in Schneider’s *Godot*.

In *Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self*, Frederick J. Hoffman remarks of the clown of the music-hall and burlesque houses: “In every case, the actor-talker is defective, not whole or proper or tidy or distinguished.”⁴²³ His comments once again situate *Godot*’s “take” on the vaudeville or music-hall two-act within the curve of the monodramatic-like relationship of embodied halves of a single person. The reference to the traditional cross-talk comedians’ seedy or undignified mien serves to identify them as “low characters” whose equalizing classlessness effectively banishes from their partnership the deeply disturbing differences that abound between those with power and those without. It is the comic *similarities* between these traditional stage partners that Beckett draws on in fashioning the Vladimir-Estragon duo. He proceeds to heighten this sense of “sameness” to the point where the lines of demarcation between paired performers -- based on the “straight man” and his “stooge” allocation of roles -- confusingly blur. Beckett extirpates this once “inviolable” area of personality contrast between members of the traditional cross-talk act by having his tramps engage in the kind of sudden role reversals that allow each to assume the part of either the commonsensical partner or the funny “slow-witted” one. Though Vladimir and Estragon spar like all cross-talkers, we discern that a good many of their lines of repartee could be delivered by either of them.

With the innovative interpolation of these role-inversions, the standard cross-talk format is divested of what could be deemed its one overt, though still comparatively subtle, power imbalance: that of giving the performer who plays the “stooge” all the punch-lines -- and laughs. Both partners equally dole out the choice quips in *Godot*. Yet to achieve an even more consistent levelling off of power or privilege between

Vladimir and Estragon, the play's humour is implanted more (as Fletcher points out) "in the meandering of the dialogue than in any particular joke or situation."⁴²⁴ Hence the sense of comic "balance" inherent in the tramps' swiftly subject-shifting, short-line-alternating duets reflects the carefully measured "balance" of power between its participants. In fact, if one partner is remiss or dilatory in chiming in with the next line of dialogue, the other will decorously "prompt" him to continue by gently saying his nickname aloud. For the most part, the *clochards* avoid the kind of "witty" repartee geared towards getting in the last (clever) word.⁴²⁵

The resultant impression of Vladimir and Estragon's interchangeability is precisely what Beckett is after when he opts to model their relationship on a double-act predicated, in part, on a) the *absence or near-absence* of one partner's supremacy over the other, and b) the *duplication* of quantities, styles and even content of speech. (Not coincidentally, these "similarity"-highlighting features stand in direct opposition to the "dissimilarity"-highlighting characteristics of the circus trainer/animal act reified in the Pozzo-Lucky pairing.) Beckett's insidious erosion of the contrasts between his cross-talking personae represents his wish to base the tramps' more amicable relations almost exclusively on these two points. The play's terrain of cross-talk is now adequately groomed to become the site for the Vladimir and Estragon character-halves' most tangible displays of their inseparability.

The following snippet of classic "old-style" cross-talk of the 1930's, performed by the popular Irish O'Gorman Brothers, marvellously illustrates what Michael Patrick Gillespie describes as cross-talk's "cadence of continuity based not on strict contextual consistency but on an ability to make and sustain flexible connections."⁴²⁶

DAVE: There are some funny sights to be seen in this world.
JOE: Yes, I was just looking at you.

DAVE: And everybody has a double.
 JOE: If he has the money.
 DAVE: Scouring the globe --
 JOE: Cleaning out the goldfish --
 DAVE: Always thirsting for knowledge --
 JOE: And beer --
 DAVE: Travelling this way, then that --
 JOE: Then under the seat --
 DAVE: What do we find, to be sure?
 JOE: Fag-ends and orange peel.
 DAVE: North, South, East and West.
 JOE: And Midland.
 DAVE: Always on the look-out.
 JOE: For the ticket-collector.
 DAVE: Live and learn.
 JOE: Die and forget it.⁴²⁷

The same 'cadence of continuity' -- built on split-second deliveries, verbal symmetries, and fluid and cohesive conversational rhythms grounded in free-association and word-play -- also permeates the tramps' comic discussion centring on Godot's putative "response" to (what might be) their latest appeal for mercy:

ESTRAGON: What exactly did we ask him for?
 VLADIMIR: Were you not there?
 ESTRAGON: I can't have been listening.
 VLADIMIR: Oh . . . Nothing very definite.
 ESTRAGON: A kind of prayer.
 VLADIMIR: Precisely.
 ESTRAGON: A vague supplication.
 VLADIMIR: Exactly.
 ESTRAGON: And what did he reply?
 VLADIMIR: That he'd see.
 ESTRAGON: That he couldn't promise anything.
 VLADIMIR: That he'd have to think it over.
 ESTRAGON: In the quiet of his home.
 VLADIMIR: Consult his family.
 ESTRAGON: His friends.
 VLADIMIR: His agents.
 ESTRAGON: His correspondents.
 VLADIMIR: His books.
 ESTRAGON: His bank account.
 VLADIMIR: Before taking a decision.

ESTRAGON: It's the normal thing.
 VLADIMIR: Is it not?
 ESTRAGON: I think it is.
 VLADIMIR: I think so too.
*Silence.*⁴²⁸

This sequence is excellent at conveying how the tramps' pressing need to safeguard against any "breaks" in, or decisive "cappings" of the exchange results in each saying the first thing that instantly comes to mind once the stimulus of his partner's last line has been offered up as a playful "goad" for the next line, etc., etc. Without recourse to the usual time-lapse between lines of dialogue, each consecutive line seems but a slightly modified echo, or even pithy completion, of the last phrase uttered. The "breezy," automatic quality of this verbal interplay, based in part on Vladimir and Estragon's complementary senses of humour, suggests how they are of "one mind," both figuratively and (we suspect) literally.⁴²⁹

With the straight/funny man character-divisions now dissolved, and the dialogue's humour extended into a "long-running" gag in which both partners participate (the joke being that they are exhaustively recalling the details of a conversation that never took place), Vladimir and Estragon, unlike the O'Gorman Brothers, could easily be mistaken for one another in conversation. And indeed they have been -- by spectators and actors alike. In regard to this latter group, Declan Kiberd explains: "it is almost impossible for the actor playing each tramp to keep a clear memory of the sequence of his own lines as distinct from the other's, because their speeches criss-cross so confusingly throughout the play."⁴³⁰ The same conspicuous blurring of identities occurs in the shorter stichomythic duets in which the pair band together "as one" to ape mockingly Pozzo's melodramatic pronouncements on his suffering (i.e. "I can't bear it . . . the way he [i.e. Lucky] goes on . . . I'm going mad. . . ." ⁴³¹), and the waning

of the twilight's "effulgence."⁴³² At these times, the tramps so closely resemble one another as to conflate suggestively into the solo figure of the vaudeville parodist (like Fred Niblo or Doc Rockwell) who unflatteringly caricatures whatever overly sentimental or self-importantly "serious" act precedes him on stage.

Only the cross-talk act's wealth of comic repetitions of sounds, words and phrases -- interspersed throughout *Godot* -- are largely missing from these two quoted excerpts. All three types appear in concentrated form in the tramps' second-act patter sequence of words (i.e. "leaves," "ashes," "rustle," "murmur," etc.) recreating the ghostly stirrings of "dead voices."⁴³³ Beginning with the line "They make a noise like wings,"⁴³⁴ this passage suggests how the rapid stringing together of repetitive and similar-sounding words can be used to preempt the thinking process so as to circumvent facing painful truths about the human condition. For Bergson, this kind of "thoughtless" dialogue becomes more comical "as the relations set up between the ideas become more superficial . . . [until] gradually we come to take no account of the meaning of the words we hear, but only their sound."⁴³⁵

The "dead voices" sequence, in particular, palpably splinters into compact islands of silence-punctuated sounds in a very brief period of time. Consisting mainly of onomatopoeic words (whose sounds *are* their "meaning") automatically flowing into other similar sounding and functioning words, this dialogue has almost nothing holding it together *but* a resemblance of sounds -- spurred on by the pleasures of interactive sound-play. As words increasingly metamorphose into sounds, character-differentiation becomes -- like Estragon's idiosyncratic wish to keep repeating the first line of each of his "sound-descriptions" -- virtually an afterthought. Niklaus Gessner sees the duo's rhythmically alternating lines of dialogue as being 'interlocked' in a manner loosely recalling a contrapuntal musical score.⁴³⁶ This might explain why

these “word-sounds,” when spoken at the accelerated tempo of the cross-talk delivery, seem to fuse into one larger, intricately constructed voice.

Beckett’s earlier adjustments of standard “cross-talk” form -- in concert with those of its features which he elects to interweave into *Godot* -- are, in the end, orchestrated to lend the impression of Vladimir and Estragon’s essential indistinguishability *when engaged in this comic type of interplay*. In suggesting that the pair’s cascading routines have overtones of Leibniz’ ‘*harmonie préétablie*,’⁴³⁷ Melvin J. Friedman appears to have picked up on just *that*. Friedman tells us that from a Leibnizian perspective (which Beckett would have been familiar with), Vladimir and Estragon in cross-talk represent the “ideal unity [encompassed within each monad] resulting from the perfect coherence of body and soul -- to the point where each loses identity.”⁴³⁸ “Body” and “soul” are, of course, only two of the many possible combinations of character-halves that the tramps suggest in their almost literal inseparability.

A key reason why Vladimir and Estragon, unlike Pozzo and Lucky, appear at times to regress into their primordial or “fool-like” wholeness of self lies in their greater equality of status, which entitles both partners to a share in the genuine pleasures inherent in their various collaborations. That the Vladimir and Estragon “parts” openly desire to interact with one another makes for a significantly greater frequency and fluidity of interplay out of which arises the temporary sense that this larger self is no longer a problematically (and often painfully) divided one. In contrast to this is the typically aloof or balking Lucky, who must be made -- either by being ordered or yanked by the rope by Pozzo -- to join in on an act exclusively designed to secure Pozzo’s superficial gratification; hence the fitful, graceless and tediously limited nature of many of their interactions. Comparing the two double-acts of *Godot*, we

cannot help but feel that the gayer, more variegated antics of the Vladimir-Estragon pairing are better at passing the time both for us and their participants than those of the master-slave duo.

Ultimately what we find in the more diverting Vladimir-Estragon union is each “side’s” ability to check -- either by means of deflating tactics or artful inducements to levity -- the other “side’s” tendency to take itself (like the Pozzo character-part) too seriously. This near-perfect counter-balancing of the composite self’s contrasting qualities and propensities results in its ability not to take *itself* too seriously. We see this reflected in the kind of comically light-hearted and even self-parodying pastimes that this larger self’s two-sided (or well-rounded) nature gravitates to. This capacity for not taking oneself too seriously becomes, for Beckett, another crucial life-skill that can be learned so as to wrest more “entertainment-value” out of the trying experience of being alive. A facility for making light of things results in *Godot* not so much in a superficial life as in a *lived* (or courageously endured) life. For in the eyes of this playwright-humorist, the inability to laugh (especially at oneself) is, as Richard Keller Simon aptly puts it, “a fatal weakness for anyone living with so many provocations to laugh.”⁴³⁹

To summarize, in maximizing the differences between the partners of the traditional circus double-act, and minimizing those of the classic cross-talk act, Beckett brings into being paired characters whose respective interplay represents two disparate ways of coping -- and getting through life -- with these contrasting sides of ours. The implication seems to be that in according each side equal weight or opportunities for “self-expression,” we bestow upon them the potential for a greater interactional unity; this, in turn, results in a seeming interchangeability of parts as our various sides wholeheartedly join forces in trying, as Gilliat writes, “to make art

out of the unpromising material of life, and [through] bringing off at least one achieved stylistic feat as a way of beating the dark."⁴⁴⁰ In other words, in dedicating almost all of our extant energies to the task of turning the banal stuff of daily life into satisfying sources of self-amusement, we find ourselves better able to counter -- and survive -- the wretched conditions of our existence. Given that Beckett mirrors the participants in a relationship in the parts of the self, and vice versa, these sage insights take on twice as much value in our evermore lengthening lives.

CONCLUSION

After *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett begins the process of gradually phasing out the conventions of demotic comedy from his stage plays. In the context of the future couple-oriented plays of *Endgame* and *Happy Days*, this diminishment is commensurate with the ongoing decay of the characters, their worlds, and the inextricable relationships in which they feel themselves to be increasingly imprisoned. By examining in closer detail the reasons why *Endgame* and *Happy Days* jettison the bulk of popular comic devices and effects so prevalent in Beckett's first published play, I will reinforce -- in what will become my thesis' concluding statements -- the chief reasons for *Godot's* comparatively lavish incorporation of them.

Bair notes that Beckett's early "couple" plays follow a thematic and presentational pattern in which "each successive one [is] stripped more painfully bare, each grating more harshly on the rituals and relationships of life in the present century."⁴⁴¹ Her remarks reflect the playwright's own admission that the Hamm and Clov characters of *Endgame* are an older or extended version of Estragon and Vladimir, now at the apparent close of their relationship.⁴⁴² This explains, in large part, Hamm and Clov's intensified exasperation with the deadening repetitiveness of their lives together, their heightened antipathy for each other (and each's annoying habits), and their marked abstention from interacting with each other for prolonged periods of time -- both by choice and owing to a sharp decline in each partner's physical and/or mental dexterity. Less proficient than their predecessors in passing the time in inventive and diverting ways, this less unified -- and therefore more void-cognizant -- duo represents Beckett's gradual move away from the conception of his later couples as paired comedians. The arguably even more disaffected Winnie-Willie partnership of *Happy*

Days similarly appears to take up where the Hamm-Clov one left off. In resorting to what may be the only options for survival available to the couple that is beyond even wishing and/or being able to engage in the back-and-forth exchanges by which two people express their intolerance to and torture of one another, this latter twosome may be seen as a still more palsied, degenerated avatar of the Vladimir-Estragon couple. Yet even they remain bound together by the same heavy yoke of interdependence that holds all of Beckett's increasingly more incompatible duos together.

Endgame and *Happy Days* suggest the further stages of deterioration and suffering – anticipated by the afflictions of *Godot*'s characters – through which the mortality-bound human being must pass. In the case of *Endgame*, Hamm, the master, is blind and confined to a wheelchair, while Clov, his attendant/servant, is himself physically crippled in the curious manner spoken of earlier. Because they can no longer partake of the more mindless and unrestrained satisfactions of physical interplay that were a significant part of the glue holding Vladimir and Estragon together, the often “balletic” physical humour of popular comedy is largely absent from *Endgame*. The sharp reduction in the variety of “bonding” activities that Hamm and Clov can mutually participate in results in their greater dependence on dialogic interactions as a way of asserting their being. But rather than simulate the fluid rhythms and inspired “twists and turns” of comic cross-talk, their duologues must reflect the greater mental impotence and proneness to a self-contained laconicism that overtake two people after countless years of being together. Consequently, their exchanges are more gratingly predictable and linguistically broken down than those of the tramps. They demonstrate a progressive weakening of the “terrible materiality of the word surface” through which alternative realities are constructed in defiance of the pre-existing ones.

This tapering off of the key means by which Vladimir and Estragon amused one

another (and their audiences), and indulged their more childlike and even improvisational impulses to turn any situation or conversation into a game, is significant. It reminds us that as advanced in their years as the tramps are, their desire and ability to entertain and be entertained stem from their still somewhat energetic “youthfulness,” enduring affection for and interest in each other, and the lingering “freshness” infusing their rapport -- all *relative* qualities which their later Hamm-Clov incarnation seems almost entirely to lack. A comparison of *Godot* with *Endgame* reveals that the former play’s vision of the survivalist tactics of human beings ultimately pertains to the earlier, comparatively “roseate” stages of partnership with another. As Beckett’s own views on the nature of ongoing relationships evolve and change over time, so too do the temporal stages and aspects of life with another human being which he chooses to depict on his stage. As we look ahead to Beckett’s subsequent plays, we realize that the comparatively animated, light-hearted and briskly-paced character of *Godot*’s stage ‘turns’ (these being the very traits that distinguish them as “popular”) was possible only because the play’s interdependent character-relationships, particularly that of the *clochards*, had not yet become merely a prison house of empty habits through with continuing bonds -- and identities -- are joylessly eked out. This eventuality is precluded by the palpable feelings of fellowship that the tramps still manifest for one other, and which are hurtling towards extinction by the time we get to *Endgame*.

Besides affecting the characters, the corrosive effects of time usher in the dying of the outside world in *Endgame*. In limiting the personae’s potential for physical activity, these pared-down bodies and stage world (now a cramped room in a shelter purportedly opening onto a scene of near-global ruin) signal a move away from the expanses of *Godot*’s physical space into the more claustrophobic confines of mental

space. If we recall, this retreat into a subjectivity blind to all but the most egocentric of concerns and pursuits was prefigured in the tramps' marked preference for monologuing and sleeping by the close of *Godot*. Further precipitated by the gradual severance of our ties with the outside world that occurs as our senses begin to fail us with age, this sink into solipsism (sometimes resembling madness) becomes an increasingly central motif in Beckett's later drama. Because Hamm is the more corporeally-and-sensory-impaired of the pair, it is the contents of his mental or inner world that are more compulsively plumbed, elaborated and subsequently dramatized.

Since the non-ideal disposition of the human body is already a patent "given" by time we reach *Endgame*, the talents of the preternaturally somatic clown of popular entertainment -- with his capacity for expressing through pretence-shattering physical comedy the absurdity and futility of our attempts to be what we are not -- are less in demand here and in the Beckett plays that follow. Superseding the dramatic tension between the claims of words and the realities of action (or lack thereof) is the conflict between the idealistic aspirations of language and the non-ideal, if not downright abject, physical circumstances in which these later personae find themselves. (Generally speaking, these "inhospitable" situations tend to portend the hero's physical demise in one form or another.) Cohn explains Beckett's shift towards a 'grimmer' type of comedy in terms of his growing desire to redirect the admittedly dwindling quotas of humour in his later plays into "the irony of the situation."⁴⁴³ Because it is the disparity between the less-than-comical wretchedness of the protagonist's physical circumstances and the comically absurd efforts that he -- or "she" in the case of *Happy Days* -- makes "to ignore" these circumstances by thinking and living in diametrical opposition to them that now amuses us, the

omnipresent clowning that we encounter in *Godot* is ill-suited to Beckett's drama from *Endgame* on. *Godot*, after all, dramatizes a point in the characters' lives when the presentation of their physical plight can still be viewed as openly comical, since the personae still remain at a relatively safe distance from the nothingness of *utter* personal dissolution. This provides the necessary comic counterweight to the somewhat more theoretical or abstract tragedy of their metaphysical situation. As Beckett's later couples come progressively closer to confronting the prospect of their permanent non-being, the tragic element begins to outweigh the comic.

The circumstances that see Hamm growing progressively more dominant despite his formidable debilitations -- leaving Clov with ever-less to contribute to the on-stage proceedings -- preclude their being suggestively cast in the mould of the traditional double-act. For if we recall, the comic twosome generally demands almost equal amounts of collaborative effort from both participants, though one may still have more dialogue⁴⁴⁴ or control than the other; it also presupposes the ability of two people to function as a single "unit," an interactional dynamic that is virtually obsolete by the time we reach the stage of a relationship represented by this master/servant pairing. As the dramatization of Hamm's personal interpretation of himself and his world represents a move away from the mutually collaborating and corroborating two-man effort of imaginatively re-ordering reality that we saw operating in the Vladimir-Estragon union, the end-product will necessarily be even less credible than the "make-believe" universe and personas of the *clochards*.

More emphatically than *Godot*, *Endgame* suggests a monodramatic-based construction of character both in its stage set (which has been said to resemble the interior of a skull⁴⁴⁵), and its presentation of a central protagonist whose dominant consciousness is that of the writer or story-teller bent on defining an indefinite world

and essential self in terms which ironically chart the parameters of his own delusional self-image. Supremely egocentric and painfully aware of all that has been lost over time, Hamm chooses to reinvent himself through words as a suffering hero who is an amalgamation of his fading memories of the dying kings of Shakespearean tragedy.⁴⁴⁶ Though he occasionally falls back on the histrionic change of voice to assist him in shoring up his self-conceived identity, the more concretely vivid, mind-and-body-involved impersonations of *Godot's* tramp-clown-based characters are more infrequent, since *rhetoric* has almost single-handedly become the new medium for self-conceptualization. In this extended version of the Didi-Gogo couple, the meting out of identities is now mainly the task of one, rather than two people. Thus Clov and the play's other two characters (i.e. Hamm's dustbin-housed parents) -- made subjects of Hamm's residual if "voided" kingdom -- have their "lesser" roles "dealt" to them via his habitual narrative renderings of them as subordinate players before the central figure of his tragic king. Consequently, those with whom Hamm shares his stage seem at times to be mere extensions of his psyche or will compelled to "play along" with his need to save himself from his own deepening insignificance and nothingness.

But Beckett also wishes to stress how these suggested "parts" of the composite self seem to belong together less as *enough* time goes by. Consequently, Hamm and especially Clov's exchanges (chiefly of interest to Hamm alone) are constructed so as to lend the impression of hobbling along painfully. That Clov refuses to "build on" -- in the conversational sense -- Hamm's articulated delusions of living in happier or grander times reflects the fact that they are no longer "of one mind" as the tramps frequently were, and that interpersonal power struggles, mounting to a cataclysmic head, riddle their duologues. The "balking" cadences of their tensely pause-laden

exchanges suggest almost the antithesis of the breezy, swiftly-paced rhythms of the classic double-act that pass the time so effectively for performers and spectators alike. As I mentioned earlier, this latter feat constitutes the criterion by which two people, or parts of a whole, are deemed “a good match.”

At other times, however, these “secondary” characters openly disobey the conventions of formal drama by which Hamm attempts to limit their scope of autonomy and power. This is especially true of Clov. In wanting only to escape Hamm's tyranny by returning to his (off-stage) kitchen, he repeatedly defies his master's wishes to keep him back so as to have him continue to act as Hamm's “confidante” and occasional repartee-purveying “straight man” in accordance with the terms of their unequal partnership. Accordingly, theirs becomes the war of wills that Beckett has called “the heart of the play.”⁴⁴⁷ The signs of inconsistency evinced by Vladimir and Estragon in their “attendant” modes have now erupted into episodes of outright abandonment as Clov increasingly refuses to take on the servile roles expected of him. Clearly, the popular tramp-clown theme of mutually-salutary role-playing that permeated *Godot* is unsuited to a play in which the majority of the personae stand to incur only further degrees of subjugation and suffering if they fully embrace their parts.⁴⁴⁸ Since it is now harder for the characters to stay together but still more impossible for them to part (as the void outside their refuge appears unable to sustain much life), Clov derives increasing solace in remaining isolated from and unknowable to the very person who can endow him with a fixed, objective sense of self. Now that the pursuit of a confirmation of one's existence and sense of a personal identity that necessitated pairing up with another and engaging in the repetitious rituals of daily life has been shown over time to yield less than desirable results for at least one partner, it is the move towards the termination of this kind of lifestyle that *Endgame* must deal with. As

such, Clov spends much of the play preparing to leave his master.

Because *Endgame* focusses on the point (be it an indefinitely hovering moment as it is here) just prior to the termination of a long-time partnership that is also the “end” of two people whose strongest claim to existence lies in their dialogue, its vision must be darker than *Godot*'s. Any attempt made to neutralize the play's sombre tones with a heavy application of the buoyant tones of popular comedy would only undermine the sense, shared even by the characters, that these lives are beyond improvement -- outside of possibly death itself. In *Godot*, this capacity for turning away from the probable finality of despair and defeat was the province of the clown of mass entertainment, transferred to characters who still derived enough pleasure out of life and their not unloving relationship to believe in a future that would hold more than simply the darkness of their meaningless, painful dissolution. Even minimal amounts of life-affirming experiences and feelings enable the tramps to persist in engaging in the ludicrously futile routines of daily life upon which the themes and devices of popular clownery are based -- and upon which hope for a better tomorrow rests.

Endgame, by contrast, deals only with the characters' memories of this lost world of ephemeral happiness and nobly tender feeling for another human being. As such, humour, where it does sparsely crop up,⁴⁴⁹ is almost exclusively at the service of either acknowledging what is now the near-constant of human unhappiness, or diffusing the greater pathos of *Endgame*'s verging-on-the-end-of-a-world dramatization -- one self-consciously enacted as well as emotionally experienced. Because Vladimir and Estragon's earlier “game” of continuing has now become Hamm and Clov's “game” of ending, it is predominantly the formal conventions of stage drama (particularly those of the final “deathbed” scenes of traditional tragedy) that are evoked and parodied. This need for a new set of theatrical resources with which to

attempt to structure meaningfully one's day is tied to *Endgame's* presentation of aging or dying man's *inability to cope* amid the emptiness of the present without escaping into the illusion of another kind of life -- in this case one culled from a juncture in our cultural past wherein a meaningful grandeur still suffused human suffering, loss and, finally, death. Popular comedy -- with its now conflicting, outdated message of *coping* with life's adversities through laughter -- must therefore remain at a bare minimum in a play in which the characters, now closer to nothingness, find it increasingly more difficult, if not impossible, to laugh.

Other genres of comedy must then be substituted to accomplish the two humour-reliant objectives outlined in the foregoing paragraph. In shouldering the majority of the play's scattered instances of physical comedy (including a funny walk, the chronic forgetting of needed props, an opening dumbshow involving preparations for the ensuing scene), Clov suggests the clown. But it is the clown in the guise of the comic servant of traditional stage comedy, or the type of comic counterpoint (often found in traditional tragedy) represented by the hell porter in *MacBeth*,⁴⁵⁰ that critics have predominantly likened him to. Hamm and Clov's snatches of staccato dialogue are comic parodies less of music-hall cross-talk than of the stychomythia of classical tragedy -- due to their being spurred on by what we might loosely call "plot." Hamm and his father Nagg's sporadic, self-conscious attempts at vaudevillesque word-play and stylized story-telling peppered with vocal modulations serve to undercut the play's pathos with comic touches. But these deliberate attempts to be amusing are explicitly portrayed within the text as examples of repetitious, forced humour that eventually wears thin. In appealing mainly to the "gag-man" himself, this overt "comic business" distances itself from its popular sources and their phasing out of material considered unsuccessful (or unentertaining) to outside audiences.

By the time *Happy Days* is published three years later, the prospect of the characters' non-being (or death) has become too frighteningly inevitable a reality to be "longingly" rehearsed any longer. (Hamm closes *Endgame* with a histrionic gesture of "expiring" as Clov only pretends to leave him.) Proceeding beyond the hearsay of *Endgame*'s perishing universe, the sun-scorched earth of *Happy Days* is now *visibly* in the grip of its own mortality. Protective shelters and trees under which to take cover are notably extinct. The paired personae's incapacitations have also worsened, heightening the disparate nature of their respective deteriorations. These increasingly divergent modes of existence unbalance the relationship to an even greater degree than was witnessed in the Hamm-Clov bond, now giving one partner *much* more to say and do on stage than the other. As the play opens, a substantial portion of Winnie's body has already "died" and been buried, as her waist-down entrapment in the stage's grave-like mound metaphorically suggests; by the second act her bizarre interment has extended up to her neck, restricted her to facial movements alone. Winnie's radical immobility is counterpointed by the more mind-atrophied Willie's aphasia-like tendency toward muteness. Compounded by the fact that the hearing-impaired Willie can only crawl and Winnie only speak in the interrupted rhythms of disjointed thoughts, the greater interactional and communicative difficulties faced by this moribund duo deepen what is already their profound emotional disconnection from one another.

Their almost total, irremediable estrangement from each other results in a genuine clash of temperaments that has nothing of the complementary nature of the ideal "union-of-opposites" paradigm that Vladimir and Estragon strove "to fit into" in the initial stages of their *relatively* harmonious partnership. The deep rift that has arisen over time in Winnie and Willie's respective attitudes and responses to what is now

only a semblance of a relationship generates within it a slew of conflicting needs, the most conspicuous being -- as we increasingly saw with Beckett's former duos -- one partner's intensified need for dialogue and the other's escalating need for the avoidance of it. In choosing to make this particular conflictual dynamic a constant in this later couple's strained-bordering-on-murderous relations, Beckett aptly exploits the familiar battle-of-the-sexes themes and gags of the music-hall and vaudeville. Popular stage comedy's prototypical pairing of the domineering wife and hen-pecked husband for whom "Marriage was a trap from which every man had a duty to escape,"⁴⁵¹ helps to define *Happy Days's* central domestic situation: that of a garrulous wife incessantly addressing -- in alternately tender, mothering and stridently petitioning tones -- a largely unresponsive, oblivion-craving husband who wants nothing more than to disappear behind the open pages of his newspaper or into the solitude of his personal sanctum (a large hole, in Willie's case).

Since in Beckettian terms this leads to one partner (i.e. Willie) predominantly choosing the silence of "non-being" over a "being" that involves openly strained relations with his more demanding partner, even the give-and-take of dialogue is now all but defunct. Given that Winnie (like Hamm) at least appears to wield more control over, and glean more satisfaction from, this nominal partnership, it is she who must work harder at perpetuating it. By *Happy Days*, however, it becomes clear that the "engine" driving this Beckettian thematic is one partner's greater proximity to death. (As Doherty rightly points out, the play's third act must ultimately silence Winnie.⁴⁵²) As we saw with the tramps' transient encounters with the silence-symbolizing nothingness, the agonizing awareness of the inexorable advances of non-being unleashes in us an even more tenacious will to live and validate our existence by having another pay heed (in this particular case) to our words. Since reassuring proof

of Willie's attentiveness is precisely what he cannot and/or will not offer her -- save for a few ever-dwindling words and sounds emitted in response to her deluge of speech -- Winnie must invent ways of conjuring up a more constant "audience" for herself.

Happy Day's partial return to the motifs and devices of demotic entertainment rests on the fact that Winnie opts to fill what is for the most part an abyss of silence and (by all appearance's) still solitude with what Kennedy calls "the dynamics of talk, with the pauses, and the tragicomically appropriate action (wiping one eye, making up the lips) [which] transform the literary fragments into theatrical events. . . ."453 Drawing on the popular stage performer's resources of comic pantomime, animated story-telling, sardonic "character" impersonations, and the casual addressing of a flow of personal, inconsequential chatter to a specific, if out-of-sight, partner (who may be both Willie *and* the seated theatre-goers), Winnie manages to transmogrify what is essentially a stream-of-consciousness monologue into outward-directed conversation *with a presupposed audience*. As Winnie buoyantly denotes through word and (when still possible) gesture how happy and comfortable she is with her present life and relationship, the contrast between the character's mental attitude and physical circumstances becomes so extreme as to reveal how the progressively dying Beckett hero increasingly speaks and acts out of blind habit -- casting back to an earlier, perhaps illusory, time untouched by the tragic ravages of time.

While Winnie's and, on occasion, Willie's vaudevillesque routines and gags recall some of the standard "pathos-diffusing" comic forms seen in *Godot*, their method of execution is (for the most part) more deadeningly mechanical.⁴⁵⁴ This suggests that even the characters themselves do not believe in the now glaringly false content of their own reality-re-ordering "acts," though there is still some comfort to be had in mindlessly performing them -- as an alternative to reflecting on one's present state.

Winnie's increasingly unconvincing performance robs the play of *Godot's* more blatant and consistent comic edge, which hinges on the still-not-entirely-disillusioned *clochards'* ability to project (at least temporarily) a belief in the "foolish" claims of their own pretences. By Act II of *Happy Days*, the comic tone gives way, as Gontarski notes, to one which Beckett describes as "Mortellement triste."⁴⁵⁵ The inroads of time have now mercilessly pared a still optimism-spouting Winnie down to a "talking head" balancing on the threshold of physical obliteration. If *Endgame* concretizes the point in the characters' lives when they can no longer laugh, Act II of *Happy Days* dramatizes that time when we can no longer laugh, as the terrible pathos of dying can no longer be amusingly suppressed by the evasions of language.

Happy Days ultimately represents a sardonic reworking of one of *Godot's* earlier themes: that it is our absorbing immersion in and/or mirthful enjoyment of the mindless rituals of quotidian life that enable us to "go on" with a not unreasonable measure of optimism for a better future. Despite a seemingly lifelong commitment to this conviction (rendered pathetic by the time we reach *Happy Days*), Winnie will apparently *not* "go on" for much longer. This poignant observation allows us to see one of the principal premises fuelling *Godot's* profuse incorporation of the clowning conventions of mass entertainment in terms of its true status as a limited *interpretation* of human existence. This hardly comes as a revelation, for, as Cohn argues, "any interpretation of life is a construction, a game, a work of art, bordering on a reality that is necessarily unknown, unknowable, and frustratingly seductive."⁴⁵⁶ In the end, these subsequent plays of Beckett's help us to understand this lesson as it applies to *Godot* and its unique characters. For notwithstanding its *comparatively* vivid, credible and concrete parade of (demotic-comedy-derived) dramatic action and speech, the play is first and foremostly about the immediacy of consciousness

interpreting and constructing “reality” in *its* own fanciful way. Where there is *still* sufficient pleasure, investment of belief and potential for unfettered inventiveness left in the craft of imaginative creation, we will continue to discover in the often native grey colouring of Beckett’s personae at least a few enlivening shades of the harlequined clown of popular entertainment.

Endnotes

1 James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996) 71.

2 Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (New York: Summit Books, 1978) 48.

3 Bair 48.

4 One of the clearest indications of the extent to which motion-picture comedy adopted the clowning techniques of the illegitimate theatre -- which were themselves frequently carry-overs from the English circus once its clowns began "migrating" to the music-halls in the last quarter of the nineteenth century -- is that its stars had typically been former music-hall, vaudeville and/or pantomime artists. As film comedians, their comic skills and routines are, in the main, essentially those of demotic stage comedy -- though now more honed and elaborate to suit the spacial and temporal expanses of a feature film. Former graduates from the vaudeville and/or music-hall stage(s) include Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton and the Marx Brothers. Prior to their successful movie partnership, Stan Laurel (like Chaplin) had been a popular slapstick comedian in Fred Karno's travelling pantomime show, and Oliver Hardy a portly tenor from a touring minstrel show.

5 Bair 385.

6 Albert F. McLean, Jr. *American Vaudeville as Ritual* (Kentucky: U of Kentucky P, 1965) 120.

7 Quoted in M. Willson Disher, *Clowns and Pantomimes* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968) 181.

8 Even Beckett's clever adaptation of *single* clowning traditions may be governed by this will to illumine the full contents of the human situation through the dramatization of contradictory truths, such as how even when we are together we feel our aloneness -- an idea the playwright manages to drive home by adding novel "twists" to traditional hobo-clown themes.

9 In fact, a surprising number of writers whose articles and books formed the "secondary source" readings for the research stages of my thesis used the terms "music-hall" and "vaudeville" interchangeably when examining this variety-style entertainment either as a subject in its own right, or as a tangible influence on the comic framework of Beckett's early drama. As some of the critical insights of these authors seemed to me to be too valuable to throw away on the arguable grounds of their tendency to overgeneralize on the subject, I found myself *also* having to mute the differences between the English music-hall and American vaudeville in order to be able to incorporate some of these broader-type comments into my thesis without having to

constantly qualify them, rightly or wrongly, on my own.

The fact that European music-hall performers (like Albert Chevalier and Henry Lauder) also appeared on American vaudeville circuits, while American cross-talking double-acts regularly toured the music-halls of Britain, probably effected a subtle cross-fertilization of performance styles and techniques over the course of time. This may, in part, explain why either "music-hall" or "vaudeville" is often used as a generic term subsuming within it two or more "branches" (i.e. French, English, Irish, etc.) of this type of lively entertainment.

¹⁰ In the prologue to his book on English Variety from 1919-1960, Roger Wilmut chronicles the ways in which variety entertainment of the pre-First World War period (commonly known as 'music-hall') differed from that of the post-1914 tradition, which came to be termed 'variety.' To trace the various historical factors underlying "old-time" music-hall's lapse into a respectability that eventually ushered in its demise, see *Kindly Leave the Stage!* (London: Methuen, 1985) 13-17. The distinctions between pre-and-post-1890 American vaudeville can also be found in Edwin Milton Royle's colourful account of how vaudeville's initial bawdiness eventually gave way to a more 'wholesome' type of family entertainment, in *Selected Vaudeville Criticism*, ed. Anthony Slide (Metuchen, N. J.: Scarecrow Press, 1988) 203-13.

¹¹ T. S. Eliot, "Marie Lloyd," *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1950) 406-07.

¹² Among the more prominent commentators on American vaudeville to elucidate the connection between pre-World War I vaudeville and its largely first generation American and newly arrived immigrant audiences is Albert F. McLean, Jr. in chapter 1 ('The Symbolism of Vaudeville'), in *American Vaudeville as Ritual*. Also see Abel Green and Joe Laurie, Jr., *Show Biz: From Vaude to Video* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1951) 7-8.

¹³ McLean, Jr. 3.

¹⁴ "Music Hall and Variety," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1983 ed.

¹⁵ Quoted in *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, ed. Phyllis Hartnoll, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford UP, 1967) 666.

¹⁶ Bair 196.

¹⁷ Samuel Beckett, '*Proust*' and '*Three Dialogues*' (London: John Calder, 1965) 65.

¹⁸ Beckett, *Proust* 79.

¹⁹ Beckett, *Proust* 79.

20 Bruce F. Kavin, *Telling It Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1972) 173.

21 Beckett, *Proust* 63.

22 According to Beckett's somewhat abstruse description of this faculty in *Proust*, "involuntary memory" fortuitously casts up, at wholly unexpected times, powerful and normally inaccessible images or scenes from the past whose contents (also accidentally acquired) have in no way been altered by the operations of the conscious mind. Comparable to the 'explosive' experience of an (albeit second-hand) epiphany, the involuntary memory puts us in touch with 'the real' -- or reality before it has been mediated and coloured by the organizing principles, as outlined earlier by Kavin, of human perception.

23 Beckett, *Proust* 84.

24 Given that these images embody fundamental types of experiences or situations that will recur indefinitely throughout our lives, it is not unusual to see repeating patterns of the same images (and words for that matter) from one act to the next within Beckett's early plays, since they are meant to illumine "all that is there" in a relatively brief flash of time.

25 Josephine Jacobsen and William R. Mueller, *The Testament of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1964) 76.

26 David D. Hesla, *The Shape of Chaos* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1971) 165.

27 Quoted in Martin Esslin, "Towards the Zero of Language," *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama*, eds. James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987) 36.

28 Quoted in Esslin, "Towards the Zero of Language" 36.

29 Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992) 299.

30 Charles R. Lyons, *Samuel Beckett* (London: MacMillan Education, 1983) 23.

31 Lyons 23.

32 Yet as I will demonstrate in "The 'Staged' Stage" section of my thesis, Beckett complicates matters even further by having us call into question the ability of our senses to discern what is real, since the personae, as concretely visible and audible as they are, participate in the *unreal* world and events of a play.

33 Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus & Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1955) 37.

34 In his review of the 1996 Stratford Festival's revival of *Godot*, theatre critic Jamie Portman remarks on the fact that its 'indescribably filthy' tramps were actually made to 'stink to high heaven.' See Portman, "Imaginative touches in Stratford's revival of *Waiting for Godot*," *The Montreal Gazette* 15 July 1996: E6.

35 Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969) 25.

36 Andrew K. Kennedy, *Samuel Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 35-36.

37 Rather than being a Rabelaisian celebration of what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the 'material bodily principle' -- with its ribald bodily depictions of fertility, growth, and an overflowing plenitude signifying man's 'degrading' connection to an old-life burying and new-life generating earth -- the bodily life of Beckett's buffoons retains only the strictly debasing and/or death-portending aspects of sexuality and natural bodily functions (like eating and urinating). For a more in-depth look at what Bakhtin refers to as the 'purely formalist literary parody of modern times,' which *Waiting for Godot* may be said to epitomize, see Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1968) 21-28. To see how Beckett incorporates grotesque and macabre elements into *Godot's* sexual imagery, see Vivian Mercier, *The Irish Comic Tradition* (London: Oxford UP, 1962) 74.

38 Quoted in Bair 149.

39 John H. Towsen, *Clowns* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1976) 242.

40 Raymond Durnat, *The Crazy Mirror: Hollywood Comedy and the American Image* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969) 43. This comment represents the author's expressly stated attempt to translate into psychological terms Aristotle's own observation in *The Poetics* that what distinguishes tragedy from comedy is that 'one [i.e. comedy] would make its personages worse, and the other better, than the men of the present day.' For Aristotle's full rendering of the statement, see Aristotle, *Rhetoric and Poetics* (New York: The Modern Library, 1954) 225.

41 Lucile Hoerr Charles, "The Clown's Function," *Journal of American Folklore* 58.227 (1945): 32.

42 Quoted in Raymond Federman, *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1965) 6.

43 G. J. Watson, *Drama: An Introduction* (London: MacMillan Press, 1983) 172.

44 Herbert Blau, "Notes from the Underground: *Waiting for Godot* and

Endgame,” *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism*, ed. S. E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1986) 261.

45 Quoted in Hesla 165.

46 Quoted in Hesla 165.

47 Roger Ebert, “Fields vs. Chaplin,” *Movie Comedy*, eds. Stuart Byron and Elisabeth Weis (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1977) 53.

48 Beckett, *Proust* 86.

49 Kawin 172.

50 Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 31.

51 Henri Bergson, “Laughter,” *Comedy* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956) 79.

52 Bergson 76.

53 While music-hall and vaudeville comedians specialized in comic business involving the passing and repassing of objects, it is the hat-passing games appearing in Laurel and Hardy’s *The Music Box* (1932) and the Marx Brothers’ *Duck Soup* (1933) that are generally cited as the sources of inspiration for *Godot*’s like ‘turn.’ The former film’s thematic associations with the monotonous futility of human effort when it comes to effecting any *real* change in the world (Laurel and Hardy finally succeed in delivering an unwieldy piano to its rightful destination only to have its recipient hack it to bits with an axe) – as well as its inclusion of a hat-passing number that brilliantly expresses the mindless confusion accompanying the sudden loss or exchange of our hats (symbolizing mind as decorum-instilling form rather than essence) – would have appealed to Beckett’s acute sense of the absurdity of human action. He would also have been interested in partly modelling *Godot*’s hat-trading sequence on that of *Duck Soup*’s on account of with its “knockabout” prelude of unprovoked kicking leading directly into the hat *lazzo* involving Chico, Harpo and the Lemonade Seller. The implicitly *causeless* nature of this whole spectacle of clowning is echoed in the *clochards*’ own characteristically “out-of-the-blue” hat trick.

54 Jane Alison Hale, *The Broken Window: Beckett’s Dramatic Perspective* (Indiana: Purdue UP, 1987) 35.

55 Hale 35.

56 Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1954) 46.

57 Quoted in Bair 428.

58 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 53.

59 Valerie Topsfield, *The Humour of Samuel Beckett* (London: MacMillan Press, 1988) 31.

60 As early as *Proust*, Beckett would see the human attempt at communication as 'merely a simian vulgarity, or horribly comic, like the madness that holds a conversation with the furniture' (Beckett, *Proust*, 63).

61 Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1958) 18.

62 Alan Astro, *Understanding Samuel Beckett* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1990) 118.

63 Jack MacGowran, interview, "MacGowran on Beckett," *Theatre Quarterly* 3.11 (1973): 20.

64 Watson 182.

65 Ruby Cohn, *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut* (New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1962) 287.

66 Cohn, *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut* 287.

67 Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama* (New York: Atheneum, 1965) 347.

68 Thomas Cousineau, '*Waiting for Godot*': *Form in Movement* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990) 37.

69 Hesla 228.

70 Hesla 228.

71 Samuel Beckett, "Dennis Devlin," *Transition: Tenth Anniversary* 27 (1938): 290.

72 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 6.

73 D. F. Chesire, *Music Hall in Britain* (Devon: David & Charles Holdings, 1974) 35.

74 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 14.

75 Alec Reid, "From Beginning to Date: Some Thoughts on the Plays of Samuel Beckett," *Samuel Beckett*, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: MacGraw-Hill, 1975) 67.

76 Michael Robinson, *The Long Sonata of the Dead* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1969) 232.

77 Like the clown or fool, the guru's revolutionary thought and behaviour often operate outside the bounds of cultural expectations, traditions and rules. Like his more "popular" counterparts, the guru is, as Sheldon B. Kopp notes, 'his own man, piercing the group's conventional wisdom and overturning the usual ways of understanding the meaning of life,' relying on the 'poetic language of the myth and of the dream' to get his often metaphorical message across to an audience. For a deeper appreciation of how Beckett retains shades of this spiritual figure, whose 'moving inner vision is a journey deep into the self,' see Kopp, *If You Meet the Buddha on the Road, Kill Him!* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), chapter 2.

78 Kopp 12.

79 Kopp 18.

80 Kopp 19.

81 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 43.

82 Quoted in Israel Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters," *New York Times* 6 May 1956, sec. 2: 1.

83 Quoted in Barbara A. Babcock, "Arrange Me into Disorder: Fragments and Reflections on Ritual Clowning," *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, ed. John J. MacAloon (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984) 107.

84 Bair 436.

85 Quoted in "Samuel Beckett: Part 1," narr. Lister Sinclair, prod. Marilyn Powell, writ. Greg Kelly, *Samuel Beckett: A Stain Upon the Silence*, exec. prod. Bernie Lucht, Ideas, CBC, Toronto, 11 Feb. 1991.

86 Kenneth Tynan, "*Waiting for Godot*," *A View of the English Stage: 1944-63* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1950) 159.

87 Durgnat 81.

88 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 10.

89 Bair 422.

90 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 10.

- 91 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 8.
- 92 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 10.
- 93 Bair 422-23.
- 94 S. E. Gontarski, *Beckett's 'Happy Days': A Manuscript Study* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Libraries, 1977) 48.
- 95 Gontarski, *Beckett's 'Happy Days'* 48.
- 96 Richard F. Shepard, preface, *Why a Duck? Visual and Verbal Gems from the Marx Brothers Movies*, ed. Richard J. Anobile (New York: Darien House, 1971) 11.
- 97 Shimon Levy, *Samuel Beckett's Self-Referential Drama* (London: MacMillan Press, 1990) 33.
- 98 Levy 34.
- 99 Hugh Kenner, *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1968) 133.
- 100 As an extension of the stage-world, the theatre is also seen as mirroring its emptiness, as denoted by Vladimir's 'Not a soul in sight!' comment following his glance at the auditorium (Beckett, *Godot*, 47). S. E. Gontarski suggests that this remark may be an oblique reference to the poorly attended productions staged in the small Paris theatres that Beckett frequented, or a betrayal of the playwright's own apprehensions regarding *Godot's* "box-office" destiny. See Gontarski, *Beckett's 'Happy Days'*, 47.
- 101 Jacques Guicharnaud, "Existence Onstage," *Samuel Beckett*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea, 1985) 120.
- 102 Jerry Aline Flieger, "Blanchot and Beckett: *En Attendant Godot* as 'Discontinuous' Play," *French Forum* 5.2 (1980): 157.
- 103 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 9.
- 104 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 9.
- 105 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 10.
- 106 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 10.
- 107 Michael Robinson 232-33.
- 108 Topsfield 98.

109 Roger Blin, interview, "Blin on Beckett," *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism*, ed. S. E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1986) 231. In general, Tom Bishop's interview of director Roger Blin offers valuable insight into the dangers of overstating the 'circus element' in *Waiting for Godot*.

110 J. B. Priestley, *English Humour* (London: William Heinemann, 1976) 150.

111 Fred Miller Robinson, "Tray Bong! *Godot* and Music Hall," *Approaches to Teaching Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot'*, eds. June Schlueter and Enoch Brater (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1991) 67.

112 Raoul Sobel and David Francis, *Chaplin: Genesis of a Clown* (New York: Quartet Books, 1977) 92.

113 Priestley 151.

114 Phyllis Hartnoll, ed., *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre* 667.

115 Max Beerbohm, *Around Theatres* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954) 349.

116 P. H. Davison, "Contemporary Drama and Popular Dramatic Forms," *Aspects of Drama and the Theatre*, ed. Kathleen Robinson Committee (Sydney: Sydney UP, 1965) 179.

117 The verbal duels between the wily clown and staid ringmaster, in particular, became popular vehicles for showcasing the amusing ways in which the average American (represented by the clown) could ridicule and outwit his more educated European "neighbour" (parodically represented by the ringmaster).

118 Townsen 105.

119 Tony Staveacre, *Slapstick! The Illustrated Story of Knockabout Comedy* (London: Angus & Robertson, 1987) 17.

120 Staveacre 48.

121 Quoted in Disher 14.

122 Graham Nown, *When the World Was Young: Lost Empires* (Mississauga, Ontario: Cupress, 1986) 123.

123 Chesire 90-91.

124 Bernard Sobel, *A Pictorial History of Vaudeville* (New York: Citadel Press, 1961) 13.

125 Ruby Cohn, *Samuel Beckett* 294.

126 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 9.

127 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 25. This line is actually a variant of the comic 'Oui! Tray Bong' trademark line of music-hall comedian Charles Chaplin, Sr. Partaking of the traditional clowning technique of bastardizing the French language (with its connotations of cultured refinement), this phrase as uttered forth in *Godot* represents an implicit mockery of its pretentious speaker, as well as a parodic undercutting of our ludicrous attempts to sound more sophisticated than we really are.

128 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 26.

129 Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 42.

130 S. E. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985) 79. For an detailed analysis of the ways in which Beckett's Manichean leanings inform this Schopenhauerian idea of the "sin of being born," see chapter 3 ('The Sin of Being Born'), in Alice and Kenneth Hamilton, *Condemned to Life: The World of Samuel Beckett* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishers, 1976).

131 Bergson 75.

132 Though Roger Blin is probably the most extensively quoted exponent of this approach to *Godot's* character conception (see Blin, "Blin on Beckett," 226-35), Beckett laid the ideational foundations for this view through his contention that 'all of life was a disease,' a position ably summed up by Deirdre Bair in *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, 170.

133 J. L. Styan, *The Dark Comedy: The Development of Modern Comic Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1962) 261.

134 Katherine Worth, *'Waiting for Godot' and 'Happy Days': Text and Performance* (London: MacMillan Education, 1990) 68.

135 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 57.

136 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 33.

137 Robert W. Snyder, *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York* (New York: Oxford UP, 1989) 133.

138 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 57.

- 139 Towsen 172.
- 140 Shirley Staples, *Male-Female Comedy Teams in American Vaudeville: 1865-1932* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Umi Research, 1984) 173.
- 141 John E. DiMeglio, *Vaudeville, U.S.A* (Ohio: Bowling Green UP, 1973) 62.
- 142 Kalb 24.
- 143 "Charism," *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Elsevier Publishing Co., 1966) 269.
- 144 Richard Pearce, *Stages of the Clown: Perspectives on Modern Fiction From Dostoyevsky to Beckett* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1970) 134.
- 145 Paul Bouissac, *Circus and Culture: A Semiotic Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1976) 166.
- 146 Staveacre 88.
- 147 Kenner, *Samuel Beckett* 33.
- 148 D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen, 1969) 199.
- 149 Towsen 243-44.
- 150 Circus historian A. H. Kober concurs that 'Sometimes a chance coincidence or inspirational impromptu enriches the act . . . , but on the whole the clown prefers to stick to the comic business he has worked up' (see Kober, *Circus Days and Nights* (New York: William Morrow & Co., MCMXXXI) 177). Albert F. McLean, Jr. also discusses why vaudeville generally shunned improvisation and spontaneity in chapter 6 ('The New Humor'), in *American Vaudeville as Ritual*.
- 151 Wes McVicar, *Clown Act Omnibus* (New York: Association Press, 1960) 12.
- 152 Though the music-hall also featured a series of lively, fastidiously timed numbers, it is the post-1914 acts that were ruthlessly edited down to a matter of minutes.
- 153 Nown 123.
- 154 Albert F. McLean Jr. 11.
- 155 McLean Jr. 11.
- 156 Portman E6.

157 Francis Doherty, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1971) 87.

158 Kennedy 34.

159 Kenner, *Samuel Beckett* 151.

160 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 26.

161 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 45.

162 John S. Clarke, *Circus Parade* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1936) 54.

163 Sidney Tarachow, "Circuses and Clowns," *Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences*, ed. Geza Roheim (New York: International UP, 1951) 171.

164 Though this holds true within the dramatic world of the play, in actual point of fact those actors who fell under Beckett's personal direction may well be among the most exhaustively rehearsed and obsessively prepared stage actors of this century. In reviewing Beckett's newly published theatre notebooks on the Schiller Theatre productions of *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*, Christopher Prendergast is struck by the highly detailed complex of stage directions that were ironically needed to assist Beckett in eliminating all extraneous movement from his plays. Though the actors were sometimes left with little more than what Beckett called 'a few precise motions' with which to define the relation between the mobile and the immobile, Prendergast notes that the expression of this relation still 'demanded a minutely calculated and meticulously punctuated system of gestures, sounds, movements and pauses, down to the exact timing and duration of a grunt.' To fathom the full extent of the militant choreographing that shaped even the most seemingly haphazard of gestures or words in Beckett's early plays, see Prendergast, "Il n'y a pas de Beckett," in *London Review of Books* 14 Nov. 1996: 8-10.

165 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 41.

166 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 42.

167 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 7.

168 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 41.

169 Alain Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction*, trans. Richard Howard (Illinois: Northwestern UP, 1965) 102.

170 Renée Riese Hubert, "The Couple and the Performance in Samuel Beckett's Plays," *Esprit Createur* 2.4 (1962): 176.

171 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 47.

- 172 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 13.
- 173 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 42.
- 174 John Fletcher, *Samuel Beckett's Art* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967) 61.
- 175 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 44.
- 176 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 45.
- 177 Cheshire 77.
- 178 Sharon K. O'Dair, "The Contentless Passion of an Unfruitful Wind': Irony and Laughter in *Endgame*," *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 28.2 (1986): 165.
- 179 O'Dair 165.
- 180 Ruby Cohn, *Just Play: Beckett's Theatre* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1980) 12.
- 181 Cohn, *Just Play* 12.
- 182 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 31.
- 183 Samuel Beckett and George Duthuit, "Three Dialogues," *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965) 17.
- 184 Pierre Chabert, "The body in Beckett's theatre," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 8 (1982): 27.
- 185 Chabert 26.
- 186 Pia Brinzeu, "'Without a Word': Pauses in Beckett's Drama," *Beckett in the 1990s*, eds. Marius Buning and Lois Oppenheim (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1993) 232.
- 187 Penelope Gilliat, *Unholy Fools: Wits, Comics, Disturbers of the Peace* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973) 21.
- 188 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 23.
- 189 Gerald Mast, "A Comparison of *The Gold Rush* and *The General*," *Focus on Chaplin*, ed. Donald W. McCaffrey (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971) 127.
- 190 Some of the many forces that Keaton, as a callow city-innocent, must

contend with and/or master include a) natural enemies like a landslide, forest and ocean; b) mechanical opponents such as a locomotive, ocean liner and steamboat; and c) living adversaries in the form of an army, full police force, and phalanx of jilted brides hell-bent on exacting revenge on the unsuspecting Keaton.

191 In almost each case, the Keaton clown is evocatively portrayed by the camera's full and long shots as a small, distant figure "playing" against infinity, or the universe. It is highly probable that Beckett had this image in mind when placing his own clowns in a setting representative of the engulfing, assailing nothingness with which they too must interact. Certainly the tramps' eye-shaded scannings of the endless stage horizon are unmistakably reminiscent of the Keaton persona's frequent "painterly" reduction to the silhouetted likes of what Gerald Mast refers to as 'a human dot surveying the horizon with his hand on his brow.' See Mast, *The Comic Mind* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1979)130.

192 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 52.

193 Quoted in Durgnat 86.

194 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 44.

195 Harold Clurman, *The Divine Pastime* (New York: MacMillan Press, 1974) 64.

196 Quoted in Martha Fehsenfeld, "From the Perspective of an Actress/Critic: Ritual Patterns in Beckett's *Happy Days*," *Myth and Ritual in the Plays of Samuel Beckett*, ed. Katherine H. Burkman (Mississauga: Associated UP, 1987) 54.

197 Daniel Moews, *Keaton: The Silent Features Close Up* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1977) 7.

198 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 55.

199 Robbe-Grillet 125.

200 Helsa 230.

201 Moore 5.

202 Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues* 28.

203 Linda Ben-Zvi, *Samuel Beckett* (Boston: Twayne, 1986) 140.

204 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 27.

205 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 60.

206 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 47.

207 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 32.

208 John Fletcher, "Action and Play in Beckett's Theatre," *Modern Drama*, ed. Ruby Cohn., vol. 9 (Columbia, Missouri: Artcraft Press, 1966) 248.

209 Moore 286.

210 Knowlson 373.

211 Nown 16.

212 Ben-Zvi 6.

213 Moore 196.

214 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 41.

215 This particular Beckettian irony of discovering something only when you cease consciously seeking it is rooted in the standard clowning convention of portraying the operations of consciousness, or willfulness, as undermining our every effort to succeed. In particular, consciousness' infelicitous strategies for goal-attainment, involving monumental amounts of misdirected energy, have been exhaustively mined for easy laughs by stage and screen clowns alike. On the whole, Beckett substitutes epistemological ambitions for the more customary physical-task-oriented ones – like playing the violin, carrying a piano up a steep flight of stairs, etc. Given that Vladimir and Estragon are each searching for an essential self that eludes their deliberate attempts to grasp it, Beckett converts the play's still silences into sojourns of sagely "goal-less" being to concretize the difference between what M. Willson Disher calls 'much effort with little result and little effort with much result' (see Disher, *Clowns and Pantomimes*, 22). Disher sees the display of consciousness' inefficiency as comically 'nullify[ing] positive virtues, [such] as persistence, ingenuity and concentration' (23), while the showcased boons of an 'objectiveless' passivity laud 'the wisdom of folly or the effectiveness of sloth' (23). Seen from this perspective, the tramps' "productive" experiencing of the void's silence depends as much on their inadvertent lapses into "full-blown" idleness as on the fact that silence happens to be the nothingness' "transparent" form of self-expression.

216 Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (New York: Grove Press, 1959) 41.

217 Michael Worton, "Waiting for Godot and Endgame: théâtre as text," *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. John Pilling (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 75.

218 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 44.

219 This, of course, does not mean that vaudeville and circus clowning was devoid of lapses in movement and speech, only that when they did markedly occur, they tended to be an intrinsic part of the act itself. One of the more striking ways in which silence was used to get laughs was the standard 'comedian's pause,' wherein the performer keeps the audience waiting expectantly (if not nervously) for the next comic bit. Former music-hall comedian Max Wall was notorious for falling into silent reveries on stage, during which he would stare off into space, as the audience sat waiting for what seemed an eternity, only to break his trance with the apologetic "Excuse me, I was miles away." In general, inactivity was permitted on the popular stage only if it was in some way conducive to laughter. Even today, demotic entertainment's stern advocacy of the artist's total, unflagging commitment to performance is felt in the 'show must go on' imperative levelled at any professional entertainer whose private grief threatens to interrupt or cut short the evening's proceedings.

220 Kennedy 43.

221 John Fletcher and John Spurling, *Beckett: A Study of His Plays* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972) 66.

222 Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*, 3rd ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1958) 376.

223 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 34.

224 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 34.

225 Quoted in Pearce 3.

226 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 35.

227 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 35.

228 Knowlson 343.

229 Leonard C. Pronko, *Avante-Garde: The Experimental Theatre in France* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1962) 43.

230 Jacobsen and Mueller 161.

231 William Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974) 1287. In its entirety, this line of Lear's reads: "When we are born, we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools."

232 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 9.

233 Joseph C. McLelland, *The Clown and the Crocodile* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1970) 114.

234 McVicar 14.

235 Jean-Jacques Mayoux, "Beckett and Expressionism," *Modern Drama* 9, ed. Ruby Cohn (Columbia, Missouri: Artcraft Press, 1966) 240.

236 Guicharnaud 109.

237 Chaplin's romance-hopeful tramp-creation appends human tenderness to this repertoire of primary needs.

238 Towsen 284.

239 Ruth Manning-Sanders, *The English Circus* (London: Werner Laurie, 1952) 292.

240 Manning-Sanders 292.

241 Quoted in Towsen 284.

242 Walter Kerr, *The Silent Clowns* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975) 85.

243 Kerr 85.

244 J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1971) 110.

245 Enid Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1961) 55.

246 Fred Miller Robinson, "The History and Significance of the Bowler Hat: Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, Beckett, Magritte and Kundera," *Tri Quarterly* 66 (1986): 176.

247 Towsen 283.

248 Durgnat 78.

249 John Montgomery, *Comedy Films: 1984-1954*, 2nd ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968) 232.

250 William Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969) 16.

251 Willeford 16.

252 McVicar 5.

253 Beckett makes particularly effective use of the clown's lumpish costume to connote the profound unknowability of character in his 1953 novel *Watt*, whose narrative revolves around the fate of another educated derelict-hero (Watt) with clownish attributes. Using comically amorphous dress to shroud the solitary, tenebrously-illuminated Watt in additional layers of identity-confounding mystery, Beckett has him appear (to the onlooking Hackett couple) too indistinct to ascertain 'whether it was a man or a woman,' or even 'a parcel, a carpet for example, or a roll of tarpaulin, wrapped in dark paper and tied about the middle with a cord' (Beckett, *Watt*, 16-17.) Further thought to be perhaps a stone, the shapeless figure of Watt becomes an externalization of each human being's inner zone or sphere of chaos where rationally and linguistically conceived concepts like male/female, subject/object and animate/inanimate dissolve into utter meaninglessness. When permitted free expression in the world, this "cloddish" self evinces an anarchical disregard for all hierarchical systems of organization and thought.

254 Bair 192.

255 Bair 192.

256 Portman E6.

257 Maurice Charney, *Comedy High and Low* (New York: Oxford UP, 1978) 55.

258 Fred Miller Robinson, "The History and Significance of the Bowler Hat" 173.

259 Fred Miller Robinson, "The History and Significance of the Bowler Hat" 173.

260 Fred Miller Robinson, "The History and Significance of the Bowler Hat, 175.

261 Sobel and Francis 165. Such comically overreaching social aspirations and pretensions would invariably result in endless conflicts between reality and fantasy and limitation and ambition in Chaplin's films and the other comic mediums in which the foppish bowler appeared.

262 Fred Miller Robinson, "The History and Significance of the Bowler Hat" 182.

263 Fred Miller Robinson, "The History and Significance of the Bowler Hat" 189.

264 Fred Miller Robinson, "The History and Significance of the Bowler Hat" 189.

265 Fred Miller Robinson, "The History and Significance of the Bowler Hat" 182.

266 This point warrants a few qualifying remarks. Though over the years at least one critically acclaimed production of *Waiting for Godot* has seen Vladimir and Estragon donning the conical hats of the circus clown "proper" and sharing between them various parts of one suit modelled on the more formal attire of Edwardian music-hall cross-talk comedians (to underscore the *clochards'* resemblance to the double-acts of music hall, circus clowns and motion pictures), *this* specific playwright-endorsed departure from the play's explicit guidelines on stage dress is the rare exception, and not the rule. To gain more insight into this choice of stage dress, see Martin Esslin, "Godot. The Authorized Version," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 1 (1976): 98. In general, all textual direction concerning stage movement, costume, lighting and gender in Beckett's plays is meant to be strictly observed. As actress Billie Whitelaw remarks: 'Beckett didn't write . . . play[s] for actors to 'experiment' with. . . . He wanted them to be done as he wrote them. To him, the speaking of the lines was only a small part of the whole work. If you throw out his detailed stage directions, you lose the play.' See Billie Whitelaw, *Billie Whitelaw . . . Who He?: An Autobiography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995) 147. As such, we must heed the visual echoes of and associated themes connected to the traditional hobo-clown of mass entertainment that suffuse *Godot's* dramatic world.

267 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 10.

268 Kalb 33.

269 Fred Miller Robinson, "Tray Bong! *Godot* and Music Hall" 67.

270 Guicharnaud 108.

271 Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels* 294.

272 Rosette Lamont, "Beckett's Metaphysics of Choiceless Awareness," *Samuel Beckett Now*, ed. Melvin J. Friedman (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1970) 205.

273 Guicharnaud 110.

274 MacGowran 16.

275 Mary Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama* (London: MacMillan Press, 1993) 88.

276 Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama* 88.

277 Cirlot 51.

278 Cirlot 295.

279 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 7.

280 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 13.

281 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 24.

282 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 26.

283 The land-owning, manor-dwelling Pozzo – who goes on to become the odious stereotype of the overweening, pipe-smoking plantation-owner -- is one example of this.

284 Lyons 21.

285 Frederick Busi maintains that the character names in the play suggestively reveal Pozzo and Lucky to be grotesquely caricatured “doubles” of Estragon and Vladimir, ‘with the parts reversed and transmogrified, with spirit now at the mercy of matter.’ To appreciate the surprising number of similarities between the two pairs of men, see chapter 3 (‘Transfiguration’), in Busi, *The Transformations of ‘Godot’* (Lexington, Kentucky: UP of Kentucky, 1980).

286 Lyons 31-32.

287 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 7.

288 Not coincidentally, the mercurial shifting of mood and frequently behaviour is another of the tramp-actor’s signature qualities, indicative of his inability to be pinned down to any one consistent “personality” type. The great circus tramp-clown, Otto Griebling (1896-1972) was known for his erratic-bordering-on-crazed temperament, out of which arose a comic performance style that prided itself on working against audience expectations. This tendency to play mischievously on the emotions of the audience – who tended to retain the same pitying/scornful/fearful attitudes toward the vagrant-clown as for the real-life vagrant – is also a feature of Chaplin’s ‘Tramp,’ who will, for instance, suddenly seat himself in his adversary’s lap. The same will to confound our expectations is a staple of Harpo Marx’s tramp-creation, whose radically unpredictable nature could instantaneously veer from childlike timidity to lunatic recklessness for no apparent reason. This tradition openly leaves its mark on *Godot*’s own contradiction-bound tramps. Their quicksilver mood reversals – such as when a tender-hearted Estragon succeeds in extracting from Vladimir an embrace, only to recoil a second later in manifest disgust over his partner’s garlic-tinged breath – serve the play’s need to keep both its characters fundamentally and frustratingly unknowable to us, and its rapid-fire tonal shifts (from tragedy or pathos to undercutting comedy), so vital to its tragicomic message, in

full gear.

289 Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 53.

290 Kennedy 37.

291 Michael Roemer, "Chaplin: Charles and Charlie," *The Silent Comedians*, ed. Richard Dyer MacCann (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1993) 137.

292 Beckett, *Proust* 13.

293 Beckett, *Proust* 15.

294 Beckett, *Proust* 19.

295 Though not explicitly related to the hobo-clown themes discussed here, Frederik N. Smith has written an excellent article on Beckett's literary use of a 'verbal slapstick' involving the syntactical juxtaposing of words (either in the same sentence or paragraph) whose comically clashing tones or diction levels render it impossible for them to fuse into any rational utterance. Though Smith's argument concerns itself with Beckett's novels, the dialogue in *Godot* frequently manifests the same jarring shifting of lexical fields that leads Smith to conclude that 'The inclusiveness of his [ie. Beckett's] diction dramatizes his willing acceptance of the seemingly contradictory definitions of what it means to be human.' See Frederik N. Smith, "Beckett's Verbal Slapstick," *Modern Fiction Studies* 29 (1983): 43-55. Since its main function is to underscore the contradictory nature of Beckett's characters, this comically stylized use of language -- one entirely consistent with the traditional fool's unorthodox blend of alternately vulgar, poetic and wisdom-imparting language -- may be seen as one way in which *Godot's* tramp-clowns linguistically express the indeterminate nature of the essential self. Vladimir and Estragon's occasionally incongruously abstruse idiom also reflects Beckett's desire that we remain in the dark in respect to their histories which, he once added, may have included the acquisition of Ph.D.'s.

296 Edith Kern, "Structure in Beckett's Theatre," *Yale French Studies* 46 (1971): 17.

297 Fred Miller Robinson, "'An Art of Superior Tramps': Beckett and Giacometti," *The Centennial Review* 25.4 (1981): 344.

298 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées (Selections)*, trans. and ed. Martin Jarrett-Kerr (London: SCM Press, 1950) 35.

299 Pascal 35.

300 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 37.

301 Fred Miller Robinson, "An Art of Superior Tramps': Beckett and Giacometti" 339-40.

302 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 7.

303 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 7.

304 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 20.

305 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 20.

306 As well as having the Hamm-Clov couple of *Endgame* constitute a hypothetical father/son pairing, Beckett has compared their interdependent, long-standing relationship to a marriage (see Ruby Cohn, "Beckett Directs: *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*," *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism*, ed. S. E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1986) 299). He has even gone so far as to declare that 'Hamm and Clov were actually himself and Suzanne as they were in the 1950's' -- when they were finding it difficult to be in each other's company, though neither could face life without the other (see Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, 468).

307 Rosette Lamont has noted that the tramps' fraternal bond is also intimated in their nicknames, which recall the terms for older and younger brother in Chinese. See Lamont, "Beckett's Metaphysics of Choiceless Awareness," 207.

308 Claudia Clausius, "Bad Habits While Waiting for Godot: The Demythification of Ritual," *Myth and Ritual in the Plays of Samuel Beckett*, ed. Katherine H. Burkman (Mississauga: Associated University Presses, 1987) 132.

309 Scott Allen Nollen, *The Boys: The Cinematic World of Laurel and Hardy* (London: McFarland & Co., 1989) 44.

310 Pearce 132.

311 The self-casting involved in Vladimir and Estragon's relationship is apparent in the pair's fabrication of imaginative nicknames that reflect the organizing principle of their "new" lives together: Go-go as body-centred and Di-di as talk (or "dire" in French) or brain-centred.

312 MacGowran 17.

313 Fred Miller Robinson, "Tray Bong! *Godot* and Music Hall" 67.

314 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 40.

315 Estragon's fastidious carrot-polishing may well have its roots in Chaplin-as-Charlie's own comic parodying of the lower middle class' excessive preoccupation with and aping of the formal table manners of its upper classes. As the apotheosis of

ludicrously imitative or learned (as opposed to “natural”) forms of behaviour, the typically indigent and starving ‘Tramp’'s dining etiquette includes decorously removing a spot from a dinner plate upon which he is about to heap a portion of boiled boot in *The Gold Rush* (1925), and polishing and paring his fingernails before settling down to a lunch of grass in *The Tramp* (1915) .

316 Clausius 124.

317 Clausius 124.

318 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 28.

319 Nollen 44.

320 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 28.

321 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 59.

322 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 33.

323 As early as his second novel *Murphy* (published in 1938), Beckett was portraying this desire to split off into “couples” as one of the more blindly observed and imprisoning of social conventions. In a heated discussion with girlfriend-prostitute Celia, Murphy, the main character, accuses all women of wanting to abolish love ‘in brats and house bloody wifery.’ See *Murphy* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1957) 37. Murphy’s disparaging and reductive portrait of Celia has her more than faintly resembling the misogynistically-depicted women in Laurel and Hardy films, whose needs and subsequent demands – always stridently articulated and directed like machine-gun fire at their flinching male partners – are exactly those of respectable and bourgeois society. For a more detailed analysis of this particular delineation of women in early comic film, see Molly Haskell, “Women and the Silent Comedians,” *Movie Comedy*, eds. Stuart Byron and Elisabeth Weis (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1977) 36-40. It is interesting to note that Beckett’s early examination of this instinct to form committed pairings fails, unlike *Godot*, to consider the positive, life-sustaining benefits of “coupledom.”

324 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 38.

325 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 38.

326 MacGowran 18.

327 Lyons 48.

328 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 44.

329 Blau 259.

330 Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1974) 48.

331 Goffman 49.

332 Goffman 48.

333 Goffman 235.

334 Quoted in Walter D. Asmus, "Beckett Directs *Godot*," *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism*, ed. S. E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1986) 286.

335 Kennedy 44.

336 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970) 12.

337 Roemer 144.

338 Kennedy 39.

339 Kennedy 39.

340 Kennedy 39.

341 Huizinga 7.

342 Gerhard Hauck, *Reductionism in Drama and the Theatre: The Case of Samuel Beckett* (Maryland: Scripta Humanistica, 1992) 111.

343 Kennedy 37.

344 Ihab Hassan, *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967) 206.

345 Richard N. Coe, *Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press, 1968) 11.

346 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 42.

347 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 38-39.

348 In a more general sense, all the characters in *Godot*, with the possible exception of Lucky, are seasoned verbal manipulators adept at securing their needs. For example, Pozzo contrives to keep Vladimir – who wants to leave – in his company by ominously wondering aloud at what might happen were Vladimir to forsake his appointment with the mysterious Godot "who has [his] future in his hands" (see

Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 19). Susceptible to the fear-instilling rhetoric of divine punishment for disobedience, Vladimir elects to stay.

349 Beckett, *Three Novels* 307.

350 Blau 269.

351 Kalb 33.

352 Kalb 33

353 Asmus 288.

354 Kalb 34.

355 Roemer 133.

356 Richard Schickel, "A Chaplin Overview," *Movie Comedy*, eds. Stuart Byron and Elisabeth Weis (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1977) 27.

357 Quoted in Bair 558.

358 Martin Esslin, "Godot. The Authorized Version" 99.

359 Erving Goffman's analysis of the ways in which distinct episodes of playfulness insinuate themselves daily into our lives is helpful in enabling us to isolate some of the telltale signs of playfulness inherent in both the tramps -- and our -- at least outwardly hostile exchanges with one another. For example, Goffman points out that "insult matches" that exhibit the wit of the insulters rather than the actual features of the person(s) at whom the insults are being levelled constitute "play" (see Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 50). This reality certainly rings true with Vladimir and Estragon's highly original epithet-exchange of act two that culminates in what may be the masterstroke (for the misunderstood artist) of all insults: 'Crrritic!' (*Waiting for Godot*, 48). Peter Gidal also deconstructs the subtle play-element underlying the tramps' manipulative techniques for projecting guilt onto the other for perceived instances of personal neglect. See Gidal, *Understanding Beckett: A Study of Monologue and Gesture in the Works of Samuel Beckett* (London: MacMillan Press, 1986) 56-57.

360 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 37.

361 Roemer 134.

362 Willeford 133.

363 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 38.

364 Mary Bryden, "Figures of Golgotha: Beckett's Pinioned People," *The Ideal Core of the Onion*, eds. John Pilling and Mary Bryden (Bristol: Longdum Press, 1992) 59.

365 Bryden, "Figures of Golgotha: Beckett's Pinioned People" 59.

366 Bryden, "Figures of Golgotha: Beckett's Pinioned People" 59.

367 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 7.

368 Quoted in William K. Everson, *The Films of Laurel and Hardy* (New York: Citadel Press, 1967) 54.

369 Scott Allen Nollen's pithy synopsis of Laurel and Hardy's ironically titled *Helpmates* (1932) illustrates this point brilliantly. Nollen writes: "Ollie has thrown a wild party during his wife's absence, and, realizing the extent of the household damage, calls Stan for help. Stan arrives within seconds, and after several mishaps, manages to clean the house for Ollie. However, while Ollie drives to the train station to pick up his wife, Stan prepares a comfortable blaze in his friend's fireplace. Upon his return, a black-eyed Ollie finds Stan swinging a garden hose, attempting to douse what remains of the smoldering house. Instead of becoming angry, Ollie accepts his friend's actions as an unfortunate accident. Sobbing, Stan asks, 'Is there anything else I can do for you?'" (see Nollen, *The Boys: The Cinematic World of Laurel and Hardy*, 43).

370 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 58.

371 Durgnat 84.

372 Worth 24.

373 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 29.

374 Beckett, *Murphy* 6.

375 Beckett, *Murphy* 7.

376 Henri Bergson interestingly associates what he sees as the inherently comic situation of absentmindedness in the face of one's social obligations with the dreamstate. This may explain, in part, why *Godot's* characters -- who alternate between mentally fading in and out of the sensory world -- seem at times to be awake and at other times sleeping. Bergson prescribes the shaming corrective of laughter to wake the unsociable individual from his 'dream' (see Bergson, "Laughter," 147). Since intervals of complete withdrawal from social life are, for Beckett, simply a "given" that cannot be helped, such punitive measures are, for him and his personae, futile.

- 377 Bair 639.
- 378 Bair 639.
- 379 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 52.
- 380 G. C. Barnard, *Samuel Beckett: A New Approach* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1970) 91.
- 381 Mi-yae Kim, "The Use of Stage-Comedy in *Waiting for Godot* and *The Bald Soprano*," *The Journal of English Language and Literature* 36.1 (1990): 105.
- 382 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 51.
- 383 Alice and Kenneth Hamilton 218.
- 384 MacGowran 17.
- 385 Shari Benstock, "The Transformational Grammar of Gender in Beckett's Drama," *Women in Beckett*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1990) 179.
- 386 Benstock 182.
- 387 Bennett Simon, "The Fragmented Self, the Reproduction of the Self, and Reproduction in Beckett and in the Theatre of the Absurd," *The World of Samuel Beckett*, ed. Joseph H. Smith (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1991) 160.
- 388 William F. Fry, Jr., "Charles Chaplin: an embodiment of paradox (le comique et la terreur)," *Charlie Chaplin: His Reflection in Modern Times*, ed. Adolphe Nysenholc (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1991) 61.
- 389 See Cohn, *The Comic Gamut*, 213-15.
- 390 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 39.
- 391 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 49.
- 392 Mast, *The Comic Mind* 110.
- 393 See Asmus, "Beckett Directs *Godot*," 285.
- 394 Kern 27.
- 395 Alice and Kenneth Hamilton 158.
- 396 Barnard 89.

397 Eva Metman, "Reflections on Samuel Beckett's Plays," *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965) 132.

398 Bernard F. Dukore, "Gogo, Didi and the Absent Godot," *Drama Survey* 1 (1962): 302-03.

399 Alice and Kenneth Hamilton 161.

400 T. G. A. Nelson, *Comedy: An Introduction to Comedy in Literature, Drama, and Cinema* (New York: Oxford UP, 1990) 118.

401 Nelson 118.

402 Frequently an embodiment of the tug-of-war relations existing between these antipodal traits, Chaplin's 'Tramp' demonstrates full "fool" status as delineated by Nelson in the splitting off of self that occurs in *The Great Dictator* (1940). In this film, the duality of "worldliness" (portrayed here as cruelly instinctual, egomaniacal and morally ignorant) and "spirituality" (gently innocent, selfless and wisely compassionate) is incarnated in the Hitler-based Hynkel and the look-alike Jewish barber, both clownishly played by Chaplin. Needless to say, the latter, impersonating a speech-giving Hynkel, gets in the film's final word: a moving appeal for world peace and fellowship. By contrast, the divided sides of each of *Godot's* tramps, or the Vladimir and Estragon character-halves of the bifurcated individual, are drawn with a greater moral ambiguity than the "vice vs. virtue" ones of the 'Tramp' as portrayed in *The Great Dictator*. Hence authorial pressures to side more with one character (or aspect of him) than the other are of a decidedly less pressing nature for Beckett, whose personae -- rather than being good or bad -- just are.

403 Bouissac 167.

404 Barnard Sobel 17-18.

405 Townsen 96.

406 Douglan McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre* (New York: Riverrun Press, 1988) 62.

407 J. P. Lebel, *Buster Keaton*, trans. P. D. Stovin (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1967) 65.

408 Lebel 65.

409 Despite the fact that to a considerable extent Pozzo and Lucky freely choose to enact their respective "empowered" and "disempowered" roles, and that each remains equally dependent on the other to keep up his part of the "act," the power

structure within their relationship should not be construed as *merely* fictitious. To do so would be to imply the counter-existence of a distinctly separate factual dimension to the internal dynamics of a human relationship that the Pozzo-Lucky duo somehow manages to bypass altogether. As I have already mentioned, Beckett's paired personae, true to their fool origins, are master-dissolvers of the distinctions between fiction and fact and art and life. Though Pozzo and Lucky at some level play at being a respective master and slave, their performances also constitute the actual contents of their lives. These lives unfold with an unrivalled concreteness that mostly sees Lucky in a genuine state of degradation and suffering under the yoke of his cruel partner, and Pozzo genuinely revelling in and achieving a sense of self-exaltation through the degradation and infliction of suffering upon his partner. While the unequal allotment of power within the couple is to some extent part of Pozzo and Lucky's unreal play-acting, its effects upon the characters are unmistakably real. Also, while it has been argued that Pozzo's blindness (and heightened helplessness) of Act II diminishes or levels off power discrepancies between the two, in truth nothing much changes, since the pair continues to go through the more fundamental motions, and undergoes the same basic effects, of tyranny and servitude – as before.

410 Louisa E. Jones, *Sad Clowns and Pale Pierrots* (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, 1984) 145.

411 Geneviève Serreau, "Beckett's Clowns," *Casebook on 'Waiting for Godot'*, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 73.

412 Serreau 73.

413 Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 28.

414 To understand better the tragic reductions that have befallen Lucky's role over time, see Martin W. Walsh's analysis of the ways in which Lucky's present debilitations are linked to his once privileged but now lapsed status as artificial 'fool,' in "Taking a Knook: A Footnote to *Godot*," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 1.1-2 (1992): 137-140.

415 Pozzo and Lucky's costumes and make-up – uncircumscribed by any textual direction save that each sport a bowler -- are often made to accommodate both the circus trainer/animal and the master/slave levels of characterization. It is not unusual for the actor portraying Pozzo to appear in elegant dress and high, shiny boots, a formidable guise that can evoke both ringmaster and, as Hugh Kenner notes, a Gestapo-like official with authoritarian pretences (see Kenner, *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973) 30). The actor playing Lucky characteristically assumes the broken-down demeanour applicable to both a "hack" and victim of persecution. This duality of roles has also been bridged through exaggeratedly white facial make-up betokening how drained of life Lucky is.

416 When Pozzo later goes blind, Lucky also "becomes" his eyes.

417 Tristan Rémy, *Les Clowns* (Paris: Grasset, 1945) 315.

418 Wilmot 60-61.

419 Hubert 176.

420 Northrop Frye, "The Nightmare Life in Death," rev. of the trilogy by Samuel Beckett, *Hudson Review* 13.3 (1960): 446.

421 Ronald Hayman, *Contemporary Playwrights: Samuel Beckett* (London: Heinemann Education Books, 1968) 7.

422 Examples of the ways in which the Schneider-directed Burgess Meredith (Vladimir) and Zero Mostel (Estragon) jestingly clash can be found in Kalb, *Beckett in performance*, 28-32.

423 Frederick J. Hoffman, *Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1962) 92-93.

424 Fletcher, *Samuel Beckett's Art* 67.

425 Stanley Cavell observes that this more ruthlessly competitive conversational style is reserved for *Endgame*, with its less equalized and so more genuinely contentious master-servant pairing of characters. Cavell argues that for this couple 'victory or salvation consists (not exactly in proving a point or defending a position but) in coming up with the right answer -- or rather, the *next* answer, one which continues the dialogue, but whose point is to win a contest of wits by capping a gag or getting the last word.' See Stanley Cavell, *Must we say mean what we say?* (New York: Scribner's, 1969) 127.

426 Michael Patrick Gillespie, "Textually Uninhibited: The Playfulness of Joyce and Beckett," *Re: Joyce 'n Beckett*, eds. Phyllis Carey and Ed Jewinski (New York: Fordham UP, 1992) 99.

427 Wilmot 57.

428 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 13.

429 That major Paris, New York and Manchester productions of *Godot* have all availed themselves of veteran music-hall comedians (including Max Wall and Lucien Raimbourg) to play the leads indicates the importance Beckett attaches to achieving the expertly honed conversational rhythms needed to generate this sense of a "two-sided" wholeness of being (and well-being).

430 Declan Kiberd, "Beckett and the Life to Come," *Beckett in Dublin*, ed. S. E. Wilmer (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1992) 81.

431 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 22.

432 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 25.

433 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 40.

434 Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 40.

435 Bergson 182.

436 Hauck 119.

437 Melvin J. Friedman, "A Note on Leibniz and Samuel Beckett," *Romance Notes* 4.2 (1963): 94.

438 Friedman 94.

439 Richard Keller Simon, "Dialectical Laughter: A Study of *Endgame*," *Modern Drama* 25.4 (1982): 509.

440 Gilliat 22.

441 Bair 639.

442 Bair 468.

443 Cohn, *Just Play* 12.

444 In the case of one partner in a traditional two-act having more dialogue than the other, the latter compensates by engaging in an equal or almost equal share of action of one sort or another.

445 Hugh Kenner believes that Clov's opening motions of drawing back the curtains of each of the stage set's two windows is 'so plainly a metaphor for waking up that we fancy the stage, with its high peepholes, to be the inside of an immense skull.' See Kenner, *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study*, 155.

446 The resultant proliferation of stylized sequences of story-telling and soliloquizing in *Endgame* takes the "Pozzo-like" reliance on the rhetorically-polished monologue as a means primarily of self-amusement and self-adulation a notch higher. Now popular entertainment's mandate to provide psychically satisfying fare to its audiences — a concern still voiced in Pozzo's belated request for a "rating" of his performance from the tramps — is negated by Hamm's sole concern with his own appraisal and enjoyment of his "performance."

447 Quoted in Bair 468.

448 Unlike Lucky, Clov is not a born masochist whose needs are being met by his partner's sadistic cruelties. In *Godot*, the paired personae, for the most part, catered to each other's wants. This makes their respective relationships slightly more explicable or at least justifiable than that of Hamm and Clov, who elect to stay together despite the fact that neither character's needs are really being met by the other.

449 Roger Blin, who both directed and played the part of Hamm in the first production of *Fin de Partie*, recalls one of Beckett's steely directives: 'there was to be no intimation of comedy in this production at all. He wanted no aura of laughter, no possibility of humor. It was to be stark, grim, deadening, hopeless -- these were the words he used to describe what was taking place on stage.' Quoted in O'Dair, "The Contentless Passion of an Unfruitful Wind," 167.

450 Kennedy 65.

451 Nown 115.

452 Doherty 117.

453 Kennedy 82.

454 For example, Charles R. Lyons recalls how Beckett's 1979 production of *Happy Days* at the Royal Court saw Winnie (played by Billie Whitelaw) delivering her "happy days" and other pause-filling tag lines 'almost as an automaton. . . .' (see Lyons, *Samuel Beckett*, 132). Whitelaw attributes her notably impassive utterance of Winnie's lines to her frequent admonishments from Beckett: 'No, no, that's too much colour, too much colour,' a direction which the actress views as 'clearly a euphemism for "Please don't act"' (see Whitelaw, *Billie Whitelaw . . . Who He?*, 80).

455 Gontarski, *Beckett's 'Happy Days'* 56.

456 Cohn, *The Comic Gamut* 298-99.

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