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A Study of Samuel Beckett's People and of their Relationships
in the Plays Waiting for Godot, Endgame and Happy Days

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A Thesis
in
the Department
of
English

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
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Concordia University
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ABSTRACT

A Study of Samuel Beckett's People and of their Relationships in the Plays Waiting for Godot, Endgame and Happy Days

Tilly Angela Mandel

The thesis is an attempt to analyze what human relationships mean in the world of Samuel Beckett, particularly in the plays Waiting for Godot, Endgame and Happy Days. Beckett has said that his area of work is that of the impotent and the ignorant, of the "non-knower" and "non-carer." All that is left to his characters is the presence of another. The interrelations of both major and minor characters of all three works are traced in detail. Similarities and differences in these relationships and others of Beckett's creation are noted. Beckett's "people" - the very human characters in the three plays - are never found to co-exist happily; they are equally unable to live apart. Only their relationships, whether present, recollected, or imagined, and their intrinsic humour allow them to exist at all.

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Introduction

We have no elucidations to offer of mysteries that are all of their making. My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin. Hamm as stated, and Clov as stated, together as stated, nec tecum nec sine te, in such a place, and in such a world, that's all I can manage, more than I could.¹

As in all great drama, the plays of Samuel Beckett confront the critic with the many sided enigma of how to interpret, as closely as possible, what the artist is revealing to us of his conception of life in general or certain aspects of life. The intention of this thesis is to focus attention on the characters which Beckett presents in the plays, Waiting for Godot (1954), Endgame (1958), and Happy Days (1961) and then to examine how and to what degree they interact with one another and with their world in general. The primary aim of this study is to achieve a better insight into what Samuel Beckett sees as the meaning of human relationships. Because of the immense complexity and the suffusion of irony which Beckett injects into his work, it is hardly surprising that quite startling

¹ Samuel Beckett, letter to Alan Schneider, The Village Voice Reader (December 29, 1957): 185.

variations have arisen in the interpretations of his plays. His vast fund of knowledge appears to have fed critical thought in numerous religious, philosophical and psychological directions, often far away from the "matter of fundamental sounds" which he himself stresses. What has too frequently been laid aside not only in the critical appraisals of Beckett's major works, but also in the studies of such shorter works as Krapp's Last Tape (1960), Eh Joe (1970), or Play (1970) is their underlying humanity. It is surely the human element of Beckett's plays which gives them their great appeal and their Nobel Prize winning acclaim. Nowhere is this human element more clearly felt than in the artist's portrayal of human relationships. Either in reality or fantasy, all Beckett's characters lives in these plays are centered on their relationships. This intense focus on the relationships is a factor common to most of Beckett's plays, one which has rarely attracted much critical attention and yet one which begs to be explored.

In an interview regarding his collaboration with Beckett, Jack MacGowran, the outstanding interpretive performer of Beckett's work in English, said the following: " I have always felt . . . that his plays are not so complicated as people would like to think - that there is an underlying simplicity."² The human relationships, so subtly present within the plays, form a large part of this "underlying simplicity". The relationships which spring to life amongst the impoverished artists, tramps, prostitutes, clowns, slave drivers and slaves of Beckett's imagination are so highly visible that they become almost invisible. On close examination they are the full-blooded relationships of real human beings to one

²Richard Toscan, interview with Jack MacGowran, "MacGowran on Beckett," Theatre Quarterly 111 (July - Sept. 1973): 15-22.

another. As far as is possible, I have tried to uncover what Beckett has said about Beckett. He has always been known for his reluctance to explain his own work, a characteristic which MacGowran in the 1973 interview attempted to clarify:

The reason why Beckett doesn't like being interviewed is not that he's a recluse or a philosopher in an ivory tower. It's that he doesn't wish to try and explain his own work in the same way that an abstract painter could not explain an abstract painting. He once said, 'I will feel superior to my own work if I try to explain it,' and I thought that answered the point.³

There have, however, from as early as the days of Proust (1957), been times when Beckett has helped to shed a useful light upon some of the more difficult aspects of his work, and certain such explanations refer directly to his interpretation of human relationships. In his capacity as director of Endgame, for example, Beckett showed himself far more anxious to illustrate its obscurities than had otherwise been the case and insisted that the real key to its understanding lies in the interdependency of its characters.

In Waiting for Godot, Endgame and Happy Days, Beckett always presents cases of interdependence, and it is this interdependence which is a large part of the key to an understanding of all three plays. Two sets of couples appear in each play although in Happy Days the second couple has faded to no more than a spectre of Winnie's imagination. In every case, the primary relationship is of superior worth to the subsidiary which acts as a foil. At the core of each play is the relationship of a couple past its youth. All three of the primary relationships are of long term origin, showing the closest of ties

³ Toscan 16.

where love and hate run rivalry. Perhaps Beckett's characters are no longer young because he himself was no longer a youth at their creation. The advanced age also allows each partnership to have taken the larger part of its course. Youthful optimism has little part to play in Beckett's Weltanschauung. MacGowran says that, "He (Beckett) doesn't write about young people at all, because he doesn't see life from that point of view. He only writes about what he knows and what he has seen. He's never found anything in the younger people that he felt he had to write about."⁴ In each case the characters live in a state of human distress, but they never actually reach a state of total despair. Beckett's characters may consider suicide from time to time, but they can never leave their relationships to perform such a solitary act. In the main, it is their togetherness which supports the survival they crave, however grim its reality may be. Togetherness has become the very essence of existence for the "people" of Beckett's three plays. In constant pain, Beckett's characters long for peace and refuge. It is within the strife of their relationships that they are closest to ever finding such a haven. To each and every one of them, life is "awful" and happiness a state of being quite alien to their lives. While the characters wait for their fates to unfold, they have another who stands besides them, and it slowly becomes clear that each individual has little power of survival without his partner. Dominant and subservient roles converge and entangle in Waiting for Godot, Endgame, and Happy Days to the point where we realise that domination has many forms, many not so easily recognizable.

The analysis of the plays is intended to show that if there is any real hope in these

⁴ Toscan 22.

plays of Samuel Beckett's, it is more likely to be found within rather than without the relationships. The hope of Godot's arrival diminishes; we are continually reminded that nothing really takes its course in Endgame; and by the end of Happy Days even Winnie's "happiness" has lost much of its defiance. We are always confronted with the fact that there is "nothing to be done" for "the essential doesn't change."⁵ Something, however, has changed. Beckett's people and their relationships become firmly entrenched in our minds, and in experiencing and exploring these relationships, our own experience and understanding can be enriched.

⁵ Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York Grove Press, 1954) 7,14.

Chapter One

The Relationships of Waiting for Godot

We agree with those whose ideas (non-Platonic) are at the same degree of confusion as our own.⁶

Thus a twenty-five year old Beckett translated the views of Marcel Proust on friendship, obliquely predicting the essence of the relationships to be found in his own later works. The impressions of youth, so clearly laid out in this early writing, became indelibly etched in Beckett's mind to appear again and again in the works of his maturity. It is in Proust that Beckett openly defines that which Waiting for Godot offers in more subtle presentation. It is in Proust where Beckett early probes how, for him, man relates to man. Proust, Beckett tells us scathingly, situates the relationship of friends "somewhere between fatigue and ennui," and defines such a relationship as "a function of his (man's) cowardice . . . the negation of that irremediable solitude to which every human being is condemned."⁷ Beckett is clearly heard above the voice of Proust. The intensity of his translation speaks a personal voice, a voice which seventeen years later brings human relationships, in all their perplexity, to life in Waiting for Godot. In Godot all the characters are presented within the context of a relationship. If Beckettian man is alone

⁶ Samuel Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove Press, 1957) 65.

⁷ Proust 65, 63.

in the world and even occasionally alone on stage, he is never far out of sight of the bonds of his pairing. The purpose of this chapter is to focus on the relationships presented in Waiting for Godot. How far can their bonds penetrate the solitude of Beckett's individuals? How necessary are they for the basic survival of his "people" and, in the final analysis, what are the real strands which hold the characters together? These are the questions which my study will attempt to answer.

Amongst the vast array of Beckett criticism which has arisen since the early 50's, there has been surprisingly little exploration into the characters and relationships of Godot. As Melvin J. Friedman points out in Samuel Beckett Now, "the commentators on Godot have an unpleasant habit of tripping over one another's toes in their urgency to elucidate the play and to find some of their problems solved in it."⁸ There appears to be such a scramble to explain the complexities of the play that few critics have allotted time to what they can actually see. For what they undeniably do see is a play which shows two tramps relating to one another and a secondary relationship of two lesser characters. Very little work has focused on Beckett's tramps as whole "people" or looked very far into their interrelations. Criticism, in general, has tended to look through the characters rather than at them, has slotted them into argumentatively convenient niches and has been in somewhat of a hurry to move onto the discussion of greater things. Martin Esslin, for example, in the Theatre of the Absurd places Vladimir and Estragon in the category of the figures of Medieval Mystery plays, designed to display little more than one particular form of vice or virtue. He does not see men on stage, and as a result their relationships

⁸ Samuel Beckett Now, ed., Melvin J. Friedman (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970) 16.

are all too quickly dismissed. In a similar vein, Genevieve Serreau opens an essay on Beckett by telling us that "Vladimir and Estragon suggest clowns more than they do tramps." She defends her argument claiming that "one does not ask questions about their origin, social condition or language in the same way as one does not ask these questions of the Fool of Lear.⁹" Is it true that we do not ask such questions or similar ones? And if we do not, is it necessary to deny the real humanity of these two men and their deep involvement with one another? In the same casebook, Sue-Ellen Case gives her interpretation of the characters of Vladimir and Estragon. Case finds that "they couple the abstract and sensual as mirrors, reflecting one another's condition." She insists that this is "the only possible relationship between these confined, cyclic personalities, for anything else might cause development, or establish cause and effect."¹⁰ Case again does not see "people" or developed and changing relationships; her view of the tramps is as mirror images. Numerous critics have referred to Vladimir as representative of the intellectual side of man versus Estragon as representative of the physical side - not whole in their own right, but rather representative halves of the human whole. In a psychological analysis, Eva Metman goes yet further in her assessment of Beckett's two characters and tells us that:

instead of merely showing human existence in its unadorned nakedness, . . . he strips his figures so thoroughly of all qualities in which the audience might recognise itself, that to start with an alienation effect is created which leaves the

⁹ Genevieve Serreau, "Beckett's Clowns," in Casebook of Waiting for Godot, ed., Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 171.

¹⁰ Sue-Ellen Case, "Image and Godot," in Casebook on Waiting for Godot 157.

audience mystified.¹¹

Perhaps it is because Beckett's tramps are so very human that critics have failed to pay them the attention they so surely deserve. Perhaps because we can see our own relationships so clearly mirrored in the relationship of the two tramps on stage, it is too easily taken for granted and thereby overlooked. Perhaps also the relationship unfolding before us is too wrought with fear for a critic to feel wholly comfortable in a close examination.

The most widely acknowledged critic in the area of Beckett's "people" and their relationships is probably Ruby Cohn. Even Cohn, however, does not explore the interaction of the characters to a very full degree. She is tempted to see the relationship of the four characters of Godot as no more than a "summary" of human relationships in general. Although she strongly identifies both with the tramps and with their relationship, she still calls one of them "the Mind" and the other "the Body". In an essay entitled The Making of Godot, Colin Duckworth calls her definition just "too simple". Duckworth compares the relationship of Vladimir and Estragon to an earlier couple of Beckett's creation in a work which has remained unpublished, that of Mercier and Camier. He finds that Vladimir and Estragon:

become imbued with a totally different quality. Whereas Mercier and Camier rarely rise above the level of two rather dirty old men, Didi and Gogo positively glow by comparison, their condition is so infused with timeless, tragic quality that

¹¹ Eva Metman, "Reflections on Samuel Beckett's Plays," in Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed., Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1965) 120.

it acquires a density and depth quite lacking in the novel.¹²

For some reason, Duckworth does not quite allow himself to see a purely human couple before him. He goes no further than to call the tramps a "pseudocouple".

Several leading critics, including Hugh Kenner and Ludovic Janvier¹³, call attention to a penetrating essay by Alain Robbe-Grillet written in 1965 entitled "Samuel Beckett, or 'Presence' in the Theatre". Robbe-Grillet opens his essay with the following definition: "The condition of man, says Heidegger, is to be there." Robbe-Grillet looks at Godot and finds the following:

As for Gogo and Didi they resist obstinately any interpretation but the most commonplace one, the most immediate: they are men. And their situation can be summed up in one simple statement, beyond which it is impossible to go: they are there, they are on the stage.¹⁴

While most religious, philosophical or psychological interpretations placed upon Waiting for Godot are open to debate, Robbe-Grillet has identified a main ingredient of the play with which there can be little argument. He notices, in Beckett's two men, "a weight of being there" (Ludovic Janvier's term) which is all too easy to ignore and yet, when clearly verbalised, begs to be explored. Beckett's men are there, there on the stage and, to extend Robbe-Grillet's definition, they are there on the stage together. It is to penetrate this

¹² Colin Duckworth, "The Making of Godot," in Casebook on Waiting for Godot 90.

¹³ Hugh Kenner, "Life in the Box," in Casebook on Waiting for Godot 108, Ludovic Janvier, "Cyclical Dramaturgy," in Casebook on Waiting for Godot 169.

¹⁴ Alain Robbe-Grillet, "Samuel Beckett, or 'Presence' in the Theatre," in Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays 110.

"togetherness" that is the chief objective of my thesis, for when all is said and done, it is not Godot whom we actually meet but two couples, Vladimir and Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky.

Vladimir and Estragon, Beckett's two elderly tramps, wait side by side on a country road, their only other company a bare willow tree. Estragon tells us that there is "nothing to be done."¹⁵ He appears to be directing his remark at his ill-fitting boots, but his idea is immediately expanded by his partner to encompass both their relationship and his entire concept of life. It becomes clear that these men have known each other for a long period of time. Estragon, it appears, has left Vladimir before the beginning of the play, only to return to what Vladimir has deftly named "the struggle." It is a "struggle" which the play will swiftly reveal is not one which either tramp is able to undertake alone. Vladimir shows himself to be the more openly affectionate of the pair. Although he is the deserted party, it is his idea to embrace his friend at their reunion, and when Estragon impatiently rejects him, it becomes apparent that he is the one most easily hurt. Estragon, however, has also suffered. Alone overnight, he has known nothing but terror and fear. With a sense of real concern, Vladimir questions his straying friend, for in their many years together, he has come to see himself in the role of Estragon's protector. As the play slowly reveals the relationship of these two men, Beckett's perception of all human relationships is never far from the surface.

¹⁵ Godot 7.

Vladimir sighs, "It's too much for one man."¹⁶ He is the spokesman for the relationship and is quick to point out that the burdens upon him are heavy ones. At one level he is speculating about the effort required of him to support Estragon. At another level he is thinking about life and their long lost chance of a successful suicide. Yet at another level there surfaces his very real need to have Estragon there by his side. Vladimir's fantasy of death is a fantasy of union. It is not that he alone would have jumped from the Eiffel Tower, but rather that they "hand in hand", almost as a pair of lovers, would fall to a glorious interwoven peace.¹⁷

One of the most amusing characteristics of the relationship of Gogo and Didi, as the tramps affectionately call one another, is revealed early in the initial dialogue. They continually seem to misunderstand one another, or at least their understanding of what the other has said tends to become twisted and adapted to fulfill their own needs. Thus, Vladimir's "So, there you are again"¹⁸ is neatly returned by Estragon with the question, "Am I?"¹⁹ a question which reveals the depths of his confusion to the point where one wonders whether he questions his very existence. Laughter and sadness run side by side as these two men try to communicate with one another. Beckett's stage "people" probe the frustrations of love and friendship which their creator so long ago set out in Proust:

¹⁶ Godot 7.

¹⁷ Godot 7.

¹⁸ Godot 7.

¹⁹ Godot 7.

. . . if neither can be realized because of the impenetrability (isolation) of all that is not 'cosa mentale', at least the failure to possess may have the nobility of that which is tragic, whereas the attempt to communicate where no communication is possible is merely a simian vulgarity, or horribly comic, like the madness which holds a conversation with the furniture.²⁰

And yet however vulgar or funny communications may be, Didi and Gogo do try to communicate, and their methods of communication are uncomfortably close to those which we use every day. Vladimir talks philosophy while Estragon tears away at his painful boot. The boot, an easier problem to focus on than the tangle of their lives, then becomes the focus where real discussion can begin. The tramps, however, are unable to share each others thoughts for any length of time, and what actually emerges is the comic type of bickering so often heard between an old married couple. Both men suffer from minor physical handicaps, and both try hard to enlist the greater sympathy. Yet beneath the outward competition, Didi and Gogo can feel one another's pain.

As the dialogue lengthens, further differences between the two tramps are rapidly revealed. Vladimir pays a great deal of interest to his hat which he examines quite as obsessively as Estragon does his boots. Beneath the hat and inside the boots, not one man, but two, stand side by side. To call Didi the Mind and Gogo the Body only serves to minimise their humanity. If it makes us aware of the dominant characteristics of each one, it also makes us neglect the fullness of their personalities and the substance of the relationship which they present to us on stage. Robbe-Grillet says that they are men, and

²⁰ Proust 63.

as men they are very different. It is, in fact, their very differences at least as much as their similarities which hold Didi and Gogo together. In many ways the needs of the tramps counterbalance one another. However frustrating or even futile their attempts to share one another's greatest fears may often be, it is still more comforting to talk to one another than to succumb to total isolation. To talk to the tree beside them would be total madness; at least together there is always the chance that the other might possibly hear. There is always the feeling that, however bewildering the world outside of their relationship may be, they do at least have each other. In little more than a few short lines, the disappointment in life and the disillusionment of Beckett's two tramps have become very clear. Something of the innermost fears of each man has been subtly exposed, and something of their comfort in one another is felt with equal effect.

Vladimir emerges as the more complex character of the partnership. His emotional range is, in fact, quite striking. Beckett shows him moving from brooding, to hurt, to cold, to admiring, to decisive and on to gloomy during a period when Estragon is described as little more than irritable. He also appears as the more consciously analytical of the pair. Vladimir is able to contemplate the chances of Salvation, an area which Estragon shows little inclination to explore. But, whereas Gogo serves as little more than an absent-minded presence to Vladimir's thoughts, it is a presence nevertheless, and it is a presence with enough input to allow Vladimir to work his way through his argument. Estragon's contribution to their dialogue is terse, and yet his own few words continually hammer home the sad predicament which binds these two men. Life is not good to them. They regret the very fact that they have ever been born. In From an Abandoned

Work ²¹ Beckett writes, "All I regret is having been born; dying is such a long tiresome business." It is a "tiresome business" which ties Beckett's two tramps and all of mankind both to life and to one another. And there is room for laughter, too, amidst the sadness. For by sharing a smile at the ups and downs of life, be they major or trivial, harsh reality once more appears less harsh. Beckett's two characters may not always agree, just as the doctrines of Salvation do not appear to agree. They do, however, continue to stay together there on their lonely road. There are true feelings of camaraderie and love between these two vagabonds on stage. These feelings become more and more strongly enforced. They like one another; they care for one another; they even love one another. They can certainly be angry with one another and they also bore one another! They have little option but to listen to each other's complaints, little choice but to hear each other's fears, and hope rarely means exactly the same thing to either one of them. But besides one another they do not seem to have much else. There are times when Gogo, as his name implies, is more than ready to leave, but in all their years together he has never made that final irretrievable break from his partner.

On page 10 of the text, Estragon suggests that they should leave the stage together. The first intimation of why these men are there on the road and the first occurrence of the leitmotif of the play now presents itself. Together on the road, they are "waiting for Godot". Vladimir and Estragon appear to share an appointment of great importance which has already kept them waiting for a lengthy period of time. Waiting would indeed be tedious if they did not have each other. The insidious teasing of an old established

²¹ Samuel Beckett, From an Abandoned Work (London: Faber and Faber, 1958) 14.

relationship is introduced by Estragon. He goads his partner into believing that perhaps they have made a mistake either as to the time or the place of their appointment. He feels safe enough to play in a relationship which has outlasted so many years. Estragon's teasing, however, cannot long deny his need of Vladimir, and Beckett now allows him to verbalise his fears by saying, "Who am I to tell my private nightmares to if I can't tell them to you?"²² For Estragon, there is no-one else and he begs Vladimir as his sole comforter to answer all of his needs. Typically human, craving fulfillment, he makes demands which often go beyond that which his partner is capable of giving. Vladimir is in this case unable to listen.

The monotonous waiting seems to have no end. Vladimir and Estragon have to find some way to pass the time which lies so heavily on their hands. As they tell a story or repeat even the oldest joke, they can for a short while forget the burden of time. As they argue and reconcile and embrace, time can once again be partially forgotten. The duality of time, "that double-headed monster of damnation and salvation," as Beckett refers to it in Proust, haunts the tramps, binds their relationship together and binds us to them: "There is no escape from the hours and the days. Neither from tomorrow nor from yesterday."²³ The different interactions of the tramps offer them a temporary shelter from their awareness of time. Gunther Anders writes that,

The best way to overcome the doldrums is through the activation of their being together, through their ever renewed taking advantage of the chance that it is at

²² Godot 11.

²³ Proust 2.

least as a PAIR that they have to bear their senseless existence. If they did not cling to each other desperately, if they could not rely on the never ceasing to and fro of their conversation . . . their quarrels . . . if they did not leave each other or reunite. . . they would actually be lost.²⁴

As the play shows the tramps reuniting and embracing for a second time after an argument, it is once more Estragon who rejects his partner, by telling Vladimir that he "stinks of garlic". As in any human relationship, the need for closeness is continually at war with the individual need for distance. At this point in the play, Vladimir and Estragon look again towards the tree and think once more of suicide. In the same essay, Anders continues his analysis of Beckett's two prisoners of time. He says that although the idea of suicide may offer a certain appeal, the tramps do still want to go on and thus do not belong to the tragic class of those who consider suicide as a real option:

Ruined by their habit of inaction or of acting without their own initiative, they have lost their willpower to decide not to go on, their freedom to end it all. Or ultimately, they go on living merely because they happen to exist and because existence doesn't know of any other alternative but to exist.²⁵

It is not the idea of death which really torments this pair. What would be far worse, in the words of the Hamilton title, would be the idea of being "condemned to life"²⁶ alone. What if their attempts at hanging should result in only one suicide? There have been

²⁴ Gunther Anders, "Being Without Time," in Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays 147.

²⁵ "Being without Time," 143.

²⁶ Kenneth and Alice Hamilton, Condemned to Life (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

ample examples of how uneasy each man feels when out of reach of the other for even the shortest period of time. Vladimir cannot even bear to allow Estragon to absent himself in sleep, so dire is his need of his partner's company. How could either bear an existence without the support, however incomplete it may be, of the partner of an entire lifetime? Aware of his own need, Estragon decides, "Don't let's do anything. It's safer."²⁷ So the tramps continue their music-hall banter, a team in their wait for Godot, waiting for the appointment with destiny which faces them both. They can easily blame their "laissez faire" attitude on the fact that things may change when Godot finally does come.

For the first time, Vladimir and Estragon give us some ideas of who Godot is for them. He supposedly has a home, a family, agents, friends, correspondents, books and a bank account, "normal" things to us, but not to two homeless vagabonds. How much more must they mean to each other with such "normal" things left so far behind? Vladimir appears to have a clearer mental picture of the mysterious Godot than his friend has. Estragon, after years of dependence, tends to rely on Vladimir's lead.

Further idiosyncrasies of character are revealed in each of the men as the dialogue continues. Estragon is sure that things get progressively worse, right down to the carrot he so greedily eats. Not so, Vladimir. He "gets used to the muck" as he goes along.²⁸ It is again these differences which serve as complementary rather than conflicting elements in the relationship. They do, after all, eat from the same bag of carrots, and Gogo can have his pick of the bunch. By and large they accept that "one is what one is" and,

²⁷ Godot 12.

²⁸ Godot 14.

complain as they might, they accept one another.

Up to this point in the play, no other characters besides Vladimir and Estragon have been introduced. Each man has shown something of himself and something of his partner. Each man has acknowledged his need of the other and their joint need to wait for Godot. As far as they can see, however, little has changed from the moment the play began. There is still "nothing to be done." There is no real progress in their situation; they still have the same ailments. They still have to wait, and there would appear to be nothing that they can do to precipitate the coming of Godot. Vladimir tells us, "The essential doesn't change."²⁹ For them, as for Beckett's Molloy: "It was always the same sky, always the same earth, precisely, day after day and night after night. . . . And wheresoever you wander, within its distant limits, things will always be the same, precisely."³⁰ Unlike what happens in Molloy, however, the agonising solitude is made bearable in Godot by the relief these two men of the road find in one another.

Beckett now introduces a second pair of characters into the play. Pozzo and Lucky are also in a partnership of long-term duration, but theirs is clearly a far less desirable union than that of the tramps. Once again the physical and intellectual sides of man have become tied to one another. But here, Pozzo, our physical man, has become nothing but brute force, and Lucky, the one-time intellectual, has the luck of a slave in harness. The loving embraces of the tramps are reduced to the crack of the whip between master and man, if man he can still be called. Pozzo exhibits an enormous sense of self importance

²⁹ Godot 14.

³⁰ Beckett, Molloy (London: Grove Press, 1956) 65-66.

and greatly enjoys minimising all those with whom he comes into contact. As Pozzo whips and bullies his captive, his commands are both cruel and arbitrary. When Estragon and Vladimir examine Lucky's wounds, they are able to finish each other's sentences. Their understanding of one another is so perfect and so very different from the crude, rough orders which Pozzo barks at Lucky. Vladimir has always been more of a thinker than Estragon. It is, therefore, fitting that he is the first to remark on the scandalous state of the not so lucky, Lucky. He is more outspoken and more courageous than Estragon who, once again, will follow his partner's lead but will take little initiative alone. Estragon is, at the best of times, less altruistic than Vladimir. He has a stronger sense of immediate self-preservation and indicates more of an interest in Pozzo's chicken bones than in Lucky's welfare. As the quality of the second relationship is displayed before us, Beckett reinforces the notion that people are interdependent at sometimes unbelievably high costs. There is no give and take between this second pair. Pozzo does all the taking until Lucky has no more to give. Although Beckett's example of a sadomasochistic relationship in many ways elevates the affectionate intercourse of the two tramps, it also stresses the arbitrariness of any human relationship. Pozzo says, "Remark that I might just as well have been in his shoes and he in mine. If chance had not willed it otherwise."³¹ Beckett's man or woman is a victim of chance, and his or her relationships are no more than chance encounters knitted together by a lifetime of joint activity. Supportive or destructive as these relationships may be, they do still serve to fill the void outside them.

Pozzo, the exploiter, is eager to air himself before his new found audience. Like

³¹ Godot 21.

Beckett's Hamm of Endgame, he loves to act, and, in common with the former, he possesses little natural ability to act well. Pozzo, however, has forged a natural extension to himself in Lucky. If he cannot perform, Lucky is there to do it for him. Vladimir is impressed that Lucky can think, Estragon that he can dance. The dominant traits of the tramps are therein reinforced by their differing reactions to Pozzo's slave. Again, their interests do not conflict. Lucky provides an interesting diversion for both tramps. Unlike them, Lucky is not rooted to the spot. His relationship permits him to move on, albeit at the end of a rope. As opposed to their own Godot, who leaves his tramps waiting helplessly, Pozzo gives his man definitive direction, even if the price is excruciatingly high. There is an order built into Lucky's relationship which, however unenviable, has elements which the tramps would like to see in their own lives. They are confronted with one human being who is lucky enough to be looking for nothing outside of his relationship. Lucky's performance starts with the dance, his thinking must come later. Pozzo insists upon this as the "natural order."³² For him, the primitive side of man must always take precedence. His own physical needs appear to have absorbed and devoured a once sensitive, intelligent creature. Lucky's one-time beautiful words have been so fully eroded that nothing more than "a schizophrenic word salad"³³ can now pour from his lips. The relationship of the tramps has always provided some form of mutual nourishment; Lucky has been starved. All his energy, both physical and mental, has been sapped. Even with his hat on, another Beckettian reminder of his earlier intellectual ability, he can no

³² Godot 26

³³ Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd 34.

longer really think. Left to dance alone, he can do no more than totter about the stage. Where the tramps still have the arrival of Godot to look forward to, Lucky can only cling to Pozzo's rope. Pozzo needs no Godot. To be Pozzo is more than enough for him. By its very nature any relationship breeds compromise. Vladimir has already given ample indication of the burden of his own restraints. Beckett has, however, imbued the tramps with such warmth that the degree of suffering engendered within their relationship itself is at least counterbalanced by the positive elements of the partnership. Here, the second relationship is less fortunate. Unlike the destructive hold which Pozzo exerts, Vladimir, as the main supporting influence of the tramps, offers positive support sometimes to a most ludicrous degree. When Estragon cries out that he will never walk again, Vladimir tenderly answers, "I'll carry you."³⁴ Fulfilling both differing and similar needs, or rather the same needs to a differing degree (for all Beckett's characters suffer human conflicts), neither of the two relationships seem likely to terminate on this side of eternity. Estragon subsequently refers to Lucky's dance as "The Scapegoat's Agony."³⁵ Again, this is a generality, applicable to both relationships of the play and most relationships in life. Pozzo blames Lucky for his miseries, and Didi and Gogo have each other to blame for the discomforts of life. Each provides the other with a convenient outlet for frustration. Estragon tells us, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful."³⁶ Even with a caring partner and a relationship vastly superior to the one he has just witnessed, life is

³⁴ Godot 22.

³⁵ Godot 27.

³⁶ Godot 27.

still "awful" for Estragon - awful with his partner and only worse without. As Beckett said in The Village Voice, "nec tecum, nec sine te, in such a place, and in such a world"³⁷ Relationships for Beckett are and never can be more than this.

Beckett's preoccupation with time is again displayed in Lucky's apparent "word salad:" "Given the existence . . . of a personal God . . . with a white beard . . . outside time."³⁸ None of Beckett's stage characters can escape their entrapment in time. Time itself has cemented their relationships, and they have become not only the prisoners of time, but the prisoners of one another. The tramps are still beckoned on by the "monster" of salvation, unlike Pozzo and Lucky who have already found their own damnation. Lucky's speech cries out against the decay of man of which all relationships, those on stage and off, are a part. Estragon is even proud to be part of this general human degeneration which he translates to Pozzo in typically physical terms, "He has stinking breath and I have stinking feet."³⁹ But feet and breath however bad their state may be, are minor ailments amidst the total stench of the human situation which Beckett lays bare. In Beckett's world, relationships set up in this "abode of stones" become cemented to the point where they can hardly be broken. Pozzo even finds himself "unable to depart" from the new company he has found, so great is man's need to cling together. And Estragon knows that "such is life." He has waited and waited, unable to depart this life and just as unable to leave Vladimir.

³⁷ Samuel Beckett, letter to Alan Schneider, December 29, 1957.

³⁸ Godot 28.

³⁹ Godot 31.

Vladimir, the couple's memory bank, is always there to remind Estragon that they cannot move, that they are "waiting for Godot." Some time has passed in the presence of the other couple, but the "essential" still remains the same. As little changes around them, the confused state of mind of the tramps becomes more acute. In such an arbitrary world, even Vladimir's once reliable memory can no longer be trusted. He says, " We know them, I tell you. You forget everything (Pause. To himself) Unless they're not the same . . ." ⁴⁰ He is no longer even sure whether they have encountered Pozzo and Lucky before or not and, of course, he is too proud to admit this to Estragon. As time drags on, memories of people, times and places dim and blur. The lapses in memory, both caused and increased by the confusion, have become characteristic of both men and have become yet another element which bonds the couple.

Towards the end of Act I, one further relationship is brought into the play, a relationship which serves to make Beckett's two tramps cling more tightly to one another than they have ever had cause to in the past. A boy messenger arrives from the long awaited Godot. The tramps are told that "surely tomorrow" Godot will come, and Vladimir's optimism begins to fade. The boy's relationship to Godot appears as ambiguous as Vladimir's. Tied to Godot, the boy has no idea whether he is happy or not, and justice itself for those in Godot's service would seem to have no rational distribution. One boy minds the sheep; his reward is to be beaten. The other minds the goats; his fate is to be spared. The tramps are terrified as to what this means for them as a pair. Or perhaps worse still, what if it is not as a pair that they will finally be treated? Beckett was once

⁴⁰ Godot 32.

heard to say:

There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine. I wish I could remember the Latin. It is even finer in Latin than in English. 'Do not despair: one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume: one of the thieves was damned.' I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe them . . . That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters.⁴¹

Vladimir and Estragon are, however, little closer to knowing the shape of their fate than when Vladimir was seen wrestling with the problem at the beginning of the play. Fears of damnation haunt them both and some thoughts of Molloy's come again to mind, "The confusion of my ideas on the subject of death was such that I sometimes wondered believe me or not, if it wasn't a state of being even worse than life."⁴² Doubts with regard to their fate rise to a frightening level in both men. They appear to have a safer relationship with one another than with the one they so arduously await, the one which the boy is already a part of. As the couple's faith in Godot reaches a new low, the idea of suicide arises once again, and the tramps ponder a death in a place where it is warm and dry and where they would be "crucified quick". But the event of death is for them still far from sight. Even amidst the torment of their life, there are elements of safety, and they both still have to wait. For fifty years they have known each other. The doubtful messenger boy from the unknown Godot has offered them little to look forward to, and Estragon, as always looking for escape, wonders anew whether he would not have been better off alone.

⁴¹ Beckett, quoted by Harold Hobson, and Alan Schneider, in Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd 32

⁴² Beckett, Molloy 68.

The tragedy and comedy of their situation never loses its grip. As Act I closes, the tramps are both ready to leave the stage. They don't. Together, they stay.

In The Comic Gamut, Ruby Cohn writes of Waiting for Godot that "almost every reviewer has complained that Act II merely repeats Act I." Beckett himself answered this complaint tartly with the words: "One act would have been too little, and three would have been too much."⁴³ On the surface, as Cohn comments, Act II does seem merely a comic repetition of Act I. Among all the obvious repetition and amidst all the boredom and sameness which Beckett identifies as the human lot, there are, however, some very significant changes in the second act of the play. On close examination, the text reveals discernible developments both in Beckett's characters and in the nature of their relationships. No new characters are introduced into the play, and, except that they may have moved on to another day, the life of the tramps appears static. In Act I, Estragon is the first to speak. In Act II, Vladimir is given the opening line. He now handles the boots on stage and introduces the theme of "nothing to be done" as he sings his song "A dog came into the kitchen,"⁴⁴ a song which acknowledges universal cruelty to be the rule and not the exception. The roles of the two tramps begin to show signs of change. Their relationship has caused a gradual merging of personalities. In Act I, Estragon shows almost stoic resignation towards his unknown assailants. In Act II, this resignation gives way to the voice of hysteria. He cries out to Vladimir in agony, "Don't touch me! Don't

⁴³ Ruby Cohn, Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1962) 212.

⁴⁴ Godot 37.

question me! Stay with me!"⁴⁵ His childlike qualities, and his need of Vladimir's protection - these are things which have not changed. There is, however, a new urgency present within their friendship; and, as a result, their feelings towards one another are now more clearly verbalised. They have again tried to separate from one another, and Vladimir can now acknowledge having felt a certain sense of ease in his solitude, a satisfaction which he could never admit to in the first act. It is Estragon who now feels hurt by the relationship as he discovers Vladimir to be singing whilst he himself has felt so alone. Vladimir is once more delighted at his friend's return, but this time he can more openly express his feelings. This initial joyful reaction appears to be a purely instinctual one, for as Vladimir's conscious thoughts take over, Beckett once more insists that whatever the joy of their reunion may be, little has actually changed in the circumstance of their lives: "Now? . . . (Joyous) There you are again . . . (Indifferent) There we are again . . . (Gloomy) There I am again." ⁴⁶ Again they are together, and again their togetherness can never be enough. This dependence upon one another, which they have such difficulty in articulating, does little to change the overall picture of their lives. Vladimir would like to hear Estragon say that he is happy. He has to force the words out of him. It is obvious that this relationship has little to do with happiness. In fact, it makes a farce of such an illusion. Thus the dramatist expresses the confusion of a pair of human beings confronted with a senseless world. With nowhere to turn outward, it is natural for them to turn towards one another in the darkness.

⁴⁵ Godot 37.

⁴⁶ Godot 38.

There is an ever increasing need in both men to be able to root themselves in some form of discernible reality. It becomes of paramount importance to Vladimir to know where they were and what they were doing "yesterday". He is desperate to find some landmark in the void which they inhabit and is just as anxious that Estragon should be able to remember incidents which he, himself, is no longer sure occurred. Vladimir needs Estragon to validate his reality. When he actually finds a wound on Estragon's leg, he is triumphant. He has found tangible evidence to prove to himself that the encounter with Pozzo and Lucky which he remembers from the day before actually happened. In his attempts to rationalise an irrational world, Vladimir fears that he can no longer trust his own mind. Against this hostile cosmos, these two bums are a team, and each half of that team desperately needs the other in order to survive. Estragon is even perhaps now more aware of this than Vladimir: "We don't do too badly, eh Didi, between the two of us? We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?"⁴⁷ By and large, this "something" which they find is a "something" which has repeated itself in the past. It is a "something" which has become one of the many habits of their relationship. Beckett identifies habit as one of the mainsprings of any relationship. His definition of the term in Proust is as follows:

Habit is a compromise affected between the individual and his environment . . .

Habit is the ballast that chains a dog to his vomit. Breathing is habit. Life is habit . . . The creation of the world did not take place once and for all time but takes place everyday. Habit then is the generic term for the countless treaties

⁴⁷ Godot 44.

concluded between the individual and their countless correlative objects.⁴⁸

The tramps have been together for half a century. As long as they continue the habit of living, their relationship will go on. The same arguments are encountered time and again between the pair. They are a habit. The music hall banter, bandied too and fro, is heard over and over again. This too is a habit of the relationship. Even the separations and the reunions have become a habit for these two men of the road.

These are habits of a stage relationship which Beckett perceives as life. Again in Proust we are told that "Of all human plants . . . habit requires the least fostering and is the first to appear on the seeming desolation of the most barren rock."⁴⁹ The only way that the tramps can continue on their own "barren rock" is to continue with their old habits. It really doesn't matter whether they "contradict each other" or "ask each other questions." Both will lessen the misery. "What is terrible is to have thought," for then alone can all the fears and doubts surface. It is that terrible time when, as Beckett says in Proust, "the boredom of living" is replaced by "the suffering of being."⁵⁰ The habits of the tramps allow them to run away from "the suffering of being." They allow them to keep on going, and they further necessitate the perpetuation of their relationship. With something to do together and something to talk about together, there is not much time to contemplate the tragedy of life.

⁴⁸ Proust 18-19.

⁴⁹ Proust 28.

⁵⁰ Proust 19.

Another glimpse of Vladimir in his protective role is given in the second act as he sings his frightened friend a lullaby. Once more the strengths and weaknesses of the partners complement each other, and the surprising harmony which occasionally is shown between these two gives yet one more reason to account for the length of time that they have spent together. Closeness is naturally broken once more by Estragon threatening to leave. Now, however, the hurt is reciprocal, for Estragon is bidding a farewell to a Vladimir who is no longer able to hear him - a Vladimir who has become immune to such threats and rather more self-controlled. The hats have become the primary concern of the stage directions, and Estragon knows that he will stay. As awareness expands in both of the tramps and as more and more traits of each become common to both, it becomes clear that within their static situation there has been real human growth.

Beckett leaves open the question of whether these men will always be victims of the same fate just as life leaves such questions open. When the tramps hear what they think is the approach of Godot, Estragon screams that he is "accursed," but Vladimir's reaction holds more optimism. He says, " We have kept our appointment and that's an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?"⁵¹ And after a lifetime shared, they have kept their appointment together.

Pozzo and Lucky once more enter the scene. In The Comic Gamut, Ruby Cohn tells us that "By the end of the play, the wandering of Pozzo and Lucky is seen to be as compulsive as the waiting of Didi and Gogo."⁵² Neither relationship can escape the trap

⁵¹ Godot 51.

⁵² Ruby Cohn, Samuel Beckett: the Comic Gamut 213.

of its respective habits. The relationship of the tramps, however, has never seen the abuse of that between Pozzo and Lucky, an abuse which is reflected in the sudden physical degeneration of the second couple. There is, of course, no poetic justice in this world of Beckett's. If Pozzo has been punished for his cruelty by becoming blind, does Lucky really deserve to lose his speech? They deteriorate as one in an intrinsically rotten relationship. The tramps have a little more hope, but there can really be no guarantees "on an impossible earth under an indifferent heaven."⁵³ All they are really sure of is the presence of the other.

What Beckett has presented in Waiting for Godot, is not only individuals who have formed relationships, but relationships which hold the key to the identity of the individuals themselves. The "togetherness" of Beckett's "people" has taken on a life of its own.

⁵³ Godot 51.

Chapter Two

The Relationships of Endgame

We die every day, and we die all day long; and because we are not absolutely dead, we call that an eternity, an eternity of dying: And is there comfort in that state? Why, it is that state of hell itself, Eternal dying, and not dead.

John Donne

Waiting for Godot made its first stage appearance in 1953. Five years later, Endgame, Beckett's English translation of the French Fin de partie, opened in New York. In a letter to the American director Alan Schneider, Beckett described his new play as "rather difficult and elliptic, mostly depending on the power of the text to claw, more inhuman than 'Godot'".⁵⁴ But Ruby Cohn points out, "the anguish of this later play is heartbreakingly human."⁵⁵ What appears to be more inhuman is that the overriding warmth displayed in the relationship between Beckett's two tramps in Godot has turned to ashes as the characters in Endgame end their lives. As was the case with Godot, the scope of interpretations which critics have given to the meaning of Endgame is both wide and conflicting, and, as with Godot, the relationships between the four characters on stage

⁵⁴ Samuel Beckett, letter to Alan Schneider, 1957.

⁵⁵ Ruby Cohn, Back to Beckett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973) 140.

have been largely downplayed. Allan Brick ("A Note on Perception and Communication in Beckett's Endgame"), Andrew Brink ("Samuel Beckett's Endgame and the Schizoid Ego", and "Universality in Samuel Beckett's Endgame"), and Louis Gordon ("Dialectic of the Beast and Monk")⁵⁶ all discuss the play as either a study of the split self or an exploration of the schizophrenic mind. If the characters of Endgame are seen as little more than components of the human mind, any examination of human relationships within the play must be precluded. Any critical argument which undermines the authenticity of characters in Beckett's work automatically refuses to look at the real life interrelations enacted on stage. Most psychological, existential or mystical interpretations of Endgame fall victim to this loss. If anti-religion becomes the focus of the critical argument, as in the cases of Kenneth Hamilton ("Negative Salvation in Samuel Beckett"), Frank Kermode ("The New Apocalptists"), and Charles Lyon ("Beckett's Endgame: An Anti-Myth of Creation"),⁵⁷ the characters, although then viewed as more rounded figures with the built-in potential of forming meaningful relationships, tend to be sketchily treated. Isolated human relationships have a way of fading into the background if the critical concern is mainly with the lofty and the abstract. There have been a number of studies concerned with the character of Hamm, including those by Anthony Easthope ("Hamm, Clov, and Dramatic Method in Endgame"), P. Merivale ("Endgame and the Dialogue of King and Fool in the Monarchical Metadrama"), David Lowenkron ("A Case for 'The Tragical Historie of

⁵⁶ Modern Drama 4 (1961): 20-22; The Sphinx 4 (1982): 87-100; Queen's Quarterly 78 (1971): 191-207; Dissertation Abstracts 28 (1967): 1077A.

⁵⁷ Queen's Quarterly 69 (1962): 102-111; Partisan Review 33 (1966): 339-361. Crisis and Literature: Modern Drama 7 (1964): 204-209.

Hamm"), and, most incisively, by John J. Sheedy ("The Comic Apocalypse of King Hamm").⁵⁸ An examination of only one character or of only the main pair of characters rarely gives a full view of what the relationships of the play entail in any detail, or what such relationships mean in Beckett's world. Of those articles examined, Sheedy's article is probably the best. In stating the following, he captures much that is present in the relationships of Endgame, and also leaves room for a great deal of further exploration:

A shelter in the midst of a wasteland where a family huddles together in its attempt to stay alive, the acting place is the private realm of the family and Hamm is its absolute and tyrannical father ruler. Here the positive functions of the private realm - food, comfort, love, safety - have been lost. Only the negative characteristic remains: isolation within a group within a shelter which is itself isolated. Since extensions into political or natural worlds outside are no longer possible, action in this private realm can have no meaning beyond itself; in the utterly private realm, that is, life can only be a game, limited in space and duration, with no meaning, consequence or relevance beyond its own space and duration.⁵⁹

This chapter will focus on all the relationships in Endgame. Again, as Robbe-Grillet points out, we are dealing with the essential theme of "presence."⁶⁰ What we do not see

⁵⁸ Modern Drama 10 (1968): 424-33; Modern Drama 21 (1978): 121-36; Arizona Quarterly 30 (1974): 217-28; Modern Drama 9 (1966): 310-318.

⁵⁹ Modern Drama 9 316.

⁶⁰ Alain Robbe-Grillet, "Samuel Beckett, or 'Presence' in the Theatre," in Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays 114.

does not exist. All that we do see are Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell playing the game of Sheedy's analysis. As in Godot, two pairs of characters constitute the principal element of what is on stage. As in Godot, the interaction of these "people" is the lifeline of this play.

Beckett has been quoted as stressing that this subsequent play should bear the title Endgame, as in chess, rather than the literal rendering from the French of End of the Game. To an actor who played the part of Hamm, Beckett wrote the following:

Hamm is a king in this chess game lost from the start. From the start he knows he is making loud senseless moves. That he will make no progress at all with the gaff. Now at last he makes a few senseless moves as only a bad player would. A good one would have given up long ago. He is only trying to delay the inevitable end. Each of his gestures is one of the last useless moves which put off the end. He's a bad player.⁶¹

The key words in Beckett's statement are not only the word "king", but also the word "player." Hamm and the other characters of Endgame are not pieces in a chess game, but the remains of full-blooded human beings who, for the most part, are forced to live in stalemate but are never quite willing to relinquish the hope of a checkmate. The "people" of Endgame must play out their relationships in a situation more desperate than even that of Godot. They are human beings at the end together and knowingly at the end - dramatically restricted characters in dramatically restricted relationships. The game of

⁶¹ Quoted in Back to Beckett 152.

chess which, says Voltaire, "reflects most honour on human wit"⁶² is one of the games left open to them, but it is not the only one. Behind the wit of the chess board, the turbulent emotions of any family relations live on.

The four characters of Endgame are no longer waiting on the road of Godot. They are already at the end of that road, with only their shelter left to protect them from the void beyond. The immediate family has been extended from that in the earlier play. We no longer have only the couple presented, but parents, son and, although Clov's exact status is ambiguous, possibly a grandson. Unlike in the relationship of Didi and Gogo, no relief can be found from any outside relationship. There is now no one left outside. Within the shelter, Beckett shows us human beings and human relationships trying to finish, but while they are trying, they are still very much alive.

Waiting for Godot opened with the words: "Nothing to be done." In Endgame, Clov is one step nearer to the grave as his opening words tell us, "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished!"⁶³ Once again there is a longing for an end which beckons but is still beyond grasp. Clov's introduction is as a subservient character. He waits to be summoned by the impersonal note of a whistle. Beckett shows again how long-term suffering can become an indispensable ritual. The kinship to a game of chess is clear from the beginning as Hamm, the main character, yawns his opening, "Me - to play." Like the tramps in the earlier play, he too cries out for an end to suffering, and yet he too is unable to hasten his own demise: "And yet I hesitate, I hesitate, I hesitate to

⁶² Quoted in H. Golombek, The Game of Chess (Middlesex: Penguin, 1954) 7.

⁶³ Endgame 1.

. . . end. Yes, there it is, it's time it ended and yet I hesitate to." ⁶⁴Clov's relationship to Hamm, however, is not the one of the abject slave that Lucky's was to Pozzo. Clov is well able to counter Hamm's commands. Once again, Beckett presents a long-term relationship. "All life long," Clov has heard "the same questions, the same answers".⁶⁵ Once more Beckett invites us to explore the very essence of the threads which hold tortured human beings together. In the Hamm/Clov relationship, the former, both blind and in a wheelchair, seeks to dominate. Hamm is not averse to using threats and cruelty to serve his ends. With the key to their dwindling food supply in his possession, he has ample power to wield. As in Waiting for Godot, the dialogue swiftly explores the reasons why these two men remain together, reasons of which, like Beckett's two tramps, they themselves can only be partially aware. Hamm and Clov live under the conviction that outside their shelter there is no one left alive on earth. As far as Hamm is concerned, there is no one else. As far as Clov is concerned, there is nowhere else. This is an important distinction. Throughout the play, Hamm needs Clov more than Clov needs him, or at least he more readily admits to this need. Like Estragon, Clov frequently feels driven to leave the relationship. There is no apparent love in the situation in which he finds himself, but he has never made that final ending. Clov's state of health has deteriorated as all in the world of Endgame has deteriorated. His eyes are bad as are his legs. But, for all his frailty, Clov is still the physically dominant of the pair. Without the help of Clov, Hamm loses his mobility and also loses his sight, for Clov acts very much

⁶⁴ Endgame 3.

⁶⁵ Endgame 5.

as his seeing-eye dog. Thus, if only on the basis of physical need, there is a balance of power in the relationship. It is a balance of power in a very real sense, for each man has the means, if he wishes to exercise it, to deprive the other of life. Each man, however, also knows that without the other he cannot survive, and behind the carefully rehearsed moves of Beckett's two leading players, the fragments of a one-time love relationship still forge their own ties. Their need for one another extends far beyond the key to the food supply.

Just as Vladimir and Estragon were forced to pass their time on their lonely road, Hamm and Clov must pass the time in their desolate shelter. Again these "people" do not have to pass the time or bear the burden of their fears alone. Clov has Hamm to turn to when he says, "I see my light dying", and blind Hamm can counter with: "Your light dying! Listen to that! Well, it can die just as well here, your light. Take a look at me and then come back and tell me what you think of YOUR light."⁶⁶ If the relationship does not offer comfort, it does at least enable Hamm and Clov to test their suffering against one another. The two characters have their own way of alleviating stress and yet even in its extremity, it is not too difficult for an audience to identify with. Like Didi and Gogo, Hamm and Clov quarrel and make up, and quarrel and make up as they wait for "something to take its course."⁶⁷ Clov claims that he has been trying to leave their relationship ever since he was "whelped". The struggle for independence and autonomy continues in Beckett's characters, a struggle which seems to be continually thwarted.

⁶⁶ Endgame 12.

⁶⁷ Endgame 13.

In Waiting for Godot and in Endgame, the relationship of the major characters is offset by the relationship of the two minor characters, and the interaction of the two pairs adds a further dimension to each play. In Endgame, Hamm's parents Nagg and Nell are given this subsidiary role. At this point, I intend to only examine the parents as they relate to the major characters. The married couple is one which deserves detailed, separate study and one which I intend to explore later, outside of the Hamm and Clov relationship.

Nagg and Nell are elderly. They have no legs and are deteriorating at an alarmingly rapid pace in the two dustbins to which they have been assigned. There appears to be no love lost between Hamm and his father. Nagg can remember not answering Hamm's cries when he was an infant; Hamm shows no intention of hearing his parents' cries now. The cruelty Hamm can often show towards Clov is magnified in his approach to his "bottled" mother and father. In direct contrast, there are caring elements present in Clov which can be glimpsed in certain of his interchanges with Hamm. Hamm loves to give orders. He feels great excitement that he can go "right round the world",⁶⁸ but Clov remains the only axis that can turn him. Whatever the reality may be, however small their world has now become, it is essential for Hamm to feel master of his environment. He must be at the very centre of their universe where the illusion of power can most intoxicate him. Hamm's behaviour towards Clov is that of a male Xanthippe. There are times, however, when he is nervous. He is not quite sure of his hold over his partner, and every now and then he admits to him, "you give me the shivers."⁶⁹ Hamm knows that he is vulnerable,

⁶⁸ Endgame 25.

⁶⁹ Endgame 27.

but he continues to command Clov in his cruel and arbitrary manner to the point where we can almost sympathise with the younger man as he says, "If I could kill him I'd be happy."⁷⁰ But Beckett still insists that his characters survive by means of interdependence. Alone in the world outside, Clov would have neither food nor shelter, and there is a suppressed kind of caring still present in Clov which makes murder an unlikely action. At this point in the play, neither does he leave Hamm, nor does he kill him.

Hamm is often heard to comment on the progress of their day. At first it is "slow work", which then becomes "not much fun" and later deteriorates to "deadly".⁷¹ The duality of time which the tramps had felt is once more experienced by these partners. Their togetherness may make the time pass more bearably, yet time itself is a major factor which has contributed to the deterioration of their relationship. Things show little likelihood of "livening up" as Clov ironically makes clear.

While Clov gazes on the bleak horizon, Beckett again probes man's eternal hope of recognising his place in the universe. To this end, Hamm uses Clov to test his reality, but one by one any illusions which he may have fostered are destroyed. Their relationship slowly takes on the same greyness as their horizon. This breakdown of illusion is one which Beckett confronted in Waiting for Godot, where Vladimir's hopes of salvation weaken during the progress of the play.

Again in Endgame, it is routine and habit which allows the characters to go on. Hamm still tries to find some meaning to his life, and Clov can only laugh at the whole idea.

⁷⁰ Endgame 27.

⁷¹ Endgame 12, 13, 28.

There is a history of horror which binds these two men together, one more grim than either Vladimir or Estragon have ever had to confront, but it is, once more, life rather than death which engenders the greatest fear. An ant alive in their shelter could mean a new Creation. Negligible though the chance may be, it terrifies them more than any prospect of death.

As in Godot, each partner at some time experiences the need for separation. Hamm has a fantasy of embarking alone on a raft. But separation once again breeds fear, and Hamm imagines his little raft being chased by sharks. He swiftly drops the whole idea. Hamm continually insists that Clov's eventual fate will be the same as his own. It is a question which Beckett always left open in the case of his tramps, and one which he will not answer in Endgame. Clov knows that "it's not certain,"⁷² for nothing can be certain in their world. Relationships are arbitrary, and each has his own fate to endure. These men are unable to commit suicide and equally unable to kill one another. The bonds which hold them together are both clear and obtuse, both those which can be verbalised and those which in any relationship are left unsaid. At almost the half-way point of the play, Beckett gives us the first implication that Hamm could be Clov's father. If the biological tie is left ambiguous, it is clear that Hamm thinks of himself as Clov's father and that Clov has no memory of another father-figure in his life. He does, in fact, show stronger filial commitment to Hamm than the latter does to his parents. However much Clov rallies Hamm's aggression, he still remains to look after Hamm's physical needs and to provide this "father" of his with the audience he so dearly craves. These two characters

⁷² Endgame 36.

feed each other's hopes as much as they feed each other's despair.

Like Vladimir and Estragon, questioning why they stay together has become a habit of their co-existence for Hamm and Clov. The answers they find are never fully satisfying. Clov cries out, "Do this, do that, and I do it. I never refuse. Why?"⁷³ Hamm knows that Clov is not able to refuse, but he has no answer to the "why". In Endgame these partners play every "bloody awful day"⁷⁴ and express their pain in words which are no longer adequate to show the true horror of their lives. If "the sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new," in Beckett's novel Murphy,⁷⁵ it no longer shines on the two couples of Endgame.

Mixed in with Hamm's sadistic and bullying treatment of Clov, there is another side to Hamm's character. Of the two, he is the more sentimental and affectionate. He wants to hear that Clov loves him; he even wants a kiss. If such feelings have ever existed between the pair, Clov has now totally suppressed them. He has reached the point where he is able to threaten to leave Hamm without the slightest form of farewell. He far prefers to allow an alarm clock to herald his farewell than to offer any display of physical affection. Hamm's fear of finding himself suddenly abandoned is almost as extreme as Estragon's when he considers life without Vladimir. Fear of the unknown in Beckett's characters always binds them to the present, however hideous that present may be. They have made a place for themselves in the universe; they cannot bear to have their small

⁷³ Endgame 43.

⁷⁴ Endgame 43.

⁷⁵ Beckett, Murphy (London: Grove Press, 1957) 1.

unit change. Hamm is even ready to find comfort in the deterioration of Clov's health. It gives him a certain security to know that eventually Clov will not be able to leave. And Clov has still not left. The habits of their relationship continue as, together, they probe life's uncertainties. Clov asks Hamm whether he believes in the life to come, and Hamm's answer is "mine was always that."⁷⁶ If life has any real meaning, it is beyond the scope of their experience. They live on fragments of hope which never quite hold together and yet which can never be totally discarded.

Hamm's kingly stature slowly weakens as the play progresses, and as Hamm grows weaker, Clov more and more begins to feel his own strength. He is able to refuse to listen to Hamm's stories, and Hamm is now reduced to forcing his father to become his audience. Here is someone whom Hamm still possesses the power to bribe. Father and son both appear anxious to deny the very existence of a relationship between them. Hamm asks why he was "engendered" and is told that had Nagg known who his son would be, the case may well have been otherwise. Their relationship no longer leaves any room for affection. Their game has long passed such a state. Hamm holds his father to ransom for a sugar-plum, and when Nagg finds out that the promise is an empty one, he is not surprised. He is even willing to admit that his own treatment of Hamm as a child may warrant the cruelty now shown towards him. Nagg does, however, want revenge. He wants Hamm's domination reduced to that of an infant wailing in the dark. Hamm's promise to his father has been made on his "honor", an idea which Hamm himself greets with hearty laughter. There is little place for any kind of honor or obligation in such a

⁷⁶ Endgame 49.

desperate world. Mutual need is all that thrives at the end of the game.

Hamm is shown to be articulate, far more so than Clov. He finds great solace in his role as an actor. Play and reality, however, are difficult to separate, for play can only be an extension of or a retraction from life. Within his play, Hamm knows the fact that they are "on earth, there's no cure for that!"⁷⁷ There appears to be no cure for any of these characters. Their relationships offer the only kind of sedative still available for the pain of being on earth. Reality continues to impose itself on fantasy, and even Hamm's story must come to an end. As all runs out in Endgame, Hamm runs out of characters. It is possible that Nagg is aware of how much of a child Hamm still is. Hamm frequently displays the behaviour of a small child. Early in the play he finds comfort in mastering a toy dog. Later groping for his dog, he is unable to reach him, and he is convinced that the dog just is not there. Anything out of his immediate grasp ceases to exist for him which is probably one of the reasons why he is always so loath to part with Clov's company, even for the shortest period.

Whereas Waiting for Godot makes us laugh a great deal, Endgame makes us laugh a great deal less. There is, however, a wry humour present throughout the relationships of the later play, existing both in the way Hamm relates to himself and the way the characters interact with one another. They know they are playing a game, and like the tramps, they know that they have an audience. Thus amidst the shambles of their lives, Hamm can say to Clov, "You're a bit of all right, aren't you?" and Clov can playfully

⁷⁷ Endgame 53.

reply "A smithereen."⁷⁸ Of course, the comedy turns back upon itself as Beckett reminds us that a smithereen of life is all that is left.

Further conflicts in the relationship between Hamm and Clov are revealed. Clov has a fantasy of order in his world, one which conjures up a picture of eternal rest. Such a fantasy totally disorients Hamm; he has no wish to relinquish his own sense of order.

Again and again we are reminded that we are watching a play. Hamm ironically points out to Clov that it is the "dialogue" which keeps him there, and the "dialogue" at this point is as contrived as their relationship. Clov is incredulous to hear Hamm mention that the progress of his chronicle is "better than nothing."⁷⁹ Clov is still in the process of deciding whether it is possible for anything to be better than nothing.

Every now and again, Hamm makes a decided effort to be friendly. He appears quite sincere when he asks Clov, "What about having a good guffaw the two of us together?"⁸⁰ Although he never actually regrets the abuse which he brings to their relationship, he often makes a conscious effort to hold their unit together. Laughter is, however, once more limited in the world in which they exist, and Clov, after an earlier burst of laughter, has reached his saturation point. Clov's bitterness with his lot is ever apparent, but it becomes acute when he realises that the innocence of childhood is no more than an illusion to be quickly dispelled by the nightmare of adult life. Suffering is intrinsic to Clov's experience of adult life and to all which he sees around him. Clov symbolised his fantasy

⁷⁸ Endgame 11, 12.

⁷⁹ Endgame 59.

⁸⁰ Endgame 60.

of peace in a search for order within. Hamm's fantasy has become one of being washed away by a benevolent sea. Both men never cease to yearn for the pain to stop, and yet both still fear the actual event of death.

In Waiting for Godot, Vladimir forces Estragon to say that he is happy. In Endgame, Hamm asks Clov whether he has ever experienced an instant of happiness, and Clov is unable to recall even that. The tormented lives of Beckett's characters deny the reality of either happy individuals or happiness within a partnership. In Beckett's eyes, this is not a happy world. Hamm may try to convince himself that life can be good, "Ah great fun, we had, the two of us, great fun,"⁸¹ but there is no one there who is likely to believe him. As he basks in an imaginary ray of sunlight and tries to fabricate happiness, his fear of Clov once again emerges. Hamm cannot allow himself to become too comfortable, for when Clov stands behind his chair, he half expects to be stabbed in the back.

Hamm's mother appears to die, but her son shows no evident emotion, and he displays no more than mild curiosity for his father's grief. Yet his demands for Clov to show him some signs of affection arise time and time again in the play. Beckett demonstrates that logic has little place in any relationship and that man makes his relationships work for him according to his own emotional needs. Almost every exchange between Hamm and Clov ends with the latter threatening to leave; it is as if for him each of Hamm's remarks is the last straw. Yet as Hamm says, "the end is the beginning and yet you go on."⁸² The cycle of horror continues for both of these characters. There are times when Hamm faces

⁸¹ Endgame 63.

⁸² Endgame 69.

reality and is clearly aware of what will come: "There I'll be, in the old shelter, alone against the silence and . . . I'll have called my father and I'll have called my . . . my son."⁸³ Hamm knows that however much he fears solitude, the nature of his relationships can eventually lead him to nothing else. Regression to childhood and subsequent madness prevail in his fantasy, for Hamm has not given adequate care to his relationships. In his fear of madness, Hamm is not alone. Clov tells us "sometimes I wonder if I'm in my right senses. Then it passes off and I'm as intelligent as ever."⁸⁴ The world around these two men is in a state of flux, and their senses deteriorate correspondingly as the play progresses. As their relationship to the world becomes still more confused, so does their understanding of themselves and of each other.

Hamm still seeks to explore their situation. He wants to know "what's happened?" But the play does not disclose such answers, and Clov makes it clear that whatever the explanation may be, it no longer has any bearing on their lives. For Clov there was a time when such things did matter, and he subsequently reveals other reasons which have made him bitter towards Hamm. He accuses his "father" of being responsible for the death of "Mother Pegg." Beckett never tells us who Mother Pegg actually is. She becomes yet another unknown factor in a play of many. Her mention, however, serves to underline the basic humanity of Clov's character and his resentment towards his partner because of his brutality and lack of sensitivity towards others. Remembering the episode with Mother Pegg again leads Clov to question why he finds it necessary to obey Hamm. Is this the

⁸³ Endgame 69.

⁸⁴ Endgame 73.

life-long habit of a small boy with a domineering parent? If Hamm has never grown up, perhaps neither has Clov. At the end of the play there is mention of another small boy, a boy whom Clov claims to see outside the window. Once more the intentions of the play are ambiguous. Does Clov wish to destroy the child to avoid any chance of procreation or does he wish to save him? Has he now become more callous than Hamm? Does he fear that his position in the shelter could be usurped by the presence of a new life? There are never any clear answers, only more questions.

The extent of confusion within the relationship is embodied in the play's ending. Hamm dismisses Clov, claiming that he no longer needs him and yet begs him for a few kind words "to ponder in my heart."⁸⁵ Clov appears to have reached a mental state so depressed, that he closely resembles the madman in an asylum whom Hamm has described. He tries to leave, "dressed for the road," a road which no longer exists, and yet the curtain falls without our ever knowing whether he has finally ended his relationship with Hamm. All that is sure is that both men, at the end, are still on stage.

I intend now to concentrate on the relationship of the two minor characters of Endgame. Criticism, in general, has left this legless pair in their respective dustbins, and yet on close examination, it is clear that Beckett's secondary relationship is not an arbitrary one. The marriage of Nagg and Nell carries its own meaningful message in Endgame. Direct interaction between the pair occurs only once, now painfully restricted as a result of their confinement. Their only contact with one another is made when they can find the strength to pull themselves up from their dustbins. In her biographical account,

⁸⁵ Endgame 79.

Deirdre Bair claims that Beckett scorns the idea that the older generation has been relegated to the trash can.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, on stage this is exactly the case. Nagg makes his first entrance alone. It is both comical and horrific. His head emerging from his bin, he wants his "pap". His verbal capacity is primitive, doglike, and when he is given a dog biscuit, for there is no more "pap" in a world where everything is running out, he fingers and sniffs it in true canine spirit. But man does not possess the same faculties as a dog, and poor Nagg does not have the teeth to make use of a dog biscuit. Nagg appears aware of little more than his most basic needs. His name alone is reminiscent of some very lowly kind of animal. Soon after his entrance, Nell, his wife, rises out of her dustbin in response to Nagg's wishes. The faces of both display a grotesque pallor and their appearance is made yet more ludicrous by mention of their respective nightcaps and mopcaps.

As Nell first addresses Nagg, she appears to be living in a world of dreams of the past. She asks him whether it is "time for love".⁸⁷ At this "endgame", where neither of the couple even has the mobility of pawns, a time for the kind of love to which she seems to be referring can only belong to the past. Nagg reaffirms this when he asks if she was asleep. It is Nagg's turn to step back to the past when he asks his wife to kiss him. Once more Beckett shows a couple who need each other to test reality. In their totally suppressed state, past and present are almost impossible to differentiate, but each partner is there to steady the other, and Nell knows that they are no longer able to kiss. It

⁸⁶Deirdre Bair, Samuel Beckett: A Biography (New York: Harvest, 1978) 469.

⁸⁷ Endgame 14.

becomes clear that an attempt to kiss one another has become a daily event for Nagg and Nell, a habit of the past which still has some meaning in an unbearable present and an unthinkable future. As in the relationship of Hamm and Clov, Nell, in fact using the same phrase as Clov, questions the necessity of apparently unrewarding habit as she asks, "Why this farce day after day?"⁸⁸ But the "farce" has continued for a long time, and Beckett has always insisted that habit is one of the mainstays of existence. The yearning for physical closeness, present in any human relationship, is represented with greater force in this subsidiary relationship than in Hamm's own hope of a kiss from Clov.

Nell rarely says a great deal. Within her remarks, however, there is a tendency towards the romantic and a fluency non-existent in Nagg's. When Nagg talks about having lost a tooth yesterday, he literally means the day before. When Nell exclaims "Ah yesterday," she captures poetically a mourning for a long dead past, a past which once held great beauty now lost both to them and to all around them. It is only in the realms of the imagination that she is able to move beyond their present confinement.

As in Beckett's other relationships, both differences and similarities bind this pair together. Nagg and Nell share much due to the frigid environment in which they find themselves. Both are losing their sight, and Nell, more aware of their pathetic condition, is almost thankful for it. Both are also experiencing difficulty in hearing without even realising it. Again the physical senses in Endgame deteriorate more quickly than the mind. Like Hamm and Clov, this elderly couple share a long history. There was a time long ago when they were able to ride across the Ardennes on a tandem, a time which ended the

⁸⁸ Endgame 14.

carefree times, for it was there that they lost their "shanks". There is still, however, a form of communication left open to them. Together they can laugh at the memory of the tandem ride, the shared laughter of both good and bad times. It is the first deep laughter to be heard in the play, and it reflects a warmth still present in both partners which has been almost totally extinguished in the relationship of the major characters of the play. Beckett once said, "All that matters, is the laugh and the tear." The only way that these people can bear the obscenity of their situation and tolerate any further deterioration is to release tension in laughter. But laughter, too, must die away to be replaced by a new awareness of the present pressing in upon them. After a lifetime together, the dustbins, the memories, "the hours and the days" still hold Nagg and Nell close to one another as far as circumstance and personality permits.

Nagg and Nell begin to discuss how cold they are, and we feel the frigidity and numbness of their total condition. There is a dreamlike lack of awareness in Nell as she finds herself unable to decide whether to remain with Nagg in their joint hell or to seek separation in the sand of her own closed bin. Like Estragon and Clov before her, another partner seeks distance from a relationship. For Nell it is important that Nagg is "accurate" in his use of language. Showing herself to be the thinker of this particular pair, there are several exchanges where she tries to correct either Nagg's behaviour or his expressions. At one point, he, with his very practical concerns, inquires whether her "sawdust" has been changed, and she insists he should refer to it as "sand," for sand is what they now have in their bins. It is seemingly important to Nell to reaffirm the disintegration of their lives, perhaps to enable her to cling to reality for just a little longer. The presence of

sawdust would suggest wood, trees and life, things which now only exist as distorted images in their minds. Only sand is left in their present, sand made up of particles of rock from the dead sea beyond their window. As in one exchange Nell captured the beauty of "yesterday", she condenses the same feeling into the word "once" - once things were different. Clov too has used this word with a similar intent at the beginning of the play, when Hamm asked to know if he was loved. In both the relationships, it is characteristic of Clov and of Nell to reaffirm repeatedly the death of the past.

The dialogue breaks down again and again as the characters are shown unable to hear what has been said. It corresponds to the weakening of their senses and their slipping sense of awareness. Several times either Nagg or Nell have to repeat their questions. Another couple shows the problems of human communication. In a world where things are continually moving toward the end of the game and where the reality of yesterday has no bearing on today, the barriers to communication are almost unbreachable - almost, but not totally. Just as the elderly pair could join in laughter at their ill-fated tandem ride, Nell understands Nagg when he laughs at their son complaining about "something dripping"⁸⁹ in his head. Once more, she corrects him and shows us that this is the laughter beyond tears. It is the laughter of the madman at his own horrors:

Nothing is funnier than unhappiness. I grant you that. But - Yes, yes, it's the most comical thing in the world. And we laugh, we laugh, with a will, in the beginning. But it's always the same thing. Yes, it's like the funny story we have

⁸⁹ Endgame 18.

heard too often, we still find it funny, but we don't laugh any more.⁹⁰

Nell's will has faded; like Clov she is no longer able to bring laughter into the relationship, and she is no longer able even to play this game. There is an ominous ring to the conversation as Nell tells Nagg that she will leave him. It seems that she may be the only one of Beckett's characters of either Godot or Endgame who does achieve some form of permanent separation. But Nagg typically misunderstands her. He brings the conversation back to the animal level at which he is most comfortable, asking to be scratched much as a dog would wish its fleas scratched away. Nell, however, has become enveloped in her dreams of "yesterday" and has reached a point far beyond both laughter and tears. Her husband is quite unable to understand her condition, and, much as Hamm always demands that Clov listen to his stories, Nagg insists on repeating an oft repeated tale to her. It is a tale at which in "the beginning", she was always able to laugh. While Nagg talks, Nell looks back on the richness of all that they have lost. She sees before her a trip where they were rowing on Lake Como. While Nagg insists that his story always made Nell happy, she remains at her own level of thought, revelling in the purity and cleanliness of the water in her memory, far from the dirt and decay of their actual existence.

Beckett leaves us to decide for ourselves whether Nell will ever hear Nagg again. This other couple of Endgame displays an interdependence similar to Beckett's principal characters of the play. Nagg is the earthy, practical partner. Nell is the intellectual and emotional support, sharing his adventures and listening to his stories, yet always

⁹⁰ Endgame 19.

maintaining her own private sense of imagination. Like Hamm and Clov, they too can recall the way they were in better days while we watch both them and their relationship in their decline. Their disintegration is symbolic of the universal disintegration of the play, and physically, again at different paces, they go through better and worse together, held close no longer by their wedding bands, but by the rims of their dustbins. Nagg and Nell are introduced to us at a point when they have already become reduced to such a pathetic state that only their predominant characteristics have managed to survive the test of time. All their other characteristics are only echoes from the past. They still have their conflicts, weak now because they have become weak people, but they have stayed together for better, for worse: "Nec tecum, nec sine te."

A sense of heaviness, the approach of death and loss of hope pervade the relationship of Nagg and Nell. There is an arbitrary sense of who lives and who dies and how long before . . . it is a reflection in microcosm of the entire play. At Nell's death, a marriage would end; Hamm's roots would be severed, and the only family Beckett has left us with in this play would be half dead. But we have no definite proof of Nell's death. In fact we have no proof of any of the relationships in the play definitely ending. Where there is life, even in Beckett's world of threadbare hope, there is hope, and it is the relationships where hope is never quite extinguished, which give this play, so bereft of hope, its very last vestiges. There may still be room for play in this "state of hell itself."⁹¹

⁹¹ John Donne.

Chapter Three

The Marriage of Happy Days

The syndrome known as life is too diffuse to admit of palliation. For every symptom that is erased, another is made worse. The horse leech's daughter is a closed system. Her quantum of wantum cannot vary.⁹²

Happy Days follows Endgame, just as Endgame has been seen to follow Godot. No longer waiting on a road, no longer ending in a stifling shelter, Beckett's married couple, the only two characters in Happy Days, are suspended in a hellish limbo. It is the only one of the three plays discussed in which the leading characters are of opposite sexes and in which the main role has been given to a woman. Critics greatly in tune with Beckett's writing, including Ruby Cohn in Back to Beckett and Alan Schneider,⁹³ who has spent a lifetime producing the works of Beckett, have found the play to be the most moving and human that Beckett has ever written. Cohn writes the following:

Happy Days haunts me as the quintessential drama of modern humanity Because man's fate can drive him mad, Winnie maintains her equilibrium as we all do - living in a minor key. It is a gallant part, played with discipline if not splendour, with style if not panache, and with gentle

⁹² Murphy 200.

⁹³ Back to Beckett 192: "Any Way you Like Alan," Working with Beckett. Theatre Quarterly, Vol V 19-1975.

lovable grace.⁹⁴

It is also a part which, more than in previous plays, insists on the absolute necessity of human relationships for any form of existence. The relationship of Beckett's married pair becomes the very essence of this later work.

Once again, critics of the play differ greatly in their interpretations, this time often finding that Beckett has no great regard for the women of his works. I hope that this chapter may prove that the words of Winnie, Beckett's leading lady of Happy Days, and the nature of her relationship both to the world around her and towards her partner have captured her creator at least as much as any of his male heroes. In what is almost a monologue, beautifully offset by the sparse words of her husband, Winnie reveals her own relationship, our relationships and the absolute human need of a partner's presence. Winnie captures not only the boundaries of womanhood, but of all humanity. She is not as Kenneth Hamilton finds "after all . . . only a female"⁹⁵ but is at least as much a human being as she is a woman. Her self-perception is almost as acute as that of another of Beckett's females, Maddy Rooney in All That Fall:

Oh, I am just a hysterical old hag, I know, destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and church-going and fat and rheumatism and childlessness. . . . Love that is all I ask, a little love, daily, twice daily, fifty years of twice daily love like a Paris horse-butcher's regular, what normal woman wants affection? A peck on the jaw in the morning, near the ear

⁹⁴ Back to Beckett 193.

⁹⁵ Hamilton, Condemned to Life 175.

and another at evening, peck, peck, till you grow whiskers on you. There is that lovely laburnum again.⁹⁶

These two Beckett women often find the words which his male characters find impossible to say. What Eva Metman says of Mrs. Rooney applies equally well to the heroine of Happy Days: "In her, life spills over its boundaries, still turbulent amidst decay and death."⁹⁷ Like Mrs. Rooney, Winnie never forgets to look for the "lovely laburnum"; and as with Mrs. Rooney and the rest of us, "a little love" goes a long way to make life bearable. Two people and the power of their relationship survive amidst the amber of "scorched grass" and the "blazing light" of Happy Days.

A full physical description of Winnie is given by the initial stage directions of the play. She is a well-preserved woman of about fifty, a bosomy blond, wearing a low bodice and a pearl necklet. Beckett immediately makes Winnie's sensuality apparent. This is as much, however, as can be seen of Winnie, imbedded as she is in a mound, in an expanse of scorched grass. It is clear from almost the very beginning that she is not alone. We are told that Willie is asleep behind the mound. No other clue to his identity is furnished. Beside the sleeping Winnie is a large shopping bag and a parasol. As she slowly awakens to the sound of a piercing bell, the heroine of Happy Days opens her eyes to another "heavenly day." Not complaining that there is "nothing to be done" or even

⁹⁶ Samuel Beckett, in Krapp's Last Tape and other dramatic pieces (London: Grove Press, 1957) 37.

⁹⁷ Eva Metman, "Reflections on Samuel Beckett's Plays," in Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays, 138.

hoping against hope that "it must be nearly finished,"⁹⁸ trapped by the merciless sun, buried to her waist in the mound, Winnie, from the very beginning, tries to make the best of things. The few possessions still within her reach have become old, dear friends to Winnie. From inside her bag, she can extract a toothbrush and begin her day the way her audience does and the way she used to in days gone by. The habit of a lifetime, that of brushing her teeth upon awakening, helps Winnie to begin each new "day". She knows that the things around her are old and "running out"; she is only too well aware of the fact, but the contents of her bag and her silent Willie are the only family left to Winnie. There are some things which, as far as Winnie is concerned, are now "no better and no worse." The words of the wedding ceremony take on a lifeless quality as she considers her situation. Winnie is happy that she feels little pain; she is happy to be able to apply her lipstick, and she is grateful that there is some writing on her toothbrush which she can still puzzle over. These lifeless companions which Winnie can draw from her bag make her feel just a little less alone. She is aware that Willie is luckier than she. He has found an escape in sleep. There is "nothing to touch" his "marvelous gift."⁹⁹ Yet for all her obvious torment, the heroine of Happy Days refuses to be daunted. With her sleeping husband leaving her so much to her own devices, she insists that she has "so much to be thankful for."¹⁰⁰ The New York correspondent for The Times on September 25, 1961, wrote the following in response to the first Cherry Lane performance: "Upon a

⁹⁸ Godot 7: Endgame 1.

⁹⁹ Happy Days 10.

¹⁰⁰ Happy Days 11.

substructure of gloom, defeat and impotence Mr. Beckett has constructed a portrait of an incurable optimist." It is, however, an optimism based on too much awareness rather than too little. Winnie is neither stupid nor naive. She is brave enough to confront the plight of her life and to confront her enforced isolation and solitude. She knows that if she is to maintain any kind of equilibrium, she must salvage all possible satisfaction from those remains of the past which happen into her grasp. Winnie knows about "the suffering of being".¹⁰¹ She also knows that she must somehow carry on. We are never allowed to lose sight of Winnie's humanity. There are times when even her vast reserves of strength threaten to fail her, when the evidence of decay, of rotting teeth and failing eyes refuses to be denied. But Beckett has left her a powerful ally against despair, and once more this ally, as in the other plays in this study, is in the form of a lifelong partner. When Winnie feels that she can no longer cope by herself she turns to her "poor, dear Willie."¹⁰² Anger and need live side by side as she cruelly strikes her husband to wake him and then politely explains to him that he should not sleep any longer, for she may have need of him. She may recognise his good fortune in being able to sleep, but there are times when her own needs override such considerations, when she at least has to feel that she is not alone with her thoughts. Behind the careful politeness of her words, her desperation becomes slowly apparent. The contents of her bag continue to remind Winnie of life in "the old style."¹⁰³ Her pain for the loss of this life is not something which she can clearly express, but like

¹⁰¹ Proust 20.

¹⁰² Happy Days 10.

¹⁰³ Happy Days 13.

many people who are married, the easiest way for Winnie to release some frustration is to hit out at the person closest to her. There is both humour and sadness in the relief which she finds in hurling an old glass medicine bottle in Willie's direction; if its contents can no longer cure the ailments of her life, it does at least still have some use. Winnie reaches out with hunger for any satisfaction which she is still able to find.

Winnie's Willie is comically introduced. We see his head supporting a boater at a rakish angle. Winnie has a more private view which she brings to our attention by warning him, in a wifely manner, to slip on his pants before he gets "singed."¹⁰⁴ Winnie's attitude is both domineering and maternal as she derives her contentment from seeing Willie following her instructions. The fact that there appears to be a response from him, albeit a silent one, is enough for her to consider this "another happy day."¹⁰⁵ As this couple is married, Beckett uses the stereotype picture of communications between husband and wife to stress once more the difficulty any two people have in communicating with one another. Winnie makes every effort to maintain her looks, using all the equipment in her bag to its fullest capacity. Her husband appears oblivious to all but his newspaper. It is clear that Willie makes little attempt to support his wife's reality. We hear him read from the obituary column: "His Grace & Most Reverent Father in God Dr. Carolus Hunter dead in tub."¹⁰⁶ Once more, Beckett begins to explore the intricacies of communication between his pair of characters. Winnie is able to hear Willie's words rather than his

¹⁰⁴ Happy Days 14.

¹⁰⁵ Happy Days 15.

¹⁰⁶ Happy Days 15.

message. She remembers better days both for herself and for Charlie Hunter and translates Willie's obituary into one of the "happy" memories. As Willie continues to search the advertisements of long ago, his words repeatedly trigger in Winnie memories in which she can revel rather than a conversation which both can truly share. Again Beckett shows how far from the ideal, human communications really are and yet how very necessary his partners are to one another. Even in its early stages of discovery, it is clear that the relationship of Happy Days offers both stimulation and placation to both of its partners.

Time, which hung so heavily on the characters of Godot and Endgame, bears down equally upon the married pair, and they, like the others before them, use every device at their disposal to pass the time away. Each partner once again has his own method of escape. Winnie can persist in examining what is written on her toothbrush and try to convince herself that, amidst all the hardship, she is never far from learning something new. Willie is able to pursue his own fantasy as he greedily examines an erotic postcard. Neither partner has any real interest in the other's fantasy, and yet the fantasies do open certain channels of communication for Winnie and Willie. Still trying to apply the values of her former life, Winnie can admonish her husband for his poor taste, and he, obviously not for the first time, can ignore her. It is a pattern of their relationship which appears to have been long since established. Winnie is by far the more outspoken partner of the two, and once more we see the power of silence in a relationship as we endure with Winnie Willie's non-replies.

If Winnie is an optimist, she is also a realist. She knows that there is only one real happiness left open to her, "the happy day to come when flesh melts at so many degrees

and the night of the moon has so many hundred hours."¹⁰⁷ Until that day comes, Winnie must cling to her relationship. Wyndam Lewis claimed that the greatest satire is nonmoral and constitutes an attempt to understand how man bears his own company.¹⁰⁸ What Beckett's partnership again shows us is that man or woman can rarely bear his or her own company for too long. Winnie is actually more frank in her exploration of the nature of her relationship than the male characters of either Godot or Endgame. Vladimir can only barely admit to Estragon that he is lonely while his partner sleeps. Winnie clearly tells us that her husband has to be conscious in order for her to be able "to go on" or at least to "go on talking".¹⁰⁹ The implication is that for Winnie these amount to one and the same thing. Even if her words form a monologue, Winnie desperately needs to feel that there is some chance that they will form part of a dialogue.

Ah yes, if only I could bear to be alone, I mean prattle away with not a soul to hear. (Pause.) Not that I flatter myself you hear much, no Willie, God forbid. (Pause.) Days perhaps when you hear nothing. (Pause.) But days too when you answer. (Pause.) So that I may say at all times, even when you do not answer and perhaps hear nothing. Something of this is being heard, I am not merely talking to myself, that is in the wilderness, a thing I could never bear to do - for any length of time.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Happy Days 18.

¹⁰⁸ Recalled by H. Kenner, Samuel Beckett - A Critical Study (London: John Calder, 1962) 36.

¹⁰⁹ Happy Days 21.

¹¹⁰ Happy Days 20-21.

However little Willie may hear, it is enough to give some small meaning to Winnie's life. Willie keeps Winnie from feeling that she is in a "wilderness" of total abandon. In her artificial day, alerted to wakefulness or to sleep by a relentless bell which Beckett once described as her enemy, having no one to talk to would amount to the end of any kind of tolerable existence. She knows that she would still have vague memories to serve as her companions. She also knows that this could never be enough for her: "what would I do, what could I do, all day long, I mean between the bell for waking and the bell for sleep? (Pause.) Simply gaze before me with compressed lips."¹¹¹ Winnie knows the value of her relationship. She also senses that dwelling too long on her fate and her loss is something she cannot afford. Such thoughts are too close to reality for comfort. It is far more reassuring to reach out to her bag and to worry anew about her grooming.

Winnie's thoroughness in making best use of all tools at her disposal is extended to the way in which she speaks. She is extremely precise in her use of language and it is this very precision which often opens up the path to communication with her husband. Kenner also points out the following of Winnie: she "maintains a logician's, a grammarian's detachment from her plight and human dignity asserts itself in syntax."¹¹² Winnie also appears to consider her husband to be her intellectual superior. Although she acknowledges that he says little, and we have ample evidence to this effect, Winnie feels that he can find the words which both illude and yet hold such great importance for her.

¹¹¹ Happy Days 21.

¹¹² Kenner 93.

What would you say, Willie? . . . What would you say, Willie, speaking of your hair, them or it? . . . The hair on your head, I mean. The hair on your head, Willie, what would you say speaking of the hair on your head, them or it?¹¹³

Winnie has the unfortunate talent of asking a question and nagging in almost the same breath. Willie has learnt well how to defend himself. He utters no more than one syllable, and Winnie knows that this is as much or more than she can expect in answer. Willie's reply of "It" has to be enough to make the rest of her day happy. It is enough for her to be able to turn away from him to the habits which otherwise occupy her.

Winnie's thoughts wander back to her wedding night, and for the first time her voice breaks as she thinks of her once golden hair and of a once golden day - golden, not scorched. Once more the subtleties of the relationship are evoked as much by silence and pause as by what is actually said. Beckett's Unnameable says:

I'm in words, made of words, other's words, what others, the place too, the air, the walls, the floor, the ceiling, all words, the whole world is here with me, I'm the air, the walls, the walled-in one, everything yields, opens, ebbs, flows, like flakes, I'm all these flakes, meeting, mingling, falling asunder.¹¹⁴

And yet for Winnie too, there comes a time when "words fail . . . when even they fail,"¹¹⁵ and once more her only recourse is either a return to her grooming or to her husband.

¹¹³ Happy Days 23.

¹¹⁴ Samuel Beckett, The Unnameable (London: Grove Press, 1956) 386.

¹¹⁵ Happy Days 24.

They are the things which "tide one over."¹¹⁶ Winnie appears to be physically very protective of her husband. For all her apparently good intentions, however, her nagging rarely ceases. The humour Beckett engenders by Winnie's step by step instructions to Willie about his every movement is hardly something which Willie is likely to share with his audience. However much his wife wishes to appear in control, her own anguish and dependence on the relationship are never far from the surface. She may carefully direct her husband to safety, but she can never bear to think of him as being out of earshot. It is the one and only thing that Winnie is sure that she cannot tolerate, for she knows that when once again her own resources seem in danger of running out, she will crave to hear "dear Willie's" voice once more.

The anger and fear encompassed in the relationship between husband and wife are clearly brought to the surface by the stage directions following Winnie's frantic request that her voice be heard. Willie's answers change from "irritated" to "more irritated" to "violent"¹¹⁷ not once, but twice, and his wife is finally halted by his anger. She knows that she is in danger of exceeding her limits, limits which have surely been long since established. Winnie knows that she is still strong enough to exist under these ever-present conditions. She also clearly fears that a time will come when her strength will be sapped to such an extent that she will need continual assurance from her husband that all her words have been heard. This will be a time when her fears of his anger will take second place, a time which will precede her being left alone with the bag which "will always

¹¹⁶ Happy Days 24.

¹¹⁷ Happy Days 26.

be."¹¹⁸ Winnie acknowledges that the greater the pressures upon her, the more she will necessarily depend upon her husband. It is also clear to her that the more this need arises, the more likely it is that he will push her away. For the first time she verbalises her fear that Willie will leave her. Like Es'ragon and Clov before them, it would appear that the threat of separation hangs over this other close relationship. Once more Winnie cloaks her anguish and pain at the much feared event with her own brand of polite grammar: "You are going, Willie aren't you? (Pause. Louder.) You will be going soon, Willie, won't you? (Pause. Louder.)"¹¹⁹

After years of togetherness, Winnie, like many women, is convinced that she can read her husband's mind, "Oh I can well imagine what is passing through your mind, it is not enough to have to listen to the woman, now I must look at her as well."¹²⁰ The years of being ignored by her husband have taken their toll on her self-esteem. Winnie lays bare her own needs throughout the play. What becomes extremely touching is her consequent recognition of the basic problem of her marriage. Neither partner is able to completely satisfy the other. Winnie cannot leave her husband alone. She also now admits that what he essentially needs is to be left in peace. We have never seen her look so closely into her relationship before.

A tiny emmet suddenly crosses the ground before the married pair. Willie has a new excuse to display his superior scientific knowledge. For the first time in the play, the

¹¹⁸ Happy Days 27.

¹¹⁹ Happy Days 27.

¹²⁰ Happy Days 29.

couple share an external event which gives them a cause for joint laughter. As they laugh quietly together at Willie's pun on the word "fornication", a new awareness of the better times which they have shared is brought to the surface. Winnie cannot even be sure that they are laughing at the same joke, but they are at least laughing with one another. The feeling that it is still possible for them to share gives Winnie enough confidence to ask her husband whether she was ever really lovable. A short pause is enough to make her realise that she will receive no reply, and she returns anew to her apologetic and defensive manner as she senses that she is asking more than she ought. Winnie is always swift to insist that she only bothers her husband as a last resort, and that, in general, it is enough for her just to feel that he is within hearing distance. When she knows that she can go no further, Winnie finds enough strength to turn away from Willie and to explore her other pastimes. She carefully examines the possibilities open to her, the habits which she can practice on her own, but she knows that she must not exhaust them too greedily. They may never be a substitute for human company, but one day they may be all that she has left. They are likely to outlive her married relationship, to remain after Willie has gone. Willie, however, is not yet gone, and, sadly enough for Winnie, neither is he quite there. While this situation remains, a quick dip into her bag seems a very tempting proposition to her. She pulls out another old friend from her store, in the form of a revolver, her Brownie. It would appear that depression is nothing new to the couple's relationship, even long before their present plight. Winnie fondly recalls how she was always there to keep Willie from total despair and to prevent him from suicide. Once again Beckett's people are shown to need one another for their own basic survival. The

experiences of each may be quite separate, for as Winnie says, "it all depends on the creature you happen to be,"¹²¹ but we are all in dire need of our fellow creatures however extensive our differences may be. Winnie needs Willie to give substance to her memories and to test her reality, and she still feels that she can turn to him to fill certain gaps which appear in her own knowledge. When the parasol in her hand catches fire, the end of one of the habits of her day, Winnie still has someone to ask whether such a thing has ever occurred before. For the most part, we are given the impression that Willie is almost immune to his wife's ceaseless chatter. There are, however, times when he appears to show her signs of both sympathy and affection. When she begs him to indicate that he is still conscious by raising a little finger, he is generous enough to raise all five. As a result, Winnie can continue once more "with an easy mind."¹²²

When Winnie feels a little less alone than usual, when she has received some fresh indication of her husband's attention, she can show a level of philosophical awareness at other times hardly expressed:

Did I ever know a temperate time? (Pause.) No. (Pause.) I speak of temperate times and torrid times, they are empty words. (Pause.) I speak of when I was not yet caught - in this way - and had my legs and had the use of my legs, and could seek out a shady place, like you, when I was tired of the sun, or a sunny place when I was tired of the shade, like you, and they are all empty words. (Pause.) It is no hotter today than yesterday, it

¹²¹ Happy Days 34.

¹²² Happy Days 37.

will be no hotter tomorrow than today, how could it, and so on back into the far past, forward into the far future.¹²³

Winnie's life and marriage have rarely known anything other than a basic state of misery. That which is hellish in the present is never more than an extension of a horrific past - the foreshadowing of an equally terrible future. Winnie does not often try to share her pain with her husband to such an extent. She wants to be quite sure that this time she has been heard.

It is an external stimulus in the form of a tune escaping from his wife's music box which once again rouses Willie to awareness. Does Winnie see herself to be the merry widow of the tune? Does this give Willie one more reason to ignore his wife? Would he be happy if he were in the position of widower?

As solitude again threatens to engulf Winnie, she conjures up an imaginary couple in her mind. Whether their name be Shower or Cooker, this other couple's relationship would appear to be as terse as Winnie's own. The arguments are just as apparent, and the questions and the lack of meaning in life are an ever present force. The couple of Winnie's imagination may question Winnie's relationship, but their own poses similar questions, and for neither is there any real remedy or rescue.

Just as Estragon and Vladimir longed for the day to be over, Winnie awaits the bell for sleep, her one other respite from pain. Like Estragon, she has someone with whom to share her dreams. What Winnie wishes for more than anything in the world is that Willie will one day come around to her side of the mound where she will be able to see him.

¹²³ Happy Days 38.

However much she may order her husband around, Winnie never escapes from her longing to have him close to her. It matters little to Winnie how Willie sees himself. Even if he describes himself as a "castrated male swine, reared for slaughter,"¹²⁴ the content of his words do not seem to penetrate her consciousness. It is "a happy day" for her because her husband has answered one more of her questions. As Act I ends, both members of the marriage feel comfortable enough in their relationship to return to those individual habits which start and finish each of their "days."

As Act II opens, the physical deterioration which Winnie so feared has had a marked effect. She is now imbedded up to her neck in the mound and all earlier movement is denied her. Winnie does her utmost to resurrect her old optimism: "Someone is looking at me still. (Pause.) Caring for me still. (Pause.) That is what I find so wonderful. (Pause.)"¹²⁵ But looking at her does not mean that we can be of any help to her. There has never been any help for her, for to Beckett's mind, "there's no cure"¹²⁶ to being on earth. With stress mounting, Winnie's thoughts have become more confused than in the first act, and her cries for Willie are yet more heart-rending because she is not sure whether he is dead or has gone away. Winnie's arms and breasts have disappeared into the ground, symbolic of the fact that she will never again be able to hold her husband close to her. When she hears no response from Willie, her panic at being alone and the anger which she feels towards him mount to the point where Winnie is almost hysterical. The terror of her

¹²⁴ Happy Days 47.

¹²⁵ Happy Days 49.

¹²⁶ Endgame 68.

experience is communicated by the frantic sort of babbling to which she is reduced. She attempts to turn her attention to those things which were able to keep her occupied in Act I. "Things have their life, that is what I always say, things have a life,"¹²⁷ she insists, for Winnie has been forced to give them a life to fill in the voids both of her relationship and her existence. Just as the tape recorder of Krapp's Last Tape¹²⁸ introduces such sadness because of its actual lack of life, it is clear that none of the things which "have a life" around Winnie will ever be as important as her husband. However much life she may wish into them, they can never be a substitute for the real thing. Desperate once more from loneliness, Winnie tries again to people her world with her imagination. She thinks of a small girl who, surrounded by love is unable to escape life's inevitable tragedy. Not even the closest of relationships can save the child from her pain, and behind the voice of the child, Winnie can scream out her own agony. It is a pain to which she rarely gives vent, one which she always feels that she has to hide. This time, however, her anger at Willie's silence is too close to the surface for her to be able to quell it for long. She wonders aloud for the first time whether he is "wantonly cruel",¹²⁹ but, as always, does not wish to pursue such a path of thought. It is less confusing to believe that Willie is unable rather than unwilling to answer and to continue her habit of rhetorical questions, her one great refuge from solitude. While she talks on, in her mind they talk together. Beckett's heroine never quite allows herself to believe that she has been totally abandoned. She

¹²⁷ Happy Days 54.

¹²⁸ Samuel Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape, (London: Grove Press, 1960).

¹²⁹ Happy Days 56.

knows that her marriage has not been free of deception, and that it has been far from perfect. She has no difficulty in admitting that even after physical love, she has often felt very alone and she sees that they have never communicated well: "Oh, I know you were never one to talk, I worship you Winnie be mine and then nothing from that day forth only titbits from Reynolds' News."¹³⁰ Nevertheless, one renewed glimpse of her husband is enough to make her day another "happy" one and more than enough to allow her to repair back to her old nagging self. There is so much left unsaid between Beckett's partners, either of the pain or of the pleasure which they find in one another. Not until his final appearance is Willie described as happy. It is an expression that both shocks and frightens his wife. Because he is a man of few words, Willie's appearance has to speak for him. The stage directions tell us that he appears "dressed to kill,"¹³¹ uttering one word to Winnie. His only word in the whole of the second act is his nickname for her. At the end of the play, Willie calls out to his "Win".

Neither Godot, Endgame nor Happy Days ever shows us either the real beginnings or the actual end of the relationships. What is really shown is each relationship "in progress." Each partner may strive to "win" the game of their partnership, but as neither is whole without the other, this becomes an almost impossible event. As Winnie sings the last words to this marriage of "happy days," the play-long tension between her and her husband reaches a crescendo. We cannot be sure whether Willie has dressed himself for a wedding or a funeral. Beckett's Murphy had once warned his Celia that "You, my body, my mind

¹³⁰ Happy Days 62.

¹³¹ Happy Days 61.

. . . one must go." In Willie's case it is left uncertain which it will be, and any interpretation serves little more than to reflect the extremes of emotion present in the lifelong partnership on stage. What we are actually left with is a Winnie still trying to convince herself that she is truly loved, singing a last song which defines love quite differently from her own experience and a relationship which separates both Winnie and Willie from the alien "wasteland" beyond the boundaries of their union. However much Beckett may wish to deny it, the palliative effect of the relationship rings clear.

Conclusion

My thesis is an attempt "to elucidate" some of the "mysteries"¹³² of Beckett's own making, an attempt to shed some light upon the excruciating incongruity of what he senses the human relationship to be. His own cryptic directives have often been helpful in my search, none more so than those which insist that his "people" speak for themselves. I have tried not to abuse his advice. A close examination of what each character reveals about himself or herself either consciously or subconsciously (and Beckett's characters are woven to the point where the subconscious can be fruitfully examined) and how he relates to others and to the world around him shows in new detail what it means to Beckett when one individual co-exists with another. There will always be some mystery left in such an exploration. In Beckett's illogical world, there is little that can make better sense. Even the most brilliant student of human behaviour cannot possibly give every reason for or nuance of human action. Only a genius of Beckett's stature can create characters that have such hidden quality, who relate in such a human manner. My work has been to lay bare that which we are invited to discover and to observe those things which Beckett's "people" actually do and say or do not do and say, in the human entanglement in which they find themselves.

From the very beginning of each play, Beckett's pairs have "always" been together. They cry together; they cry alone. They laugh together; they laugh alone. They suffer

¹³² Samuel Beckett, letter to Alan Schneider, December 29, 1957.

together, torment one another and ease each other's pain. The tears of the world are a "constant quantity"¹³³ to Beckett; when one ceases to cry, another begins. Not one of his characters is complete enough in himself to be able to attempt life alone. The tramps wait for Godot as a pair, the men of Endgame never leave the chessboard, and Winnie never faces the dreaded shot from the "Brownie." Beckett's relationships endure, in all their suffering, until we leave the theatre. They continue to live on in that fragile memory of ours which Beckett so frequently calls into question,¹³⁴ and they stay alive. We will never be any closer to knowing their ending than we are to predicting the outcome of our own human relationships.

It is no wonder that Beckett openly scorns many of the "overtones" of "their" (the critics')¹³⁵ making. To pull out a single thread from such a totally human fibre, be it a religious, psychological or philosophical thread, tends to give an examination by microscope rather than an appreciation by the human eye. It may throw light on some of the more difficult aspects of Beckett's work. It must also be extremely aggravating to their creator. Beckett fondly refers to his "people", and it is in their humanity that we experience the very intensity of their relationships. What Beckett has "managed" is to make the subjective experience universal. Human relationships are a bad joke to Beckett, played by a God who may or may not exist. They are a joke with which no one can escape laughing along.

¹³³ Godot 22.

¹³⁴ Proust 29-30.

¹³⁵ Friedman, Melvin J. "Critic," Modern Drama 9, No. 3 (December, 1966): 300-304.

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