THE STRATEGIES OF WAITING
A Study of Action in Samuel Beckett's Plays

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ABSTRACT

This essay is principally concerned with the nature and possibilities of action in Samuel Beckett's four major stage plays: Waiting for Godot, Endgame, Krapp's Last Tape, and Happy Days. The problem arises from the fact that each of these plays is organically inconclusive, indicating that the action is not causally structured in the Aristotelean sense. Action is therefore examined in terms of the characters' separate activities: how they are initiated and terminated, their internal order, and their relation to each play as a whole.

The three basic sources employed for criteria are Beckett's critical essay, Proust; his early novels, Murphy and Watt; and Johan Huizinga's Homo Ludens. Proust provides a clear indication of Beckett's theories on time, habit, and friendship; Murphy and Watt are seen as character prototypes; and Homo Ludens is useful in that it supplies a working definition of play.

After a detailed examination of each play in the above terms, the general conclusion reached is that in all cases Beckett has portrayed a state of being as opposed to a process of becoming. In other words, the characters feel and act as though they are caught in an endless present: in their situations they feel cut off from their past, and at the same time they cannot plan and project their activities to-

ward a known goal, for the future is completely uncertain. Consequently, aside from those moments when the characters have no effective control over their actions, and aside from those actions governed by some form of necessity, everything they do during the course of the plays is done simply to fill the enormous void of time.

Considered separately, each activity or strategy of waiting is seen to conform to the characteristics of play as defined by Huizinga, and furthermore, each activity is seen as a habitual response to reality. The similarities between one activity and another are conditioned by two fundamental factors: a subject-object dichotomy, or the relation between the individual, the world, and other people; and death, the one event in human life which is certain, but not fixed. The differences between the various activities, on the other hand, are conditioned primarily by the ages of the characters: the older a character is the more he loses contact with the world and other people, and this affects the scope of his activities.

It is finally concluded that Beckett has portrayed the fundamental isolation of western man--the tragicomedy of individualism. Cut off from others and time, man's habitual response to life and the external world has been to devise strategies of waiting for the time when it will all end.

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INTRODUCTION

The principal concern of this essay is to examine the nature and possibilities of human action in Samuel Beckett's four major stage plays. I feel that this is the key issue in these plays because in a state of seemingly endless waiting, a situation faced by each of the characters, the problem of passing the time is paramount. The reason for this is that boredom lurks behind waiting as an ever present threat, and the longer waiting is protracted, the more intolerable boredom becomes. Consequently, if waiting is both unavoidable and continuous (in a hypothetical situation), boredom becomes the arch-enemy, and if it cannot be defeated, it must at least be held at bay by any strategic means possible.

From a general point of view we should be able to outline the limitations on the nature and extent of action in a state of waiting. In the first place, the activities of "ordinary" life would seem to be suspended because the waiting may be terminated at any moment, thus preventing continuity and projected action. In other words, as far as rationally structured action is concerned, the past provides building blocks for the future, but in a state of waiting the past is of no practical value because the future cannot be planned. Consequently, we should suspect that action under these con-

ditions cannot be causally structured in the Aristotelean sense, but that it must be limitless: it can begin and end anywhere and its internal structure is arbitrary--at least to the extent that one activity is not necessarily conditioned by its predecessor. Rather, the duration and order of the activities are obviously conditioned by chance and by the response of those who wait to their situations. We are therefore primarily concerned with this response of the characters in the four plays under discussion--their attitudes toward the endless amount of time at their disposal and the nature of the activities they devise to fill this time.

Action in a state of waiting would also seem to be restricted spatially, and not simply because time and space are interrelated, but because of the nature of waiting itself. If a character is waiting for a person--as in Waiting for Godot--he is restricted to a specific meeting place, but if he is "waiting" for death--as in Endgame, Krapp's Last Tape, and Happy Days--he is restricted by a decreasing mobility as old age incapacitates him. In either case, however, the character is cut off from the space surrounding him to the extent that it too becomes a void, a "nothingness." His activity is therefore confined to a limited space and this naturally has an effect on the nature of his activity.

Under these restrictive conditions, the activities of those who wait seem to bear a strong resemblance to the artificial quality of play and its specific variations, art and

games. In a study of the play element in culture, Johan Huizinga has arrived at a number of the basic characteristics of play which can serve as tentative criteria for the study of action in Beckett's plays. According to Huizinga, play is a voluntary activity in that it is free from physical necessity and moral duty; play sets itself off from ordinary life and into a world of its own; play proceeds within its own boundaries of space and time according to fixed rules; and finally, play creates an order of its own.[1] In connection with this last characteristic we might add Marshall McLuhan's important observation that play (or a specific game) tends to be a model of a culture in that games incorporate the actions and reactions of a society in a single dynamic image.[2] Art forms, of course, also fall into this category, and it is in this sense that we can examine Beckett's plays as dramatic metaphors--hypothetical situations presented as models of modern western culture--rather than as literal imitations of reality. Whether or not these plays are valid models is not the concern of this investigation, we can only ask that each play consistently adheres to its own hypothetical conditions.

We should now be able to summarize the various questions to be taken into consideration in our analysis of the action in Beckett's plays. In the first place, we are interested only in that type of activity which is undertaken freely. This means that we must differentiate between those activities

undertaken from necessity--which would include spontaneous reactions--and those which we shall call the strategies of waiting. Once this is done we must examine the nature of these strategies, how they are initiated and terminated, their internal order, and their relation to the play as a whole. In addition, attention must be paid to each character's personality in so far as it affects his ability to devise and take part in these strategies. Finally, the nature and extent of the hypothetical conditions of each play must be examined because they are the conditions which restrict the actions of the characters.

INTRODUCTION--NOTES

[1]Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture (Boston: Beacon, 1955), pp. 7-8.

[2]Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (Toronto: New American Library, 1966), pp. 210-211.

CHAPTER ONE

PROUST, MURPHY, and WATT

To the reader of Beckett's works one fact soon becomes quite clear--that they are closely related by theme, character type, and meaning. In so far as this is true, Beckett's early works can provide us with a useful introduction to the plays under consideration.

The first serious work with relevance to the strategies of waiting is Beckett's essay on Proust, published in 1931, in which certain important concepts are tentatively explored, namely time, memory, friendship, and communication. Of these concepts perhaps time is the most important, since it acts as the antagonist in the plays and as such it influences the structure and outcome of the waiting. In Proust Beckett first describes the effect of time on both the subject (man) and the object of desire (whether the object is a lover, a friend, death, or Godot). Man is a creature of time and is therefore in a constant state of flux:

> The individual is the seat of a constant process of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time, agitated and multicoloured by the phenomena of its hours.[1]

In this constant process of change, both physical and mental,

self-awareness is a constant motivating factor--man is always aware of change and aware that he cannot escape it. Consequently, in the pursuit of an object, disappointment is inevitable: "what is attainment? The identification of the subject with the object of his desire. The subject has died--and perhaps many times--on the way."[2] The feeling that the future (along with the object of desire) can be controlled is utterly destroyed by fixing the future event with a date--it then becomes inevitable. But when that future is death, it can be neither controlled nor fixed--it recedes before the subject "indistinct and abstract."[3] This, then, seems to be the basic characteristic of time as it is experienced in the plays: the future event is always a little farther away from the character(s), just as a hyperbolic curve moves closer but never touches its axis, or, to use a more appropriate image from Endgame, the heap of millet always increases but is never complete.

From this point of view, therefore, planned action (which involves both the past and future) is futile since control of, or stability in, the future event is only an optimistic delusion:

> The poisonous ingenuity of Time in the science of affliction is not limited to its action on the subject.... Exemption from intrinsic flux in a given object does not change the fact that it is the correlative of a subject that does not enjoy such immunity. The observer infects the observed with his own mobility.[4]

We need only substitute the word "waitor" for "observer" in

the last sentence above to make the issue clear. For this reason, for example, we may call Vladimir an optimist: he continually expects Godot to arrive at a certain time (even though he has forgotten what that time is), but Godot does not come.

When the object of desire is another human being (and here we move into the area of love and friendship), "we are faced by the problem of an object whose mobility is not merely a function of the subject's, but independent and personal: two separate and immanent dynamisms related by no system of synchronization."[5] Just how accurately this rather uncompromising statement reflects Beckett's personal attitude toward friendship is of course a matter of major concern in our examination of the plays, since the degree of co-operation and communication possible between partners in the game against time should have some effect on their success.

Beckett first defines friendship (ostensibly in relation to Proust) roughly as a function of cowardice--cowardice because it is self-fear:

> The exercise of friendship is tantamount to a sacrifice of that only real and incommunicable essence of oneself to the exigencies of a frightened habit whose confidence requires to be restored by a dose of attention. It represents a false movement of the spirit--from within to without ...to the abject and indigestible husks of direct contact with the material and concrete.[6]

It should be noted, before we go further, that in all of this there is a strong hint of Beckett's personal distaste for human contact which, when combined with his portrayal of

characters whose bodies are in many forms of advanced decay, comes close to being an obsession. For this reason, the effect of time on the body is only a partial explanation of the existence of characters who cannot sit down, who cannot laugh, and who live in garbage cans, their stumps embedded in their own excrement. Actually, this attitude betokens a conflict between concrete and material reality, which is subject to the ravages of time, and an extra-temporal essence in flight from that reality. The inescapable presence of decaying bodies is not going to help foster a close friendship. In any case, friendship is not only a form of self-fear, it is also a negation of solitude, and for this reason characters who fear solitude do not leave their "friends" alone: every time Estragon falls asleep Vladimir wakes him up, and every time Clov leaves the room, Hamm whistles him back.

True friendship, however, is finally impossible because meaningful communication between subject and object is impossible:

> There is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication. Even on the rare occasions when word and gesture happen to be valid expressions of personality, they lose their significance on their passage through the cataract of the personality that is opposed to them. Either we speak and act for ourselves--in which case speech and action are distorted and emptied of their meaning by (the other) or else we speak and act for others--in which case we speak and act a lie.[7]

The impossibility of communication does not imply, of course, that conversation is impossible, although this too becomes attenuated in the plays. Conversation without communication

can and does, as we shall see in the plays, have certain specific results. The dialogue either becomes a meaningless babble between characters who try to communicate but fail, (thus becoming a source of irritation), or it becomes a co-operative strategy--that is, the characters tacitly agree to leave subjective or personal matters out of the conversation and simply play with words in an effort to pass the time. However, this is a matter which shall be dealt with in the discussion of the plays.

Beckett calls memory and habit "attributes of the time cancer"[8] with the former subject to the more general laws of the latter, which in turn is a function of the subject's desire to escape the reality of the world in which he must live:

> Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability
> .....
> life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals; the world being a projection of the individual's consciousness, the pact must be continually renewed....[9]

Habit, then, is not a condition, but an active agent, and as such it operates as a strategy. Routine is habit, and when waiting is filled with routine, it too is habit. But when habit breaks down, the individual suffers:

> The periods of transition that separate consecutive adaptations ...represent the perilous zones in the life of the individual, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being....[10]

While habit is a minister of boredom, it is also an "agent of security," but certainly no guarantee:

> When it [habit] is opposed by a phenomenon that it cannot reduce to the condition of a comfortable and familiar concept ... it betrays its trust as a screen to spare its victim the spectacle of reality, it disappears, and the victim, for a moment free, is exposed to that reality.[11]

Moments like these are frequent in Beckett's plays--even the most successful adaptation, Winnie's, has moments of anguish when her routines or strategies break down and she is exposed to the "spectacle of reality," the reality of waiting.

According to Beckett, the key to Proust is his use of time in relation to memory. Here Beckett distinguishes between what Proust calls "voluntary" and "involuntary" memory. Involuntary memory occurs when something which has been forgotten is relived in its entirety in the present, "it is at once imaginative and empirical, at once an evocation and a direct perception, real without being merely actual."[12] Voluntary memory, on the other hand, does not bring anything to life because it was never dead.[13] The experience of involuntary memory (which cannot be consciously controlled), because it makes the past identical with the present, communicates an extra-temporal essence, and it follows, Proust claims, that the communicant is for the moment an extra-temporal being.[14] Theoretically, however, involuntary memory is not a possible source for the strategies of waiting until after it has occurred because it is not a conscious process. When, on the rare occasion that it does occur, it may or may

not be used depending on its content--if it is painful, it will be forgotten as quickly as possible. In addition, even voluntary memory must pose a dilemma for those who are caught in a perpetual state of waiting: on the one hand, memory is a painful reminder of their temporal natures, while on the other hand, the past is irrelevant to them in their situation. Consequently, the content of memory can only become a strategy by becoming objectified and thus turned into something which is no longer part of the self, such as an art form. As we shall see later, this is what Hamm does when he composes his "narrative," and it is also what Krapp does when he mechanizes his experiences and plays them back at a later date.

As far as Proust is concerned, we have tentatively established a number of concepts which may affect the strategies of waiting. In the first place, time has an ambivalent effect on the individual: while he is in a constant process of change involving an accumulation of experiences, he is unavoidably cut off from any object of his desire including the future, and this means that his past is of no practical use to him. Secondly, friendship is a form of self-fear and protection from solitude, but at the same time it is finally impossible because communication between individuals is impossible. Thirdly, habit provides protection against the vicissitudes of reality, but it is constantly breaking down, necessitating new adaptations. Finally, memory, which is a temporal medium, is a reminder of the process of change and since it is therefore both painful and irrelevant, its

content is best forgotten or fictionalized.

As we might suspect from the foregoing, there tend to be two basic character types throughout Beckett's work--one we can describe as the self in retreat or the "underground" man of modern western literature (described by Frederick J. Hoffman in Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self), and the other as the "rational" man. While Beckett usually pushes each of these types to comic extremes, each contains enough of the other's characteristics to be tinged with tragedy. These types--the prototypes of the characters in the plays--are initiated in his early novels. Beckett himself intimated this when he stated in an interview that if we want to discover the origins of Waiting for Godot, and by extension the rest of his plays, we should look at his first novel, Murphy, published in 1938.[15]

The line which ends (as far as we are concerned) with Willie in Happy Days actually begins with Belaqua in More Pricks than Kicks.[16] Belaqua is a lethargic loafer who bumbles from one adventure to another but who, like his namesake in Dante's Purgatorio (Canto IV), would rather be left alone in a ditch to wait out his weary existence. The "ditch" or Purgatory, according to Beckett, is that area which lies between the extremes of unrelieved viciousness (Hell) and unrelieved tedium (Heaven) and which is the meeting place for the forces of these extremes.[17] This type is more explicitly developed in Murphy, where the hero is torn between his desire for Celia, who would have him become an employed

member of society (thus being of some practical use to her), and his quest for the essence of self, a search which leads him to the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, the asylum where he meets Mr. Endon, a catatonic schizophrenic. Celia means involvement, in the world and with people, whereas the asylum represents a retreat from the world of reason and frustration. This conflict between the "big world" and "little world," as Beckett calls it, is described in Chapter Six and it need not concern us here except in so far as it pinpoints the central issue of both the novels and the plays, namely the conflict between the individual and the world in which he is forced to live, and the lack of connection between them.

The climax of the novel occurs when Murphy plays a game of chess with Mr. Endon (no-end).[18] Mr. Endon cannot make the first move. It is simply against his nature to initiate, so he quite unaffectedly assumes Black, leaving Murphy the White and the first move. This does not disturb Murphy in the least, for in his simple optimism he still assumes that he is on the offensive and that there is a definite, desirable end worth pursuing, namely winning the game. Mr. Endon's "Affence" is, as the name implies, a (unbeatable) combination of irrational moves--"irrational" in relation to "proper" rationally constructed chess. In all probability Mr. Endon's game has no organic connection whatever with his opponent's--the appearance of connection is in fact coincidental, and this is Beckett's point, just as the body's "game" appears to have some tenuous connection to the mind's "game."

To be sure, no game at all would be possible if the contestants did not voluntarily adhere to the rules, and Mr. Endon certainly plays within the area defined by the rules of chess--in every respect except one. He moves his various pieces "correctly" and only moves when it is his turn, but the one rule he breaks (the only "rule" it is possible to break and still play, or appear to play) is the object of the game: he does not try to win. This is an important point: the insane Mr. Endon, faced with a rational system, is able to play his own game and yet remain within the rules, and he can keep this up indefinitely.

Mr. Endon's game is tangental to chess, a strategy calculated to preserve his security within his own world. He is therefore primarily interested in avoiding conflict, and otherwise in the shape of his moves and the formations of his chessmen. Thus, while Murphy fumbles with his attempts at a rationally constructed offence, Mr. Endon retreats as completely as possible back to his opening position. When Mr. Endon makes a forward move, however, it is not to attack Murphy, but to set up artificial, symmetrical patterns. In other words, Mr. Endon is somehow convinced that he cannot win with the rational method, so he refuses to become involved.

Murphy's game is a parody of chess logic and from a wider perspective, of the rational approach to life where man attributes human rationality to the whole of existence, the macro as well as the micro, where inductive logic att-

ributes causes from experienced effects. However, after making a number of desperate attempts to at least engage Mr. Endon, Murphy begins to appreciate the absurdity of his efforts and "with fool's mate in his soul he retires."[19] Murphy has learned a great lesson--the state of nirvana-like detachment inhabited by Mr. Endon to which Murphy aspires is unattainable from his rational position.

The line which ends with Winnie begins in Watt, which is roughly contemporary with Waiting for Godot.[20] This type is characterized by the comic attempts of reason to deal with the world, and if there is a quest, it is a search for reality, a reality that will satisfy reason. Unlike Murphy, then, Watt is doggedly determined to deal with the world, and he has been equipped with an incredible mind. He questions and analyses everything he perceives, from the existence of his employer, Mr. Knott, to the "reality" of a past event. The co-ordination between his mind and body is so tenuous and complex that the simple process of walking has to be analysed, made into a formula, and carried out step by step. He is so obsessed by "whatness" that the possibility of "knotness" completely escapes him, and this might explain the fact that as he tries to reconcile external perception, memory, and reason, everything becomes meaningless to him and he is finally driven insane. In the asylum Watt literally turns language inside out in his effort to find the proper expression for thought that will match perception and give it reality. In other words, he feels the need of destroying the

inherent linearity of language in order to express the irrationality of the world. But in doing so his rational mind is also destroyed, together with any possibility of communication. Watt, then, is a character who tries to discover the best means of winning the "game," and who finds that rational strategies only lead to increasing frustration whereas he might have been satisfied (like Mr. Endon) with a stalemate.

In very general terms, these are the character prototypes behind the dramatis personae. Under the heading of "the self in retreat" we might place Estragon, Lucky, Hamm, Krapp, and Willie; and under the heading of the "rational mind" we could place Vladimir, Pozzo, Clov, and Winnie. As was pointed out, however, each of these types contains characteristics of the other and therefore this categorization reflects only general tendencies. Lucky's speech, for example, is very much like the demented Watt's, while in every other respect he behaves like Mr. Endon. While these two personality tendencies can be useful in differentiating between two characters, they are usually combined in one character as well, with a bias toward one side or the other.

CHAPTER ONE--NOTES

[1]Samuel Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove, 1957), pp. 4-5.

[2]Ibid., p. 3.

[3]Ibid., p. 5.

[4]Ibid., p. 4.

[5]Ibid., p. 8.

[6]Ibid., pp. 47-48.

[7]Ibid., p. 46.

[8]Ibid., p. 6.

[9]Ibid., p. 7.

[10]Ibid., p. 8.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., p. 40.

[13]Ibid., p. 41.

[14]Ibid., p. 56.

[15]Colin Duckworth, "The Making of Godot," Casebook on Waiting for Godot, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove, 1967), p. 89.

[16]Raymond Federman, Journey into Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), see Appendix for summary of More Pricks than Kicks.

[17]Ibid., Appendix.

[18]Samuel Beckett, Murphy (New York: Grove, 1957), p. 243.

[19]Ibid., p. 245.

[20]Samuel Beckett, Watt (New York: Grove, 1959).

CHAPTER TWO

WAITING FOR GODOT

For our purposes, a better translation of the original French title, En Attendant Godot, would be While Waiting for Godot, for this would place the emphasis where we want it, that is, on what the characters do while waiting, rather than on Godot. We are not concerned with who Godot is nor with what his motivations, if any, are. This is not to say that Godot is unimportant. Godot simply represents that which is waited for, when waiting itself is an ambiguous metaphor for the human condition--the dichotomy of the self and the world. Godot will come as surely as death, but he will not come today. In this sense Godot is an absence, a void which surrounds those who wait.

Waiting is therefore the hypothetical condition on which the play rests (a non-linear equivalent of Aristotle's action), or to borrow a concept from Beckett's later novel, Molloy, waiting is a "hypothetical imperative"[1]--the characters must wait. From this imperative we can derive others, namely that the characters must wait together and they must wait at this particular location for a specific (although unknown to them) length of time.

Within these imperatives the characters are "free" to do anything they like, which is to say that they are free to

improvise with the materials at hand by employing the faculties they possess--basically, speech and gesture. This means that they can speculate about their situation, about the exact nature of the imperatives, and test these imperatives by trying to disobey them; they can play with their garments (and the contents of their pockets); they can make use of their environment; they can observe and become superficially involved with any passers-by; and finally, they can "use" each other for conversation, argument, comfort, and games.

Theoretically, in each of these fields of possible activity and within the postulated imperatives, it is clear that whatever the characters do they are in fact playing, whether they expressly realize it or not--with certain important exceptions. The first of these exceptions includes those activities undertaken by necessity as, for example, when Estragon eats (although eating does pass the time), and when Vladimir is forced to leave the stage to relieve himself (and then Estragon plays by himself). Estragon's habitual dozing is even less an exception than eating, for he quite clearly uses this as a strategy (unsuccessful) to avoid waiting. Another important exception occurs during those moments when a particular activity inevitably comes to an end and something new has to be initiated. During these brief periods the characters feel the full weight of the nothingness that surrounds their existence. Finally, of course, there are those actions over which the characters have no

control--their spontaneous reactions to external incidents--which also cannot be considered as strategic actions. Invariably, however, these spontaneous reactions do not last, for in a state of waiting nothing can happen which could involve those who wait for very long. An example of this occurs when Estragon is kicked by Lucky. This is an unexpected action and Estragon reacts accordingly with a howl of pain. His involvement in this action, however, lasts only as long as the pain lasts, and he is soon using Pozzo and Lucky again as a source of entertainment. While these exceptions occur frequently during the course of the play, the intervening strategies take up the bulk of the play and are consequently far more important.

Before we turn to the wider implications of the strategies of waiting and the form this waiting assumes, we should examine a strategy from each of the above possible activities. First there are those strategies which each character can perform by himself. We first see Estragon, for example, seated alone on the stage tugging at his boot. Whether or not he is doing this because of the pain the boot causes him, or to pass the time, or both, is not indicated in the text. All we can say for certain is that it takes him a long time to remove his boot and that it does provide both of them with some diversion. Later, when Vladimir leaves the stage, Estragon shadow-boxes and while we might connect this with what Vladimir is doing off-stage, a more plausible explanation

would be that Estragon is imitating the battle he goes through each night. Similarly, when Vladimir is alone at the beginning of the second act he dashes around the stage, examining the landscape for changes, and then sings a song. This song is not only an artistic representation of the situation in which he finds himself (which can only end in death/tomb), but it is also sung with some concern for the quality of presentation: he starts too high, clears his throat, and starts again. The only general conclusion we can draw from this type of solitary strategy, therefore, is that while it is very limited in scope, it does contain a high degree of play.

In place of traditional exposition, the beginning of this play is concerned with the characters' speculations about the nature of their situation and the time and place of the meeting with Godot. In other words, they pass the time discussing the nature of the hypothetical imperatives. In between the various parts of this strategy, Vladimir initiates and tries to sustain a game of abstract speculation on hope, Christ, the two thieves, and salvation. We learn that this is a game when Vladimir says impatiently, "Come on Gogo, return the ball, can't you, once in a way?" and Estragon replies "(with exaggerated enthusiasm) I find this really most extraordinarily interesting."[2]

The next basic thing they do amounts to a test of the imperatives--an attempt to escape waiting by suicide--and while it is clear that they are desperate, it is also clear

that this is simply another pastime. This is proved by the fact that they manage to find so many complications to the act that they talk themselves out of it. Having nothing else to do after all this, the two characters talk, and their conversation gradually turns into a word game:

Vlad: Well? What do we do?
Es: Don't let's do anything. It's safer.
Vlad: Let's wait and see what he says.
Es: Who?
Vlad: Godot.
Es: Good idea.
Vlad: Let's wait till we know exactly how we stand.
Es: On the other hand it might be better to strike the iron before it freezes.
Vlad: I'm curious to hear what he has to offer. Then we'll take it or leave it.
Es: What exactly did we ask him for?
Vlad: Were you not there?
Es: I can't have been listening.
Vlad: Oh...Nothing very definite.
Es: A kind of prayer.
Vlad: Precisely.
Es: A vague supplication.
Vlad: Exactly.
Es: And what did he reply?
Vlad: That he'd see.
Es: That he couldn't promise anything.
Vlad: That he'd have to think it over.
Es: In the quiet of his home.
Vlad: Consult his family.
Es: His friends.
Vlad: His agents.
Es: His correspondents.
Vlad: His books.
Es: His bank account.
Vlad: Before taking a decision.
Es: It's the normal thing.
Vlad: Is it not?
Es: I think it is.
Vlad: I think so too.
(Silence.)
Es: And we?
Vlad: I beg your pardon?
Es: I said, and we?
Vlad: I don't understand.
Es: Where do we come in?
Vlad: Come in?
Es: Take your time.

Vlad: Come in? On our hands and knees.
Es: As bad as that?
Vlad: Your Worship wishes to assert his prerogatives?
Es: We've no rights any more?
(Laugh of Vladimir....)
Vlad: You'd make me laugh, if it wasn't prohibited.
Es: We've lost our rights?
Vlad: (Distinctly) We got rid of them.
(Silence. They remain motionless, arms dangling, heads sunk, sagging at the knees.)[3]

This conversation begins to turn into a game when Estragon answers his own question--"A kind of prayer"--and then repeats the same thing in different words--"A vague supplication." The second stage of the game begins when Vladimir gets the idea and joins in--"That he'd have to think it over"--thus becoming a partner. From this point on, the game becomes a matter of word and idea association until Vladimir ends it with "before taking a decision." After this, the game begins to die out even though Estragon tries to start it again. The content of this game expresses the characters' feeling that Godot and everyone else also play the same kind of game--"It's the normal thing." That is, Godot postpones his decision with many consultations.

After this game, Estragon tries a desperate ploy by saying that he is hungry, and off they go on an elaborate routine which ends with Estragon eating a withered carrot. At this point games and inspiration peter out, but they are saved by the arrival of Pozzo and Lucky.

After they recover from their initial shock at (and spontaneous reactions to) the arrival of this strange pair,

Vladimir and Estragon begin to examine Lucky as an object--they walk around him and comment on his sores, face, and eyes --and soon they find themselves acting as spectators while Pozzo performs. In effect, then, the Pozzo/Lucky episode is a play within a play, and Vladimir and Estragon are as much responsible for this as Pozzo, for they encourage him and are eager to have Lucky perform. This episode is not only a strategy for Vladimir and Estragon, it is also a confrontation between those who wait and the outside world, in other words, the play within a play provides us with a fresh perspective on waiting. We are able to view these outsiders and their relationship through the eyes of Vladimir and Estragon, and we see a pompous egotist who likes an audience, who governs his actions according to clock time, and who treats his companion as an animal.

In this half of the play, the characters have more or less exhausted the possibilities open to them--they have discussed their situation and have tested the rules, they have conversed, argued, and played games with each other, they have examined the landscape and have used food and clothing to pass the time, and finally, they have "used" passers-by as a diversion. In all of this one fact is clear: these characters are amazingly versatile with very little material aid--they have succeeded in passing the time with a minimum amount of pain and boredom. In addition, and this is the most important aspect of their activities, each thing they do (aside from the previously noted exceptions) conforms to

the general characteristics of play. Each activity is restricted in space and time (each is limited to the stage and comes to an end as soon as one of the "players" runs out of improvisations), and each is voluntarily undertaken, since no physical or moral compulsions force the characters to perform these specific activities. Each activity sets up a world of its own, with its own rules: the rules of improvisation which are impossible to codify, but which are present nevertheless. Finally, each activity has an order of its own, as the word games, for example, have a kind of artistic order: the one quoted above starts with a set of questions and answers, gradually switches to variations on a theme, and ends with questions and answers, the whole forming a dramatic poem. In addition to the play-like quality of each activity, however, there is the quality of the whole to consider, in which the separate activites become individual strategies in a much wider context.

Perhaps we can begin to examine the form the waiting assumes and the tension which accompanies it by taking a look at what happens in the play in the simplest terms possible. On a country road in the evening, a man sits tugging at his boot. Another man appears and the two talk, argue, attempt suicide, try to leave, and generally pass the time as well as they can. This goes on for approximately a half hour until two more men appear. One of these men talks to and tries to entertain the original pair (who encourage him), while the other is ordered to dance and think. After these

men leave, the sun sets and the moon rises, and the original pair talk for a short time until a small boy appears to say that Mr. Godot will not be coming tonight, but surely tomorrow. The two men speak again of suicide, decide to leave but do not move, and the curtain falls. The above is repeated in the same order in the second act, which is the next evening. This is the bare structure of the waiting in terms of events, and by itself it is enough to tell us that for those on stage one day is essentially the same as the next--tomorrow will be the same as today which is the same as yesterday--and for some reason, as their abortive attempts at leaving and suicide indicate, it appears that this pattern cannot be broken. Since the events are identical from one act to the next, the characters seem to be caught in an eternal evening, that is, a stalemate by perpetual check.

We in the audience begin to realize this at the same time as (or just before) those on stage. At the beginning, we, along with them, expect the arrival of Godot. We are disappointed at the end of the first act, but more or less trust the boy's message. At the end of the second act, we no longer trust the boy but we realize that nothing can be done about it. This gives us a clue to the basic cause of the dramatic tension we feel in watching the play: although they cannot bear to wait, they must. They can no more stop waiting than as actors they can leave the stage or as humans they can cease to exist. And as actors they realize that when the curtain rises again they must reappear on stage and

go through the same tedious process. Just as we must assume that the center of a circle exists, they must assume that Godot exists: since they are waiting, they must be waiting for something, and that something is personified by the name "Godot." While they begin to feel that the day-to-day pattern cannot be broken, they assume or hope that Godot can break it, but he is always one day away from doing so.

If we examine the "events" of the play a little more closely we can see that while they occur in the same order, their proportions are significantly different, and this difference parallels a rise in tension. In the first place, the second act is shorter by approximately twenty minutes (if we reckon the time of the play objectively), making everything more compact; conversely, from within the play the repetition has the effect of making the evening appear much longer and less bearable, at least to the extent that the characters are aware (or suspect) that they are caught in a repetitive cycle. Thus there is an increase in tension (which is communicated to the audience) in inverse proportion to the length of the play. In addition, the events of the stage evening take up far less time in the second act, leaving the two main characters alone with nothing to do for a longer period--in the first act the Pozzo/Lucky episode, for example, lasts for over two-thirds of the total time, while in the second act it lasts for less than one-third of the total time. Thus, as far as the audience is concerned, the second act rises to a series of climaxes of tension in direct re-

lation to the characters' desperate attempts to find new strategies as the old ones break down. These elements of structure, incidentally, also underline a contrast in time scales between those who are waiting and those who try to live by clock time, or between those who are suspended in the present and those who are oriented toward the future. However, this is a subject which must be left for later. What we are concerned with at this point is that the events of the play are beyond the control of the main characters and are consequently non-strategic. They can only be turned into strategies by the main characters after the initial shock and involvement has worn off, as is the case with the Pozzo/Lucky scene.

Perhaps more significant than the bare fact of the external events of the play is the complex pattern underlying these events, forming the detail of the play's structure. A superficial glance shows that Beckett makes extensive use of pauses and silences to control the quality of the play's rhythm and pace. While there is certainly no simple rule governing the use of pauses and silences, a significant pattern can be discerned if they are related to the basic events and the dialogue--especially when the two acts are compared. First, there is a general tendency for the pauses to be intralinear whereas the silences usually occur at the ends of short speeches, or to put it another way, the pauses have the effect of commas and the silences the effect of periods--resulting in an overall structural punctuation. While the

pauses generally give emphasis to the preceding phrase or indicate uncertainty in the speaker, the silences (besides giving even greater emphasis) indicate that a speech or thought (strategy) has been abortive, that the significance of the preceding idea has struck home, ending the strategy on a sour note, or that the pointlessness of the game has suddenly engulfed the players in a wave of despair. Consequently, the pauses can make the rhythm of the lines spasmodic and painful and the pace slow, but the silences can, besides breaking the speeches and ideas into larger and more definite groups, heighten the hopelessness and despair of waiting (for it is when there is silence that the fact of waiting and the need for further strategies are emphasized) and at the same time increase the dramatic tension. The following illustration is one of the best examples in the play of Beckett's dramatic use of the silence as it indicates simultaneously the effort to pass the time, the characters' growing desperation as they begin to run out of things to say, and the tendency for such efforts to become ritual-like in form.

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

(Silence.)

Vlad: They all speak at once.
Es: Each one to itself.

(Silence.)

Vlad: Rather they whisper.
Es: They rustle.
Vlad: They murmur.
Es: They rustle.

(Silence.)

Vlad: What do they say?
Es: They talk about their lives.
Vlad: To have lived is not enough for them.
Es: They have to talk about it.
Vlad: To be dead is not enough for them.
Es: It is not sufficient.

(Silence.)

Vlad: They make a noise like feathers.
Es: Like leaves.
Vlad: Like ashes.
Es: Like leaves.

(Long silence.)

Vlad: Say something!
Es: I'm trying.

(Long silence.)

Vlad: (In anguish) Say anything at all!
Es: What do we do now?
Vlad: Wait for Godot.
Es: Ah!

(Silence.)

Vlad: This is awful![4]

In this passage (and the one immediately following it) the whole play is present in miniature--a perfect imitation of the action and at the same time an excellent example of a thoroughly improvised and conscious strategy. It should first be noted that in this type of strategy the beginning, as Vladimir says, is the most difficult part, for from there on it is a matter of word and image association--the object being, of course, to keep the ball rolling as long as possible. However, this is extremely difficult to do because either character is likely to run out of words--in this case it is Estragon, and Vladimir has to re-start the rally each time. This strategy breaks down rather quickly as a result of this lack of versatility on Estragon's part since they are soon led back to the beginning--"Like leaves"--which is a dead end. In other words, a strategy which imitates the repetitive situation in which they are caught is not a good or successful strategy.

Immediately after the above passage, however, they have another "little canter," but this time it is Estragon who manages to keep it going by taking advantage of new opportunities as they arise (e.g. "that's right, let's contradict each other")[5] and by asking questions. The main difference between this game and the previous one, therefore, is that this one has a linear structure--it goes from one point to another, with new ones being added--whereas the previous one was both repetitive and circular. But even this game has to come to an end sooner or later--the expression "que voulez-

vous"[6] sums up their feelings with finality--and they are left with the need to start something else.

The first act of Waiting for Godot has approximately seventy pauses and thirty silences, while the second act has the reverse with approximately thirty-five pauses and sixty silences. Consequently, the marked increase in tension and despair in the second act indicated by the basic design is both supported and filled out by the underlying structural punctuation. The only other fact that we can learn from this detail itself, however, is that the pauses and silences tend to be grouped, with a somewhat heavier concentration toward the end of each act--the groups indicating peaks of tension around those points where time weighs most heavily on the main characters. These points occur when Vladimir and Estragon find it difficult to keep the conversation going, when the strategies employed to pass the time break down. One of the most obvious of these (besides the one just quoted) occurs immediately before the entrance of Pozzo and Lucky in the second act. The tension, emphasized by the number of pauses and silences, has been steadily increasing: Estragon, becoming increasingly desperate, has tried to leave four times in as many minutes, and Vladimir has anxiously been trying to verify their location in space and time on one hand and invent strategies to take his mind off his doubt on the other. They finally turn their mutual hostility into a desperate strategy--name calling--which proves somewhat

successful: "How time flies when one has fun!"[7] However, the tension is soon back again, and the entrance of Pozzo and Lucky serves as an extremely welcome diversion. This time it is Vladimir who is able to make the most "use" of Pozzo and Lucky, while Estragon soon becomes bored with them, whereas in the first act it was Estragon who had an ulterior motive (charity from Pozzo) and Vladimir who became bored with Pozzo's pompous speeches. This time the shoe is on the other foot as Vladimir plays the role of the Good Samaritan with pomposity. In other words, Vladimir is becoming more adept at improvising on any situation and turning it into a strategy, a strategy moreover, which is completely artificial.

Interwoven among the pauses and silences and major events in the play are certain important thematic elements which Beckett has also used structurally. These themes are orchestrated contrapuntally as leitmotifs and sub-themes, and they impart an accumulation of meaning to the content of the play and, in addition, act as indicators of the characters' despair and the ultimate stalemate of their strategies. Since the importance of the accumulative effect of repetition is greater than the effect of a single part or even the sum of the parts, the inevitability of the final stalemate is underlined by these interrelated leitmotifs. The "action" of the play, which is inaction or waiting (not to be confused with the action of the characters, which is, as far as Vladimir and Estragon are concerned, to pass the time, and, as far as Pozzo is concerned, to keep up to time), is reinforced

by the principal leitmotif:

Es: Let's go.
Vlad: We can't.
Es: Why not?
Vlad: We're waiting for Godot.
Es: Ah!
(Silence.)[8]

This refrain (also a reiteration of the basic imperative) is used eight times in all, twice in the first act (at the beginning when all themes are introduced, and at the end when they are all recapitulated) and six times in the second. By the end of the play the refrain has become so familiar and so deadly that the last two times it occurs it is significantly shortened by Estragon, who until now had to be reminded: "Let's go. We can't. Ah! (Pause.)"[9]

There are two sides to this refrain, waiting and its antithesis leaving, and consequently it underlines the principal thematic conflict in the play. In addition, the two sides of the refrain are constantly reinforced throughout the play with variations on each theme--the idea of waiting being mentioned eight times in each act and the counter-idea of leaving twelve times in each act. It is interesting to note that the optimist, Vladimir, usually has the lines referring to waiting, while Estragon, naturally enough, usually has those referring to leaving, so that when this tendency is broken, the point becomes especially significant. Vladimir, for example, says "I'm going" for the first time in the Pozzo/Lucky scene of the first act when the ramblings of Pozzo (which bear no relation whatever to Vladimir's sit-

uation) become extremely tedious. On the other hand, Estragon, who normally would have jumped at the idea, says, "so soon?"[10]--he is quite content to stay because he feels there is a possibility of further charity from Pozzo. It goes without saying that each time the phrase "Let's go" or "I'm leaving" is spoken, nothing happens--there is the unspoken knowledge that they cannot leave. When they finally get together at the end of each act and agree to go, but do not move, the action of the play is summed up with finality, and the first line of the play (another leitmotif) is recalled: "Nothing to be done."[11]

In addition to the above mentioned major themes (waiting and leaving), there are several sub-themes which are used as leitmotifs to give added dimension to the action and meaning of the play. The first of these, "Nothing to be done," is used five times in the first act and then dropped, to be replaced in the second act by the more desperate "What'll we do?"[12] and they both relate not only to their situation in the game against time, but also to the value of the strategies. The first of these sub-themes has a more subtle irony, as it is used in reference to something specific, such as Estragon's boot or Vladimir's hat, with only an indirect reference to their general situation. Vladimir comments on this pessimistic conclusion of Estragon's by indicating that his own position is a little more optimistic, although changing: "I'm beginning to come around to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir, be reason-

able, you haven't tried everything yet. And I resumed the struggle."[13] A short time later he uses the same phrase in exactly the same way as Estragon (in reference to his hat and his inability to laugh), that is, in resignation. And yet, for some time he continues to cling to the hope that Godot will come. All of these leitmotifs are therefore an indication of the breakdown or end of particular strategies, and as such they indicate both the depths of despair felt by the characters and the height of tension created by the resulting vacuum. Consequently, if we consider these leitmotifs together with the structural punctuation on the one hand and the interwoven strategies on the other, the basic rhythmical pattern of the play is revealed, in addition to the alternation of comic action with tragic silence.

Beyond the specific meaning of each leitmotif and its use as a structural device, is the overall importance of the idea of repetition itself. As these interwoven themes are repeated verbatim (with, on the stage, correspondingly identical movement, expression, and attitude) and in conjunction with the repetition of the major events of each act and the game-like quality of the intervening dialogue, the play inevitably becomes ritualized, emphasizing not only the fact that the pattern established by the end of the play could go on forever (it has become rigidified), but also the impression that the characters on stage are analogous to performers who have gone through the same motions many times and will continue to do so as long as the "run" lasts.

A further important consequence of the use of repetition as a structural principle is that it reflects Beckett's attitude toward the value and meaning of human action (in our context, the strategies of waiting). In the context of an eternally repeating pattern, the actions of a finite being have no effective meaning, they are reduced to marking time or waiting. If man's actions appear ridiculous, however, the fault does not necessarily lie in an absurd universe--the fault is at least partially man's: the rational creature "looking for sense where possibly there is none"[14] is at least partly to blame if his looking is in vain. He should not, as Vladimir says, "blame the faults of his feet on his boots."[15]

The many commentators on Beckett's work have had much to say about the relationships between the various pairs of characters, ranging from the claim that they represent the perceiver and the perceived (Esslin)[16] to the claim that they represent the dualism of the body and mind (Cohn).[17] Undoubtedly each of these interpretations helps us to understand something of the nature of the relationships, but their weakness lies in their narrow-mindedness--they ignore the essential ambiguity which lies at the heart of any aspect of Beckett's work. Aside from the relevance of Belaqua, Murphy, and Watt as prototypes, the first significant relationship in Beckett's work is that of Mercier and Camier, who can be considered the prototypal "pair."[18] Mercier and Camier are

a homosexual couple, one exhibiting, in very general terms, male characteristics, and the other, female: one is more agressive, intellectual, and protective; the other is emotional, submissive, and introverted. When they acquire a bicycle (which they plan to use in their escape from the city), one takes the handlebars and the other hangs on to the seat. Similarly in Waiting for Godot, a list of individual characteristics for Vladimir and Estragon could be made (see Appendix), but perhaps more important than their personalities is the significance Beckett attaches to the relationship as such and specifically its usefulness in the strategies of waiting.

In Proust we saw that friendship, according to Beckett, is a form of self-fear, and that while the presence of another person helps to allay this fear, no real communication is possible between one person and another because the relationship operates on a subject-object basis. In other words, each person is an object to the other and can be useful only if he is willing or if he is being coerced. This principle seems to be illustrated by Vladimir and Estragon. They need each other to help pass the time and to keep their minds off their situation. The many verbal strategies they employ (usually initiated by Vladimir) would not be possible without co-operation and will only last or be successful as long as there is co-operation--someone has to return the ball. Estragon generally co-operates in the partnership because, as he says, "we're incapable of keeping silent ... it's so we

won't think."[19] But when he tries to sleep, Vladimir invariably wakes him up because he is lonely. They even play at the fact that they get on each other's nerves, by pretending to sulk in an imitation of a lovers' spat and then making up. Finally, their situation is so unreal to them and their alienation from the world of motion or time so frustrating that they need each other to prove to themselves that they exist: "We don't manage too badly, eh Didi, between the two of us? ... We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression that we exist?"[20]

On the other hand, their strategies always have a limited success because more often than not one character will refuse to co-operate: Vladimir will not listen to Estragon's dreams and Estragon will not play "Pozzo and Lucky," although it is usually Estragon who wants to be left alone and who says, "I'm leaving," or, "Wouldn't it be better if we parted?"[21] but who significantly never does actually leave--he needs Vladimir for some vague kind of protection and comfort and for this reason he usually consents to Vladimir's demands.

As a pair, Vladimir and Estragon illustrate what Hoffman has called the "marginal self,"[22] especially if we can see a continuity from Mercier and Camier, who want to leave the city, to Vladimir and Estragon, who are (now) in the country. Hoffman has postulated three major metaphors for the marginal self in modern Western literature: the Christ figure or scapegoat (to whom Estragon compares himself), the under-

ground man (which would apply to Hamm and Krapp), and the clown (poet, artist, acrobat, juggler).[23] The marginal figure exists on the periphery of society, time, space, and "reality" and this is certainly true of Beckett's characters. In addition, however, it is the marginal existence represented by the stage which applies most appropriately to Beckett's plays. Here the characters exist as clowns, condemned to repetition and imitation of life. As clowns they not only "act out" existence, they also suffer the frustrations of defective creatures who are not equipped to imitate existence expertly and consequently their strategies appear to be clownish. If we can define the pratfall as any collapse of pretension, such as that which happens when Estragon intends to imitate Lucky's dance and falls, we find that each time the characters try to act like rational creatures their pretensions collapse in absurdity. As rational men, for example, they discuss the pros and cons of helping Pozzo and they fall down; they discuss the possibilities of suicide and Estragon's pants fall down, or the rope breaks and they both fall; and finally, their pretensions to rational sentiment also collapse as when Estragon tries to comfort Lucky and gets kicked, ending this strategy with a cry of pain.

As Ruby Cohn has noted,[24] the personal characteristics of Vladimir and Estragon, while fairly distinct in the first act, become blurred in the second. The reason for this, I believe, is that Vladimir gradually loses his optimistic expectations (the only progress as far as these characters are

concerned), and thus comes closer to Estragon's outlook on their situation and his reactions to it. While this progress is slight, there are indications that it is taking place. For example, in the first act when the boy arrives, Estragon says, "Off we go again," indicating his awareness of the repetition, and he is quite harsh with the boy; in the second act, however, it is Vladimir who says, "Off we go again," and it is he who is harsh with the boy (Estragon, who has retreated even farther, is asleep). In addition, Vladimir can now anticipate the boy's message:

> Vlad: You have a message from Mr. Godot.
> Boy: Yes sir.
> Vlad: He won't come this evening.
> Boy: No sir.
> Vlad: But he'll come tomorrow.
> Boy: Yes sir.[25]

Vladimir does not go so far as to admit to himself the <u>certainty</u> that the next day will be the same as the present one (an impossible prediction in any case), but whereas in the first act he speculated on the thief who was saved and on the idea of hope, he has now become relatively pessimistic, and concludes that "habit [the habit of coming and waiting each day] is a great deadener."[26]

When we turn to Pozzo and Lucky, who are on a different time plane and who are therefore characterized by motion and change rather than immobility, we find that their personal differences, while similar, are even more striking. Pozzo has tied himself (as Vladimir and Estragon are "tied" to Godot) to a busy schedule and an objectively <u>regulated</u> time,

even if that time from our point of view is unbelievably fast (his watch records the years--an indication of how fast time goes for him). His regulated sense of purpose helps him avoid the stagnation of self experienced by Vladimir and Estragon, as does his sense of the motion of time which is guaranteed by his watch, and he uses Lucky as a manifestation of his purpose and as a guarantee of his objective existence. Lucky, on the other hand, appears to be a completely willless creature who submits without protest to Pozzo's domination. He has retreated into an animal-like existence, performing his duties mechanically as if he were scarcely aware that he did them, and his rational process has disintegrated into a jumble of fragments so devoid of coherence that when he speaks his words become mere incantation. Similarly, his will to initiate or end anything has, like Mr. Endon's, completely disappeared--he has to be ordered to begin anything and forced to stop. For these reasons he is "Lucky."

As far as Waiting for Godot is concerned, then, this is the basic operative principle underlying human relationships and it reflects the characteristics of the subject-object dichotomy explained in Proust. If we can accept the apparent fact that Vladimir and Estragon are inseparable, we must conclude that while they are usually successful in passing the time together, most of that time they get on each other's nerves--Vladimir wants to talk about their situation and Estragon wants to be left alone: "Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me!"[27] But

Vladimir must talk and Estragon must complain, and his complaints invariably bother Vladimir: "Will you stop whining! I've had about my bellyful of your lamentations!"[28] This continues until they become desperate and agree to "talk calmly," which means to play a game of some kind. But these games do not last long despite their attempts to prolong them. Because they have conflicting desires and needs as subjective personalities, and because they can only view each other as objects, communication between them must be both artificial and unstable. Each character is not willing to be treated as an object by the other, and since this is the only type of relationship possible, the result is a fundamental antagonism which is kept at a minimum only by their common objective (which is compulsory)--they have to wait for Godot.

With Pozzo and Lucky, however, the situation is different, although the results are the same. Lucky is more or less willing to be treated exclusively as an object because as an object his existence in the world is simple, regulated, and protected by Pozzo, while Pozzo is willing to provide this type of existence for Lucky in return for Lucky's obedience--a perfect sado-masochistic relationship. However, while Pozzo is able to maintain the semblance of an active life with Lucky's help, the deterioration of his physical being makes this incredibly difficult, and just as Vladimir and Estragon can never attain their objective (Godot), Pozzo

can never complete his schedule.

From this point of view, therefore, the strategies the characters adopt must end in a stalemate, but is this necessarily a failure? This depends upon their real objective. If Vladimir and Estragon want and expect to meet Godot (that is, harmonize their subjective selves with objective reality) they will obviously fail; but if, rather than trying to escape from their situation, all they want and expect to do is to forget the fact that they must wait for Godot, they will probably succeed, although not without a great deal of anguish. Since there is no indication that they will succeed in committing suicide, or that they will leave the stage ahead of time, or fail to turn up the next day, and since there is every indication that Godot will always be one day away from them, we must conclude that they will succeed in waiting for him--until they are struck down by some irrational factor, which, in the game of living, is death. This also applies to Pozzo, whose objective is really not to reach the "board" but to keep moving. This he will continue to do as long as he is physically able, and consequently, we can expect to see him pass by every day that Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot.

The relationship between the two pairs of characters is also of some significance. In a sense, Pozzo and Lucky correspond (in an exaggerated and speeded up way) to Vladimir and Estragon. That is, Vladimir exhibits some of the char-

acteristics of Pozzo, and Estragon some of those of Lucky (see Appendix). However, because of the "time differential" (Pozzo is oriented toward the future and the tramps are caught in the present), there is a great deal of confusion and lack of communication between the pairs. In order to attract Pozzo's attention, for example, Vladimir has to speed up his speech: "Do you want to get rid of him?"[29] is repeated four times without making an impression on Pozzo, but when Vladimir says, "You waagerrim?"[30] Pozzo takes notice. Each pair has an unsettling effect on the other: Pozzo has difficulty leaving after his momentary state of rest and claims that he has need of a "running start;"[31] at the same time the presence of Pozzo places Vladimir in the position of listener or audience, a position to which he is not accustomed, and his awareness of the suspension of time is correspondingly increased: "Will night never come? ... Time has stopped."[32] (On the other hand, this new awareness also gives him some insight into the relativity of his own situation, as we shall see.) In addition, Estragon and Lucky abuse each other physically, with Estragon receiving most of the punishment.

In short, we might conclude that while the Pozzo/Lucky scene begins as a "welcome diversion" (in each act), it ends both times with a certain amount of pain for both pairs. This is true in spite of the fact that each time Pozzo and Lucky leave Vladimir says, "That passed the time," indicating that the confrontation had served as a strategy. But the

point is that Vladimir can only say this after the other two have left--while they were present the situation became more and more boring, making it necessary to devise new strategies.

Since we in the audience identify with Vladimir and Estragon, these confrontation scenes provide us with an important degree of perspective. That is, we are able to gain a subjective impression of other people and objects (Pozzo, Lucky, and the tree through the eyes of Vladimir and Estragon): we see the others age and the tree grow leaves while Vladimir and Estragon do not change. At the same time, through aesthetic distance, we view Vladimir and Estragon objectively enough for this phenomenon to strike us as an unexplained absurdity. Consequently, we can appreciate all the more graphically the weight of time felt by Vladimir and Estragon.

However, a further dimension to this perspective is added by both Vladimir and Estragon as the second evening draws to a close. The tendency toward an objective awareness is initiated by Vladimir at the outset of the second act when he sings the circular song, pausing a number of times on the word "tomb." He then spends some time trying to prove to both himself and Estragon that there has been a significant change since the last time they were there, as this would indicate that the process is not repetitive and that the game they are forced to play has some direction and meaning they might discover--that is, that time moves. This fails to prove convincing, however, and when Pozzo and Lucky

arrive he shows that he is aware of the true nature of the situation:

> All I know is that the hours are long under these conditions, and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings which--how shall I say--which may at first sight seem reasonable, until they become a habit. You may say it is to prevent our reason from foundering. No doubt. But has it not long been straying in the night without end of the abyssal depths? That is what I sometimes wonder.[33]

When Pozzo and Lucky leave, Vladimir comments on how much Pozzo and Lucky have changed, but Estragon observes, "They all change. Only we can't."[34] Then Vladimir begins to suspect that Pozzo was not blind, that is, that he had "seen" them all too clearly. Brooding on this, Vladimir then gives his own version of Pozzo's speech on time (in which time was seen as simultaneity):

> Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the gravedigger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (He listens.) But habit is a great deadener.[35]

He next indicates that he is aware of the relativity of their situation:

> At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, He is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. (Pause.) I can't go on! (Pause.) What have I said?[36]

Immediately after this, the boy arrives and Vladimir anticipates his message. He is even ahead of Estragon to some extent, for when Estragon says, "I can't go on like this," Vladimir replies, "That's what you think."[37] At the same

time, in all of this, both Vladimir and Pozzo (whose blindness has given him insight) have the feeling that all change is an illusion--Pozzo feels that perhaps he is still sleeping, that no change has really taken place. Vladimir goes even further:

> Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? To-morrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be?[38]

The answer to this is that from a purely subjective point of view all change, all events, and indeed all action, is meaningless, or to put it another way, all activity is play. Vladimir has not only gained some awareness of the situation in which he and Estragon are caught, he has also resigned himself to it: "I can't go on! ... What have I said?"

The basic consequence of this awareness and acceptance in so far as it affects the strategies of waiting becomes clear if we compare the general nature of the strategies in each act. While each activity the characters perform (with the exceptions noted at the beginning of this chapter) can be considered a strategy from our point of view, this is not necessarily the case with the characters themselves. As a matter of fact, very few of the activities in the first act are <u>consciously</u> undertaken simply to pass the time--even the two word games are merely spontaneous improvisations. The

only fully conscious strategy in this act is the attempted suicide, for the Pozzo/Lucky episode is really out of their hands, although they do take full advantage of it. In the second act, however, almost every activity either begins as a conscious pastime or evolves into one. The single exception to this is Vladimir's desperate attempt to prove that they are in the same place as the day before and that the place has changed.

The first of these strategies evolves from the argument about their relationship: "Say you are [happy], even if it's not true."[39] The first word game is initiated quite consciously by Estragon: "In the meantime let us try to converse calmly...."[40] and the second word game is started by Vladimir: "We could start all over again perhaps."[41] The next conscious strategy again evolves from Estragon's new boots: "What about trying them? ... It'd pass the time ... I assure you, it'd be an occupation."[42] After this Vladimir initiates the hat trick to entice Estragon back. Then a series of games follow in rapid succession, beginning with playing at "Pozzo and Lucky;"[43] followed by the "abuse" game--"That's the idea, let's abuse each other;"[44] the making up game--"Now let's make up;"[45] the "exercise" game--"We could do our exercises;"[46] and finally, the "tree" game--"Let's just do the tree, for the balance."[47] After this, Pozzo and Lucky arrive and Vladimir quite consciously begins to make pompous speeches: "Let us not waste our time in idle discourse!"[48]

We might conclude from this that there seems to be a direct relationship between the awareness of the repetitive nature of the situation, the acceptance of it, and the conscious attempt to invent pastimes which, considering the severe conditions of the main characters' existence, is a creative process. The strategies of waiting to this point, therefore, are a form of improvised art, analogous to the art of stage comedians who have no play to follow.

CHAPTER TWO--NOTES

[1]Samuel Beckett, Molloy (New York: Grove, 1960), p. 117.

[2]Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove, 1954), p. 9.

[3]Ibid., pp. 12-14.

[4]Ibid., pp. 40-41.

[5]Ibid., p. 41.

[6]Ibid., p. 42.

[7]Ibid., p. 49.

[8]Ibid., p. 10.

[9]Ibid., p. 58.

[10]Ibid., p. 19.

[11]Ibid., p. 7.

[12]Ibid., for example, p. 44.

[13]Ibid., p. 7.

[14]Samuel Beckett, Play (London: Faber & Faber, 1964), p. 18.

[15]Beckett, Godot, p. 8.

[16]Martin Esslin, Introduction to Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Esslin, Twentieth Century Views (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 3.

[17]Ruby Cohn, Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p. 206.

[18]Raymond Federman, Journey into Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), see Appendix for summary of Mercier and Camier.

[19]Beckett, Godot, p. 40.

[20]Beckett, Godot, p. 44.

[21]Ibid., p. 11, p. 19.

[22]Frederick J. Hoffman, Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1964), p. 40.

[23]Ibid.

[24]Ruby Cohn, Comic Gamut, p. 204.

[25]Beckett, Godot, p. 58.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid., p. 37.

[28]Ibid., p. 46.

[29]Ibid., p. 21.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid., p. 31.

[32]Ibid., p. 22, p. 24.

[33]Ibid., p. 51.

[34]Ibid., p. 32.

[35]Ibid., p. 58.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Ibid., p. 60.

[38]Ibid., p. 58.

[39]Ibid., p. 39.

[40]Ibid., p. 40.

[41]Ibid., p. 41.

[42]Ibid., p. 44.

[43]Ibid., p. 47.

[44]Ibid., p. 48.

[45]Beckett, Godot, p. 48.

[46]Ibid., p. 49.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Ibid., p. 51.

CHAPTER THREE

ENDGAME

Even more than in Waiting for Godot, the paradoxes of "that old Greek," Zeno of Elea, underlie the themes and actions--and consequently the strategies--of Endgame. Zeno's philosophy is that a finite being (e.g. man) is unrelated to and incompatible with the universe, the essence of which is infinity,[1] just as the subjective side of man is unrelated to and incompatible with the objective world. This dichotomy is expressed in the play by the "heap of millet" paradox. It introduces the play: "It's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. (Pause.) Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, the impossible heap."[2] It reoccurs near the end of the play: "Moment upon moment, pattering down, like the millet grains of ... that old Greek, and all life long you wait for that to mount up to a life."[3] The point is that the completed heap, or life, is an impossibility--one moves closer and closer but the whole cannot be comprehended, the last second is either caught and suspended in a limbo of consciousness or it is always one second away. Endgame is about this last second.

One of the two most significant differences between this play and Waiting for Godot is its location. Whereas the

earlier play takes place in the open, on a country road, and tangental to society (represented by Pozzo and Lucky), Endgame takes place in a closed space, completely cut off from society and the outside world, and on the borderline between land and sea (as in Embers, which takes place in the closed space of the mind of Henry, who sits on the beach).
In addition, the movement in Endgame in terms of psychological space, is a withdrawal into the mind of Hamm, and "leaving" on the part of Clov--neither of which is accomplished although both are initiated. Nagg, who is not quite dead, and Nell, who is not quite alive, are figuratively on the same borderline--their stumps rest on sand from the beach--and confined in an even smaller space. The walls which separate the inside from the outside represent the barrier between the two modes of existence--subjective and objective--and are analogous to but not the same as the skull, which separates the "little world" from the "big world." This barrier can be crossed, but the moment it is the thing that crosses is changed, it is no longer what it was, and therefore it has never really crossed the barrier. For this reason Hamm has a desire to feel the "old wall" and then to be placed safely back in the centre--safely, because "beyond is the other hell,"[4] which to him is worse than the one he is in. Within these walls an artificial, finite space is apparently created and here Hamm can at least pretend to rule as if the conditions of his existence were

under his control.

The second most important difference between Endgame and Waiting for Godot is the quality of its time. In the latter time, like space, is relatively open-ended: the country road is supposedly extended in both directions and is thus a link with the objective world, and time is open in the sense that (we discover) there is apparently always another day. In other words, the waiting seems to be taking place in an infinite/eternal system. On the other hand, Endgame appears to be a closed system. That is, time is ostensibly coming to an end (for Hamm and Clov) in that it appears that their lives (and "stories") are coming to an end, and consequently the basic structure of the play is not characterized by repetition as is that of Waiting for Godot, but by the process of ending: "Something is taking its course."[5] Of course, even Waiting for Godot is not really characterized by repetition since everything from birth is in the process of ending, but in the "middle game" where there is always another day ahead and one day is essentially the same as the next, "repetition" seems to be more appropriate than "ending." However, in Endgame there is also no end, and consequently there are two distinct levels of action: one is an imitation of the process of ending and the other is the process of waiting for the end which does not come, and for our purposes the imitation will be considered as a strategy of waiting. It is very easy to confuse these two levels in terms of what is

really happening. That is, it is difficult to tell which level is real, since Beckett himself has deliberately made the question ambiguous. Just as there seems to be a movement in space (Hamm's withdrawal from the objective world), there seems to be a movement (almost imperceptible) in time, for the situation at the end of the play is apparently different from that at the beginning: Hamm speaks less, and more slowly, while Clov has his hat and coat on and has put everything "in order." However, this is only the apparent direction the play is taking--the imitation of the process of ending.

Clov deludes himself about leaving as he says, "I'm leaving you" or its equivalent fifteen times during the course of the play, but he never does. He merely imitates leaving by going into his kitchen--to stare at the wall and wait. He also deludes himself about time, as he frequently claims that "it's finished,"[6] that he is "winding up."[7] Similarly, Hamm deludes himself that he has a choice between staying and leaving--he tells Clov to build a raft so that they can leave (he does not really mean it, as he will not let Clov leave) and he tries to propel himself with a gaff, all in vain. He, too, likes to pretend "it's finished"[8] as he tries to finish his story and his life, but he is not dead as the curtain falls. However, this is all part of the dramatic, game-like strategy played to pass the interminable time until the end, as are Hamm's stories and Clov's conscious attempts to complicate simple actions in order to

prolong them--he even admits this at one point, for example, when he drops the telescope: "I did it on purpose."[9]

To Nagg and Nell, who are even closer to the end than Hamm, space is more restricted, as is movement within that space, and in their senile old age time has become relatively meaningless to them. Just as they "play" with the restrictions of their space: "Why this farce day after day?"[10] (after they have tried and failed to kiss, knowing that they cannot), they "play" with time. Nell especially has a feeling of euphoria about the past which is much like Winnie's--her "Ah! Yesterday!"[11] is similar to Winnie's "Old style"[12]--even though it is completely alien to her present condition: "Can you believe it?"[13] Memories and a half-hearted concern for their material comforts are all these senile creatures have left. While Nell is quite content to drift with time as her hours run out, Nagg, who is somewhat more alive, has to adopt a more active strategy: he has to talk, and once again we have a subject-object relationship much like that between Vladimir and Estragon. During the course of the play Hamm and Clov do not even reach this stage of decay, while Nagg and Nell go beyond it.

What is <u>really</u> going on here? Perhaps if we can discover the hypothetical conditions of this play we will have a key to the strategies of waiting in <u>Endgame</u>. Shortly after the opening of the play, Hamm and Clov in effect tell us what these imperatives are. Hamm is blind and cannot walk,

while Clov cannot sit down. Clov depends on Hamm for food while Hamm depends on Clov for sight and mobility. Therefore, Clov cannot leave, although he wants to, until Hamm dies, whereas it seems that Hamm will not die as long as Clov is around to take care of him. What we have here, then, is a master-servant relationship which imposes human limitations on their existence. In addition, they are restricted to a confined space and limited to a dwindling number of material aids. Since they cannot escape this relationship until the end of their lives and since their lives do not end by the end of the play, they are clearly playing a game calculated to pass the interminable time until their end does come.

As the endgame is played out, the relationship between the characters becomes more clearly defined, whereas in the "middle game" (i.e. Waiting for Godot) the distinctions are increasingly blurred. Hamm is much more the ego, the authoritarian self who can demand obedience and attention from his object, and Clov (the object) is much more the mechanical slave. At the same time there is evidently an interdependence between the two--they are tied together in much the same way that Pozzo and Lucky are tied together (symbolized in their case by the rope). This paradox is expressed by Hamm and Clov:

> Hamm: Gone from me you'd be dead!
> Clov: And vice versa.
> Hamm: Outside of here it is death![14]

In other words, the status quo is the only possible situation--the two are inseparable in spite of their mutual dislike--any change would not only mean the end of their relationship, but also the end of each character. Consequently, Hamm and Clov cannot be fully explained as separate characters or even as a sado-masochistic relationship, like that between Pozzo and Lucky, since in the first case each cannot exist without the other, and in the second case Clov is not the willing slave who finds his freedom in the other's dominance--at least not nearly to the extent observable in the Pozzo/Lucky relationship. Thus, while each character seems to be a complete human being, it might be helpful to consider them as separate aspects of a single personality as expressed, for example, by the mind-body duality. Considered in this way, their interdependence and antagonism can be explained--why, for example, the body cannot leave and why the mind cannot be free until it does; how the mind can demand and the body be forced to obey; and how the presence of one causes pain to the other. Clov cannot leave until Hamm dies because he depends on Hamm for food, and conversely, when Hamm dies Clov can leave, but will starve. Hamm cannot be free until Clov leaves, but he depends on Clov for mobility and consequently he will die if Clov does leave. Finally, we can also see why Clov must obey when Hamm whistles; why Clov is able to assert his independence more and more as Hamm weakens; and why Clov, who is mobile, experiences pain in his

legs and Hamm, who is immobile, experiences pain and "dripping" in his head. We might safely conclude, therefore, that Beckett is stating that the relationship between humans exhibits the characteristics of the subject-object relationship, the sado-masochistic relationship, and the mind-body relationship, and that co-operation between the characters in the strategies of waiting is limited by these characteristics.

Unlike Waiting for Godot, Endgame has little to offer in the way of structural insights. In the first place, the elements of composition have neither the same meaning nor are they as plentiful. There are no "events" in this play, unless we change the meaning of that word and apply it to the appearances of Nagg and Nell, the comings and goings of Clov, and Hamm's story. The rather definite difference between the use of the pause and silence has disappeared, as only pauses (of varying quality and length) are employed--in fact there are nearly twice as many pauses as there are pauses and silences combined in Waiting for Godot, which is a longer play. Once again, of course, they affect the rhythm and pace of the play, but this time the effect is to progressively slow the play down--nearly twice as many pauses occur in the second half of the play and nearly two-thirds of these in the last quarter. Similarly, the number of words in the play in relation to its length rises and falls like a dying heartbeat, with a little flurry of "activity" occurring near the end, which in turn dies off slowly as the

end is approached.

While it is difficult to judge without watching a performance of the play, it seems that there is a corresponding increase in physical activity on the part of Clov as the play nears its end--he busily puts things in order, looks out the windows, and goes through the process of "winding up." All of these factors underline the action of the play, which is to play out the endgame by adopting a strategy which imitates ending, that is, pretending to end even if they do not and know they cannot--at least they pass the time. This means that the entire play is a single strategy with a number of stages which correspond to the form of the play, with the exception of the end. In other words, the game is an imitation of a linear plot, with a beginning, middle, and end, but the end of the game does not correspond to the end of their lives nor to the end of the play, which is arbitrary. Consequently, we are faced with the question of what happens next when the curtain falls--Hamm is not dead and Clov has not gone out the door. Either the game would continue in the same direction somehow (but this would mean an end to the play as such since there would be no dialogue) or it would begin again. There is nothing to indicate which path would be taken if the play were to continue. The endgame fits the play so well that an illusion is created which is thrown in doubt only by the inconclusive ending.

The opening ritual of the play when Clov mechanically

but deliberately prolongs the business of opening the curtains and taking the sheets off Hamm and the ash bins, announces the beginning of the endgame. This strategy is carried through the play with variations corresponding to the progress of the game: Clov takes Hamm on a tour of his "kingdom,"[15] he climbs up to the window and reports the condition of the outside world,[16] and then he proceeds to put things in order,[17] wind things up,[18] and dress for the outside[19]--actions which are performed with the same ritual-like quality, and yet presumably have never been done before.

The endgame in chess occurs after the scrabbling for position and the major battles have taken place and there are very few pieces left on the board. The business of the players at this point is to checkmate their opponent's King as quickly and efficiently as possible. However, in chess two endings are possible--the checkmate and the stalemate--both of which are finally inconclusive although by an arbitrary agreement the checkmate is the end. But the checkmate does not mean the death of the King, it is only the final move of the game--the King cannot move any farther for if he did, the rules of the game would be broken. He can go up to the end, but as King he cannot be consummated in the end. Thus, in a sense, the checkmate is a form of stalemate and we can see this illustrated in Endgame, for while Waiting for Godot with its repetition is a stalemate by perpetual check, Endgame is a stalemate by checkmate. "King" Hamm can go right up to the

end but he can do nothing about death, and until he dies Clov cannot leave. If we carry the chess analogy a little further, Clov would be the guard Pawn, who protects the King but cannot move. Since Hamm will not listen to Clov's plea, "Let's stop playing,"[20] a feeling experienced by most chess players when it seems pointless to continue, we will never see the end. We might conclude this point by adding that the endgame played by Hamm and Clov is very much like Mr. Endon's game, but without Mr. Endon's detachment.

Endgame seems to answer each of the stipulations in Huizinga's definition of play as an activity freely entered into, occurring within certain limits of space and time, having no contact with any reality outside itself, and whose performance is its own end. Forced to play under restricted conditions and with a decreasing number of "aids"--no more bicycle wheels, rugs, pap, pain killer, and coffins--the principal characters seem to play the game according to their own rationally oriented rules and objectives in a grand strategy against an unpredictable opponent which can only end in a stalemate. That a stalemate is inevitable is evident in the nature of the opponents, which for the sake of convenience can be expressed by a series of interrelated dualities: body and mind, subject and object, subject and the world, and subject and time. Unable and unwilling to cope with objective existence, the characters--that is, Hamm, with the forced assistance of Clov--attempt to create a closed system gov-

erned by themselves. This attempt, however, is thwarted at the same time by their very existence in the world, a fact manifested by Clov's antagonism and desire to leave, and Hamm's physical pain and need to talk to someone besides himself. These factors plus the deteriorating effect of time are the weapons of their opponent, and this means that when they say, "It's finished,"[21] in fact it is not, it has only become a little harder to play the game.

It is not surprising, then, that Hamm should be very interested in the condition of the outside world and insist on frequent and accurate reports of any change in the light, since this would signify his own (real) progress towards the end. The progress is slight, however, if in fact there is any at all. Endgame takes place, as does Waiting for Godot, in the grey of evening--neither the light of day nor the darkness of night--but this is a borderline situation which portrays the relationship between time, space, and man with very little perspective. In Waiting for Godot we are shown simultaneously the relationship between the objective and subjective worlds, so that we are able to compare the two--the world of Vladimir and Estragon gains meaning in relation to the world of Pozzo and Lucky as they briefly touch each other. In Endgame, on the other hand, we are cut off from the outside world just as much as Hamm and Clov are and consequently the real process of ending is barely perceptible. Progress towards the end is so slight, in fact, that the

characters complain that one "day" is the same as the next and they indicate that their "game" or strategy of waiting (the imitation of ending) has been going on for some time: Clov claims that the outside is "the same,"[22] he complains (as Nell does) about "this farce day after day,"[23] and Hamm concludes that "it's a day like any other day."[24] At the same time, however, there is a gradual change by infinitesimal degrees, measured by the fact that the light has "sunk"[25] when there had been "a bit left,"[26] and the effect of this change is to make the game all the harder and more painful, since it means a constant decrease in the number of aids (e.g. painkiller) the characters can use, and a constant deterioration of the co-operation between the mind and the body.

While Hamm and Clov are figuratively on the same team, they are at best reluctant partners, and consequently there is a divided focus between the disintegration of the contact of Hamm's consciousness with any being, object, or experience external to itself, and the desire of Clov to break away, but neither of these actions can be completed because of the presence of the other character. As the end of the game is approached and Hamm becomes more introspective, he discards his "props"--those material objects such as the toy dog, whistle, and gaff, which connect him to the external world--since they are no longer aids, but hindrances, to his desire to "finish it," that is, his strategy. At the same time Clov becomes more independent as he hits Hamm over the head with

the toy dog, goes through the process of winding up, and dresses for the outside. Hamm also begins to deal with the condition of loneliness forecast by Nagg:

> I was asleep, as happy as a King, and you woke me up to have me listen to you. It wasn't indispensible, you didn't really need to have me listen to you.
> (Pause.)
> I hope the day will come when you'll really need to have me listen to you, and need to hear my voice, any voice.
> (Pause.)
> Yes, I hope I'll live till then, to hear you calling me like when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened in the dark, and I was your only hope.[27]

Hamm acknowledges the fear which will overtake him when he is alone, but realizes that as this happens his strategy will be to turn to fiction to dispel the fear:

> All kinds of fantasies! That I'm being watched! A rat! Steps! Breath held and then....
> (He breathes out.)
> Then babble, babble, words, like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together and whisper in the dark.[28]

This raises the question of Hamm's so-called story, the story of the man who came begging for his child. There is at least a strong suspicion that this story is based on the incident (real?) with Mother Peg,[29] who came begging for oil for her lamp, or that it is a fictionalized version of the Mother Peg incident. At any rate, Hamm's strategy in this regard consists of his elaborate pains at composition with "detached" critical comment: "A bit feeble, that."[30] He ob-

jectifies the story further by using a "narrative tone"[31] and concludes that he is soon going to finish it, unless he brings in other characters. This latter note provides the only explanation of the appearance of the small boy on the beach, that is, that their opponent is doing just that: introducing another character, which means that even when Hamm and Clov die the game will be taken up by someone else.

This play is also on the borderline between theatre and fiction and expresses a movement much like that from a theatrical, stage existence to a fictional, "novel" existence as Hamm withdraws from the world into himself and from dialogue into monologue. At the same time, however, there is a counter-movement from the dialogue to mime, as Clov becomes independent by speaking less and moving more. But as long as they are on stage (in the room together) they must act--Hamm must speak out loud and Clov must listen and answer, for the dialogue keeps them both there. When the dialogue ceases (or very shortly thereafter) the play ceases, and the characters are no longer stage characters. Thus, as Hamm and Clov begin to divide into separate entities--which coincides with their deaths--the strategy also begins to come apart. That is, the co-operation of dialogue, which is tenuous and hostile at best, begins to break down: the final stage of Hamm's strategy is his story and Clov's is the mimed winding up. More than in Waiting for Godot, then, Endgame contains numerous small references to the characters' theatrical ex-

istence and even to their awareness of it as such. Both characters seem to address an (hypothetical) audience--Clov refers to his attempt to make an exit,[32] and Hamm mentions the "aside,"[33] the "soliloquy,"[34] and the "underplot."[35] These references are all concerned with what the characters are doing, as are such phrases as "We're getting on,"[36] and "We've come to the end."[37] These remarks on the condition of the game are juxtaposed with references to the condition of the outside world, such as, "something is taking its course"[38] --a reference which is relatively vague and which implies that while they know exactly what they are doing, they do not know what their opponent is doing. This brings us back to the assertion made at the beginning of this chapter that in this play there are two levels of action: the <u>imitation</u> of the process of ending, and <u>waiting</u> for the end, and that the imitation is a strategy of waiting. Thus, since Clov, for example, knows that he cannot leave until Hamm dies, his attempts at putting things in order, winding up, and making an exit, are in fact comic imitations of those actions and collectively an imitation of the process of ending.

In conclusion, it is clear that the game of waiting for the end is long, tedious, and inconclusive. While Hamm and Clov are quite aware of the progress of their game and at the same time desperately trying to measure this against the "progress" of the outside in order to prove that their game has brought them closer to the end, the difference is so

slight that they have very little perspective. From our point of view, the death of another person or thing when it is in its final stage seems very quick, just as after the person or thing has died its life is complete and finished, but to the person or thing experiencing the approach of death, the end never comes although the agony grows stronger. In other words, the end is just a vicious game.

CHAPTER THREE--NOTES

[1]This is practically common knowledge, but I refer the reader to a summary of Zeno's paradoxes in W.T. Jones, A History of Western Philosophy (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1952), p. 37.

[2]Samuel Beckett, Endgame (New York: Grove, 1958), p. 1.

[3]Ibid., p. 70.

[4]Ibid., p. 26.

[5]Ibid., for example, p. 13, p. 32.

[6]Ibid., for example, p. 1,

[7]Ibid., p. 72.

[8]Ibid., p. 50, p. 79.

[9]Ibid., p. 29.

[10]Ibid., p. 14.

[11]Ibid., p. 20.

[12]Samuel Beckett, Happy Days (New York: Grove, 1961), for example, p. 42.

[13]Beckett, Endgame, p. 21.

[14]Ibid., p. 70.

[15]Ibid., p. 25.

[16]Ibid., p. 73.

[17]Ibid., p. 57.

[18]Ibid., p. 72.

[19]Ibid., p. 82.

[20]Beckett, Endgame, p. 77.

[21]Ibid., for example, p. 1, p. 50, p. 79.

[22]Ibid., p. 4.

[23]Ibid., p. 32.

[24]Ibid., p. 45.

[25]Ibid., p. 30.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid., p. 56.

[28]Ibid., p. 70.

[29]Ibid., p. 75.

[30]Ibid., p. 52.

[31]Ibid., for example, p. 50.

[32]Ibid., p. 81.

[33]Ibid., p. 77.

[34]Ibid., p. 78.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Ibid., p. 9.

[37]Ibid., p. 79.

[38]Ibid., p. 13.

CHAPTER FOUR

KRAPP'S LAST TAPE

> Now the day is over,
> Night is drawing nigh-igh,
> Shadows--[of the evening...] [1]

Krapp stops singing after the word "shadows" in the above fragment from a traditional Anglican Vespers hymn. The time is late evening, the space around his table is in deep shadow, his face is very white except for a last spot of colour (his nose) nourished by heavy drinking, and he is about to record his "last" tape. He is beginning to find that day and night are separated by an interminable period and for this reason the words "memorable equinox"[2] have very little meaning for him now. As he sits there, surrounded by darkness, he appears to be a manifestation of Hamm's "speck in the void."[3] He is alone with his tapes, which, while irrelevant to him, nevertheless have been a source of entertainment (and consequently a strategy of waiting), taking the place of another person. The light too, while symbolizing his essential isolation from the world, helps him feel "less alone,"[4] especially as he moves around in the dark and comes back to it. Krapp's Last Tape, then, is a play concerned with the individual as the solitary player in the game of living, and the focus is on Krapp and his efforts to

use his past as a strategy, rather than on the relationship between two characters as partners. This is the most important new imperative in the game of waiting--the loneliness of old age anticipated by Hamm in the last play discussed. Krapp is not only old, he also has all of the infirmities of old age--the faculties of hearing, speech, and sight have deteriorated, his walk is infirm, he thinks slowly, and he probably has some chest condition. In addition, his clothes are old and covered with the dirt of years and he no longer takes any care of his personal appearance--his hair is disorderly and his face unshaven.

Krapp has reached that stage in life where other people have been shut out and where the only pastime is memory. Memory in this play is compared to spools of tape which have been numbered and stored away in boxes, and the mechanism of memory is a tape recorder. The rest of the hypothetical imperatives of this play, therefore, are derived from the mechanics of tape recording: Krapp can select the passage he wants to hear, play it and replay it, stop it and start it again, or he can record a new tape. By referring to the ledger which records the years of the tapes and a summary of their contents, Krapp can select a particular portion of his past and play it back, but as a subject who has changed many times since then, he cannot identify with that past, he can only listen to it objectively.

Throughout the play Krapp is in a semi-stupor caused by

his heavy drinking, and this condition is increased as the play progresses. We are not told why he drinks, but we do know that it has been going on for a long time and that he probably uses it to kill the pain of waiting. In any case, it does not induce any state of euphoria or nostalgia, nor does it lessen his cynical and critical attitude toward his past. His drinking is therefore an unsatisfactory strategy.

Life to Krapp has been a long and continuously "flagging pursuit of happiness"[5] as a result of nagging troubles of the body, such as constipation, indigestion, alcoholism, and "that old weakness"[6]--bananas. Most of all, however, he has been disappointed in his attempts to find happiness with women: "Could have been happy with her, up there on the Baltic, and the pines, and the dunes. (Pause.) Could I? (Pause.) And she? (Pause.) Pah!"[7] As we have seen, Beckett has maintained that happiness between two people can only be the result of a perfect identification of subject and object, and this is impossible. Consequently, all Krapp has left is the memory of failure:

> Lie propped up in the dark--and wander. Be again in the dingle on a Christmas eve gathering holly, the red berried. (Pause.) Be again on Croghan on a Sunday morning, in the haze, with the bitch, stop and listen to the bells. (Pause.) And so on. (Pause.) Be again, be again. (Pause.) All that old misery. (Pause.) Once wasn't enough for you.[8]

The thought of wandering through the years and reliving "all that old misery" is too much for Krapp, and he throws this

tape (which he is recording) away. He then plays back the old tape with its sexual passage, which is a description of momentary union that Krapp tries in vain to recapture--it cannot last, as Winnie in Happy Days acknowledges: "Sadness after intimate sexual intercourse one is familiar with of course."[9]

Perhaps the central meaning of the play is, as Beckett might say, a matter of elimination. Krapp is trying to separate the "grain from the husks"[10] and thereby eliminate the "old misery" and find something worth keeping, but there is nothing but misery and failure. This is borne out by the many references to "laxation,"[11] "the iron stool,"[12] "the hard little rubber ball"[13]--and all of these are linked by the sex act. In other words, Krapp's past seen in retrospect only adds more misery to his physical deterioration.

The structure of the play is based on the interplay of the "last" tape and the earlier one, as well as, once again, the use of pauses, which in this case increase drastically during the last third of the play as Krapp himself slows down, until the end with its long silence and empty tape. By mechanizing memory with the aid of a tape recorder (Krapp's basic strategy) and with each year's tape--recorded on each birthday, the "awful occasion"[14]--carefully numbered and stacked away in boxes, Beckett has dramatized simultaneously the relationship between past, present, and future. The key to this relationship and its meaning lies in the structure of

the play, which is divided roughly into six sections with Krapp himself hovering over each: Krapp, Tape I, Tape II, Tape I, Krapp, Tape I. In the introduction Beckett has indicated that the play takes place on a "late evening in the future,"[15] and at first this seems to be an irrelevant directive because of the "presentness" of the stage medium. Shortly, however, we find that the presence of the tape recorder makes the tape "past" in relation to the stage Krapp who is "present," but then the tape speaks of an earlier tape, which in relation to itself is now the "past," making the tape "present" and Krapp himself the "future." We are now able to see at once the whole of a man's life and the relation between his past, present, and "future," along with the meaning each "time" has for its successor--a meaning, we find, that is so divorced from the present that the tape is listened to with both horror and contempt.

Quite frequently Krapp cannot even understand some of the words he had used--he has to look up "viduity" in the dictionary[16] and "memorable equinox" no longer has any meaning for him.[17] With the past forever hidden from him and with nothing left to record for the future, Krapp is caught in the present, and like the characters who came before him he must simply wait. In Waiting for Godot we witnessed the juxtaposition of subjective and objective time cut off from each other: Pozzo and Lucky grow old while Vladimir and Estragon do not. In Endgame we saw subjective time cut off

from both objective time and its own past--to the extent that it had become the material for fiction. Now with Krapp's Last Tape we have three time periods, each of which is subjective at the time of recording but objective at the time of listening.

The effectiveness of the strategy of the tapes, however, is wearing thin as Krapp has begun to feel the pointlessness of his yearly recordings. Possibly his original intention had been to record impressions from year to year so that he would have a measure of the intellectual and emotional progress he was making--a basis for comparison. But this has proved to be impossible--the past is no longer "his" and he cannot recapture it, for as Beckett pointed out in Proust, "the subject has died, many times, on the way."[18] The significance of the title thus becomes clear: this cannot be Krapp's last tape because he is still living, but it is his last tape because he has nothing more to record after the "last tape"--"Nothing to say, not a squeak. What's a year now? The sour cud and the iron stool."[19] All Krapp can do is sit there and wait for the surrounding darkness to engulf him. Krapp's last strategy, suggested by the words "iron stool," is the word "spool"--the sound of a word has given him "the happiest moment in the past half million."[20]

CHAPTER FOUR--NOTES

[1]Samuel Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape (New York: Grove, 1960), p. 17.

[2]Ibid., p. 13.

[3]Samuel Beckett, Endgame (New York: Grove, 1958), p. 36.

[4]Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape, p. 15.

[5]Ibid., p. 16.

[6]Ibid., p. 14.

[7]Ibid., p. 25.

[8]Ibid., p. 26.

[9]Samuel Beckett, Happy Days (New York: Grove, 1961), p. 57.

[10]Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape, p. 14.

[11]Ibid., p. 17.

[12]Ibid., p. 25.

[13]Ibid., p. 20.

[14]Ibid., p. 14.

[15]Ibid., p. 9.

[16]Ibid., p. 18.

[17]Ibid., p. 13.

[18]Samuel Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove, 1957), p. 3.

[19]Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape, p. 25.

[20]Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

HAPPY DAYS

Winnie is a middle-aged, buxom Pollyanna whose basic strategy of waiting is happiness. Most of the time she seems to be cheerful and confident, but in her condition this seems very funny, for nothing is funnier than totally unjustified total confidence. However, we soon see that Winnie's confidence and cheerfulness are not complete and eternal. She breaks down and cries or falters--not often, but often enough, and when this happens we can see that her attitude is not the result of happiness, but of a well-developed and habitual strategy which helps her adapt to her situation and face each day with a smile. When her strategy breaks down she suffers, but not for long, for her happy memories (she tries to suppress the unhappy ones) and her grab bag of "habit stimulants" soon restore her will to continue.

The limiting conditions of her existence are derived from her increasing immobility, the unpredictable bells for waking and sleeping, and a decreasing number of material aids --Willie being the main one. Since she cannot know how long she must wait for the bell to ring, Winnie must make the most of each object in her bag, each activity (such as brushing her teeth), and each topic of conversation which happens to

"float up out of the blue."[1] Whether or not any of these objects, activities, or topics of conversation are of any consequence is of course beside the point. The only requirement is that they help her pass the time--happily. Consequently, with the exception of those moments when she breaks down, everything she does--in conjunction with her ability to see something interesting, wonderful, or merciful in most thoughts and activities--helps her pass the time happily.

Winnie is Beckett's first (major) female stage character, but she exhibits many of the female attributes of the earlier fictional ladies, as well as those of Nell and Maddy Rooney. She is quite hefty, has large breasts, arms, shoulders, and probably hips as well, although the fact that they are hidden indicates that she is as barren as the ground she is in; and she is quite sensual, romantic, and, most important and fortunate for her, she is compulsively talkative. She is also, as Celia is to Murphy, a man-trap, and thereafter a source of constant irritation to her victim--always maintaining, of course, a very cheerful, motherly manner that is difficult to object to. In the scheme of things, therefore, she is Willie's goad, a goad he cannot escape, no matter how uncommunicative and reclusive he becomes. Her constant chatter and nagging questions are the slings and arrows of his daily life, and he bears them with a commendable stoicism. It is no wonder, however, that he has no "zest ... no

interest in life,"[2] that he has a marvellous gift for sleeping, and that he is a man of few words. Willie's one need, and Winnie acknowledges this but must disregard it, is to be left in peace--but her need is to talk and to have someone to listen. Who is to say whose need is the most urgent?

Our focus, however, is on Winnie. Sometimes Willie disgusts her, but his (theoretical) presence is vital to her: "Just to know that you are there."[3] Since she cannot stop talking, she reasons that Willie must be there--just as Vladimir and Estragon, forced to wait, assume they are waiting <u>for</u> something, she reasons that she is talking <u>to</u> somebody:

> I used to think ... (Pause.) ... I say I used to think that I could learn to talk alone. (Pause.) By that I mean to myself, the wilderness. (Smile.) But no. (Smile.) No no. (Smile off.) Ergo you are there.[4]

She does, however, also talk to herself, by employing the split between her subjective and objective selves as a partnership in her strategy against time--a partnership which is quite successful as she can frequently admonish "herself" for being greedy with the bag or with words. On the other hand, her partner at times will simply not obey her: "How often have I said, in evil hours, sing now, Winnie, sing your song, there is nothing else for it, and did not."[5] For the most part, however, she has amazing control over her partner, and she usually manages to stay happy--this being the point of the play.

Willie never gives her any trouble, he is simply not

very co-operative, but this does not particularly bother her since his presence is all that is required, and she confidently continues to believe in his presence even in the second act when Willie never answers her and she cannot see him. If we had been presented with only this act, we would have concluded that this confidence is also totally unjustified. But Willie confirms her belief in the face of absurdity: "What Willie? ... MY WILLIE!"[6] Thus, the whole question of the existence of anything external to Winnie is raised, even the contents of her bag, her breasts, and her cheeks which she cannot see--but Winnie maintains the existence of the objective world <u>even as a fiction</u>, for without it she would have very little to do and this would be unbearable to her (whereas to Murphy and perhaps Estragon, Lucky, and Clov it would mean complete freedom.) In other words, her strategy of waiting depends on her belief in the external world.

Winnie is forced to cope with an absolute situation: a "world without end"[7] and time without end, which for all practical purposes, is the same thing as an eternal present. Here, as she says, nothing changes, and in the context of complete strangeness nothing is or can be remarkable, and consequently Winnie finds no truth in relative concepts:

> 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 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, and they are empty words. (Pause.) It is no hotter today than yesterday, it will be no hotter tomorrow than today, how could it, and so on back into the far past, and forward into the far future.[8]

For this reason Winnie speaks of all relative time concepts such as today, yesterday, days "going by" (that is, the movement of time), and even dying, as being in the "old style."[9] This phrase, one of the chief thematic leitmotifs in the play, is particularly diabolical as Winnie tries to govern her activities according to this endless time with its arbitrary divisions--not knowing when the bell for sleep will come and desperately afraid that she will find herself "left, with hours still to run, before the bell for sleep, and nothing more to say, nothing more to do ...."[10] Consequently, Winnie is always on the alert and happily ready to improvise with anything that comes into her head.

Winnie therefore speaks of her "happy day" in the future perfect tense, or she says that the day has been happy "so far"[11]--she still has the rest of it to get through. She cannot measure her progress toward the bell for sleep because of her immobility--motion in time as well as in space is dependent upon change, and to her nothing changes, and for this reason she is waiting, like the rest of Beckett's characters, for the end which can never come.

In this impossible situation Winnie is constantly on the

brink of collapse and she must constantly renew her efforts to shut out pain and unhappiness, or at least to overcome them by adapting herself and her strategies as they arise. There are many pitfalls: things have a way of running out (her toothpaste, painkiller, and lipstick) because they belong to the objective world and the "old style," as do her nails, teeth, and eyes; the odd unhappy thought or memory will "float up out of the blue,"[12] especially thoughts about her former beauty and love life, which, however, gradually become less real:

> That day. (Pause.) The pink fizz.
> (Pause.) The flute glasses. (Pause.)
> The last guest gone. (Pause.) The look.
> (Long pause.) What day? (Long pause.)
> What look?[13]

and consequently less painful:

> Ah yes ... then ... now ... beechen green
> ... this ... Charlie ... kisses ... this
> ... all that ... deep trouble for the mind.
> (Pause.) But it does not trouble mine.
> (Smile.) Not now.[14]

The greatest change, of course, is in Winnie's relation to the earth--we see it as a definite and dramatic change, but it is so gradual and unaccompanied by any change in herself that she does not recognize it as a change at all. To her the only reality is her present situation, whether she is buried up to her waist or neck there is no truth in any past situation. Thus, in the second act her breasts, arms, and legs do not exist and never have--what she can see exists and what she cannot see does not exist--but she insists that

Willie does exist, even though she cannot see him. She cannot prove that Willie himself exists independently, but since he must exist for her to talk to, she <u>believes</u> he exists, and we conclude that he exists in her mind. Thus Willie is not subject to change because Winnie is not, and because she can no longer use her grab bag as a strategy, Willie is now more important and therefore more "real" than when she could see him. This leads us then, to the only consistent explanation of Willie's appearance at the end of the play. Since there is no indication whatever that the initiative came from Willie himself, we must conclude that he appears because she wants him to--love has triumphed--but this is not love between subject and object, but between Winnie and her creation.

As Winnie approaches the end, her strategies thus become more subjective in relation to her decreasing contact with the external world: her last strategy, "when all else fails,"[15] being her story told to the omnipresent Willie. In the first act her strategies are adapted to the possibilities left open to her: she makes a game of the objects in her bag, prolonging her examination and use of each object so that it will take up as much time as possible before turning to something else, and all the time employing a barrage of words to fill the gaps. She even has self-imposed rules for these little games: she must not take off her hat once it is on,[16] she must not sing her song "too early,"[17] and above all she must not use up all of the things in her

bag nor her store of words--her "two lights"--too soon.[18] In the second act the possibilities have been drastically reduced, but this makes no basic difference to her. She makes a game of those objects she can still see and then she turns to her story and Willie. Winnie's relationship to Willie thus becomes the most important development in the strategies of waiting to this point. It is a development linked to subjective awareness and art, however, and not a change in Beckett's attitude toward the conditions governing the subject-object relationship, which, as far as the drama at least is concerned, has not changed since Proust.

The rest of Happy Days is very similar to the earlier plays. While the ever present Brownie is a comfort to Winnie, the idea of suicide, as in Waiting for Godot, is employed as a strategy and not as a permanent escape. The impossibility of escape, as mentioned above, is maintained by the goad: the bell for waking which rings every time she tries to blot out consciousness when it is not time for sleep (a "wonderful gift"[19] she does not possess), and the bell for sleep which is always ahead of her. Significantly, we never hear the bell for sleep, as the curtain falls before it rings, and consequently it is always something waited for, just as Godot is. This goad, like the others in Beckett's plays, has no rationality behind its action--it simply belongs to a hypothetical sphere beyond the reach of human reason--and Winnie's strategies are correspondingly improvised but ration-

ally oriented games played to pass the time.

Once again Beckett's use of pauses in relation to thought and "weak" points is used as a structural device emphasizing the weight of time, and the struggles to fill it emphasized by the flurries of words and activities. Since Winnie must redouble her efforts in proportion to the decrease in the possibilities left open to her, this increase in effort underlines the endless amount of time ahead of her in spite of the fact that the second act is relatively short by clock time. Finally, Winnie, who has very few legitimate words at her disposal, repeats them over and over again, and these repetitions form the network of thematic leitmotifs which gather meaning and become less funny as they progress through to the end of the play. This especially applies to such phrases as "the old style,"[20] "that is what I find so wonderful,"[21] "this will have been another happy day,"[22] and "many mercies"[23]--each phrase gathering irony as it becomes clear exactly how true they are, the opposite to what we felt at the opening of the play.

In conclusion, we should note that while in Waiting for Godot it is remarkable that the "change" from the first to the second act is so slight, in Happy Days the "change" is so great that it is remarkable that it makes no essential difference. Winnie must continue to wait for the end, and Willie will always be there for her to talk to. However, this does not mean that she has won the game against time,

for the situation at the very end of the play is clearly a stalemate: Willie cannot reach Winnie and she cannot force him to. On the positive side, Winnie's belief in Willie--her faith in his existence--has almost resulted in union. The female has succeeded where the men failed.

CHAPTER FIVE--NOTES

[1]Samuel Beckett, Happy Days (New York: Grove, 1961), p. 20.

[2]Ibid., p. 10.

[3]Ibid., p. 31.

[4]Ibid., p. 50.

[5]Ibid., p. 40.

[6]Ibid., p. 51.

[7]Ibid., p. 8.

[8]Ibid., p. 38.

[9]Ibid., for example, p. 13, p. 18, p. 22, p. 32, p. 44.

[10]Ibid., p. 35.

[11]Ibid., for example, p. 34, p. 48, p. 62, p. 64.

[12]Ibid., p. 20.

[13]Ibid., p. 60.

[14]Ibid., p. 51.

[15]Ibid., p. 54.

[16]Ibid., p. 23.

[17]Ibid., p. 32.

[18]Ibid., pp. 36-37.

[19]Ibid., p. 12.

[20]Ibid., for example, p. 13, p. 18, p. 42, p. 50, p. 53.

[21]Ibid., for example, p. 18, p. 24, p. 39, p. 49, p. 56, p. 58.

[22]Ibid., for example, p. 40, p. 48, p. 64.

[23]Ibid., for example, p. 12, p. 58.

CONCLUSION

The most important factor common to the four plays we have examined, I feel, is the quality of time experienced by those who wait--in so far as it affects their activities. In each play the characters feel and act as though they are caught in an endless present: in their situations they feel cut off from their past and at the same time they cannot plan and project their activities toward a known goal, for the future is completely uncertain. (Of all the characters Winnie is the only one who tries to economize her activities so that she will not be caught with hours left and nothing to do, but even Winnie does not pretend that she can in any way control the future through planned action.) Similarly, although time does have an effect on their bodies, thus limiting the scope of possible activity, this effect is unnoticed by those who wait in the sense that they do not recognize their various ailments as the products of aging. Vladimir and Estragon are aware of change in others, but do not recognize a corresponding change in themselves; Hamm and Clov try to find some evidence of change--that is, progress toward the end--but the indications they find are so slight that they are immaterial; Krapp is so divorced from his past that he cannot recognize his former self; and Winnie maintains that her

present condition is the same as it has always been. Consequently, aside from those moments when the characters have no effective control over their actions, and aside from those actions governed by some form of necessity, everything they do during the course of the plays is done simply to fill the enormous void of time.

When these activities are considered separately, we can conclude that each conforms to the characteristics of play as defined by Huizinga--at least to the extent that each activity has a play-like quality. In the first place, each activity is a thing unto itself in that it is neither conditioned by any preceding activity, nor the cause of any subsequent activity, and consequently each activity is free of necessity as far as its content is concerned. Secondly, the internal structure of each activity also has an order of its own by virtue of this independence in that it has a beginning, middle, and end. The middle is the part containing the "rules" of the activity, but these rules are improvised as the activity progresses, they are not agreed upon or formulated beforehand, and consequently the rules of one activity usually differ from those of other activities. Rather, unity among these diverse activities is achieved through thematic means: each activity shares a common impulse (to fill the void) and objective (to last as long as possible). Finally, since each activity must come to an end, the plays (which after all are merely segments taken from the lives of the

characters) must end inconclusively--the characters are waiting just as much as they were at the beginning.

We can safely predict, therefore, that if any of the plays we have examined were extended, the characters would continue to act as though they were waiting for someone or something and that while waiting they would devise similar activities. In other words, these characters are creatures of habit as Beckett uses the term in Proust, and at this point his statement bears repeating:

> Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability
> .....
> Life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals; the world being a projection of the individual's consciousness, the pact must be continually renewed....[1]

The activities of the characters, or their strategies of waiting, therefore, are habitual responses to the reality of their existence--strategies to fill the void which surrounds them during moments of rest. However, since any activity governed by habit cannot be completely free, the strategies of waiting are not purely play. The play element as such enters once the particular activity has begun--the characters are free to prolong the activity and improvise on its elements as Clov does, for example, when he looks out the window with the telescope; and they are free to choose among a number of possibilities as Winnie chooses articles from her bag.

Beckett's three later plays are not simply repetitions of Waiting for Godot, however, for when the plays are compared certain important differences are noticeable. While both Murphy and Watt are concerned with relatively young men (roughly thirty) and their inability to reconcile themselves with the external world and other people, Waiting for Godot is concerned with characters who have passed middle age and who have therefore entered the long, tedious, and painful process of deterioration leading to death. As indicated by the country road where they wait, these characters have withdrawn from society, at least to the extent that their contact with other people (Pozzo and Lucky) is both sporadic and tenuous. Vladimir and Estragon are a homosexual couple living in a world of their own and since each is unable to avoid the presence of the other, their activities are based on their relationship--co-operative discussions alternate with bitter quarrels. However, since the ties which bind them together are stronger than the differences which drive them apart, and since they must both wait for Godot, their quarrels are usually short-lived and they manage to pass the time with a minimum of pain.

Endgame portrays the problems of human relationship and waiting from an entirely different point of view. In the first place, Hamm is older and less mobile than either Vladimir or Estragon. Secondly, Hamm completely dominates Clov, however rebellious Clov might be. Their relationship is thus

closer to a master-servant or father-son relationship, and consequently the strategies in this play reflect Hamm's domination over Clov and his egotistical concern for himself, as well as their conflict of interests. With the focus on Hamm, therefore, it is not surprising that the nature of the action in Endgame is more unified than it is in Waiting for Godot. The bulk of the play is really one long strategy directed by Hamm and carried out with the aid of Clov. That it is a strategy is made obvious by the inconclusive ending and by the consciousness of the characters that they are playing the endgame. From this point of view the various activities can be considered as loosely connected stages in the endgame.

In Krapp's Last Tape the point of view has shifted once again from human relationships to the solitary figure who employs excerpts from his past in an effort to dispel loneliness, boredom, and a sense of the futility of his life. The structure of this play and consequently the strategies of waiting, are based on a "dialogue" between the present and the past, but as we have seen, no dialogue is possible. In addition, Krapp has nothing left to record for the future as a result of the process of withdrawal from the world around him, but he has life left.

In Happy Days Beckett once again deals with a human relationship, but this time it is demonstrated that the strategies of waiting do not depend on either co-operation or true dialogue, but on Winnie's ability to believe in Willie's ex-

istence in spite of a lack of evidence to prove that he does exist, and this ability enables her to continue to invent things to talk about--in other words, she has an audience.

In summary, I feel that action in Beckett's plays is conditioned by two fundamental factors: the subject-object dichotomy, or the relation between the individual, the world, and other people; and death, the one event in human life which is certain, but not fixed. He has portrayed these factors from different points of view and from youth to old age. In youth the confrontation between the self and the external world is emphasized and it takes the form of a lack of communication between the two and a desire to retreat on the part of the self. In middle age human relationships are emphasized, with death as a remote factor. This takes the form of an armed truce--a more or less antagonistic relationship: man must co-operate because he cannot escape the society of others, but this co-operation is necessarily artificial. In old age the self, as a result of increasing immobility, loses contact with the external world and others, and the wait for death is emphasized. In this case, action--or the strategies of waiting--takes the form of an interior monologue. This development is paralleled by a structural movement toward an increased emphasis on physical movement and dialogue.

Beckett thus portrays the fundamental isolation of modern western man--the tragicomedy of individualism. Cut off

from others and time, man's habitual response to life and the external world has been to devise strategies of waiting for the time when it will all come to an end, and this has resulted in a stalemate. This in itself, however, is a remarkable achievement, considering the nature of the struggle, and to this extent Beckett is finally optimistic: man has an incredible ability to cope with his predicament.

CONCLUSION--NOTES

[1] Samuel Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove, 1957), p. 7.

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APPENDIX

The following is simply intended to illustrate in a very general and schematic way the complementary nature of some of Beckett's "couples," and their similarity to the two prototypes: Murphy and Watt.

Vladimir	Estragon
Acts as the protector and provider.	Needs protection and sympathy.
Does the "thinking," is more speculative; emotional problems, dreams, etc. of Est. upset him.	More emotional, introverted; rational problems posed by Vladimir upset him.
Relatively optimistic regarding arrival of Godot and what Godot can do for them; never forgets their reason for being there; insists that they stay.	Very pessimistic regarding their whole situation; doubts Godot's value even if he does come; has to be reminded that they must wait.
Needs company: a partner to help pass the time, an audience to listen.	Suggests that they should part; likes to be left alone.
Initiates most games; the more versatile player, especially in second act.	Reluctantly agrees to play games; not very imaginative.
Better memory for insignificant facts regarding their environment and situation; desperately tries to accumulate and order data to prove regularity of space and time --memory therefore important.	Remembers only what directly affects him, e.g., Lucky kicks him; nothing else is worth remembering; space and time meaningless; "nothing changes."
Active.	Lazy.
Bullies Estragon.	Submits.
Gregarious.	Anti-social.

Pozzo	Lucky
Acts as the protector and provider.	Needs protection for freedom.
Does the "thinking," is more speculative; emotional problems upset him; makes the decisions; insensitive to feelings of others, who are objects.	Introverted and hostile if disturbed; has lost the ability to think in rational structures.
Optimistic regarding life and his purpose; never forgets his schedule.	Fully resigned to his role; never initiates; waits for orders.
Needs an audience and a partner to ensure purpose.	Detached, but submissive.
Good memory; clings to watch time.	No memory discernible.
Very active.	Inactive.
Bullies Lucky.	Submits.
Gregarious.	Anti-social.
Hamm	**Clov**
Acts as the protector and provider.	Needs protection, sustenance.
Does most of the thinking; gives the orders; insensitive to feelings of others; egocentric.	Introverted; obeys most of the orders.
Confident in his superiority, but has lost illusions.	More or less resigned to his role, but rebellious.
Needs an audience and someone to fetch for him.	Has a distrust of words; will not speak unless he has to.
Talkative.	Prefers to be inactive.
Bullies Clov.	Partially submits.