

# REFLECTIONS ON SAMUEL BECKETT'S PLAYS

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## INTRODUCTION

JUNG (1951, *Coll. Wks.*, p. 121) speaks of a class of schizophrenic and neurotic patients whose illness "seems to lie in their having something above the average, an overplus for which there is no adequate outlet". And he continues: "We may then expect the patient to be consciously or—in most cases—unconsciously critical of the generally accepted views and ideas."

The impression one gains in such cases is that there is somehow more wisdom in their madness than in the kind of sanity in which the majority feels safe. These patients do not find their feet in the world unless they succeed in integrating those notions which can form the nucleus of adequate self-expression. As long as they have not reached this point, they tend to vacillate between moods of inflated rebellion and of deep despair and sense of failure. Their disorientation seems to be an unconscious compensation for what has been described as a contemporary threat to the uniqueness of the individual. This threat of collectivization has been called the illness of our epoch.

In a letter to the critic George Jean Nathan, Eugene O'Neill says that the dramatist of today has to reveal the root of the sickness of our time. This root of sickness he describes as "the death of the old god and the incapacity of science and materialism to give a new god to the still living religious instinct". The dramatist's task, he continues, is "to find a new meaning of life" with which to allay man's fear of death (Mellinger, 1950).

This statement of O'Neill's should be seen against the background of an historical development. The fact that the collapse of the old projections on the one hand and the fascination by his own discoveries and inventions on the other have driven modern man away from his psychic roots, and that the levelling down and the hollowing out of his mind have gradually become a widespread phenomenon, has led to the response by the creative few. Ever since the first passionate warnings of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche about a hundred years ago, a small minority in the field of art, literature, and philosophy has been moved by an increasing feeling of urgency about man's self-estrangement in the modern world. Partly simultaneously and parallel with

the growing contribution which Jung's life-work made to this very problem, the interest in it gradually became a powerful trend in Western thought.

This reaction did not start in the field of drama. The idea of man's tragic self-estrangement has been expressed in the works of, for instance, Dostoevsky, Rilke, and Kafka, and those writers of very varied orientation who have—against their own protest—been thrown together under the common description of "existentialists", Heidegger, Jaspers, and Sartre.

That these three and their followers have all been given the same label of existentialists is proof of the impact upon their contemporaries of what they have in common. It is their rebellion and protest against any form of creed or system, their scorn of traditional philosophy and religion, and, most of all, their ardent insistence upon the importance of an "authentic" individual life. They all attempt to rouse man from his anonymous collective existence and from the tragic absurdity of his self-estrangement by refusing to evade dread, agony, despair, and disgust, and by stressing the importance of the problem of how to meet death (cf. Kaufmann, 1957).

The ideas of the existentialists are obviously akin to O'Neill's awareness of the lack of meaning in modern life and of the vacuum by which man's religious instinct is starved and cut off. But the existentialists themselves are divided with regard to the conclusions to be drawn. Sartre—in his play *The Flies*—introduces Zeus and the ancient Erinyes (in the form of flies), but only to stress the need for man to be a responsible ego and to carry his guilt without any gods—alone. Jaspers (cf. Kaufmann, 1957, p. 142), however, states that "in the Deity alone there is reality, truth and the immutability of being".

O'Neill's special appeal to the dramatists shows that the existentialist mood and the problems raised by it are finding a growing response. Not only because it has spread from the relatively small circle of readers of philosophical works to the larger theatre audiences, but also because drama addresses itself more explicitly to the imagination and the emotions. In other words, it has entered the realm of affective psychological processes.

So far both philosophers and dramatists have shown themselves acutely aware that modern man's self-estrangement cannot be overcome unless pathological psychic developments are allowed to contribute to the new orientation. Heidegger takes his inspiration from Hölderlin and Nietzsche, who both became insane. Jaspers is a psychiatrist and has written a work on psychopathology. Sartre—in his *Saint Genet*—canonizes a social and moral outcast who discovered his literary gifts while imprisoned for theft.

Here an interesting problem emerges: if a creative minority has written the importance of the abnormal on its banner while the majority is alienated from its psychic roots, it seems that an irresistible factor in the unconscious has declared war upon the collective pseudo-ego (cf. Metman, 1956). The quest thus reveals itself as one for a yet unborn true ego, that is, one related to the unconscious.

Meanwhile this unborn ego remains projected upon a potentiality in the

readers and spectators. This means that half the creative effort is expected and demanded of them: the reader has to put in the ego. Jaspers, for instance (cf. Kaufmann, 1957, p. 25), says of those who (erroneously) look for a doctrine in his philosophy, "these readers must say that I really say nothing. What does happen in their case is what I have called the beating of the other wing which is necessary if that which is said in the text (as the beating of one wing) is to achieve fulfilment of its meaning and soar up". Of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, whom the existentialists regard as their spiritual ancestors, Jaspers says (Kaufmann, p. 180): "Their common effect to enchant and then disillusion, to seize and then leave one standing unsatisfied, as though one's hands and heart were left empty—such is only a clear expression of their own intention: *that everything depends upon what the reader by his own inner action makes out of their communication . . . they deny every satisfaction*" [*my italics*].

This same technique is, in different degrees, characteristic of the most challenging contemporary dramatic works. Their authors, despairing of the validity of any romantic, moralistic, sentimental, or philosophical interpretation of the facts of existence—with which the dramatists of the previous epoch overfed their public—present these facts to their audiences in a deliberate nakedness and without any hints at truths or values in which they may or may not believe. Thus these authors, by refraining from committing themselves to any definite standpoint, have entered a new phase in the age-old tradition of dramatic art.

In spite of the great variety of its subjects, modes, and styles, dramatic art has always been concerned with man's relation to the great archetypal powers which can determine his attitude to life. In times of religious containment it has shown man as protected, guided, and sometimes punished by these powers, but in other epochs it has shown the visible and tangible world, in which man fulfils his destiny, as permeated by the demonic essences of his invisible and intangible being. In contemporary drama a new, third orientation is crystallizing in which man is shown not in a world into which the divine or demonic powers are projected but alone with them.

This new form of drama forces the audience out of its familiar orientation. It creates a vacuum between the play and the audience so that the latter is compelled to experience something itself, be it a reawakening of the awareness of archetypal powers or a reorientation of the ego, or both (Brecht has given this the name *alienation effect*).

By far the most profound and daring writer associated with this new development in drama is Samuel Beckett, who has gone considerably further than any of his contemporaries. Instead of merely showing human existence in its unadorned nakedness, he strips his figures so thoroughly of all those qualities in which the audience might recognize itself that, to start with, an *alienation effect* is created that leaves the audience mystified. That is to say, the vacuum between what is shown on the stage and the onlooker has become so unbearable that the latter has no alternative but either to reject and turn away

or to be drawn into the enigma of plays in which nothing reminds him of any of his purposes in and reactions to the world around him.

Significantly, all Beckett's novels are mainly monologues, or rather musings, of some solitary person, and from this we may take the hint that the various figures which he puts on the stage are not really persons but figures in the inner world.

## WAITING FOR GODOT

In his *Waiting for Godot*, which has aroused great controversies in Europe and in America, practically nothing happens, nothing is done, no development is discernible, and there is no beginning and no end. The entire action boils down to this: in a place where there is nothing but a tree, two tramps dawdle away their time waiting for a rescuer from misery. Two strangers, a cruel master and his half-demented serf, cross their path and leave again. At the end of the first act, a messenger from the rescuer arrives and promises that he will come tomorrow. In the second act the waiting goes on; the other couple pass by once more, but the master is now blind and the slave is dumb. Both stumble and fall. The tramps help them on their way. The messenger appears again with the same promise. Everything remains as it was in the beginning. It is a play without a woman, and in so far as the onlooker—perhaps against his wishes—is captivated by the strangeness of what he witnesses, he begins to hope for a turn or a solution which never comes. Beckett denies satisfaction to his audience, to whom he wants to give the chance of suffering extreme despair, this "more cruel and precise expression" of "... suffering than the conscious estimate of the sufferer who is spared at least one despair, the despair of the spectator" (Beckett, 1931, p. 29).

The two destitutes in this play, Vladimir and Estragon, are incapable of anything more than mere beginnings of impulses, desires, thoughts, moods, memories, and impressions, and everything that arises in them sinks back into oblivion before it arrives anywhere. They live, to a large extent, in a twilight state and though one of them, Vladimir, is more aware than his companion Estragon, inertia prevails throughout. They belong to a category of people well known in Paris as *clochards*, people who have known better times and have often, as in this case, originally been cultured and educated. They make a point of being rejects of destiny, in love with their own position as outsiders.

Comparing the past with the present, speaking of losing heart and hinting at suicide, Vladimir says at the beginning of the first act:

We should have thought of it when the world was young, in the nineties . . . Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were respectable in those days. Now it's too late. They wouldn't even let us up.

Their incapacity to live or to end life, the opening and concluding theme of the play, is intimately linked with their love of helplessness and of wish-dreams which they make no attempt to realize. Altogether their wishdreaming and their playfulness blot out whatever serious moods come over them.

VLADIMIR: Suppose we repented . . . Do you remember the gospels?

ESTRAGON: I remember the maps of the Holy Land. Coloured they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. There's where we'll go, I used to say, there's where we'll go for our honeymoon. We'll swim. We'll be happy.

VLADIMIR: You should have been a poet.

ESTRAGON: I was. (*Gesture towards his rags.*) Isn't that obvious?

They are full of frustrations and resentments and cling together with a mixture of interdependence and affection, easing their situation by calling each other childish names, *Gogo* and *Didi*. In these and other respects they are like an old married couple who always want to separate and never do so.

VLADIMIR: I didn't get up in the night, not once!

ESTRAGON (*sadly*): You see, you do better when I am not there.

VLADIMIR: I missed you . . . and at the same time I was happy. Isn't that a queer thing? . . .

ESTRAGON: And now?

VLADIMIR: Now? . . . (*Joyous*) There you are again . . . (*Indifferently*) There we are again . . . (*Gloomy*) There I am again.

ESTRAGON: You see, you feel worse when I'm with you. I feel better alone too.

VLADIMIR (*piqued*): Then why do you come crawling back?

ESTRAGON: I don't know.

This uninspired symbiosis seems to display a concept of friendship which Beckett attributes to Proust; he "situates friendship somewhere between fatigue and ennui" (1931, p. 47).

Through this twilight world in which the two *clochards* spend their days occasionally remembering that they are waiting for their rescuer Godot who never appears, two other figures move as a pair of eerie passers-by. They come from nowhere and are going nowhere and they leave no trace.

One of them, Pozzo, looks (in the London production) like a brazen idol, massive, smooth, and rigid. Walking ahead of him, at the far end of a long rope which Pozzo holds in his hands, is his emaciated and anaemic slave who even has to carry the whip with which he is beaten. His name is Lucky. Although in stark contrast to each other, Pozzo and Lucky have one thing in common: they are both driven by a desperate attempt to evade panic which would grip them if they lost their belief in what Pozzo stands for. Pozzo lives by monosyllabic orders hurled at Lucky, without ever looking in his direction. No other will than his own exists. Whatever he does or says means: The Universe is Me. He destroys whatever might be growing in time by not

listening and he ignores urgency by taking time to fidget with his pipe or his mouthspray. In the first act, he indulges with relish in an almost impressive display of pessimistic philosophy. But in the second act, as we shall see later, his pessimism becomes, for a moment, poetic.

Lucky deserves his name because he has a master who, however cruelly, organizes his life for him. Once, we are told, Lucky could, by dancing and thinking, amuse and inspire Pozzo; but his state of slavery has gradually put an end to all that. Thus his spark of spontaneity has died; of his original dancing nothing is left but a slouch and a totter, and his thinking has deteriorated into the endless repetition of meaningless words reminiscent of the "word-salad" of schizophrenics.

I think we are justified in interpreting Pozzo as a gruesome product of the modern age. This "small bundle of subjective feeling and responses" (Scott, 1956, p. 158) may sometimes indulge in self-pity but represses its fear with narcissistic pomposity: "Do I look like a man who can be made to suffer?"—but deeply hidden under the mask of hardness there lies an unconscious nostalgia for lost values. He says of Lucky:

POZZO: But for him all my thoughts, all my feelings, would have been of common things. (*Pause. With extraordinary vehemence*) Professional worries! (*Calmer*) Beauty, grace, truth of the first water, I knew they were all beyond me. . . .

In Lucky, on the other hand, we can see the destroyed contact with the creative sources of the psyche.

It becomes more and more evident in the course of the play that Lucky takes it for granted that only within the pattern of a mutual sado-masochistic relationship between himself and Pozzo can there be any safety for him. In the first act, Pozzo reveals this mutual torture in the words:

I can't bear it . . . any longer (*groaning, clutching his head*) the way he goes on . . . you've no idea—it's terrible! . . . he must go . . . (*he brandishes his arm*) . . . I'm going mad . . . (*he collapses, his head in his hands*) . . . I can't bear it . . . any longer . . .

And later (*sobbing*): He used to be so kind . . . so helpful . . . and entertaining . . . my good angel . . . and now . . . he's killing me!

For this mutual fixation Lucky has sacrificed everything, even his soul and his creativeness. And he accepts this abject misery and slavery as a matter which concerns nobody but Pozzo and himself. This is borne out by a little episode in the first act. Pozzo, commenting upon Lucky's voluntary slavery, says:

POZZO: But instead of driving him away as I might have done, I mean instead of simply kicking him out on his backside, in the goodness of my heart I am bringing him to the fair where I hope to get a

good price for him. The truth is you can't drive such creatures away. The best thing would be to kill them. (*Lucky weeps.*)

ESTRAGON: He's crying.

POZZO: Old dogs have more dignity.

But when Estragon tries to wipe Lucky's tears away with Pozzo's handkerchief, Lucky suddenly kicks him in the shinbone.

The relationship of master to serf features prominently in Sartre's writings. He says (cf. Heinemann, 1954) that the sadist attempts to make the other person totally dependent on him, whereas the masochist sees the basis of his own freedom in the freedom of the other. Each one is object to the other and there is no thou.

Significantly, in the second act of our play, Pozzo is blind and Lucky dumb—this is the only change that takes place in any of the figures. This, however, it seems to me, is not really a change but rather a becoming manifest of what was there before: his inability to meet others. It is true that Pozzo's moments of hysterical groaning culminate later in his shouts for help—but he never realizes that he is defeated. Neither does Vladimir nor Estragon. The essence of the play, namely, lies in that it has no climax but, on the contrary, an inexorable levelling down. Pozzo and Lucky are gradually drawn closer to the state of the two vagabonds. In the first act, Pozzo says:

I myself in your situation, if I had an appointment with a Godin . . . Godet . . . Godot . . . anyhow, you see who I mean, I'd wait till it was black night before I gave up . . .

and in the second act, when the blind Pozzo and dumb Lucky leave, Vladimir asks Pozzo: "What do you do when you fall far from help?" And Pozzo replies: "*We wait till we can get up. Then we go on*" (*my italics*).

If we are right in assuming that the Pozzo-Lucky couple are comparable to the collective pseudo-ego, we may expect the tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, to reveal features of the lost value hidden in those who have "something above the average, an overplus for which there is no adequate outlet", of the rejected which will have to come to the rescue of a no longer valid normality.

This is indeed borne out by their role in the play. When, in the second act, the blind Pozzo, who has fallen down and cannot get up, calls out for help, the two tramps keep making futile attempts to assist him and in between they keep forgetting that it concerns them at all, until Vladimir suddenly realizes the human significance of the situation and says:

To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not—

but his momentary awareness of the ego ("all mankind is us") slides back

into what one could call the dominant slogan: "In this immense confusion, one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come."

That passages like this are deliberate, is corroborated by the fact that, as early as 1931, in his essay on Proust, Beckett (p. 5), speaking about man's relation to the future, said: "Lazily considered in anticipation and in the haze of our smug will to live, of our pernicious and incurable optimism, it [the future] seems exempt from the bitterness of fatality: in store *for* us, not in store *in* us" [*my italics*].

### WHO IS GODOT?

Let us now listen to the description of the absent but ubiquitous Godot. The tramps wait for Godot in a state of twilight, occasionally lit up by a fleeting vision of a rescuer. They have vague phantasies of being taken to his farm and being able to "sleep, warm and dry, with a full stomach—on straw". But who is Godot? He seems to be a kind of distant mirage. At the end of each day, a boy-messenger arrives in his stead with the promise that he will come tomorrow. In the first act we hear that he does not beat the boy-messenger, who is a goatherd, but that he beats his brother, who is a shepherd. The two friends feel uneasy about him. When they meet him, they will have to approach him "on their hands and knees" and if they stopped waiting he would punish them. At the end of the second act we hear two more items: Godot does nothing and his beard is—probably—white.

From all this we may gather that Godot has several traits in common with the image of God<sup>1</sup> as we know it from the Old and the New Testament. His white beard reminds one of the image of God's old-father aspect. His irrational preference for one brother recalls Jehovah's treatment of Cain and Abel; so does his power to punish those who would dare to drop him. The discrimination between goatherd and shepherd is reminiscent of the Son of God as the ultimate judge; as a saviour for whom men wait and wait, he might well be meant as a cynical comment on the second coming of Christ; while his doing nothing might be an equally cynical reflection concerning man's forlorn state. This feature, together with Beckett's statement about something being believed to be "in store *for* us, not in store *in* us", seems to show clearly that Beckett points to the sterility of a consciousness that expects and waits for the old activity of God or gods.

But this is not all. Let us go back to the discrimination between goatherd and shepherd. Whereas Matthew (25, 33) says: "And he shall seat the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left", in the play it is the shepherd who is beaten and the goatherd who is favoured. What Vladimir and Estragon expect from Godot is food and shelter, and goats are motherly, milk-providing animals. In antiquity, even the male goats among the deities, like

1. The title of the play is obviously a variation on that of Simone Weil's book *En attendant Dieu*.



Pan and Dionysos, have their origin in the cult of the great mother and the matriarchal mysteries, later to become devils.

We hear that, once, Vladimir and Estragon had *seen* Godot. But they do not remember quite clearly, and the vague promises he seems to have given them are treated with facetiousness born of doubt. In fact, Beckett makes it appear as if, to them, God, Godot, and Pozzo were sometimes merging into one blurred picture. When, in the second act, they talk of God, Pozzo appears and is mistaken by Estragon for Godot. Here the play seems to imply that, today, religion altogether is based on indistinct desires in which spiritual and material needs remain mixed. Godot is explicitly vague, merely an empty promise, corresponding to the lukewarm piety and absence of suffering in the tramps. Waiting for him has become a habit which Beckett calls a "guarantee of dull inviolability . . ." (1931, p. 8), an adaptation to the meaninglessness of life. "The periods of transition," he continues, "that separate consecutive adaptations . . . represent the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment *the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being*" (*ibid.*, *my italics*).

In the play there are even hints at the possibility of such moments of transition, but Beckett takes great care never to let a transformation take place. In one of his more lucid moments, Vladimir tries to make Estragon participate in his own fears about the question of salvation, damnation, or mere death, but Estragon remains unmoved. Vladimir talks about the two thieves who were crucified beside the Saviour and he ponders the fact that only one of the four Evangelists mentions that one of the thieves was going to be saved. (This is a reference to St. Augustine: "Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned" [Schneider, 1958].)

VLADIMIR: One out of four. Of the other three two don't mention any thieves at all and the third says that both of them abused him.

ESTRAGON: What's all this about? Abused who?

VLADIMIR: The Saviour.

ESTRAGON: Why?

VLADIMIR: Because He wouldn't save them.

ESTRAGON: From hell?

VLADIMIR: Imbecile! From death.

ESTRAGON: I thought you said hell.

VLADIMIR: From death, from death.

ESTRAGON: Well, what about it?

VLADIMIR: Then the two of them must have been damned.

ESTRAGON: And why not?

VLADIMIR: But the other Apostle says that one was saved.

ESTRAGON: Well? They don't agree, and that's all there is to it.

VLADIMIR: But all four were there. And only one speaks of a thief being saved.  
Why believe him rather than the others?

ESTRAGON: Who believes him?

VLADIMIR: Everybody. It's the only version they know.

ESTRAGON: People are bloody ignorant apes. (*He rises painfully, goes limping to extreme right, halts, gazes into distance off with his hand screening his eyes, turns, goes to extreme left, gazes into the distance. Vladimir watches him, then goes and picks up Estragon's boot, peers into it, drops it hastily.*)

VLADIMIR: Pah! (*He spits.*)

(*Estragon moves to centre, halts with his back to auditorium.*)

ESTRAGON: Charming spot. (*He turns to front, halts facing auditorium.*) Inspiring prospects. (*He turns to Vladimir.*) Let's go.

VLADIMIR: We can't.

ESTRAGON: Why not?

VLADIMIR: We are waiting for Godot.

It is passages like this that lead us to infer that Beckett is presenting us with a state in modern man in which fear and a flight into clinging to some recognized deity of the past are mixed with doubt and bitterness on the one hand and with tired indifference on the other. This becomes highly probable when we remember that attempts to confront their contemporaries with a deeper awareness of the spiritual void of our time are a central issue in the existentialists' works and altogether in the air. This dread of the void behind the feelings of doubt and bitterness alternating with resignation, is the realm of existence where the "suffering of being" might lead to transition. The passages which describe this mood belong to the most poetic expressions in the play. When, in the second act, the blind Pozzo is about to leave, Vladimir asks him to let Lucky sing and think once more.

POZZO: But he is dumb.

VLADIMIR: Dumb? Since when?

POZZO (*suddenly furious*): Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time? It's abominable. When? When? One day, isn't that enough for you? One day like any other he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, isn't that good enough for you?

And then, suddenly, comes a reference to the feminine. Pozzo, becoming visionary, adds: "They give birth astride of a grave. The light gleams one instant. Then it's night once more."

This passage might be called Pozzo's leitmotiv. The hopeless vision of life as a brilliant moment between the womb and the tomb is stressed and explained by the words, "one day like any other". If one day is like any other,

there is nothing but fruitless repetition and no transition can take place. Pozzo only deteriorates. But, towards the end of the play, Vladimir sinks into a reverie in which Pozzo's vision re-emerges with important additions. He asks himself:

Was I sleeping while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake or think I do, what shall I say of this day? That with Estragon, my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed with his carrier, and talked to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be? . . . (Pause) 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. But habit is a great deadener. At me, too, someone is looking, of me, too, someone is saying: he is sleeping, he does not know that he is asleep. (Pause) I can't go on! (Pause) What have I said? [partly quoted from the French original. Ed.]

Here, most movingly, Vladimir becomes aware of a difference between two possible ways of living life. One awake. One in a state of twilight. And he even realizes that he can't go on—with what? With an existence in which the womb and the tomb seem to fit together like two hemispheres which are lifted apart for a brief moment to let in a ray of light. But, at this very instant, when Vladimir is about to wake up, Godot's boy-messenger appears and destroys the process that was just about to take place in Vladimir. Godot's function seems to be to keep his dependants unconscious. His messenger does not know anything either; he does not know whether he is unhappy or not, or why Godot is kinder to him than to his brother, or, for certain, whether Godot's beard is white. He even fails to recognize the tramps he had seen the day before. (The French version states that it is the same boy.)

The uncertainty and unreliability with which Godot surrounds himself reveal him as highly ambivalent. There is an interesting parallel in Rivkah Schärf's thesis, elaborated in 1948, in which she states that the messenger of God is a personification of God's activity displaying God's ambivalent and unconscious character (p. 22). The unconsciousness and ambivalence of Godot, expressed in his promise to rescue the tramps and his preventing them from becoming conscious, demonstrates exactly what Jung (1952, *Coll. Wks.*, p. 416), speaking about God, formulates in these words: "The fact of God's 'unconsciousness' throws a peculiar light on the doctrine of salvation. Man is not so much delivered from his sins . . . as delivered from *fear of the consequences of sin* . . ." [my italics]. When Vladimir says: "At me, too, someone is looking, of me, too, someone is saying, he is sleeping, he does not know that he is asleep.—I can't go on . . .", he expresses a faint awareness of the sin of unconsciousness and the notion of a knowing witness. The words: "at me, too, *someone* is looking" indicate that a spontaneous image has arisen within Vladimir and that, for a short moment, he is outside the sphere of

habit and conventional expectation. He is aware of an inner witness, "in store in him". But this he cannot endure. (Cf. Nietzsche, 1941, p. 235: "The God that saw all, *even man*—that God could not but die! Man could not endure that such a witness should live.")

The hopelessness of Vladimir's situation, after the advent of the messenger, is as grim as that of Pozzo's vision of life as a flash between the womb and the tomb: Vladimir's flash of consciousness dies between his question "what have I said?" and his relapse into the reliance upon the coming of Godot.

This episode may well explain why there is no woman in this play, that is to say no woman on the human level: the mother goddess, who is both the womb and the tomb, envelops all and everything with her dread power. In ancient Egypt this goddess was known as an upper and a lower hemisphere, not only feared but worshipped in her two aspects as Nut and Naunet. Beckett, however, refrains both from differentiation and from valuation.

Godot is merely ambiguous: as a farmer who promises food and shelter, he is obviously of the earth. As one who reminds us of the God of the Old and the New Testament, he seems to be inclined to rule from above. Furthermore, he beats the keeper of the sheep, that is, of the docile, obediently following creatures, and prefers the minder of the goats, of the wayward, self-willed animals, and yet he obviously expects unconditional patience and obedience from those who depend upon him and prevents their waking up to an awareness of their own centre.

In this duplicity of his nature, he is the counterpart of her who envelops the world and all living beings as womb and tomb. The poetic note of sadness in what I called Pozzo's leitmotiv and in Vladimir's moment of dawning consciousness defines the exact phase of development in the relation between the power of the goddess and the figures in the play. Neumann (1954, p. 45) describes the emergence of self-consciousness in adolescence as one in which "feelings of transitoriness and mortality, impotence and isolation" prevail, "in absolute contrast to the [child's] situation of contentment and containment". Obviously the figures in our play are exactly on the border between these two phases.

### THE DISMEMBERED HUMAN IMAGE

It now becomes clear that, in *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett leads us into a deep regression from all civilized tradition, in which consciousness sinks back into an earlier state of its development, into an *abaissement du niveau mental*, where neglected and rejected contents become activated. Such a regression Jung (1944, *Coll. Wks.*, p. 322) compares to a descent into Hades. This, he considers, is connected with the dissolution of the conscious personality into its functional components; and (1946, *Coll. Wks.*, p. 197) he says: "The painful conflict that begins with the *nigredo* or *tenebrositas* is described by the alchemists as a *separatio* or *divisio elementorum* . . . or as a dismemberment of the body."

In so far as the phenomenon of contemporary drama with which we are concerned has its roots in the general cultural situation and in the increasingly unbearable contrast between conscious aims and unconscious needs, we may understand the four figures in the play as four components of contemporary man. Beckett, to use his own words relating to Proust (1931, p. 34), has "decomposed the illusion of a solid object into its manifold component aspects".

Accordingly, many people have remarked that the play struck them as a product of schizophrenia and lacked all coherence, and Beckett himself is reported to have said that his play was about nothing. In this case it would be noteworthy that, in Beckett's novel *Malone meurt* (1957a, p. 32), the phrase "nothing is more real than nothing" appears as "one of those little phrases which rise from the abyss and don't stop until they drag us down into it" [*my translation*]. This is exactly what I believe Beckett aims at doing to his audience. And it seems particularly relevant to hear what Jung, with reference to Joyce's *Ulysses*, has to say about modern art (1932, trans. p. 11). "It would never occur to me to class *Ulysses* as a product of schizophrenia. . . . *Ulysses* is no more a pathological product than modern art as a whole. It is 'cubistic' in the deepest sense because it resolves the picture of the actual into an immensely complex painting whose dominant note is the melancholy of abstract objectivity . . . The medical description of schizophrenia offers only an analogy in that the schizophrenic has apparently the same tendency to treat reality as if it were strange to him, or, the other way round, to estrange himself from reality . . . In the modern artist [this] tendency is not produced by any disease in the individual but is a manifestation of our time."

As we have seen (cf. p. 46 above), Pozzo, who whips and despises his slave and victim, is a prototype of modern inflated consciousness rejecting and neglecting the flow of inner processes which "happen" and constitute the source of spiritual inspiration: "but for him [the now crushed Lucky] all my thoughts, all my feelings would have been of common things".

The other couple, Vladimir and Estragon, are moved by the impulse towards direct experience which cannot yet express itself in a valid form. Vladimir has a dim awareness of tragedy, which he keeps repressing: "The air is full of our cries, but habit is a great deadener", whereas in Estragon dreams attempt to give voice to what lives in the depths and remains repressed by Vladimir's fear. In the first act, Estragon falls asleep.

*Vladimir halts before Estragon:* Gogo! . . . Gogo! . . . GOGO!

ESTRAGON (*restored to the horror of his situation*): I was asleep. (*Reproachfully*)

Why will you never let me sleep?

VLADIMIR: I felt lonely.

ESTRAGON: I had a dream.

VLADIMIR: Don't tell me.

ESTRAGON: I dreamt that—

VLADIMIR: DON'T TELL ME!

ESTRAGON (*gesture towards the universe*): *This one is enough for you? (Silence.)*  
It's not nice of you, Didi. Who am I to tell my private nightmares to if I can't tell them to you?

VLADIMIR: Let them remain private. You know I can't bear that! [*my italics*].

Just as Vladimir almost discovers the inner witness, Estragon almost discovers the inner universe. But the interplay between the two figures prevents any lasting move towards consciousness.

Jung (1954, *Coll. Wks.*, p. 7) asks: "Why have we not long since discovered the unconscious and raised up its treasure-house of eternal images? Simply because we had a religious formula for everything psychic—and one that is far more beautiful and comprehensive than immediate experience."

This explains why the process of differentiation—or what the alchemists represent as dismemberment—of the human image in the play cannot yet lead to any lasting increase in consciousness: the parts of the psyche of modern man embodied in the two tramps are still prevented from creative confrontation with each other and with their inner voices by the prevailing power of a "beautiful and comprehensive" image that has been handed on, represented by Godot, for whom they wait.

These two features, the juxtaposition of parts of the dismembered whole and a critical and compensatory opposition to the Christian world of ideas, Beckett's play has in common with alchemy, which Jung has described as an undercurrent to the Christianity that ruled on the surface (1944, *Coll. Wks.*, p. 23).

Further details of the play fit well into this set of ideas: First, the fact that the process of confrontation of opposites is arrested by the power of the traditional religious imagery creates an atmosphere of depression and painful frustration throughout. This in itself may be compared with the state of *nigredo* which "was felt as 'melancholia' in alchemy" (Jung, 1944, *Coll. Wks.*, p. 36).

Second, as already stated, the audience is kept hoping for a change which never actually comes about. But, while the curtain is down between the two acts, that is, while the contact between the play and the audience is suspended and the tramps are supposed to be asleep, an apparently insignificant change has taken place: the originally bare tree has produced leaves overnight. And Vladimir remembers that he noticed it when he talked about happiness.

Beckett (1931, p. 49) quotes Proust as saying: "Man is . . . a tree whose stem and leafage are an expression of an inward sap." And Jung (1956, p. 197) quotes the alchemist Mylius: "Into every created thing God has breathed a certain power of germination, i.e. the *greenness* . . ."

In a passage preceding this quotation, Jung interprets this symbolism as follows: "The state of incomplete, merely hoped for and expected *transformation* appears to be not only torture but also a positive though hidden joy.

It depicts the state of a human being who . . . in confrontation with himself, has not only found deadly boredom and melancholia but an opposite . . . , [a] relationship which is experienced as joy, known paradoxically as *benedicta viriditas* or as *leprosititas metallorum*, as a hidden happiness and also as a suffering or illness."

It is, however, as we saw, not the figures in the play who are confronted with themselves and who found an opposite but the author who wrote, and those among the audience who were affected by, the play. To them the entire play is a confrontation with an opposite and therefore not "deadly boredom and melancholia" but a "relationship which is experienced . . . as a hidden happiness and also as a suffering or illness".

Third: the tramps wait for a rescuer whom they see as a fatherly figure, whereas the only indication of hope that occurs in the play is that "greenness" of which Jung (1956, p. 197) says that one could call this power the *anima mundi*.

Neumann (1956, p. 201), following Jung, equates the mother goddess with the unconscious and says: "Western culture and religion, society and morals are mainly formed by this [Jewish-Christian father-god] image and the psychic structure of the individual is partly made ill by it . . . Today, as always, the battle of Western consciousness is fought in the spirit of the Old Testament war that Jahveh waged against the mother-goddess."

If we are justified in assuming that the compensatory trend in the unconscious of our time, speaking through Beckett, wages this same war from the opposite side, namely in favour of the latent values in the unconscious and against the obsolete and dying conventions and attitudes, we may expect, in his later plays, a further development in the relation between these two elements.

In *Waiting for Godot* we saw the inability of the two figures in each couple to let each other go, although the stagnating quality of their togetherness was amply expressed. The wish to control (Pozzo) and the wish to be protected (Lucky) remain inseparable. So do the impotence of consciousness (Vladimir) and the power of unconsciousness (Estragon).

This inseparability of factors of potential conflict expresses a state of latency in the psyche. This state of suspense is maintained throughout the play by means of a deliberate lack of continuity which ensures the ebbing off of every impulse and move towards change.

## ENDGAME

In Beckett's next play, *Endgame* (1958), the situation is markedly different as it leads up to a sudden crisis. It takes place in a bare interior with, high up, two small windows. The light in it is grey. The world outside has come to an end. In the centre sits the blind Hamm, who cannot stand on his feet. His dressing-gown is suggestive of a cardinal's robe and he wears a skullcap. A

bloodstained handkerchief covers his face when the curtain is raised. "Motionless, by the door, his eyes fixed on Hamm", stands his servant Clov, who cannot sit and who can only totter. Once again there is a blind master and his servant, but this time it is not they who represent the collective pseudo-ego (cf. p. 42 above) but Hamm's sentimental and infantile parents, who only occasionally half emerge from the ashbins to which they are confined.

The master and his servant seem again inseparable. But they do not live in a state of twilight; they both suffer consciously and, in and between them, an active intelligence makes moves and countermoves as in a game of chess. When Clov asks, "What is there to keep me here?" Hamm replies: "*The dialogue*" [*my italics*]. Hamm combines Pozzo's tendency to control and to be in the centre with Vladimir's longing for and fear of deeper meaning. And Clov is a mixture of Lucky's dependence with Estragon's openness to what goes on inside him. His recurring remark is "Something takes its course"; and, in the end, something indeed does take its course in him, in Hamm, and in the total situation.

Whereas the tramps in *Godot* played with the idea of suicide in an insincere and facetious way because of their immense fear of dying, Hamm learns to meet death, and Clov, unlike Lucky, finally finds it possible to leave his master and to let him die.

CLOV: I say to myself—sometimes, Clov, you must learn to suffer better than that if you want them to weary of punishing you—one day. I say to myself—sometimes, Clov, you must be there better than that if you want them to let you go—one day . . . (*Pause*) Then, one day, *suddenly, it ends, it changes*, I don't understand, *it dies, or it's me* [*my italics*], I don't understand that either . . . I open the door of the cell and go. I am so bowed I only see my feet, if I open my eyes, and between my legs a little trail of black dust. I say to myself that the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit. (*Pause*) . . . It's easy going [in French: *ça va tout seul*]. (*Pause*) When I fall I'll weep for happiness.

And whereas in *Waiting for Godot*, he who is incessantly expected never comes, in *Endgame*, in the world which has come to an end, in which nothing familiar is left and where nothing is expected any more, the unexpected appears.

A child, a small boy, seated motionless on the ground and, as far as Clov can see through his telescope, looking at his navel, is the signal for Hamm to realize that the time has come for him to face the end and for Clov to be able to leave. The curtain falls on this "moment of transition" in which the old ego dies and the new is about to emerge. The blind and lame Hamm, left without an answer from Clov, who has been looking after him, and therefore left to die—the parents have died already—*actively* adjusts himself to the situation and says: "Me to play. Old endgame lost of old, play and lose and



have done with losing." And, finally, taking from his pocket the handkerchief with which he is to cover his face, he ends with the words:

Since that's the way we're playing it . . . (he unfolds handkerchief) let's play it that way . . . (he unfolds) and speak no more about it . . . (he finishes unfolding) . . . speak no more. (He holds the handkerchief spread out before him.) Old stancher! (Pause) You . . . remain. (Pause. He covers his face with handkerchief, lowers his arms to armrests, remains motionless. Curtain.)

He thus turns the process of dying into an act of dying, whereas in Clov the act of leaving is born out of an inner process: "suddenly it ends, it changes, I don't understand, it dies, or it's me, I don't understand that either . . ."

### AN IMAGE OF THE SELF

The progression from *Waiting for Godot* to *Endgame* consists not only in the continuation of the process of *separatio* and *nigredo* (in *Endgame* we hear that the whole place stinks of corpses), but also in the fact that in *Waiting for Godot* the old conventional god (Godot) prevents the emergence of the inner witness, whereas in *Endgame* the inner liberation is heralded by the advent of—may we say—a child-god. The "small boy" is—in the French original—called a "mighty procreator" and is described as contemplating his navel.

This description of the child and the empty world in which it appears corresponds almost exactly to the imagery in the Indian story of Markandeya. This saint, after having wandered all over the earth, inside the body of the creator, for a hundred years, at last slips out of the god's mouth and, as he believes, outside the realm of illusion. And there, "in the world which, devoid of all beings, is one great waste of ocean . . ." he beholds "a child playing fearlessly". Later the child says to the saint: "I am thy procreator, child, am thy Father and Elder . . ." And when Markandeya asks to be shown the essential truth beyond all illusion, the god replies: "I am the primal being out of whom everything is born . . . I am the cycle of the year that creates all and swallows it back again . . . I am the bringer of the end of all created beings and am called the death of all . . . I am the highest truth . . . I am from the first beginning and am the highest refuge . . . Thus speaking, the primordial Lord draws Markandeya swiftly to his mouth. There the great saint re-enters the body of the Exalted One . . ." where he now stays in a place of solitude listening to the song of the swan who is the great god (Zimmer, 1936, p. 54, my translation).

As little as this parallelism suggests that Beckett knows this Indian myth does it in any way point to an "Indian solution". What it does show is that in Beckett the unconscious produces a symbolism relevant to the problem of truth and illusion.

In *Waiting for Godot* the inner truth made itself heard at moments but was never given a chance of victory over the power of Godot's promise.

In *Endgame*, however, the old father-god is discarded. Hamm's attempt to pray to him together with Nagg (his father) and Clov bears this out:

NAGG (*clasping his hands, closing his eyes, in a gabble*): Our father which art . . .

HAMM: Silence! In silence! Where are your manners? (*Pause*) Off we go.

(*Attitude of prayer. Silence. Abandoning his attitude, discouraged.*) Well?

CLOV (*abandoning his attitude*): What a hope! And you?

HAMM: Sweet damn all! (*To Nagg*) And you?

NAGG: Wait! (*Pause. Abandoning his attitude.*) Nothing doing!

HAMM: The bastard! He doesn't exist!

CLOV: *Not yet [my italics].*

Therefore, what remained latent in *Godot* is developed in *Endgame*: the experience of transition. What was there the sprouting of a tree is here the appearance of a human figure, the "small boy", who corresponds to the solemn change towards merciless reality in Hamm and ruthless acceptance of freedom in Clov. As the outer manifestation of this conjunction of will and surrender in both, he may be regarded as an image of the self.

### BECKETT'S RESTRAINT

Beckett, however, refuses to acknowledge this image which occurred to him as a valid symbolic expression. In the English version of *Endgame* (1958) he has dropped Clov's ecstasy at discovering the "small boy" and his description of him as sitting motionless on the ground and looking at his navel; and instead of calling him a mighty procreator, *un procréateur en puissance* (1957c), he is reduced to a "potential procreator".

Equally, in his English version of *Godot*, Beckett has dimmed the contrast between the inner voice of consciousness and Vladimir's anxious repression. In the French edition the inner witness says: "He is asleep; he does not know that he is asleep", and in the English translation: "He is asleep; he knows nothing; let him sleep on."

These alterations seem significant for Beckett's own response to what happens in his plays. There is no doubt that he is intensely concerned with the conflict between the old "beautiful formulae" of our cultural tradition on the one hand and latent new values in the human psyche on the other. Hamm exclaims: "I love the old questions. (*With fervour*) Ah the old questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them." Beckett's ardent participation as an author in this struggle between the old and the new has, gradually but irresistibly, led him to a "no" to the old but the new remains a mere potentiality. In *Endgame* the old god is discarded, the parents die, the entire world has come to an end, and, between Hamm and Clov, "the old pact is out of date" (Beckett, 1931, p. 10)—but no encounter takes place between Clov and the "small boy". If they did meet, a pessimist might feel—as Hamm did when he heard that there was still a flea about: "But humanity might start

from there all over again!" Once more, someone older would take pity on an orphan, as long ago Hamm did on Clov, and then a "new habit" would be created that would "empty the mystery [of transition] of its threat—and also of its beauty" (ibid., p. 11).

This hesitation in *Endgame* to move on to a further cycle after the hint at a new life would amount to taking sides—and that Beckett refuses to do. His friend, Alan Schneider (1958), quotes him as saying: "I take no sides. I am interested in the shape of ideas . . . It is the shape that matters."

Thus Beckett insists on doing nothing but shaping the antithesis in man's soul without giving preference to either side. His disinclination to believe in and trust any accomplished processes or "solutions", let alone to hint at anything like "meanings", leads him back to the suspension of knowledge and will that is the one dominant note of the short mime, *Act without Words*, added to *Endgame* in the original production as well as in the publication.

There "the man", tossed about in the desert by whistling noises and by illusionary objects, slowly learns that whatever presents itself to him either recedes or collapses as soon as he attempts to grasp it or to use it for his purpose. In the end the flask of water that he tried in vain to reach appears in front of his face without being acknowledged by him, and now both it and all the other objects disappear into the heights from where they came, while he remains immobile, looking at his hands.

This "man", alone in a desert, is a grim counterpart to the hope-bringing "small boy" in *Endgame* who, in a world devoid of living beings and objects, contemplated his navel.

## EGO AND GODHEAD

To the not keenly observant onlooker "the man" would appear to succumb to utter hopelessness and numbed despair. Yet his final endurance—after his total defeat he sits motionless and erect until the curtain falls—expresses a dignity and concentration which stand in vivid contrast to the meandering semi-hopelessness and disorientation of the figures in *Waiting for Godot*.

Such an "enduring" Heidegger (cf. Kaufmann, 1957, p. 214) calls an "out-braving the utmost", and he says that together with a "standing in the openness of Being" it constitutes "the full essence of existence".

In this context, "the man" would answer a demand dictated by the psychological situation of our time, in which the extreme amount of inessential knowing and willing calls for a compensatory image of essential Being.

The progression from the *four* unrelated fragments of the personality in *Godot* to the dialogue between the *two* opposing sides in *Endgame* thus culminates in the *one* in *Act without Words*.

The comparability between this one "man" and the "small boy" reminds us of what Jung (1955, p. 119) says about the relation between the ego and

the Godhead: "It is the usual conviction of the West that there is the vastest difference between God and the ego; India, however, takes their identity for granted . . . The alchemists have at least had a notion of the secret godlikeness [of the ego] . . . The East solved these confusingly contradictory aspects [of man's smallness and godlikeness] by letting the personal atman merge into the universal atman and thereby declaring the ego to be a play of maya . . . Where his [the Western alchemist's] . . . symbol reaches the level of conscious gnosis, however, it is just the smallness and humbleness of the ego which gives rise to the recognition of identity in extreme oppositeness."

### NO "OPTIMISTIC ANTICIPATION"

Here the parallel between the imagery in Beckett's plays and that of the alchemist's may seem to come to an end. "Conscious gnosis" means not only the emergence of reconciling images but the conscious acknowledgement and valuation of their impact upon the entire personality.

The road, however, between the appearance of these images and their taking hold of the total being is a long and precarious one. Fordham (1957) has stressed the painful length of the process in which a person is more and more gripped by his symbolical experiences until, in the end, they "become more and more real and abiding" and "throw [him] together' into a unity" (p. 61). This experience of wholeness, which defies explanation and understanding and which befalls man as it did Clov when he saw the "small boy", is everywhere connected with child images: the child is unbroken and entirely itself.

In this context it is noteworthy that in Beckett's radio-play *All that Fall* (1957b), which was performed shortly before *Endgame* and *Act without Words*, we are given to guess that a blind, embittered old man has killed a child by pushing it out of the train.

Speaking of another child who acts as his daily guide to and from the train, he says to his wife:

HE: Did you ever wish to kill a child? (*Pause*) Nip some young doom in the bud? (*Pause*) Many a time at night, in winter, on the black road home, I nearly attacked the boy. (*Pause*) Poor Derry! (*Pause*) What restrained me then? (*Pause*) Not fear of man. (*Pause*) Shall we go backwards now a little?

WIFE: Backwards?

HE: Yes. Or you forwards and I backwards. The perfect pair. Like Dante's damned, with their faces arsy-versy. Our tears will water our bottoms.

In *Endgame* this theme recurs. There Hamm has an elaborate fantasy in which he refuses to give a man food to save his child because, as he passionately argues, life "on earth" is "beyond remedy".

There is obviously a link between the theme of infanticide and the way in

which women, mothers, and mother-symbols are treated in Beckett's plays. In *Waiting for Godot* the female was either symbolically implied and cursed (by Pozzo) as "this bitch of the earth", or accused for "giving birth astride of a grave". In *Endgame*, apart from the nostalgic dying mother in the dust-bin, one woman is merely mentioned in a fragment of dialogue. She is Mother Pegg, to whom Hamm has refused oil for her lamp so that she "died of darkness".

The wife in *All that Fall* is the only woman who is real and even painted in vivid colours. She is enormous and shapeless, "a big pale blur" who laments for her only child, a daughter who died as a little girl, and for the lost *raison d'être* of her savage femininity. Yet, she takes a pride in always having been, and still being, "alive to all that is going on": "Oh, if you had my eyes . . . you would understand . . . the things they have seen . . . and not looked away . . ." None of the horrors of what she has seen, not even that of her own decay, can rob her of her undying emotional vitality. Talking aloud to herself on her way to the station, she says:

"Oh, I am just a hysterical old hag I know, destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and church-going and fat and rheumatism and childlessness. (*Pause. Brokenly*) Minnie! Little Minnie! (*Pause*) Love that is all I ask, a little love, daily, twice daily, fifty years of twice daily love like a Paris horse-butcher's regular, what normal woman wants affection? A peck on the jaw in the morning, near the ear and another at evening, peck, peck, till you grow whiskers on you. There is that lovely laburnum again."

Here the open-eyed, disintegrated woman and the blind, embittered child-killer present a contrast unknown in any other of Beckett's plays. In her, one feels, life spills over its own boundaries, still turbulent amidst decay and death, and untroubled by the quest for meaning, whereas her blind husband, ruled by the fear of life and of emotions, has always been obsessed by fantasies of killing the child (in himself). He knows he is damned and obviously expects his end to be near: he promises his boy-guide a penny on Monday ". . . if I am alive". His last words are an attempt to prevent his wife from learning that "a little child . . . fell out of the carriage . . . on to the line . . . under the wheels", and his last utterance is a groan. Similarly, in *Endgame*, the blind Hamm—who had the fantasy of not saving the child, who let Mother Pegg die of darkness, and whose fear of life prevented him from ever "being there"—prepares himself for death.

Clov, however, and the "small boy" remain; and, in the mime, "the man" in the desert does not collapse.

Thus, in Beckett's plays, the carriers of life, future, and wholeness prevail over those of negation, despair, and defeat. In spite—or should one say because of—the author's explicit refusal to "take sides", "something takes its course". It is conceivable that, in Beckett's work, which, in my view, presents a fundamental problem of contemporary man, the process in which the

images of wholeness become "more and more real and abiding" has to be an exceptionally long-drawn-out one, because an optimistic "anticipation" of the future, "lazily considered . . . in the haze of our smug will to live", would be an inadequate response to the grave collective situation of our time.

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