

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

**Quiet Desperation of Modern Life: A Study of Beckett's *Happy Days***

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social  
Sciences, Ratna Rajay Laxmi Campus, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu,  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in English

by

Sarika Thapa

March 2007

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

This thesis submitted to the Department of English, Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus, Kathmandu by Sarika Thapa entitled “Quiet Desperation in Modern Life: A Study of Beckett’s *Happy Days*” has been approved by the undersigned members of the Thesis Committee.

Research Committee Members

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

External Examiner: \_\_\_\_\_

Head : \_\_\_\_\_

Department of English

Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus, Kathmandu

Date:

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost gratitude goes to Mr. Hrisheekesh Upadhyaya, the Head of Department of English, Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus, Kathmandu, for the acceptance of this research work. I am equally obliged to Mr. Hari Adhikari, Lecturer, for his valued supervision to turn this research work into reality. I am indebted to British Council, Kathmandu, and Tribhuvan University Library, Kritipur, for their support for the pursuit of materials.

The whole research work and its achievement have been dedicated to my parents Mr. Bhupal Singh Thapa and Mrs. Bhima Kumari Thapa and my whole family, the source and inspiration of my living, and without whom this work would never have been possible. I am thankful to everybody who stood by me in course of research regardless of their inconvenience.

Sarika Thapa

## Table of Contents

<b>Approval Letter</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Chapter I    Affluent yet Depressed: Absurdist Ambience in</b>	
<b>Post World War II Drama</b>	<b>1</b>
European Life in the 1950s	1
Living in Transition: Beckett and his Works	6
Modernism: A Cultural Response to Modern Life	12
Modernism	14
Precursors to Modernism	15
The Beginning of Modernism	18
The Explosion of Modernism (1910 – 1930)	20
High Modernism (1930 – 1945)	23
Goal of Modernism	25
Modernism in Literature	25
Beckett as Modernist	30
Postmodern Spirit in Beckett’s Later Works	33
<b>Chapter II    Beckett’s World: Seeking Meaning in Meaningless Life</b>	<b>40</b>
Textual Overview of <i>Happy Days</i>	40
Happiness versus Existentialist Angst	43
Existentialist Outlook on Beckett and his <i>Happy Days</i>	48
<b>Chapter III    Quiet Desperation in Beckett’s <i>Happy Days</i></b>	<b>54</b>
Winnie’s Predicament: Parody of Modern Happiness	54

Possibility/ Impossibility of Happiness in Modern Life	61
<b>Chapter IV Desperate Cure for Incurable Conditions? Some Conclusions</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Works Cited</b>	<b>71</b>

## **Chapter - I**

### **Affluent Yet Depressed: Absurdist Ambience in Post World War II Drama**

#### **European Life in the 1950s**

After the World War II, the three revolutionary upsurges, namely socialism, national liberation in colonized countries and workers' struggle in developed capitalist countries, constituted a synthesized and direct attack to both the stronghold and the backyard of capitalism. The struggle between capitalism and socialism, between the capitalist road and the non-capitalist road became the major contents of the transitional time from capitalism to socialism all over the world.

In response, the US, Britain and other capitalist countries sought to establish a new capitalist system to obtain global domination; the ambition the German and Japanese fascists once had failed to realize through war. The new capitalist system was to fulfill these three essential tasks; consolidating and reinforcing the capitalist countries' alliance, of which the North Atlantic Treaty Organization played the pivotal role; taming the Third World countries and bringing them back under the control of imperialism; and terminating the socialist system, the greatest menace to the survival of capitalism.

However, after the World War II, when people had just escaped from the hell of slaughtering and destruction, of concentration camps and human gas chambers, they tended to be more humanitarian and tolerant, and they were said to ardently wish for a peaceful and better life. European and the North American countries' economies recovered and strongly developed. Capitalism embarked on an unprecedentedly long period of growth, seemingly challenging all theories on the chronic crisis circles. Reviving from the war, capitalism in 1950-1960 withdrew its fangs and claws and did its utmost to 'peacefully emulate' with the socialist system obviously of great superiority in many aspects. The capitalism launched a new strategy, which first and

foremost aimed at winning over the socialism in economic terms, provoked arm races to weaken the USSR and other socialist countries, supported Germany-Japan and the bourgeoisie governments in some formerly colonized countries of important geopolitical position, and implemented some social policies to buy off workers and Trade Unions' leaders.

It can be said that Keynes' post-World War II model of capitalism was a transitional model that capitalists must temporarily accept amidst adverse world's changes. Welfare States, Trade Unions' movements and democratic socialism existed in parallel with the newly-born socialism system. The struggle inside capitalism and the external changes both took effect and created a more human face for capitalism. It was in this period that 'people's capitalism' was first mentioned. However, the real ideological foundation for post-World War II capitalism was the doctrine of neo-liberalism by Friedrich Hayek, a nobel economic laureate who considered inequality not a failure of capitalism but an inevitable consequence and an indispensable condition for good performance of the economy. Capitalism ranks inequality as a major value not only within countries but also in international affairs. This is reflected through capitalism's unequal development mentioned by Marxist-Leninist classics. Neo-liberalism is against state control over the market and against welfare state, which, according to its argument, encourages egalitarianism. Neo-liberalism views social justice as a destroyer to markets' freedom, citizens' liberty and talents' vitality: two major determinants of people's success; considers its ideal to create conditions for the strong to win and the weak to lose; regards competition as the only motivation for development and opts for liberalization, deregulation and privatization as fundamental strategies. This led the Europeans along with the United States towards extreme point of the economic growth leaving rest of the world far behind in terms of their accessibility to the world assets.

To maintain this disparity, no sooner had the war ended than the US and Britain gave birth to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), usually known as the World Bank. These are the major instruments for capitalism to establish its global economic-financial and trade dominance. Consequently, the US proposed to create a General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) instead of an International Trade Organization (ITO). GATT would constitute a set of rules that covered tariffs reduction, non-tariffs barriers removal and strictly limited room for Government's intervention in private economy and trade. They argued that fast economic growth could only be achieved in such free trade (Thanh).

This is a false rhetoric. Realities show the contrary. Extremely high tariff barriers were indeed put in place in the stage of development and industrialization in capitalist countries to protect their domestic industries. Tariff liberalization had not been introduced until their domestic industries gained enough strength to compete with imported goods. In late eighteenth century, the industrial revolution began in Britain in favorable conditions brought about by pragmatic mercantilism for raising export of textile and other industrial goods. The principle of laissez-faire, Adam Smith's theory of free market or David Ricardo's theory of free trade, were accepted in the United Kingdom only when the country had reached a far higher productive capacity over its neighbouring countries France and Germany.

This gave birth to ubiquity of mass media and mass production, and shift from manufacturing to service economies; variously described as consumerism or, the late capitalism, a context where manufacturing, distribution and dissemination have become exceptionally inexpensive, but social connection and community have become more expensive. It gave rise to more rapid transportation, wider communication and ability to abandon standardization of mass production, leading to



a system which values a wider range of capital than previously, and allows value to be stored in a greater variety of forms. And, obviously, people had to make sacrifices in various forms in the name of progress.

A second dimension of flexibility, 'place' flexibility, is an increasingly important feature of life for European workers. Spatial mobility, especially for managers and professionals like scientists, engineers, and accountants, has typically involved inter-regional moves, but increasingly it involves moving internationally for relatively short periods as 'skilled transients', causing people to lose the concept of home. Housing now is complex space; even though 'being together' remains a conjugal norm, housing as a 'unity' is disintegrating under the effects of increasing mobility demanded in the pursuit of paid work. There has been a growth in the number of computer couples who have two places of residence involving inter-regional and international weekly or less-frequent commutes.

It is said that, by this moment workaholic European life had turned into 'grab and go' society. According to a survey published in local newspaper, European families were spending more than ever before on 'convenience living' to cope with the demands of modern life. Three quarters of working parents said that lack of time forced them to pay somebody else to their cleaning, ironing, cooking or dye, and nearly half were too busy to spend quality time with family or friends.

A nationwide survey of 1,000 adults, in Britain, conducted by NOP, the polling organization, confirms that the 'Grab and Go' society is here to stay with families paying financially and emotionally to balance the pressure of work and home.

"Today's working families are richer in material terms than their counterparts of just 30 years ago but are becoming increasingly time poor. It seems that we're all working a lot harder just to stand still and

we have become so busy that we have to spend more and more money to try to keep our households running smoothly', said Bridget Walsh, the group marketing manager of Abbey National, who commissioned the research. (Hardill 123)

Nearly three-quarters of the families said they bought take away food at least once a week because they could not find the time to cook. People in London, with or without children, were the most likely to buy take-aways, 49 per cent overall, followed by those in Yorkshire at 45 per cent and Scotland at 43 per cent. Nearly two-thirds of the people who worked full time to visit the supermarket and shopped instead at local convenience stores, adding more than 20 pound a week to their food bill. The increasing pace of life has made it more difficult for nearly 70 per cent of the population to manage their time. The survey showed that 37 per cent of those questioned had forgotten an important anniversary or birthday in the last 12 months. People with children found that they were too busy to go to the cinema , 49 per cent, to organise holidays, 36 per cent, to do the gardening, 37 per cent (Hardill 91).

The increasing popularity of the organizations such as TEN, Time Energy Network, which organizes birthdays and anniversaries of people reminding those people about it and arranging everything to celebrate it, proves how busy those people are and to what extent they are not aware of their personal as well as familial happiness.

Growth in individualism had affected leisure and consumption patterns of the European life in number of ways. The rapid growth in the number of single person households, decline in fertility, growth of divorce and rising levels of income for some women are some of the more obvious in individual training regimes via cycling, swimming and gymnasias, at the expense of team and competitive sport, is a further

reflection of this. There has been an increase in the obsession with health and fitness, bodies and performance as well.

There had been a decline of formal religion during the last few decades, though most of the European countries claim to remain predominantly Christian countries. No doubt that there had been decline in an alarming rate of church-going and adherence to formal organisations. Membership of Christian churches had declined, and the form of the Christian community does not remain same as before (Hardill 101).

All in all, people were tired of blind, uncaring corporate world which alienates individuals from their own individual meaning so that rather than becoming to be 'something', the actualization of their potential, they become rather 'nothing', by devaluing and disregard of their potential they are never able to actualize themselves in society as productive members of a process directed towards an end, they become mere tool to be used and dispensed with as needed.

### **Living in Transition: Beckett and his Works**

Samuel Beckett was born near Dublin, Ireland, on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 1906. Raised in a middle class, Protestant home, the son of a quantity surveyor, William Beckett Jr. and a nurse, Mary Roe, he was a typical child passing summer afternoons painting with his brother and mother, taking piano lessons, and having more boisterous times with his father. In his late childhood, Beckett, the only one in his family who loved books, began a careful keeping of them in his own uncluttered section of his shared bedroom. At the age of 14, he was sent off to attend the Portora Royal School and he admitted Trinity College, Dublin in 1923 where he took his B.A. degree in 1927, having specialized in French and Italian.

Looking back on his childhood, he once remarked, "I had little talent for happiness." Beckett was consistent in his loneliness. The unhappy boy soon grew into

an unhappy young man, often so depressed that he stayed in bed until mid afternoon. He was difficult to engage in any lengthy conversation; it took hours and lots of drinks to warm him up; but the women could not resist him. The lonely young poet, however, would not allow anyone to penetrate his solitude. He once remarked, after rejecting advances from James Joyce's daughter, that he was dead and had no feelings that were humans. In 1928, Samuel Beckett moved to Paris, and the city quickly won his heart. Shortly after he arrived, a mutual friend introduced him to James Joyce, and Beckett quickly became an apostle of the older writer. Beckett worked as a teacher in Belfast and lecturer in English at the Ecole Normale Superieure in Paris, during which time he became a friend of James Joyce. He also translated a fragment of the book into French under Joyce's supervision. In 1931 Beckett returned to Dublin and received his M.A. in the same year. He taught French at Trinity College until 1932, when he resigned to devote his time entirely to writing. After his father died, Beckett received an annuity that enabled him to settle in London, where he underwent psychoanalysis during the years 1935-36 (Kenner 39).

At the age of twenty three, he wrote an essay in defense of Joyce's magnum opus against the public's lazy demand for easy comprehensibility. A year later, in 1930, he made his debut as a poet with "Whoroscope", a ninety-eight-line poem accompanied by seventeen footnotes for which he won his first literary prize – ten pounds. In this dramatic monologue, the protagonist, Rene Descartes, waits for his morning omelet of well-aged eggs, while meditating on the obscurity of theological mysteries, the passage of time, and the approach of death. After writing a collection of essays, "Proust" (1931), however, the young man came to the conclusion that habit and routine were the "cancer of time", so he gave up his post at Trinity College and set out on a nomadic journey. Beckett made his way through Ireland, France, England, and Germany, all the while writing poems and stories and doing odd jobs to

get by. In the course of his journeys, he no doubt came into contact with many tramps and wanderers, and these acquaintances would later translate into some of his finest characters. Whenever he happened to pass through Paris, he would call on Joyce, and they would have long visits. It was rumored that they mostly sit in silence, both suffused with sadness. Beckett finally settled down in Paris in 1937. Shortly thereafter, in 1938 he was stabbed in the street by a man who had approached him asking for money. He had to be taken to the hospital with a perforated lung. After his recovery, he went to visit his assailant in prison. When he asked the other man why he had attacked him, he replied "Je ne sais pas, Monsieur", a phrase hauntingly reminiscent of some of the writer's later works. Around this time he met Suzanne Dechevaux-Dumesnil, a piano student, whom he married in 1961.

During World War II, Beckett stayed in Paris; even after it had become occupied by the Germans. He joined the underground movement and fought for the resistance until 1942 when several members of his group were arrested and he was forced to flee with his French-born wife to the unoccupied zone. In 1945, after it had been liberated from the Germans, he returned to Paris and began his most prolific period as a writer.

Samuel Beckett is regarded as a postmodernist, whose works are concerned with human suffering and survival, and his characters are struggling with meaninglessness and the world of the nothing. Most of his works are written in French and subsequently translated into English with substantial changes. Beckett said that when he wrote in French it was easier to write 'without style'; he did not try to be elegant. With the change of language Beckett escaped from everything with which he was familiar. These books reflected Beckett's bitter realization that there is no escape from illusions and from the Cartesian compulsion to think, to try to solve

insoluble mysteries. Beckett was obsessed by a desire to create what he called, 'a literature of the unword'.

As an avant-garde writer Beckett fretted from the start of his career over the inescapable signification that accompanies the words he wants to use abstractly. In a world deprived of meaning how can the linguistic artist express this meaninglessness with words that necessarily convey meaning? How can he produce what he called a "literature of the unword?" Throughout his long writing life Beckett conducted a war on words that led him to startling innovations in form and language (Finney 19).

He waged a lifelong war on words, trying to yield the silence that underlines them. Samuel Beckett's first play, *Eleutheria*, mirrors his own search for freedom, revolving around a young man's efforts to cut himself loose from his family and social obligations. His novel *Molloy* (1951) depicts two storytellers Molloy and Moran in a quest for the word that will make the journeys real since their travels exist only in the travelogues they write. In the same year appeared his next novel *Malone Dies* (1951) where Malone, a narrator, writes a diary and describes his present state as he awaits his imminent death, moving from the 'almost lifeless' to the 'lifeless'. In *The Unnamable* (1953) the Unnamable, as a narrator, expresses despair over the limitations of language, suggestion the inadequacy of personal pronouns, tenses, punctuation and, finally, all language. The obsession with the inability to speak, and the inability to be silent, gives rise to the often-quoted last line, "I can't go on, you must go on, I'll go on."

His first real triumph, however, came on January 5, 1953, when *Waiting for Godot* premiered at the Théâtre de Babylone. Written in 1949 and published in English in 1954, the tragic-comedy in two acts brought Beckett international fame and established him as one of the leading names of the theater of absurd. In spite of some expectations to the contrary, the strange little play in which "nothing happens"

became an instant success, made the history of running for four hundred performances at the Théâtre de Babylone and enjoying the critical praise of dramatists as diverse as Tennessee Williams, Jean Anouilh, Thornton Wilder, and William Saroyan who remarked, "It will make it easier for me and everyone else to write freely in the theatre" (Federman 7). *Waiting for Godot* deals with two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, meet near a bare tree on a country road, who wait, seemingly endlessly, for Godot, an elusive figure who they expect can save them from their misery, boredom, and despair. Perhaps the most famous production of *Waiting for Godot*, however, took place in 1957 when a company of actors from the San Francisco Actors' Workshop presented it at the San Quentin penitentiary for an audience of over fourteen hundred convicts. The production was a great success. The prisoners understood as well as Vladimir and Estragon that life means waiting, killing time and clinging to the hope that relief may be just around the corner. If not today, then perhaps tomorrow, Beckett secured his position as a master dramatist on April 3, 1957, when his second masterpiece, *Endgame*, premiered (in French) at the Royal Court Theatre in London. It developed further one of Beckett's central themes, men in mutual dependence where his unconventional characters Hamm and Clov occupy a room with Nagg and Nell who are in dustbin. In *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), an old man listens to taped recordings of himself from an earlier part of his life; the play sets up ironic tensions, repetitions, and echoes, questioning the continuity of identity over time. Beckett renders death palpable by having Krapp gaze, with fear, into the dark; death is waiting behind him and unconsciously he is seeking. In 1961, there came Beckett's yet another mysterious two act play, *Happy Days* which deals with a middle aged woman who is slowly sinking into the ground as she chatters about trivial matters; like some of the earlier works, the play features a struggle to gain control over time and the instability and decay of identity and personality.

Although English was his native language, all of Samuel Beckett's major works were originally written in French; a curious phenomenon since Beckett's mother tongue was the accepted international language of the twentieth century. But he chose to write his masterpieces in French because he wanted the discipline and economy of expression that an acquired language would force upon on him. Beckett's dramatic works do not rely on the traditional elements of drama. He trades in plot, characterization, and final solution, which had hitherto been the hallmarks of drama, for a series of concrete stage images. Language is useless, for he creates a mythical universe peopled by lonely creatures who struggle vainly to express the inexpressible. His characters exist in a terrible dreamlike vacuum, overcome by an overwhelming sense of bewilderment and grief, grotesquely attempting some form of communication, then crawling on, endlessly. Samuel Beckett was the first of the absurdist to win international fame. His works have been translated into over twenty languages. In 1969 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. He remained comparatively healthy until old age, a man who enjoyed good drink and friends, a vastly improved over the wretch he had been back in Ireland with his mother. He lived for decades with Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil, whom he married when she was sixty one and he was fifty five so that he could protect her financial future as his heir and executor. By nature diffident, distant, and reclusive, Beckett nevertheless was known for his kindness and politesse. He continued to write until his death in 1989, but the task grew more and more difficult with each work until, in the end, he said that each word seemed to him "an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness."

### **Modernism: A Cultural Response to Modern Life**

Modernity is simply the sense or the idea that the present is discontinuous with the past that through a process of social and cultural change either through



improvement, that is, progress, or through decline; life in the present is fundamentally different from life in the past. This sense or idea as a world view contrasts with tradition, which is simply the sense that the present is continuous with the past, that the present in some way repeats the forms, behavior, and events of the past.

Some critics take the modernity as a problem, terming it as the "crisis of modernity" that traditional ways of life have been replaced with uncontrollable change and unmanageable alternatives. The crisis itself is merely the sense that the present is a transitional point not focused on a clear goal in the future but simply changing through forces outside our control; this idea that the present is characterized by directionless change we call the "postmodern".

We experience modernity as a proliferation of alternatives either in regard to lifestyle or historical possibilities; future directed behavior, as opposed to tradition, tends to accelerate the proliferation of alternatives. Traditional cultures see themselves as repeating a finite number of alternatives in the present; whereas in modern cultures, the future opens up a vast field of historical and lifestyle choices. This proliferation of alternatives is a source of great anxiety and often results in cultural attempts to restrict alternatives in the face of this anxiety. Let's keep in mind that it is not the alternatives themselves which create this anxiety, it is the sense that the proliferation of alternatives has become unmanageable.

Modernity has created a worldview in us that is primarily abstract, that is, we experience the world as composed of discrete, fragmented, and separable units. Abstraction is a difficult word to define; for our purposes, it is the idea that areas of existence and culture can be separated from, that is abstracted out of, other areas of existence and culture. In addition, we form social groups that are largely based on abstractions corporations, nations, economic classes, religious preferences, race which is really an abstract rather than a physical or biological category, sexual preferences,

etc. rather than real or biological relationships; as a result, membership in social groups tends to be unstable and transitory as one can easily move between social groups. This, again, creates a high sense of anxiety and tension; this anxiety results, on the one hand, in attempts within these abstract groups to define themselves as real, that is, "not abstract," and on the other hand, in attempts to limit the possible social groups, that is, to manage the alternatives. In distinction to modernity, traditional cultures tend to experience the world as whole and integrated; separate areas of existence and culture are seen as integrally related to other areas of existence and culture. In addition, social groups are based on real, biological kinship ties, so that social relations tend to be stable and permanent.

Eysteinson writes, the modernists saw themselves as having lost tradition, that is, that their behavior patterns, their rituals, etc., are all new and innovative, that they are not repeating the past. But the experience of modernity is, in fact, to live in traditional ways and to repeat tradition in unrecognizable forms. Modern cultures still perform traditional rituals, such as sports which are originally religious rituals or shaming rituals, yet the origin and original meaning of these rituals have passed out of the culture. Modern cultures still repeat ways of thinking in the past; in fact, the bulk of modern culture is based on traditional ways of thinking repeated relatively unchanged; yet modern cultures tend to view these ways of thinking as innovations. Although we base our social groups on abstract categories, the structure and content of these social groups repeat the structure and content of kinship groups, in other words, we base our abstract social groups on principles derived from real, biological relationships; we do not, however, experience these social groups as real, biological relationships. So, in sum, modernity, the sense that the present is discontinuous with the past is an illusion, and this illusion creates modernity itself. What has changed is

social memory; we have disconnected most of our practices and ideas from our collective memory of their origins and meaning.

### **Modernism**

Modernism is a trend of thought which affirms the power of human beings to make, improve and reshape their environment, with the aid of scientific knowledge, technology and practical experimentation. The term covers a variety of political, cultural and artistic movements rooted in the changes in Western society at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. Broadly, modernism describes a series of progressive cultural movements in art and architecture, music, literature and the applied arts which emerged in the decades before 1914. Embracing change and the present, modernism encompasses the works of artists, thinkers, writers and designers who rebelled against late 19<sup>th</sup> century academic and historicist traditions, and confronted the new economic, social and political aspects of the emerging modern world (Eysteinnsson 54).

### **Precursors to Modernism**

The first half of the 19th century for Europe was marked by a number of wars and revolutions, which reveal the rise of the ideas and doctrines now identified as Romanticism. Emphasis on individual subjective experience, the supremacy of "Nature" as a subject for art, revolutionary or radical extensions of expression, and individual liberty. By mid-century, however, a synthesis of these ideas with stable governing forms had emerged, partly in reaction to the failed Romantic Revolutions of 1848. It was exemplified by Otto von Bismarck's realpolitik and by "practical" philosophical ideas such as positivism. Called by various names; in Great Britain it is designated the "Victorian era"; this stabilizing synthesis was rooted in the idea that what was real dominated over what was subjective.

Central to this synthesis were common assumptions and institutional frames of reference, including the religious norms found in Christianity, scientific norms found in classical physics, and doctrines that asserted that the depiction of external reality from an objective standpoint was in fact possible. Cultural critics and historians label this set of doctrines Realism, though this term is not universal. In philosophy, the rationalist and positivist movements established a primacy of reason and system.

Against the current ran a series of ideas, some of them direct continuations of Romantic schools of thought. Notable were the agrarian and revivalist movements in plastic arts and poetry (e.g. the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the philosopher John Ruskin). Rationalism also drew responses from the anti-rationalists in philosophy. In particular, Hegel's dialectic view of civilization and history drew responses from Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard, who were major influences on Existentialism. All of these separate reactions together began to be seen as offering a challenge to any comfortable ideas of certainty derived by civilization, history, or pure reason (Nicholls 8).

From the 1870s onward, the ideas that history and civilization were inherently progressive and that progress was always good came under increasing attack. Writers like Wagner and Ibsen had been reviled for their own critiques of contemporary civilization and for their warnings that accelerating "progress" would lead to the creation of individuals detached from social norms and isolated from their fellow men. The argument arose not merely that the values of the artist and those of society were different, but that society was antithetical to progress, and could not move forward in its present form. Philosophers called into question the previous optimism. The work of Schopenhauer was labelled "pessimistic" for its idea of the "negation of the will", an idea that would be both rejected and incorporated by later thinkers such as Nietzsche (Witcombe).

Two of the most disruptive thinkers of the period were, in biology, Charles Darwin and, in political science, Karl Marx. Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection undermined religious certainty of the general public, and the sense of human uniqueness of the intelligentsia. The notion that human beings were driven by the same impulses as "lower animals" proved to be difficult to reconcile with the idea of an ennobling spirituality. Karl Marx seemed to present a political version of the same proposition: that problems with the economic order were not transient, the result of specific wrong doers or temporary conditions, but were fundamentally contradictions within the "capitalist" system. Both thinkers would spawn defenders and schools of thought that would become decisive in establishing modernism.

Separately, in the arts and letters, two ideas originating in France would have particular impact. The first was Impressionism, a school of painting that initially focused on work done, not in studios, but outdoors. Impressionist paintings demonstrated that human beings do not see objects, but instead see light itself. The school gathered adherents despite internal divisions among its leading practitioners, and became increasingly influential. Initially rejected from the most important commercial show of the time; the government-sponsored Paris Salon; the art was shown at the Salon des Refusés, created by Emperor Napoleon III to display all of the paintings rejected by the Paris Salon. While most were in standard styles, but by inferior artists, the work of Manet attracted tremendous attention, and opened commercial doors to the movement.

The second school was Symbolism, marked by a belief that language is expressly symbolic in its nature, and that poetry and writing should follow whichever connection the sheer sound and texture of the words create (Kolocotroni 57).

At the same time social, political, and economic forces were at work that would become the basis to argue for a radically different kind of art and thinking.

Chief among these was steam-powered industrialization, which produced buildings that combined art and engineering in new industrial materials such as cast iron to produce railroad bridges and glass-and-iron train sheds, or the Eiffel Tower, which broke all previous limitations on how tall man-made objects could be, and at the same time offered a radically different environment in urban life.

The miseries of industrial urbanity, and the possibilities created by scientific examination of subjects brought changes that would shake a European civilization which had, until then, regarded itself as having a continuous and progressive line of development from the Renaissance. With the telegraph's harnessing of a new power, offering instantaneity at a distance, the experience of time itself was altered.

### **The Beginning of Modernism 1890–1910**

Clement Greenberg wrote "What can be safely called Modernism emerged in the middle of the last century; and rather locally, in France, with Baudelaire in literature and Manet in painting, and perhaps with Flaubert, too, in prose fiction. It was a while later, and not so locally, that Modernism appeared in music and architecture." The "avant-garde" was what Modernism was called at first, and the term remained to describe movements which identify themselves as attempting to overthrow some aspect of tradition or the status quo (Greenberg).

In the 1890s a strand of thinking began to assert that it was necessary to push aside previous norms entirely, instead of merely revising past knowledge in light of current techniques. The growing movement in art paralleled such developments as the Theory of Relativity in physics; the increasing integration of the internal combustion engine and industrialization; and the rise of social sciences in public policy. It was argued that, if the nature of reality itself was in question, and if restrictions which had

been in place around human activity were falling, then art, too, would have to radically change. Thus, in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century a series of writers, thinkers, and artists made the break with traditional means of organizing literature, painting, and music.

Sigmund Freud offered a view of subjective states involving an unconscious mind full of primal impulses and counterbalancing restrictions, a view that Carl Jung would combine with a belief in natural essence to stipulate a collective unconscious that was full of basic typologies that the conscious mind fought or embraced. This suggested that people's impulses towards breaking social norms were not the product of being childish or ignorant, but were instead essential to the nature of the human animal, the ideas of Darwin having already introduced the concept of "man, the animal" to the public mind.

Friedrich Nietzsche championed a philosophy in which forces, specifically the 'Will to power', were more important than facts or things. Similarly, the writings of Henri Bergson championed the vital 'life force' over static conceptions of reality. What united all these writers was a romantic distrust of the Victorian positivism and certainty. Instead they championed, or, in the case of Freud, attempted to explain, irrational thought processes through the lens of rationality and holism. This was connected with the century-long trend to thinking in terms of holistic ideas, which would include an increased interest in the occult, and "the vital force".

Out of this collision of ideals derived from Romanticism, and an attempt to find a way for knowledge to explain that which was as yet unknown, came the first wave of works, which, while their authors considered them extensions of existing trends in art, broke the implicit contract that artists were the interpreters and representatives of bourgeois culture and ideas. These "modernist" landmarks include Arnold Schoenberg's atonal ending to his Second String Quartet in 1908, the abstract

expressionist paintings of Wassily Kandinsky starting in 1903 and culminating with the founding of the Blue Rider group in Munich, and the rise of cubism from the work of Picasso and Georges Braque in 1908.

Powerfully influential in this wave of modernity were the theories of Freud, who argued that the mind had a basic and fundamental structure, and that subjective experience was based on the interplay of the parts of the mind. All subjective reality was based, according to Freud's ideas, on the play of basic drives and instincts, through which the outside world was perceived. This represented a break with the past, in that previously it was believed that external and absolute reality could impress itself on an individual, as, for example, in John Locke's *tabula rasa* doctrine.

This wave of the modern movement broke with the past in the first decade of the twentieth century, and tried to redefine various artforms in a radical manner. Leading lights within the literary wing of this movement (or, rather, these movements) include: composers such as Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and George Antheil represent modernism in music. Artists such as Gustav Klimt, Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, and the movements Les Fauves, Cubism and the Surrealists represent various strains of Modernism in the visual arts, while architects and designers such as Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe brought modernist ideas into everyday urban life. Several figures outside of artistic modernism were influenced by artistic ideas; for example, John Maynard Keynes was friends with Woolf and other writers of the Bloomsbury group (Schwartz 18).

### **The Explosion of Modernism 1910–1930**

On the eve of World War I a growing tension and unease with the social order, seen in the Russian Revolution of 1905 and the agitation of "radical" parties, also manifested itself in artistic works in every medium which radically simplified or rejected previous practice. In 1913, famed Russian composer Igor Stravinsky,



working for Sergei Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes, composed Rite of Spring for a ballet, choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky that depicted human sacrifice, and young painters such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse were causing a shock with their rejection of traditional perspective as the means of structuring paintings; a step that none of the Impressionists, not even Cézanne, had taken.

These developments began to give a new meaning to what was termed 'Modernism'. It embraced disruption, rejecting or moving beyond simple Realism in literature and art, and rejecting or dramatically altering tonality in music. This set modernists apart from 19<sup>th</sup> century artists, who had tended to believe in 'progress'. Writers like Dickens and Tolstoy, painters like Turner, and musicians like Brahms were not 'radicals' or 'Bohemians', but were instead valued members of society who produced art that added to society, even if it was, at times, critiquing less desirable aspects of it. Modernism, while it was still progressive increasingly saw traditional forms and traditional social arrangements as hindering progress, and therefore the artist was recast as a revolutionary, overthrowing rather than enlightening.

Futurism exemplifies this trend. In 1909, F.T. Marinetti's first manifesto was published in the Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro*; soon afterward a group of painters like Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, and Gino Severini co-signed the Futurist Manifesto. Modeled on the famous "Communist Manifesto" of the previous century, such manifestoes put forward ideas that were meant to provoke and to gather followers. Strongly influenced by Bergson and Nietzsche, Futurism was part of the general trend of Modernist rationalization of disruption (Schwartz 61).

Modernist philosophy and art were still viewed as being part, and only a part, of the larger social movement. Artists such as Klimt and Cézanne, and composers such as Mahler and Richard Strauss were "the terrible moderns"; those farther to the avant-garde were more heard of than heard. Polemics in favour of geometric or purely

abstract painting were largely confined to 'little magazines' (like *The New Age* in the UK) with tiny circulations. Modernist primitivism and pessimism were controversial but were not seen as representative of the Edwardian mainstream, which was more inclined towards a Victorian faith in progress and liberal optimism.

However, World War I and its subsequent events were the cataclysmic upheavals that late 19th century artists such as Brahms had worried about, and avant-gardists had embraced. First, the failure of the previous status quo seemed self-evident to a generation that had seen millions die fighting over scraps of earth; prior to the war, it had been argued that no one would fight such a war, since the cost was too high. Second, the birth of a machine age changed the conditions of life; machine warfare became a touchstone of the ultimate reality. Finally, the immensely traumatic nature of the experience dashed basic assumptions: Realism seemed to be bankrupt when faced with the fundamentally fantastic nature of trench warfare, as exemplified by books such as Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Moreover, the view that mankind was making slow and steady moral progress came to seem ridiculous in the face of the senseless slaughter of the Great War. The First World War, at once, fused the harshly mechanical geometric rationality of technology with the nightmarish irrationality of myth.

Thus in the 1920s, modernism, which had been such a minority taste before the war, came to define the age. Modernism was seen in Europe in such critical movements as Dada, and then in constructive movements such as Surrealism, as well as in smaller movements such as the Bloomsbury Group. Each of these "modernisms", as some observers labelled them at the time, stressed new methods to produce new results. Again, Impressionism was a precursor: breaking with the idea of national schools, artists and writers adopted ideas of international movements.

Surrealism, Cubism, Bauhaus, and Leninism are all examples of movements that rapidly found adopters far beyond their original geographic base.

Exhibitions, theatre, cinema, books and buildings all served to cement in the public view the perception that the world was changing. Hostile reaction often followed, as paintings were spat upon, riots organized at the opening of works, and political figures denounced modernism as unwholesome and immoral. At the same time, the 1920s were known as the "Jazz Age", and the public showed considerable enthusiasm for cars, air travel, the telephone, and other technological advances.

By 1930, modernism had won a place in the establishment, including the political and artistic establishment, although by this time modernism itself had changed. There was a general reaction in the 1920s against the pre-1918 modernism, which emphasized its continuity with a past while rebelling against it, and against the aspects of that period which seemed excessively mannered, irrational, and emotionalistic. The post-World War period, at first, veered either to systematization or nihilism and had, as perhaps its most paradigmatic movement, Dada.

While some writers attacked the madness of the new modernism, others described it as soulless and mechanistic. Among modernists there were disputes about the importance of the public, the relationship of art to audience, and the role of art in society. Modernism comprised a series of sometimes contradictory responses to the situation as it was understood, and the attempt to wrestle universal principles from it. In the end science and scientific rationality, often taking models from the 18th Century Enlightenment, came to be seen as the source of logic and stability, while the basic primitive sexual and unconscious drives, along with the seemingly counter-intuitive workings of the new machine age, were taken as the basic emotional substance. From these two poles, no matter how seemingly incompatible, modernists

began to fashion a complete worldview that could encompass every aspect of life, and express "everything from a scream to a chuckle".

### **High Modernism (1930-1945)**

By 1930, Modernism had entered popular culture. With the increasing urbanization of populations, it was beginning to be looked to as the source for ideas to deal with the challenges of the day. As modernism gained traction in academia, it was developing a self-conscious theory of its own importance. Popular culture, which was not derived from high culture but instead from its own realities (particularly mass production) fueled much modernist innovation. Modern ideas in art appeared in commercials and logos, the famous London Underground logo being an early example of the need for clear, easily recognizable and memorable visual symbols.

Another strong influence at this time was Marxism. After the generally primitivistic/irrationalist aspect of pre-World War One Modernism, which for many modernists precluded any attachment to merely political solutions, and the neoclassicism of the 1920s, as represented most famously by T. S. Eliot and Igor Stravinsky; which rejected popular solutions to modern problems: the rise of Fascism, the Great Depression, and the march to war helped to radicalise a generation. The Russian Revolution was the catalyst to fuse political radicalism and utopianism, with more expressly political stances. Bertolt Brecht, W. H. Auden, Andre Breton, Louis Aragon and the philosophers Gramsci and Walter Benjamin are perhaps the most famous exemplars of this Modernist Marxism. This move to the radical left, however, was neither universal, nor definitional, and there is no particular reason to associate Modernism, fundamentally, with 'the left'. Modernists explicitly of 'the right' include Wyndham Lewis, William Butler Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, the Dutch author Menno ter Braak and many others.

One of the most visible changes of this period is the adoption of objects of

modern production into daily life. Electricity, the telephone, the automobile, and the need to work with them, repair them and live with them; created the need for new forms of manners, and social life. The kind of disruptive moment which only a few knew in the 1880's, became a common occurrence. The speed of communication reserved for the stock brokers of 1890 became part of family life.

Modernism as leading to social organization would produce inquiries into sex and the basic bondings of the nuclear, rather than extended, family. The Freudian tensions of infantile sexuality and the raising of children became more intense, because people had fewer children, and therefore a more specific relationship with each child: the theoretical, again, became the practical and even popular.

### **Goal of Modernism**

Many modernists believed that by rejecting tradition they could discover radically new ways of making art. Arnold Schoenberg believed that by rejecting traditional tonal harmony, the hierarchical system of organizing works of music which had guided music making for at least a century and a half, and perhaps longer, he had discovered a wholly new way of organizing sound, based in the use of twelve-note rows. This led to what is known as serial music by the post-war period. Abstract artists, taking as their examples the Impressionists, as well as Paul Cézanne and Edvard Munch, began with the assumption that color and shape formed the essential characteristics of art, not the depiction of the natural world. Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, and Kazimir Malevich all believed in redefining art as the arrangement of pure colour. The use of photography, which had rendered much of the representational function of visual art obsolete, strongly affected this aspect of modernism. However, these artists also believed that by rejecting the depiction of material objects they helped art move from a materialist to a spiritualist phase of development (Greenberg).

## **Modernism in Literature**

The English literary works of the eighteenth and nineteenth century were created at a time of great confidence in British society, culture and political organization affecting not only Britain, but the Empire overseas. The novels written in this era were full of fairy-tale pattern plot, crowded with characters and all importance was given to fortune, status, and marital position of each character with the main theme of gentility and morality in them. The writers tried to present their characters from different levels of society and explore different themes, yet there is a sense of confidence in the basic structure of society, and the place of people in it that underlies their work. With the beginning of twentieth century the writers could not share this confidence; the changes in beliefs and political ideas were influenced strongly by the events of the First World War and by the events across the world that led to; the disappearance of the British Empire, but began even earlier (Daiches 1152).

To the writers of early twentieth century, E.M. Foster, Arnold Bennett and H.G. Wells to name here few, time could not be conceived of as a series of moments moving forward in a steady progress, causing them to avoid the traditional conception of plot, which generally involved taking the hero through a sequence of testing circumstances in chronological order, would cease to satisfy. Furthermore, new psychological ideas emphasized the multiplicity of consciousness, the simultaneous coexistence of several levels of consciousness and subconsciousness in which past experience was retained and by whose retention the whole of personality was coloured and determined.

The isolation of the individual consciousness steadily became the most important psychological fact in a world from which public value seemed to have departed and where every individual was seen to be the prisoner of his unique stream

of consciousness. Our response to every new event is conditioned by our private past: Virginia Woolf shaped her character Mrs. Dalloway in her novel of that name, who opens her front door to go out into the London streets and as she does so is aware with one part of her mind of a similar feeling opening the French window onto the lawn in the house she had lived in as a girl. The gestures we make to other people are bound to be in some degree misread, for other people will read them from the other side, from their side, and will not see them as they appear to us, who projected them out of our isolated consciousness. The difference between the private stream of consciousness and the public gesture is emphasized again and again in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) where we see the true state of Stephen's or Bloom's consciousness side by side with the quite different public conversation they become involved in; the two are wrought and presented together, thus stressing the inevitable loneliness of theirs.

If the characteristic theme of the eighteenth and nineteenth century was gentility and morality, that of the twentieth century is relation between loneliness and love. They raised the questions like, how is love possible when we are all, whether we know it or not, the prisoners of our private selves? How is even communication possible? To them society as a whole seemed to provide simply a collection of empty gestures and institutions which had no real meaning and could provide no real basis for communication between individuals.

Modernists attempted various experiments in creation of their work of art such as very limited number characters, subtle plot development, and use of poetic language in any genres of literature along with that of interior monologue. In course of using innovative tools in their works, the modernists subverted the basic conventions of earlier prose fiction by breaking up the narrative continuity, departing from the standard ways of representing characters, and violating the traditional syntax

and coherence of narrative language by the use of stream of consciousness and other innovative modes of narration. *The Waves* (1931), considered as Woolf's finest work, is finely stylized and is based on the carefully organized impressions of a limited number of characters, each of whom presents those impressions in a series of monologues. In her generation representing novels like *To The Light House*, and *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf has used her poetic language in her attempt to find an adequate form for her subtle and fleeting insights. There is an effective interweaving of lyrical and narrative devices with her well balanced sentences. Later Samuel Beckett has deployed the same technique of minimalism and aesthetic judgement of art in his most of the works including *Endgame*, *Waiting for Godot* and of course *Happy Days* (Daiches 1161).

James Joyce adopted the view, developed in the late nineteenth century, of the alienation of the artist. The artist had to be outside all conventions, all normal society, and this not only because those conventions and that society as Joyce found them in Dublin represented a "paralysis," a dead set of gestures having no meaning in terms of genuine human experience, but because the artist must be outside society in order to be objective, and he must be objective if he is to adopt the peculiar microcosmic view which was the way Joyce solved the modern problem. For, instead of using quasi-poetic techniques persuasive to the reader while he reads, Joyce sought a method of presenting a limited tract of time and space as microcosm, as a small-scale model of human life, to which all attitudes were possible, depending on your point of view. The artist's function was thus not to render his own personal viewpoint, but to take all points of view and to construct in his fictoianl world an enormous interrelating, punning verbal universe which, it might almost be said, presents everything as also everything else. *Ulysses* is the work of the exiled artist re-creating at a distance but with total knowledge the life he has escaped from. In its rendering of events of one



day in Dublin; Joyce achieves a realistic surface so brilliant, so convincing in its life and colour and movement, that the book can be enjoyed merely for its superficial vitality. But its true vitality goes much deeper. Joyce expands the action of *Ulysses* into microcosm, he makes his account of the adventures of Leopold Bloom, the unsuccessful advertisement canvasser, Stephen Dedalus, would-be artist a few years after we left him in the *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and others, into a symbolic picture of all history and all experience (Sanders 539).

As the catastrophe of the war had shaken faith in the continuity of Western civilization and raised doubts about the adequacy of traditional literary modes to represent the harsh and dissonant realities of the postwar world, the post war modernist poets brought a remarkable change in poetic taste and practice which resulted in the rejection of hard, clear, and precise images, the medieval pointview, discipline, and authoritarianism in politics as well. T.S. Eliot experimented with new forms and a new style that would render contemporary disorder, often contrasting it to a lost order and integration that had been based on the religion and myths of the cultural past. Apart of implying the device of dramatic monologue in his earlier poems like *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *Portrait of a Lady* (1917), in *The Waste Land* (1922), for example, Eliot replaced the standard flow of poetic language by fragmented utterances, and substituted for the traditional coherence of poetic structure a deliberate dislocation of parts, in which very diverse components are related by connections that are left to the reader to discover, or invent. His many poems achieved ironic comment on the decadence or corruption or emptiness of modern civilization by juxtaposing without comment, or any sort of overt casual linking, images from the present and from the past. This is done so cunningly that the result is not simple contrast between present decadence and past glory; the suggestion emerges that the two are perhaps one, and the past itself becomes tainted by its

modern parallels. Weaving the themes of barrenness, decay and death, and the quest for life and resurrection which he found in these anthropological sources with the Christian story, with Buddhist and other oriental analogies, and incorporating into the poem both examples and symbols of the failure of modern civilization, social emptiness, Eliot endeavoured to project a complete view of civilization, of human history and human failure, and of the perennial quest for salvation.

### **Beckett as Modernist**

In fact, a common motif in Modernist fiction is that of an alienated individual; a dysfunctional individual trying in vain to make sense of a predominantly urban and fragmented society. However, many Modernists' works like T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* are marked by the absence of a central, heroic figure; in rejecting the solipsism of Romantics like Shelley and Byron, and in terms of narration go beyond the limitations of the Realist novel with its concern for larger factors such as social or historical change; this is largely demonstrated through stream of conscious writing.

Of all the English-language modernists, Beckett's work represents the most sustained attack on the realist tradition. He, more than anyone else, opened up the possibility of drama and fiction that dispense with conventional plot and the unities of place and time in order to focus on essential components of the human condition. Writers like Vaclav Havel, John Banville, Aidan Higgins and Harold Pinter have publicly stated their indebtedness to Beckett's example, but he has had a much wider influence on experimental writing since the 1950s, from the Beat Generation to the happenings of the 1960s and beyond. In an Irish context, he has exerted great influence on writers like John Banville, Derek Mahon, Thomas Kinsella, as well as writers like Trevor Joyce and Catherine Walsh who proclaim their adherence to the modernist tradition as an alternative to the dominant realist mainstream.

Beckett is one of the most widely discussed and highly prized of twentieth-

century authors, inspiring a critical industry which has sprung up around James Joyce. His works earned immense popularity and exceptionally well critical responses for, one for his revelation of absurdity, the other for his works' critical refusal of simplicities; others condemn for decadent lack of realism.

His earliest fictions, "Assumption" (a short story, 1929), *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (a novel written in 1932, published 1993), *More Pricks than Kicks*, a novel (1934), and *A Case in a Thousand*, a short story (1934) carry modernist features like loosely developed plot, emphasis on psychological portrayal of characters and so on. In "Assumption" the male protagonist is locked in a self-imposed silence. After he has met a woman who seduces him, a lifetime's suppressed scream escapes from him that sweeps her aside and leads to his death, fused with the cosmic discord. Here, in miniature, is described the fate of awaiting Belacqua, the anti-hero of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and *More Pricks than Kicks*. Like his namesake in Dante's Purgatorio, Belacqua aspires to stasis and silence. Inevitably this makes him unlikable as he is constantly escaping social obligations and uninteresting in conventional novelistic terms. As in "Assumption" sexuality is closely linked to death, figurative and literal. Sexual love means exile from the self. It is also likely to result in that unforgivable crime; bringing another unfortunate human being into this purgatorial life. So Beckett from the start offers us an anti-hero in an anti-novel that scorns the conventions of romance (Federman 53).

In fact the Belacqua narratives implicitly reject the conventions of the entire genre of prose fiction. In his construction of fictional character Beckett explicitly renounces the appeal to milieu, race, family, structure, temperament, past and present etc. He refuses to offer motive, for instance, when Belacqua decides to commit suicide. Revealingly he offers the suggestion that, in acting so capriciously throughout the book, Belacqua may be likened to the laws of nature. So much for claims to

psychological realism by modernists such as Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence, Beckett plays just as fast and loose with the plot. Pages are devoted to Belacqua's preparations of a lunchtime sandwich. But all major events are thrown away as asides. On the eve of her marriage to Belacqua, Lucy on horseback is run over by a drunken lord in a Daimler. Her horse dies instantly. Lucy however was not so fortunate, being crippled for life and her beauty dreadfully marred. This arbitrary accident in turn becomes the key to the couple's happiness by removing her from the sexual arena. Three pages later the next section begins peremptorily: "Belacqua was so happy married to the crippled Lucy that he tended to be sorry for himself when she died, which she did on the eve of the second anniversary of her terrible accident." Beckett reverses the traditional understanding of what is and is not important within the event structure of a novel. Belacqua's death at the operating table is another pure accident that is dismissed in two sentences: "By Christ! he did die! They had clean forgotten to auscultate him!"

Similar elements are present in Beckett's first published novel, *Murphy* (1938), which to some extent explores the themes of insanity and chess, both of which would be recurrent elements in Beckett's later works. The novel's opening sentence also hints at the somewhat pessimistic undertones and black humour that animate many of Beckett's works: 'The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new'. Its hero, Murphy, not only reverses all commonly accepted social conventions preferring rest to work, contemplation to sexual love, the insane to the sane; he simultaneously inverts traditional uses of language. Beckett employs puns, paradox, allusion, repetition, inversion all in an attempt to disrupt the predictable semantic effects of language. Much of the resulting dialogue is highly mannered, showing more interest in creating mutually negating patterns of words than in mimetically reproducing plausible verbal exchanges.

*Watt* (1945; published 1953), a novel, written while Beckett was in hiding in Roussillon during World War II, is similar in terms of themes, but less exuberant in its style. This novel also, at certain points, explores human movement as if it were a mathematical permutation, presaging Beckett's later preoccupation; in both his novels and dramatic works, with precise movement. Most of the actions take place in a highly abstract, unreal world. Watt, the hero, takes service with a mysterious employer, Mr. Knott, works for a time for this master without ever meeting him face to face, and then is dismissed. The allegory of man's life in the midst of mystery is plain.

### **Postmodern Spirit in Beckett's Later Works**

As an eye witness and sufferer of the World War II Beckett's thought looks a lot like that of anguished elite Europeans of second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and his literary works written in this era can be put in the category called postmodernism. Though the term, postmodernism itself is still the subject of heated debate, it clearly refers to that which succeeds modernism, an international movement that broke with nineteenth century forms of realism. But the impetus of modernism has continued to the present day, so postmodernism coexists with that which it claims to displace. The phenomenon of postmodernism then cannot be explained in purely temporal terms. As the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard has suggested, it represents a radical epistemological break with our understanding of what the human sciences have to offer. What characterizes the postmodern in Lyotard's eyes is the abandonment of those grand narratives that began with the Enlightenment, such as the liberation of humanity or the unification of all knowledge. The unstable, heterogeneous and dispersed social reality of the postmodern cannot be contained within any totalizing theory. Without such meta-narratives, Lyotard argues, each work of art, "working

without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done," becomes a unique event describing its own process of coming into being.

This is what Beckett's plays as well as the fictions do. Each one starts out anew, inventing its rules as it goes along. Its subject is itself, the narrating voice creating a world out of language. Before, between and after the jabber of words that constitute the fiction is silence. Throughout his long writing life Beckett conducted a war on words that led him to startling innovations in form and language. He went on experimenting to the end, never content with the increasingly minimal, pared down fictions that characterize the second half of his writing life. Nothing satisfied him for long. Words, the enemy, continued to signify beyond every defeat he inflicted on them. His fictions are the progressive record of his fight to subdue language so that the silence of the Real might make its presence felt. Silence features large in his almost all literary creations.

We can see his, widely known as trilogy, three novels written in a spurt of creativity between 1947 and 1949, *Molloy* (1951), *Malone Dies*, (1953), and *The Unnamable*, (1953). Each novel has its own pseudo-couple, avatars or stand-ins for Beckett, the narrating subject. *Molloy* is divided into the story of Molloy from the moment he set out on crutches and bicycle to find his mother to his arrival in her room where he sits in bed writing his story, and the story of Moran who sets out in search of Molloy with his son and ends up writing a report of his failure to find him. *Malone Dies* describes Malone, in bed in a similar room to that of Molloy's mother's, writing stories, while waiting to die, about one Saposcat, a combination of homo sapiens and skatos, Greek for excrement, who turns into Macmann, son of man; or of Malone, the evil one. *The Unnamable* offers the narrative of a disembodied voice that conjures up images of two postmortem vice-existers, Mahood (manhood?) a trunk and head without limbs stuck in a jar, and Worm, an even more rudimentary creature with

minimal human attributes. All three novels focus on a representative human consciousness trying to come to terms with its existence by telling itself stories featuring itself as hero of its own fictions.

Each of the three novels is an exercise in self-destruction. Molloy illustrates in particular the anti-chronological thrust of Beckett's project. Moran's apparent failure to track down Molloy is undercut by the way he is transformed in the course of his search from the confident agent and authoritarian father at the start of his narrative to an uncanny copy (down to the crutches) of Molloy, whose story preceded his. The reason in part is that Moran, like Molloy, is searching for his true self, whatever that might be. Beckett uses his successive pairs of protagonists to try to stalk this self, to illuminate his darkness that constantly recedes before the light of his narrational pursuit. So the trilogy is equally about the predicament of representative man who tries to reach the core of his being by recounting his life to himself, and about the predicament of the modern artist bent on exploring the source of his imagination by telling stories to himself, and others which alienate him from the real world. The predicament, as Beckett described it in his early critical work on Proust, is that to be a modern artist "is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world, and to shrink from it desertion." As *The Unnamable* reassures himself, "I am doing my best, and failing again" (Sanders 595).

So, all the narrators and their doubles are seeking for a place of final rest; their mother's room (or womb), physical death, an end to speech. Each successive narrator pursues a more reductive search of the self; each fails because the self belongs to the void of the Real. The void belongs to a realm of silence. But humans are condemned to the false linearity, rationality and semantic properties of language. Put in Lacanian terms, each of us longs to return to the blissful ignorance of infancy when our experience was one of pure libido. Instead we are condemned to a symbolic order in

which language constitutes us as subjects split within ourselves. We are split between a conscious self whose lack condemns us to a lifetime of unfulfilled desire and an unconscious forever deferred along the signifying chain of language. We are also split between a desire for unity and a lack of concrete being. This is what Moran terms "being dispossessed of self." *The Unnamable* resorts to paradox to describe the paradoxical nature of human consciousness divided within itself: "Where I am there is no one but me, who am not."

Beckett knows, then, that he is bound to fail at his excavatory task. His failure is itself a satiric thrust at not just the meta-narratives of humanist metaphysics but at the pretensions of verbal fictions that see themselves as narrating fictions instead of concentrating on the fiction of narration. This latter Beckett does by poking fun at the tricks language plays on the narrator. Endeavouring to continue innovative approaches in his literary creations, Beckett, subsequent to these three novels, managed to create one of his most radical prose works, *How It Is* (1961). This work relates the adventures of an unnamed narrator crawling through the mud whilst dragging a sack of canned food, and was written as a sequence of unpunctuated paragraphs in a style approaching telegraphese (Begam 112).

Samuel Beckett concerns himself with the system of language and the faultiness of the proposition that the complex system of signs can actually communicate meaning. In many of his plays: *Waiting for Godot* (1954), *Endgame* (1958), *Happy Days* (1961), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), and *Not I* (1974), the irony in Beckett's works is that to speak is to exist, but in order to speak, one must adopt the system of language, words, which has no inherent meaning. Beckett's technique, to demonstrate the lack of referent or signified in language, illustrates the lack of meaning not only in language but also in life. These five plays are stripped to their bare essentials; there are few characters and even fewer props so that the



meaninglessness of postmodern life is starkly highlighted. Moreover, the dialogue, the language, is made more prominent by virtue of Beckett's sparse use of props. What few props exist is used symbolically: holes and ashbins in which characters are situated illustrate the gaps and holes in language and the lack of shared meaning or the inability of language to communicate meaning that is caused from these "gaps." However, Beckett does not provide the reader/viewer with a definitive, logo-centric text with decidable meaning; nor is this his purpose. Beckett does not presume to present a closed hermeneutic system with decidable meaning. Instead, Beckett's dramatic works challenge the reader/viewer to become actively engaged in the text; with its words and with its silences.

More specifically, these five plays can be looked at as a progression through the stages of postmodern life. Beckett's portrayal of postmodern life can be viewed as stark, hopeless and ironic: where language does not have a decidable meaning; humans lack foundational assurance; and communication continually breaks down. *Waiting for Godot* illustrates the desire to prove one's existence and make sense of the world. Estragon and Vladimir have only language to rely on to prove their existence and maintain their sanity in a seemingly hopeless world; however, language is an inadequate system in reaching any type of abstract truth or foundational assurance. *Endgame* looks at the futility of relationships; the idea that language, which promotes contact with other human beings, is self-serving, for the only goal of humans is to cling to another to avoid separation and solitude. It is through solitude that one may examine the nature and purpose of one's existence; one must also come to terms with the issue of mortality. *Endgame* examines the irony that is at the heart of human relationships; we engage in relationships in order to prolong the inevitable: the examination of existence, which, as Beckett continually shows, is meaningless. *Happy Days* examines middle aged, the unfortunate woman, and ironic realization that life is

meaningless and mechanical; the characters, Winnie and Willie, attempt simply to get through and take comfort in the small things and in each other. The main focus of the play is on Winnie, who is alienated, psychically, mentally, and sexually. In her imprisonment, she is unable to consummate her marriage or anything else. *Krapp's Last Tape* looks at the senior years of life, when one looks back, in solitude, on the past. Krapp, in his self-imposed exile, displays narcissistic tendencies; he becomes his own subject. The emptiness it opens up is nevertheless also the barely covered abyss where our identities, images and words run the risk of being engulfed. Krapp is in fact engulfed by his own identity and it is Beckett's next work, *Not I*, that takes this engulfment of the ego to its logical extreme.

*Not I* represents symbolic death and/or the continuation of the life cycle (death/rebirth). This play has but one speaker: a mouth only. Beckett's use of character in this manner provides us with a window into the theoretical gap that is fundamental to postmodern thought. This gap represents the absurdity of language: simultaneously, language provides us with an excess of meaning while also providing a lack of meaning because language is always already over determined.

In these five plays, Beckett symbolically challenges conventional notions of existence, relationships, and language in order to highlight the stark realities/absurdities of modern society. Beckettian drama breaks down the barrier between speech and writing and presents a postmodern carnivalesque notion of language: his display of the ambivalence of language connotes the lack of a determinant meaning in his texts. Traditional notions of the signifier/signified relationship are blurred and symbolic dialogical spaces are highlighted in order to illustrate the absurdity of the logocentric tradition of Western thought with its foundation in origin because it closes the space between word and thing; in contrast, a word is only a representation of a truth and not truth itself. Perhaps more ironically,

Beckett shows us that words are often all we have. But it is the way in which Beckett uses language and theater conventions that serves to change our conceptions of both.

## Chapter – II

### Beckett's World: Seeking Meaning in Meaningless Life

#### Textual overview of *Happy Days*

In the Act I, when the play begins, Winnie, a woman in her 50s, is buried waist-deep in a mound of scorched earth, with just a large, black shopping bag and a collapsed parasol. Behind her and hidden from view sleeps Willie. A bell rings and wakes her Winnie. She recites a prayer and goes through several cleaning rituals: brushing her teeth, etc., with implements from the bag. She laments that 'poor Willie' has no interest in life, but concedes that his constant sleeping is a gift she wishes she had. She tells herself that she must not complain, as she has much to be thankful for.

Winnie tries to read something written on the toothbrush handle, but can only make out 'genuine pure'. She pokes Willie with the parasol to wake him. She drops it, but Willie, still hidden, hands it back. She removes a revolver from the bag, kisses it and replaces it, then takes out a bottle of red medicine. She drinks from it and tosses it in Willie's direction, where it shatters. Willie sits up, and Winnie turns to see blood trickling from his bald head. Winnie tells him to put on his underwear, which he does not do. She proclaims it will be 'another happy day' as he reads a newspaper. Willie reads out a headline that announces the death in the bathtub of a priest, and reads about a job opening for youth. Winnie uses a magnifying glass and finally makes out "genuine pure hog's setae," or bristle, on the toothbrush handle. Winnie sees that Willie has a postcard, and asks to look at it. She is appalled by the picture and returns it to him.

Winnie regrets not letting Willie sleep, and wishes she could tolerate being alone. She says that if Willie died or left her, she would never say another word. She anxiously wonders if she combed her hair and brushed her teeth, and locates the brush and comb in her bag. She resolves to 'brush and comb them later'. She stumbles when

she wonders if hair is referred to as 'them' or 'it', and asks Willie, who answers 'It'.

Winnie is overjoyed that Willie is speaking, and pronounces it a 'happy day'. She tells Willie to crawl back into his hole to avoid the sun, which he does. Winnie thanks him for reassuring her that he can hear her, as otherwise she would have only the bag. She asks Willie if he will leave her soon, but he does not answer. She says the earth around her is tightening, and wonders if she has put on weight.

She sees an ant on the ground and watches it carry a little white ball through the grass. Willie says it was eggs, and then says "Fornication." Willie breaks into laughter. She joins him, but they alternate who is laughing. She says there is no better way to "magnify the Almighty" than by laughing at his little jokes, then wonders if she and Willie were laughing at different things.

Winnie asks Willie if she was ever lovable, but he does not respond. Though it is getting late, she says it is too soon for her song. She reminds herself not to overdo the bag, but to use it and think about the point in the future "when words must fail." She reaches into the bag and accidentally takes out the revolver, which she disgustedly throws back. She inspects the revolver again and asks Willie if he remembers how he used to ask her to keep it away from him before he killed himself. Winnie says that she is tired of Willie, and she'll leave the revolver out from now on. She discusses her feeling that without being held down she would be sucked upward, and asks Willie if he feels that way. He does not understand, even after she explains it.

Winnie hoists, with difficulty, her parasol. She ruminates on the danger of long days with little action or conversation. She says she cannot put the parasol down; she says she requires some change in the world for to move again. The parasol catches on fire, and Winnie throws it behind her to extinguish it. She then considers that the words 'temperate' and 'torrid' are empty words, as are her memories of when she had

the use of her legs. She reflects that if the earth ever covers her breasts, it will be as if no one has ever seen them. She remarks that the parasol will be back again tomorrow in perfect form. Winnie saddens and takes out a music-box from her bag, and plays the waltz duet from Franz Lehár's 1905 operetta, *The Merry Widow*, which Willie accompanies without words at the end. She becomes happy again, and when Willie refuses an encore, she discusses the difficulty of singing when one's heart is not in it.

Winnie feels she is being watched by someone, and as she files her long nails, she thinks about a man named Shower or possibly Cooker with his fiancée and tells Willie her image of them: they hold hands, carrying bags in their free hands, and stare at Winnie while they question Winnie's placement in the ground, fight, argue about Willie's and Winnie's usefulness to each other, contemplate digging Winnie out, then leave.

Winnie sees that Willie is trying to crawl out of his whole. She observes that he is no longer a good crawler, and urges him on as he progresses to his spot behind the mound. She tells him she dreams he would come to the other side so she could see him, but knows he cannot. She reads her toothbrush handle, with some difficulty, and asks what a hog is. Willie tells her, and she becomes happy. He reads the newspaper and reads out the job announcements, which are the same as before. Winnie tells herself to sing, but she does not sing, and then to pray, which she also does not do.

Act II begins as the next day, Winnie covered up to her neck in the mound and cannot move her head. A bell rings and she opens her eyes. Pausing continuously, she tries to talk to Willie, who does not respond, and surmises that Willie has died, or left her 'like the others'. She saddens over her current condition, and grows anxious over the absence of her arms, breasts, and Willie.

The bell rings, and Winnie asks Willie questions and, getting no response, says it is like him to not have an opinion. She recounts the story of a young girl,

Mildred, who was undressing her doll in the middle of the night. Winnie reprimands Willie for not paying attention, then fearfully questions if he may be stuck in the hole. She remarks on the brief sadness she experiences after singing. She imagines Shower/Cooker with his woman, both older, as they discuss Winnie's buried body. Then they fight and leave, still hand in hand and with their bags. Winnie resumes her story about Mildred, who dropped her doll when a mouse ran up her leg. Mildred's whole family came running, but Winnie says it was too late.

Winnie sees Willie crawling toward her in a fashionable outfit. She says it reminds her of the day he proposed to her. He drops his hat and gloves and crawls toward her at Winnie's delighted urgings. He whispers "Win." She grows happy and sings the waltz duet "I Love You So" that the music box played before. She closes her eyes, the bell rings, and she reopens them. She smiles at Willie, who looks at her, and she stops smiling. They continue looking at each other through a long pause.

### **Happiness versus Existentialist Angst**

After the horror of the Second World War, a French philosophical movement found human life to be directionless, worthless and generally pretty difficult and advocated authentic living, and this thought was named as Existentialism. To them, God is dead, life is meaningless, and there are no guidelines for living in the modern age; the result was an all-pervading anxiety (angst) and paralysis of action. The only solution was to make your own meaning by creating your own rules and values. You construct your authentic identity through choice; your life is nothing more than the revisions, decisions and commitment made. French writer- philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus were the key thinkers here (Appignanesi 6).

What existentialists claim is human existence precedes its essence, hence before anything/anybody else 'I' comes first. When the God thought about creating the world, if the God as creator exists, he conceived it first; he had in mind what the

world was going to be and what human nature was going to be. These were the essences of the world and of humanity, the things that will make them what they are. Then God created everything and gave existence to the essences. Thus, to God, essence precedes existence. Now, Sartre did not believe in God, so there was no place for the essence of humanity to be before human existence. To us, existence comes first, and the essence later. Indeed, the essence is whatever we decide it is going to be. So, from our point of view things are just the opposite of what they would be for people who believed in God. Now it is existence precedes essence.

The most important thing for existentialists is not so much the distinction between essence and existence but the absence of God. For existentialists like Sartre, the absence of God has a much larger significance than the metaphysics of creation: Without God there is no purpose, no value, and no meaning in the world. That is the foundational proposition for existentialism. A world without purpose, value, or meaning is literally senseless, worthless, meaningless, empty, and hopeless. It is, to use a favorite existentialist term, absurd. According to them, without God, all is permitted. Indeed, if the loss of God means the loss of all meaning and value, then actions are without meaning or value either, and one cannot say that it matters whether actions are right or wrong, since those words, or the corresponding actions, don't mean anything more than anything else.

Now, when existentialism was popular, it struck many people as liberating and enjoyable to think of the world as absurd and behavior without limitations. But the real value of existentialism as a philosophical thought experiment was to understand the true consequences of such a world. It would be a nightmare. An absurd world, and everything else in it, is actually empty and pointless. There is no reason to do anything, even to continue living. Every thing that we approach and every matter that we deal with is a void, emptiness, and horror. And only the alternative left for the



people is suicide.

The starkness and hopelessness of this problem is portrayed in an essay, “The Myth of Sisyphus” (1942), by a great French Existentialist, Albert Camus (1913-1960). In Greek mythology, Sisyphus, who had once deceived the gods and cheated death, was condemned for eternity to roll a stone up a hill. Every time he was about to complete his task, the stone would roll free back down to the bottom of the hill. Sisyphus would then have to start over again, even though the same thing would just happen again. Thus, the punishment of Sisyphus is a punishment just because it is an endless exercise in futility. Sisyphus is stuck in an eternally pointless task. Now, if the world and everything in it are also pointless, the lesson is that the task of Sisyphus is identical to every thing that we will ever be doing in life. We are no different from Sisyphus; and if his punishment makes the afterlife a hell for him, we are already living in that hell.

Presumably, Sisyphus is unable to escape his condition through suicide. So if we can, why not? Arguably, there is no reason why not. But suicide is not the typical existentialist answer. What can Sisyphus do to make his life endurable? Well, he can just decide that it is meaningful. The value and purpose that objectively don't exist in the world can be restored by an act of will. Again, this is what has struck people as liberating about existentialism. To live one's life, one must exercise the freedom to create a life. Just going along with conventional values and forgetting about the absurdity of the world is not authentic. Authenticity is to exercise one's free will and to choose the activities and goals that will be meaningful for one's self. With this approach, even Sisyphus can be engaged and satisfied with what he is doing.

If we live our lives just because of the completely free and autonomous decisions that we make, this creates nothing that is common with others. If we adopt something that comes from someone else, which could give us a common basis to

make a connection with them, this is inauthentic. If it just happens, by chance, that our own decisions produce something that matches those of someone else, then we have a connection, but it is likely to be volatile. As we make new decisions, the probability of our connection with others continuing is going to decline. We are isolated by our own autonomy. The values and decision of others, whether authentic or inauthentic, will be foreign and irritating.

The isolation produced by existentialist value decisions also explains why few Existentialists are self-identified as such. Calling someone an "Existentialist" imposes an essence on them, telling them what they are. This violates their absolute autonomy and freedom and makes it sound like they actually have something important in common with some other people, other Existentialists. This is intolerable. Sartre himself felt the moral loss involved in all this. Traditional ideas about moral responsibility disappeared when there was nothing meaningful to be responsible about. Sartre consequently tried to compensate for this by introducing a new, strengthened sense of responsibility. His view was that one is responsible for all the consequences of one's action, whether it is possible to know about them or not. The problem with this notion of responsibility is that one cannot govern or alter one's behavior on the basis of things that one cannot know about. You may be responsible for all the consequences of your actions, but if you don't know what they all are, then it really doesn't make any difference. This is why traditional morality and law have the category of "negligence," that one is responsible for things that one could know about but didn't bother to find out. Things that one cannot know about cannot impose any obligation.

More important is what Sartre's new sense of responsibility leaves out. It leaves out, indeed, the original meaning of responsibility, which was accountability. It doesn't really matter that you cannot alter your behavior on the basis of consequences

that you cannot know, because you are not accountable for your behavior anyway. The man in the story is not going to be brought to trial before either God or man, much less punished. Being responsible for the others just means you will feel bad about what you have made happen.

This is just a version of what the ordinary meaning of "responsible" has come to be, namely conscientious. A responsible person is a conscientious person, which means someone who is trying to do the right thing. Now, in Existentialism there is no right thing, so what can conscientious possibly mean? It just means that one meant to do something and accepts it. One accepts and acknowledges the consequences of one's action, and accepts responsibility, because one really intended to do the action. The opposite, not accepting one's own actions or just doing something because it is expected, is bad faith, the only real sin in Existentialism. But this just means that any action is OK, as long as one accepts it, not that one should be called to account or punished for it because, after all, all is permitted.

What the existentialists suggest for happiness is; the despair and rebellion we feel at the loss of our external sources of value are the necessary price of a greater value and happiness that comes from within. One must lose all hope of external value before seeking value within. The theme that true happiness must come from within is one that is familiar to all of us, and it is the key to understanding the existentialist conception of happiness.

If, after all sources of external value have been taken away, you can find value within yourself, you would have found what philosophers have been looking for throughout the ages: a way of achieving human happiness that is not vulnerable to the uncontrollable contingencies of the natural world. If we find ourselves isolated from external value by our radical individuality, we can make a world of ourselves, a universe of our own experience, in which we can and must find ourselves happy.

The absurd man says yes to this, and his effort will henceforth be unceasing; he knows himself to be the master of his days. At that subtle moment when man glances backward over his life, Sisyphus returning toward his rock, in that slight pivoting he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which becomes his fate, created by him, combined under his memory's eye and soon sealed by his death.

The Existentialist's secret of happiness, then, is to get ones value from within oneself. In doing so, one loses the promise of external value, but they find a more real happiness, one that cannot be taken away by the external forces beyond their control.

### **Existentialist outlook on Beckett and his *Happy Days***

Samuel Beckett offers an intriguing amalgamation of post/modern concerns, as he straddles the boundaries between modernist experimentation and postmodern meta-fiction. A linguistic and cultural minimalist, he offers dramatic representations of boredom and monotony, absurdity, impotence, comic ritual, and verbal heroism. Every drama exudes a discursive nest of meta-dramatic elements that foreground narrative and structure. All Beckett's dramatis personae play games of verbal acrobatics and do ludic linguistic somersaults across an artificial metonymic lexical playfield. Ponderous existential themes of anxiety and impotence are played out on a vaudeville stage whose mimetic absurdity merely heightens the stoic and satirical philosophy subtending postmodern drama.

In Samuel Beckett's fictive microcosm, Descartes' cogito has been transmuted into a contemporary patio: "I suffer, therefore I am." In his airless dramatic and fictional universe, existence is contingent on sin and fallibility, and even the phenomenon of suffering gives way to the heightened anxiety of eternal suspension. Beckett's protagonists hang, precipitously balanced, between a past that cannot be verified and an unknown future that holds out the tantalizing but illusory promise of release from endless tedium. Being-in-the-world becomes a function of the eternal

process of waiting, of dangling from the delicate thread of past experience, in hopeful anticipation of what was termed, in the old style, "salvation."

Suspended over the void of incertitude, and fending off annihilation, the individual clings to the tattered threads of habitual activity. Habit, Beckett tells us, is the "ballast that chains the dog to his vomit." It is the rope that ties us to the illusion of an identity continuous over time. Life is habit, or rather life is a succession of habits, a series of treaties concluded between consciousness and the environment, the periods of transition that separate consecutive adaptations and represent the perilous zones and the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being.

*Happy Days* illustrates better than any of Beckett's other drama the pithy maxim that habit is the great deadener. Like Vladimir, Estragon, Hamm and Clov, Winnie in *Happy Days* is sustained by religious rituals of speech and gesture. Habit is Winnie's sole consolation in a threatening, entropic universe winding down and gradually burning itself out. In a reductive world, narrative discourse becomes the last refuge of a disintegrating psyche. Winnie, perhaps a metaphorical stroke victim, illustrates the fact that the mind will insist on constructing activities to pass the time and provide a sustaining illusion of meaning, regardless of one's existential plight.

Winnie's situation and the way she perceives her condition and the things that surround her in *Happy Days* evinces a bleak parody of the post modern world. Willie can hide in his cave or crevice, provided he can crawl backwards and maneuver himself into a home that is a barren hole. But Winnie, buried to her waist, then to her neck and brutally exposed to the relentless light of reality, refuses to admit the absurdity of her situation. She reassures herself with platitudes that fend off panic and convince her that it is another heavenly day: "God! — ah well — [*Other corner, do.*]

— no better, no worse, — [*lays down mirror*] — no change — [*wipes fingers on grass*] — no pain." (Beckett 2544)

In *Happy Days*, that old heap of moments now becomes a murdering agent of destruction. Beckett is obviously satirizing the universal tendency to develop strategies of repression that obscure what Heidegger calls one's own most possibility of non-Being. Though a paradigmatic figure of Being-towards-Death, Winnie, like each of us, refuses to accept the inevitability of personal extinction. Literally consumed by a voracious Mother Earth, she persistently builds a refuge of language, a wall of words, to shelter herself from the horrors of annihilation. Sucked up into a grave of her own, Winnie enacts a condition of Heideggerian enclosedness. As witnesses of this tragicomic scene, we are forced to acknowledge the ineluctability of her lugubrious fate. Throughout the play, we must handle an uncanny foreboding that Winnie, first buried to her waist, then to her neck, will soon be encased in solid earth. By the third act of the play, which never takes place, she would doubtless have been buried alive.

Helpless and immobile, Winnie nevertheless asserts the priority of consciousness in a meaningless cosmos. Even as a disembodied head, a talking cranium, she is brave, noble, admirable, in short, heroic. Winnie is the closest Samuel Beckett ever comes to offering us an heroic dramatic persona. She has agreed to snigger with the Almighty as the poor little joke of entrapment. Language offers her a mode of detachment from a situation of unendurable misery. Desperately, she forages in memory to recollect shards of a worn-out and irrelevant culture that nonetheless reassure her of a continuing bond with humanity. Remnants of the classics come back to soothe her distressed psyche, as she utters half-remembered verses and bravely sings her song. Pathetically, Winnie reviews her physical attributes: nose, mouth, brows, and says: "The curve you so admired." She clings to imagined traces of

physical attractiveness and meekly asks Willie: "Was I loveable once, Willie? [Pause.] Was I ever loveable?" (Beckett 2552) Fearful of rejection, and fending off the inevitable deterioration of a sinking body, the rapidly aging woman tries to console herself with dim recollections of extinguished passion.

Winnie seems to believe that *esse est percipi*. Hanging suspended between speech and oblivion, she is convinced that discourse is impossible without audition. Winnie distorts the Cartesian *cogito* to conclude: "I speak, therefore you are. I used to think that I would learn to talk alone. [Pause.] By that I mean to myself, the wilderness. [Smile] But no. [Smile broader] No no. [Smile off.] Ergo you are there." (Beckett 2559)

Tragically, Winnie cannot force her companion to perceive or to hear her, to valorize her existence, or to break through her isolation and communicate. Nevertheless, Winnie's true heroism consists of constant verbal affirmation. Language offers a rational structure in an irrational universe, a refuge from the chaos of the phenomenal world. Even in the face of certain extinction, Winnie continues to create, to tell herself autobiographical stories and tales from the past. She devises a narrative about the Shower or Cooker couple, a bourgeois pair intent on the discovery of meaning in an irrational, meaningless universe. "What do you mean, he says, God help you? [Stops filing, raises head, gazes front.] And you, she says, what's the idea of you, she says, what are you meant to mean?" (Beckett 2556) The allegory reassures both Winnie and the audience that her entrapment is not any more unusual than the general absurdity of the human condition. Meaning can be reduced to a fiction of the scientific imagination, an artificial construct of middle-class morality.

As Winnie is gradually swallowed by the womb/tomb of Mother Earth, she descends into the recesses of memory to re-enact childhood scenes. When the fictive Mildred shrieks at the sight of a mouse, Winnie's scream allows a temporary release

of tension. If the mouse is a phallic surrogate, then its attack on Millie's thigh constitutes a repressed fantasy of rape or sexual abuse. The story may suggest a screen memory of earlier sexual experiences or a psychic displacement of erotic desire.

Finally, when Willie appears in his fashionable out fit Winnie greets him in sophisticated manner and sings a love song. Does Willie appear to kiss or kill; at the end of the play, Winnie recalls the big memory of his laconic courtship. Winnie celebrates the day saying: "Well this is an unexpected pleasure! [*Pause.*] Reminds me of the day you came whining for my hand. [*Pause.*] I worship you, Winnie, be mine [*He looks up.*] Life a mockery without Win". (Beckett 2563) Does Willie intend to offer affection? Is he determined to kiss her, or to shoot her? "Is it me you're after, Willie . . . or is it something else?" ( Beckett 2564) Kiss or kill, is the question. In any case, Winnie responds by singing a love song reassuring herself: "It's true, it's true, You love me so!" (Beckett 2569) Will Winnie's love song be her swan song? We do not know. Winnie and Willie are left in suspended animation, and the play concludes with a pregnant pause.

Winnie and Willie are slowly approaching death, but Beckett makes this more dramatic through his stagecraft. Most explicitly, the mound Winnie is slowly being buried in is her grave, one that will continue to envelop her but never kill her. Willie, too, has a hole in the earth, but his is low to the ground and he can crawl in and out of it. He is reborn each time he emerges into the past he is trying to hold on to. For example, he reads a newspaper that announces job openings for youth. But just as Winnie cannot stave off death, so, too, does he fail. Willie's crawling, as Winnie points out, is not as good as it once was, and in his final crawl he is dressed as if for a funeral. His crawling, however, is just one of many rituals both practice, repetitive exercises that that draw them ever closer to death while purportedly keeping them



active. Winnie's nail filing is a good example of this dual pull. Nail-filing is a mundane activity that seeks to return the nails to their normal length, but the nails also continue growing after the body dies, so it is a futile task; the nails will always grow back and signal the approach of death.

The black bag stores all the rituals of Winnie's life: her toothbrush, comb, magnifying glass, and, most importantly, "Brownie," her revolver. These items do not need her, as she says, they have a "life" of their own, and create an empty, static world of ritual. The bag's color provokes connections to death, and Winnie eventually takes out for good the revolver, which always seems to rest at the top of the bag despite its weight. The bag, then, symbolizes the death ritual brings to Winnie and the legitimate option of suicide it presents—one which she refuses with her steadfast optimism.

## Chapter – III

### Quiet Desperation in Beckett's *Happy Days*

#### Winnie's Predicament: Parody of Modern Happiness

Beckett's use of the irony and the absurdity in *Happy Days* illustrates the impotence and alienation of the individual in modern society. Winnie, part realistically human and part inanimate, incongruously entombed alive and yet somehow totally acceptable to the reader/spectator, exists as a surrealist metaphor for life itself. Although Winnie is cut off from her body, from her husband, from her own freedom, she remains cheerful. *Happy Days* differs from many other Beckett's works in that pessimism is only implicit in the text. Winnie does not dwell on her "death-in-life" situation; instead, she is comforted by the sound of her own voice and by other sounds she hears:

What would I do without them? [*Pause*] What would I do without them, when words fail? [*Pause.*] Gaze before me, with compressed lips. [*Long pause while she does so.*] I cannot. [*Pause.*] Ah yes, great mercies, great mercies. [*Long pause. Low.*] Sometimes I hear sounds. [*Listening expression. Normal voice.*] But not often. [*Pause.*] They are a boon, sounds are a boon, they help me. . . through the day. [*Smile*] The old style! [*Smile off.*] Yes, those are happy days, when there are sound. (Beckett 2560)

*Happy Days* examines middle age and the unfortunate and ironic realization that life is meaningless and mechanical; the characters, Winnie and Willie, attempt simply to "get through" and take comfort in the small things and in each other. The main focus of the play is on Winnie, who is alienated, psychically, mentally, and sexually. In her imprisonment, she is unable to consummate her marriage or anything else. Winnie's condition is the condition of modern human condition which is said to

be the most facilitated, advanced and most comfortable ever in the whole history of human being. If they say they are enjoying their life, they must be saying Winnie is enjoying her life too, who, is in fact at the ignorance of her predicament. What Winnie does to kill her time, what is the purpose of extensive series of repeated domestic actions that she goes through and the words she simply pronounces unable to form any meaning nor are intended to give.

In this play, Beckett starkly paints the nature of human reality as he sees it as an endless stream of activities, pointing nothing much at all with daily rituals of Winnie. *Happy Days* is stripped to its bare essentials; there are few characters and even fewer props so that the meaninglessness of postmodern life is starkly highlighted. Moreover, the dialogue, the *language*, is made more prominent by virtue of Beckett's sparse use of props. What few props exist are used symbolically: hole and mound in which characters are situated illustrate the gaps and holes in the life of modern people and the restrictions in living their life.

We never find a definitive depiction of Winnie as the main character, having only one more character that appears in the scenes and two more imaginary characters, decidable meaning, nor is this Beckett's purpose. In this sense, we can view the human life, as existentialists do, with no decidable meaning.

We are never told where Winnie came from, or what or who is responsible for this condition of Winnie, neither anybody ever takes interest to find it out, as the human being never know where we are from and why we are here. She is enslaved to the periodic ringing of a bell, and every day is considered to be the same litany of banality:

I suppose this—might seem strange—this—what shall I say this—  
what I have said—yes—[*she takes up revolver*] — strange— [*she turns  
to put revolver in bag*] — were it not — [*about to put revolver in bag*]

*she arrests gesture and turns back front*] — were not— [*she lays down revolver to her right, stops, head up*] — the all seems strange.

[*Pause*] Most strange. [*Pause.*] Never any change. (Beckett 2557)

That Winnie is trapped, there is no doubt: she is encased with rising earth, unable to act but only to talk; incarcerated by language almost; and her life seems utterly worthless, yet she beams with extreme hope and proclaims her each new day to be “Another happy day.” That’s what is the condition of ours; we are thrown on the earth, entrapped on the earth in the name of living a life, restricted with rules and regulations of society, so called responsibility towards the family, society, and nations. We are not told why we should follow the rules; just to avoid the arrest from policemen, or just to drag our life up till the end, death.

More specifically, it can be looked at as a progression through the stages of postmodern life. Beckett's portrayal of postmodern life can be viewed as stark, hopeless and ironic: where language does not have a decidable meaning; humans lack foundational assurance; and communication continually breaks down. It illustrates the desire to prove one's existence and make sense of the world. Winnie has only language to rely on to prove her existence and maintain their sanity in a seemingly hopeless world; however, language is an inadequate system in reaching any type of abstract truth or foundational assurance. It looks at the futility of relationships; the idea that language, which promotes contact with other human beings, is self-serving, for the only goal of humans is to cling to another to avoid separation and solitude. It is through solitude that one may examine the nature and purpose of one's existence; one must also come to terms with the issue of mortality. It also examines the irony that is at the heart of human relationships; we engage in relationships in order to prolong the inevitable: the examination of existence, which, as Beckett continually shows, is meaningless.

Winnie is symbolical challenge for conventional notions of existence, relationships, and language in order to highlight the stark realities/absurdities of modern society. Beckettian drama breaks down the barrier between speech and writing and presents a postmodern carnivalesque notion of language: his display of the ambivalence of language connotes the lack of a determinant meaning in his texts. Traditional notions of the signifier/signified relationship are blurred and symbolic dialogical spaces are highlighted in order to illustrate the absurdity of the logo-centric tradition of Western thought with its foundation in origin because it closes the space between word and thing; in contrast, a word is only a representation of a truth and not truth itself. Perhaps more ironically, Beckett shows us that words are often all we have. But it is the way in which Beckett uses language and theater conventions that serves to change our conceptions of both. Beckett's techniques can be viewed as protest: a protest against conventional notions of language and theater.

Winnie wakes up with the ringing of bell; the beginning and the end of her days depends on the bell. Bell might represent the external forces in human life which influences one's life. Does a modern man wake up in the morning according to his own will or does so being compelled to do so; probably with the ringing of alarm bells. They are not free to lead their life as they wish, but they tow their life as they get instruction from others, may be their boss, or familial responsibility.

Winnie is comforted only by her mindless rambling, basic objects, and by the idea that someone, Willie, is listening:

Ah yes, if only I could bear to be alone, I mean prattle away with not a soul to hear. [*Pause.*] Not that I flatter myself you hear much, no Willie, God forbid. [*Pause.*] Days perhaps when you hear nothing. [*Pause.*] But days too when you answer. [*Pause.*] So that I may say at all times, even when you do not answer and perhaps hear nothing,

Something of this is being heard, I am not merely talking to myself, that is in the wilderness, a thing I could never bear to do — for any length of time. [*Pause.*] That is what enables me to go on, go on talking that is. [*Pause.*] Whereas if you were to die — [*smile*] — to speak in the old style — [*smile off*] — or go away and leave me, then what would I do, what *could* I do, all day long, I mean between the bell for waking and the bell for sleep? [*Pause*] (Beckett 2548)

For reasons unbeknownst to us, Winnie is trapped in a death-in-life situation. Although her movement and her sexuality have been rendered static by her partial burial, Winnie sees the situation as completely normal. Is she really ignorant at her predicament or she is pretending to be so to overcome it. She is sure that Willie is listening to her; he is accompanying her during her good or bad moments though she hears Willie back very rarely. She must be aware of Willie's reaction towards her, she must have realized how Willie takes herself and her words, yet she consoles herself with the assurance that Willie is there with her, listening to her, supporting her.

Willie represents the other people in the life of human being, whom they depend upon, whom they trust, whom they love. Then the question is, whether we recognize those Willies in our life or even though we identify them, we don't want to accept it. Are we letting our and relationships continue with those people like that of Willie. Apparently, the modern people don't want to be acquainted with their false relationships, because they don't have any other choice besides keeping up with these fake relationships.

Winnie's marriage is sexually dead because Willie is impotent in a variety of ways; he is restricted in movement and, it seems, in his use of language. He is unable or unwilling to respond often to his wife. However, this situation does not cause Winnie to become asexual:

And should one day the earth cover my breasts, then I shall never have seen my breasts, no one ever seen my breasts. [*Pause.*] I hope you caught something of that, Willie, I should be sorry to think you had caught nothing of all that, it is not every day I rise to such heights. (Beckett 2554)

And later,

What I dream sometimes, Willie. [*Pause.*] That you'll come round and live this side where I could see you. [*Pause. Back front.*] I'd be a different woman. [*Pause*] Unrecognizable. [*Turning slightly towards him.*] Or just now and then, come round this side just every now and then and let me feast on you. (Beckett 2554)

Winnie's sexual experiences too, as that of the modern busy people, exist as fantasy or memory; the extent of her sensations is intentionally ambiguous. Instead of being fulfilled sexually, Winnie is comforted only in busing herself with life's necessities and by her own speech, although, by her own admission, language is inadequate:

Words fail, there are times when even they fail.[*Turning a little towards Willie.*] Is that not so, Willie? [*Pause. Turning a little further.*] Is not that so, Willie, that even words fail, at times? [*Pause. Back front.*] What is one to do then, until they come again? Brush and comb the hair, if it has not been done, or if there is some doubt, trim the nails, if they are in need of trimming, these things tide one over. (Beckett 2549)

The play ends with an impotent consummation of the married couple. Willie is finally able to situate himself in front of Winnie's mound, looking up at her. The two do not touch physically, but Winnie sings the song, "I Love You So" and the two

engage in a look; this suggests erotic undertones. Although Winnie seems pleased with this situation, the reader/spectator truly gets a sense of frustration. This frustration comes from the realization that despite the fact that Winnie is capable of using language, this capability, this ability to communicate, does help her out of her "death-in-life" situation. The function of her words is only to comfort her, so that she may temporarily alleviate herself from the void that is her life. Winnie's situation is similar to that of well off people of modern world, in that words serve only as a momentary comfort from the confrontation of the truth of existence, the hopelessness of despair, and inevitability of death.

The ending scene where, Willie's crawling forth in his towards Winnie in a fashionable outfit, Winnie's greeting him in a sophisticated manner can be interpreted as more precarious situation. Is he approaching her to kiss or to kill? Winnie, who is never ready to understand her real situation, believes he is advancing towards her to make love with her, but, Willie must be intending to end up everything, including Winnie, as he is not as optimistic as Winnie is. He does not have false hope as Winnie does have, so he might want to get rid of Winnie, and provide Winnie a salvation from the false world, fake happiness, and artificial hopes.

To sum up, Winnie, as those rich people, is resigned to her fate with cheerfulness that is almost more frightening than her despair. The title of the play holds a bitter humour: she is determined to be happy because she will not face the terrible things that are happening to her. Her defiance is that she will not allow herself to care; and for this reason, this has been described as Beckett's most despairing play.

### **Possibility/ impossibility of happiness in modern life**

When we genuinely observe the life of elite world of last one hundred years, we come across the songs of rue that will haunt the inner ear of ours even long after we have heard it. It's full of sorrows, pains, sense of loss, and never ending loneliness.



In the quest of happiness, they have reached every possible place they could, say the moon to the crust of the earth; they have conquered the depth of the pacific to the peak of the Mt. Everest, on the other word they have earned victory over the nature. There is nothing left for them to go further. But, ultimately, what they gain is pessimism.

Yet, they are almost incessantly optimistic with their life and their acquisitions. They keep themselves busy with the same rituals everyday and even every moment. Dependent on their so called, but in reality, false companions; they desperately need someone to listen to them, at least some of the time, or else they feel like they may as well not speak at all. They fear the day when words must fail; when their dialogue with their companion is reduced to a monologue, and in a monologue, language carries no meaning for them. Nearly everything they do is an attempt to diminish their loneliness; they are often confused their tedious works with that of profoundly significant works that one must do to attain full taste of the life. And, the people surrounding them create illusion in them that they really care about them.

They must be aware that spiritually they have died as modern man and they must be acquainted with the difficulty and pain of living in the modern age yet they fight off the loneliness and gets on with life. Their scorn of the gods, their hatred of death, and their passion for life won them that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted towards accomplishing nothing. They as Camus' Sisyphus are conscious of their plight, and there in lies the tragedy. For if, during the moments of descent, they nourished the hope that they would yet succeed, then their labour would lose its torment. But they are clearly conscious of the extent of their own misery. It is this lucid recognition of their destiny that transforms their torment into their victory. It has to be a victory to them for this universe henceforth without a master, as the God is already dead to them, seems to them neither sterile nor futile. Their struggle to

maintain happiness towards more heights is enough to fill a man's heart. No doubt one must imagine them to be happy.

Their life and torment have been transformed into a victory by concentrating on their freedom, their refusal to accept the fact, and their obstinate hopes, and their knowledge of the absurdity of their situation. They are like under sentence of death, trapped by a seemingly unending torment and, like Sisyphus, they continue to perform their duty no matter how useless or how insignificant their actions are. It matters little for what reason they continue to struggle so long as they testify to man's allegiance to man and not to abstractions or 'absolutes'. As the Existentialists believe the absence of God has a much larger significance than the metaphysics of creation: Without God there is no purpose, no value, and no meaning in the world. A world without purpose, value, or meaning is literally senseless, worthless, meaningless, empty, and hopeless. It is, to use a favorite Existentialist term, absurd.

To be without value and meaning is also to be without standards for behavior. Indeed, if the loss of God means the loss of all meaning and value, then actions are without meaning or value either, and one cannot say that it matters whether actions are right or wrong, since those words, or the corresponding actions, don't mean anything more than anything else.

A question arises here, what one can do to make life endurable. Well, they can just decide that it is meaningful. The value and purpose that objectively don't exist in the world can be restored by an act of will. Again, this is what has struck people as liberating about Existentialism. To live one's life, one must exercise the freedom to create a life. Just going along with conventional values and forgetting about the absurdity of the world is not authentic. Authenticity is to exercise one's free will and to choose the activities and goals that will be meaningful for one's self. With this approach, even Sisyphus can be engaged and satisfied with what he is doing.

To existentialists the other people are the 'hell'. If we live our lives just because of the completely free and autonomous decisions that we make, this creates nothing that is common with others. If we adopt something that comes from someone else, which could give us a common basis to make a connection with them, this is inauthentic. If it just happens, by chance, that our own decisions produce something that matches those of someone else, well then we have a connection, but it is likely to be volatile. As we make new decisions, the probability of our connection with others continuing is going to decline. We are isolated by our own autonomy. The values and decision of others, whether authentic or inauthentic, will be foreign and irritating.

Sartre himself felt the moral loss involved in all this. Traditional ideas about moral responsibility disappeared when there was nothing meaningful to be responsible about. Sartre consequently tried to compensate for this by introducing a new, strengthened sense of responsibility. His view was that one is responsible for all the consequences of one's action, whether it is possible to know about them or not. This is just a version of what the ordinary meaning of responsible has come to be, namely conscientious. A responsible person is a conscientious person, which means someone who is trying to do the right thing. Now, one may ask how to believe that something is right or say how to decide, which one is the authentically right. It just means that one meant to do something and accepts it. One accepts and acknowledges the consequences of one's action, and accepts responsibility, because one really intended to do the action. The opposite, not accepting one's own actions or just doing something because it is expected, is bad faith, the only real sin in Existentialism. But this just means that any action is up to standard, as long as one accepts it, not that one should be called to account or punished for it because, after all, all is permitted.

One might think that this is because intellectuals find private life and hard work boring; but then, after the "Myth of Sisyphus," one might think that any

mundane task could be valorized into the most important thing ever. The truth seems to be that existentialists never really believed that life was as meaningless as the task of Sisyphus. They actually demanded a real world of meaning vast beyond the confines of ordinary life. Thus, Marxism probably appealed to Sartre because of its pretence that it was scientific and about facts, and, as it happens, Heidegger did not really have the classical Existentialist belief in the meaninglessness of the world. The uncovering of Being made for real value, however terrible, which means that Adolf Hitler gave real meaning to the world.

## **Chapter - IV**

### **Desperate Cure for Incurable Conditions? Some Conclusions**

The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had been a kind of boon for the European countries, and their citizens. They maintained very high rate of economic growth, due to their tremendous development in industrial sector. The deployment of free economic system proved to be very successful for them, no matter what the inequality in the distribution of world asset it had caused. The liberalized market created a kind of competition among the individuals and they with no doubt devoted themselves in the money making business; upgraded their as well as the condition of the country. They enjoyed more comfortable and advanced life.

If laissez-fair capital market had given an outstanding rate of economic growth, it also to gave birth to ubiquity of mass media and mass production, and shift from manufacturing to service economies. Known as late capitalism, this system created a context where manufacturing, distribution and dissemination have become exceptionally inexpensive, but social connection and community have become more expensive. It gave rise to more rapid transportation, wider communication and ability to abandon standardization of mass production, leading to a system which values a wider range of capital than previously, and allows value to be stored in a greater variety of forms. And, obviously, people had to make sacrifices in various forms in the name of progress.

The people had grown more and more busier, which showed changes in social formation. The people turned to be more individualistic, the social and familial responsibility was more narrowed and already grown nuclear family system, now was homeless individuals. They had houses and bungalows, but lacked house, since they were too busy to return to home in the evening after their work. The wide development in transportation and communication system had narrowed the world

and broadened the concept of selfhood in the mind of people.

Samuel Beckett, an English speaking Irishman, was winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in the year 1969, one of the few times this century that almost everyone agreed the recipient deserved it. Beckett was one those writers who had their literary career flourished during the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with live memory of the Second World War in their mind and crude manners of the late capitalists in their current life.

The widespread idea, fostered by the popular press, that Beckett's work is concerned primarily with the sordid side of human existence, with tramps and with cripples who inhabit trash cans, is a fundamental misconception. He dealt with human beings in such extreme situations not because he was interested in the sordid and diseased aspects of life but because he concentrated on the essential aspects of human experience. The subject matter of so much of the world's literature; the social relations between individuals, their manners and possessions, their struggles for rank and position, or the conquest of sexual objects--appeared to Beckett as mere external trappings of existence, the accidental and superficial aspects that mask the basic problems and the basic anguish of the human condition. The basic questions for Beckett seemed to be these: How can we come to terms with the fact that, without ever having asked for it, we have been thrown into the world, into being? And who are we; what is the true nature of our self? What does a human being mean when he says "I"?

What appears to the superficial view as a concentration on the sordid thus emerges as an attempt to grapple with the most essential aspects of the human condition. The two heroes of *Waiting for Godot*, for instance, are frequently referred to by critics as tramps, yet they were never described as such by Beckett. They are

merely two human beings in the most basic human situation of being in the world and not knowing what they are there for. Since man is a rational being and cannot imagine that his being thrown into any situation should or could be entirely pointless, the two vaguely assume that their presence in the world, represented by an empty stage with a solitary tree, must be due to the fact that they are waiting for someone. But they have no positive evidence that this person, whom they call Godot, ever made such an appointment--or, indeed, that he actually exists. Their patient and passive waiting is contrasted by Beckett with the mindless and equally purposeless journeyings that fill the existence of a second pair of characters. In most dramatic literature the characters pursue well-defined objectives, seeking power, wealth, marriage with a desirable partner, or something of the sort. Yet, once they have attained these objectives, are they or the audience any nearer answering the basic questions that Beckett poses? Does the hero, having won his lady, really live with her happily ever after? That is apparently why Beckett chose to discard what he regarded as the inessential questions and began where other writing left off.

This stripping of reality to its naked bones is the reason that Beckett's development as a writer was toward an ever greater concentration, sparseness, and brevity. Most of Beckett's plays also take place on a similar level of abstraction. *Endgame* describes the dissolution of the relation between a master, Hamm, and his servant, Clov. They inhabit a circular structure with two high windows; perhaps the image of the inside of a human skull. The action might be seen as a symbol of the dissolution of a human personality in the hour of death, the breaking of the bond between the spiritual and the physical sides of man. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, an old man listens to the confessions he recorded in earlier and happier years. This becomes an image of the mystery of the self, for to the old Krapp the voice of the younger Krapp

is that of a total stranger. In what sense, then, can the two Krapps be regarded as the same human being?

In his trilogy of narrative prose works--they are not, strictly speaking, novels as usually understood--*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*, as well as in the collection *Stories and Texts for Nothing* (1967), Beckett raised the problem of the identity of the human self from, as it were, the inside. This basic problem, simply stated, is that when I say "I am writing," I am talking about myself, one part of me describing what another part of me is doing. I am both the observer and the object I observe. Which of the two is the real "I"? In his prose narratives, Beckett tried to pursue this elusive essence of the self, which, to him, manifested itself as a constant stream of thought and of observations about the self. One's entire existence, one's consciousness of oneself as being in the world, can be seen as a stream of thought.

*Happy Days* illustrates better than any of Beckett's other drama the pithy maxim that habit is the great deadener. Like Vladimir, Estragon, Hamm and Clov, Winnie in *Happy Days* is sustained by religious rituals of speech and gesture. Habit is Winnie's sole consolation in a threatening, entropic universe winding down and gradually burning itself out. In a reductive world, narrative discourse becomes the last refuge of a disintegrating psyche. Winnie, perhaps a metaphorical stroke victim, illustrates the fact that the mind will insist on constructing activities to pass the time and provide a sustaining illusion of meaning, regardless of one's existential plight.

Winnie's situation and the way she perceives her condition and the things that surround her in *Happy Days* evinces a bleak parody of the post modern world. Willie can hide in his cave or crevice, provided he can crawl backwards and maneuver himself into a home that is a barren hole. But Winnie, buried to her waist, then to her neck and brutally exposed to the relentless light of reality, refuses to admit the absurdity of her situation. She reassures herself with platitudes that fend off panic and



convince her that it is another heavenly day.

In *Happy Days*, that old heap of moments now becomes a murdering agent of destruction. Beckett is obviously satirizing the universal tendency to develop strategies of repression that obscure what Heidegger calls one's own most possibility of non-Being. Though a paradigmatic figure of Being-towards-Death, Winnie, like each of us, refuses to accept the inevitability of personal extinction. Literally consumed by a voracious Mother Earth, she persistently builds a refuge of language, a wall of words, to shelter herself from the horrors of annihilation. Sucked up into a grave of her own, Winnie enacts a condition of Heideggerian enclosedness. As witnesses of this tragicomic scene, we are forced to acknowledge the ineluctability of her lugubrious fate. Throughout the play, we must handle an uncanny foreboding that Winnie, first buried to her waist, then to her neck, will soon be encased in solid earth. By the third act of the play, which never takes place, she would doubtless have been buried alive.

Helpless and immobile, Winnie nevertheless asserts the priority of consciousness in a meaningless cosmos. Even as a disembodied head, a talking cranium, she is brave, noble, admirable, in short, heroic. Winnie is the closest Samuel Beckett ever comes to offering us a heroic dramatic persona. She has agreed to snigger with the Almighty as the poor little joke of entrapment. Language offers her a mode of detachment from a situation of unendurable misery. Desperately, she forages in memory to recollect shards of a worn-out and irrelevant culture that nonetheless reassure her of a continuing bond with humanity. Remnants of the classics come back to soothe her distressed psyche, as she utters half-remembered verses and bravely sings her song. Pathetically, Winnie reviews her physical attributes: nose, mouth, brows, and recalls that once Willie once admired them. Fearful of rejection from her companion, Willie, and fending off the inevitable deterioration of a sinking body, the

rapidly aging woman tries to console herself with dim recollections of extinguished passion. Tragically, Winnie cannot force her companion to perceive or to hear her, to valorize her existence, or to break through her isolation and communicate.

Nevertheless, Winnie's true heroism consists of constant verbal affirmation. Language offers a rational structure in an irrational universe, a refuge from the chaos of the phenomenal world. Even in the face of certain extinction, Winnie continues to create, to tell herself autobiographical stories and tales from the past. She devises a narrative about the Shower or Cooker couple, a bourgeois pair intent on the discovery of meaning in an irrational, meaningless universe.

As Winnie is gradually swallowed by the womb/tomb of Mother Earth, she descends into the recesses of memory to re-enact childhood scenes. When the fictive Mildred shrieks at the sight of a mouse, Winnie's scream allows a temporary release of tension. If the mouse is a phallic surrogate, then its attack on Millie's thigh constitutes a repressed fantasy of rape or sexual abuse. The story may suggest a screen memory of earlier sexual experiences or a psychic displacement of erotic desire. Finally, when Willie appears in his fashionable outfit Winnie greets him in sophisticated manner and sings a love song. Does Willie appear to kiss or kill; at the end of the play, Winnie recalls the big memory of his laconic courtship.

This is how, Beckett presents *Happy Days* as allegory of the postmodern society, where, people have utterly lost the happiness in their life, yet they frantically try to sustain it through their pointless daily activities.

### **Works Cited**

Abbot, H. Porter. *The Fiction of Samuel Beckett: Form and Effect*. Methuen:

Berkeley, 1973.

Abrahms, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Bangalore: Prism Books, 1993.

- Appignanesi, Richard. *Introducing Existentialism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Cambridge: Icon Books, 2006.
- Baker, Richard E. *The Dynamics of the Absurd in the Existentialist Novel*. New York: Peter Lang, 1993.
- Banach, David. *The Ethics of Absolute Freedom*.  
< <http://www.anselmphilosophy.com> >
- Beckett, Samuel. "Happy Days" *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. pg.2541  
5<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. M.H. Abrams. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987.
- Begam, Richard. *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity*. Standford: Standford University Press, 1996.
- Blamires, Harry. *A Short History of English Literature*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Routledge, 1984.
- Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Trans. Justin O'Brien. New York: Vintage, 1955.
- Cantor, Norman F. *Twentieth-Century Culture: Modernism to Deconstruction*. New York: Peter Lang, 1988.
- Crompton, R. *Women and Work in Modern Britain*. London: Oxford University, 1997.
- Culic, Dr Jan *The Theatre of the Absurd: The West and the East*.  
<<http://www.2.arts.gla.ac.uk/Slavonic/Absurd.htm>>
- Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Allied, 1969.
- DiBattista, Maria and McDiarmid, Lucy (ed.). *High and Low Moderns: Literature and Culture. 1889 – 1939*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Drabble, Margaret. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. New York: Penguin, 1961.
- Eysteinson, Astradur, *The Concept of Modernism*. Ithaca: Cornell University, 1992.

- Federman, R and Graver, L (ed). *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Finney, Brian. *The Columbia History of the British Novel*. New York: Columbia University, 1994.
- Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990.
- Gontarski, S.E.. *Beckett's Happy Days: A Manuscript Study*. Columbus: Ohio State University, 1977.
- Goodwin, Evan. *Little Blue Light – Samuel Beckett*.  
<<http://www.littlebluelight.com/lblphp/intro.php?ikey=1> >
- Greenberg, Clement. *Modernism and Postmodernism*.  
<<http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/postmodernism.html>>
- Hardill, Irene. Graham, David T. and Kofman, Eleonore. *Human Geography of the UK: An Introduction*. London.: Routledge, 2001.
- Kenner, Hugh. *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1973.
- Kolocotroni, Vassiliki *et al*, ed. *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.
- Lukes, Steven. *Individualism*. New York: Harper & Row. 1973.
- Marr, A. *The Day Britain Died*. London: Profile, 2000.
- Nicholls, Peter. *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*. London: Macmillan, 1995.
- O'Brien, Eion. *The Beckett Country, Dublin*. Dublin: The Black Cat Press, 1986.
- Paxman, J. *The English: A Portrait of People*. London: Michael Joseph, 1998.
- Philips, Michael. *Cheerful it's not, but Happy Days hits its mark*.  
<<http://www.thehypocrites.com/happyreviews.asp>>
- Pinter, Harold. *Samuel Beckett*. <<http://www.samuel-beckett.net>>

- Sampson, George. *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism and Human Emotions*. Trans. Bernard Frechtman. New York: Philosophical Library, 1957.
- Sarup, Madan. *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*. Atlanta: University of Georgia, 1993.
- Schwartz, Sanford. *The Matrix of Modernism: Pound, Eliot, and Early Twentieth Century Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1985
- Thanh, Nguyen Van. *From Seattle to Doha: Solidarity is the only Weapon of Developing Countries*. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/capitalism\\_socialism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/capitalism_socialism)>
- Theatre of the Absurd*. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre\\_of\\_the\\_absurd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre_of_the_absurd)>
- Vanasco, Jennifer. *Buried Alive*. <<http://www.thehypocrites.com/happyreviews.asp>>
- Webb, Eugene, *The Plays Of Samuel Beckett*. London: Peter Owen, 1972.
- Weiss, Hedy. *Happy Days*. <<http://www.thehypocrites.com/happyreviews.asp>>
- Wilhelm, Odelberg. *Les Prix Nobel en 1969*. <<http://www.nobelprize.org/literature/laureates/1969/press.>>
- Witcombe, Christopher. *Modernism*. <http://witcombe.sbc.edu/modernism/index/html>.