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Fragmentace a nespojitost v hrách Samuela Becketta
Fragmentation and Disjointedness in Samuel Beckett's Plays

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Abstrakt

Tato práce zkoumá různé úrovně fragmentace a nespojitosti v dramatických dílech Samuela Becketta *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Happy Days* a *Play*. Nejdříve označí určité koncepty jako fragmentované; v souvislosti s fragmentací a nespojitostí zkoumá koncepty jazyka, času, identity a reality. Motivací této části výzkumu bylo odhalení subjektivity a mnohotvárnosti daných konceptů a zjišťování, jakým způsobem jsou zastoupeny ve zkoumaných dramatech. Práce dále zkoumá Beckettovo užití fragmentace a rozštěpenosti ve vzájemné souvislosti s neúplností. Všimá si přitom důležitosti toho, co je v dílech přítomno, ale i toho, co absentuje.

Ve druhé kapitole práce zkoumá vztah formy a funkce jazyka a zabývá se jednotlivými faktory ovlivňujícími jedincovo vnímání jazyka. Jazyk je nahlížen z pohledu subjektivního, kontextuálního a sociálního. Postavy zkoumaných děl dokazují, že jazyk je komplexní vyjadřovací formou, která nezřídka vede ke komunikačním neshodám. Třetí kapitola zkoumá fragmentaci a subjektivitu času, identity a reality. Čas je nahlížen ve vztahu k postavám děl: zkoumá se, jak postavy vnímají minulost a přítomnost a odhaluje se subjektivita času. Čas je dále nahlížen jako spouštěč fragmentace identity, která se tak v čase proměňuje. Fragmentace identity je potom zkoumána ve vztahu k rozporům těla a mysli na příkladu postav děl. Fragmentace a těkavost identity je také nahlížena ve vztahu k hercům a jejich rolím. V závěru kapitoly je koncept reality shledán problematickým v tom smyslu, že zkoumané hry popisují jen realitu neúplnou. Realita je tedy dále nahlížena prostřednictvím jejích fragmentů, jejichž zdrojem jsou postavy děl, a dále prostřednictvím realit, které tyto postavy konstruují.

Čtvrtá kapitola ("Postdramatic theatre is not whole but full of holes") se zabývá absencí a neúplností. První část kapitoly zkoumá formy izolace, ve kterých se postavy her nacházejí: izolaci od společnosti, izolaci vzájemnou a izolaci od sebe samotného. Druhá část zkoumá smysl neúplnosti, která prostupuje zkoumané hry. V souvislosti s nerozhodností se analyzuje Beckettovo používání nejednoznačných zápletek, opakování, umístění děje do míst připomínajících křesťanské předpeklí a fragmentované nebo

nehybné postavy.

Zkoumání čtyř zmíněných Beckettových her vede k poznatku o rozporu mezi inscenací textu hry a její psanou podobou, který je i východiskem části práce zkoumající dramaturgii a dialogy. Koncepty jazyka, času, identity a reality působí problematičtěji v tom smyslu, že jejich role ve zkoumaných hrách byla omezená. Fragmentaci práce nalézá také na estetické úrovni: všímá si jí v oblasti řeči, lidského těla a prostoru. Zároveň fragmentaci nachází na konceptuální úrovni, když identifikuje jazyk, čas, identitu a realitu jako necelostvé, komplexní a často nejednoznačné koncepty.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore different levels of fragmentation and disjointedness in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Happy Days*, and *Play*. Firstly, certain concepts are exposed as being fragmentary. The concepts which are examined in relation to fragmentation and disjointedness are language, time, identity, and reality. The motivation behind this part of the research was to expose the subjectivity and multiplicity of these concepts, and to examine how they function in the four treated plays. Furthermore, this thesis seeks to examine Beckett's use of fragmentation and disjointedness in correlation with incompleteness, examining the importance of what is present but also what is absent in the treated plays.

In chapter 2, the relationship between the form and function of language is examined, exploring the different factors that affect one's perception towards language. Language is examined within a subjective, contextual, and social framework. The characters of the treated plays prove that language is a delicate method of expression, often resulting in rifts in communication. The third chapter deals with the fragmentation and subjectivity of time, identity, and reality. Time is examined in relation to the characters, delving into the problem of the characters' perception of the past and present, as well as recognizing the concept of time as subjective. Time is also examined as a catalyst of fragmented identity, as changes in identity are revealed over time. Fragmentation of identity is further examined in regard to the disparity between the body and mind as depicted by the characters. Fragmentation and oscillation of identity is also discussed in regard to the actor and the character he or she plays. Lastly, the concept of reality is deemed problematic in that only an incomplete reality is presented in the treated plays. Reality is then examined in relation to the fragments of reality that are acknowledged by the characters, and subsequently the realities that are fabricated by them.

The fourth chapter, "Postdramatic theatre is not whole but full of holes", focuses on absence and incompleteness. The first part of this chapter examines the various states

of isolation that the characters of the treated plays are in: isolation from society, isolation from others, and isolation from the self. The second part is aimed at examining the sense of incompleteness that pervades the treated plays. Beckett's use of inconclusive story lines, repetition, limbo-esque spaces, and fragmented or immobile characters is analyzed in regard to irresolution.

The research of Beckett's four aforementioned plays lead to recognizing the disparity between the performed text and the written text, allowing for an analysis of the concepts discussed in the thesis in relation to dialogue and staging. The concepts language, time, identity and reality proved to be problematic in that their functionality within the treated plays was exposed as being limited. Fragmentation was then found on an aesthetic level, observing speech, the human body, and space as being fragmented; but also on a conceptual level, where language, time, identity and reality proved to not be whole, unitary concepts, but rather multifaceted and often ambiguous concepts.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the works of Samuel Beckett, human existence is presented as fragmented and complex, in that life does not consist of cohesive occurrences, but rather comprises of a series of ambiguities. Beckett explores the multifaceted mode of perceiving different aspects of human existence, i.e. language, time, identity, and reality. Beckett thus departs from the classical notions of unity and mimesis, and instead addresses the instability and inherent flux of these concepts.

Martin Esslin recognizes the preliminary necessity to address the changing perception of the world, and the subsequent need to redefine outdated concepts. In his study of the Theatre of the Absurd, Esslin claims that “It (The Theatre of the Absurd) bravely faces up to the fact that for those to whom the world has lost its central explanation and meaning, it is no longer possible to accept art forms still based on the continuation of standards and concepts that have lost their validity.”¹ Esslin thus addresses the relationship between the Theatre of the Absurd and its analysis, as it cannot be interpreted on the basis of dated and irrelevant notions. An entirely new system of interpretation is thus employed, disposing of old notions of objectivity, unity, and universality; and replacing it with notions of fragmentation, subjectivity and dissonance.

This very consideration of reinvention not only of theatre but also its analysis, is also subsumed in Hans-Thies Lehmann’s work *Postdramatic Theatre*, where he addresses the need to provide relevant and adequate definitions of theatre and its aspects, in order to justly analyze postdramatic works. One of the leading theatric errors Lehmann confronts is the notion of unity, as he recognizes dramatic texts as a *mélange* of fragments that need to be addressed as such. Both postdramatic theatre and the Theatre of the Absurd, though not one in the same, share the necessity to recognize a shift of values in theatre.

Lehmann comments on the notion of fragmentary experience as an inherent element not only of postdramatic theatre, but of its reception. He recognizes that along with the innovations made in theatre comes a reform within the observer himself, stating

¹ Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Edinburgh: T. & A. Constable, 1962) 290.

that “The mode of perception is shifting: a simultaneous and multi-perspectival form of perceiving is replacing the linear-successive.”² The transition from this “linear-successive” mode of perception which is rooted in the acceptance of the text as being structurally conservative, into the realm of “moving images” (in this case theatre), brings about a newfound sense of artistic and perceptual liberty. The playwright is then emancipated from the authoritative text, allowing him to experiment with the staging, dialogue, and overall mode of performance. This freedom to experiment with the content of the play as well as its form, brings about a freedom but also an ambiguity in perception on the part of the observer. Lehmann recognizes this as fundamentally characteristic of what he defines as postdramatic theatre in that “Enclosed within postdramatic theatre is obviously the demand for an open and fragmentary perception in place of a unifying and closed perception.”³

This intrinsic ambiguity of perception goes on to form one of the tenets of postdramatic theatre in regards to the casting off of the Aristotelian unities of action, place, and time; rendering unity a completely inadequate concept altogether. The use of a fragmentary mode of presentation can then be seen as correlating to the postdramatic depiction (or lack thereof) of reality. Lehmann elucidates the tension between reality and its depiction in theatre: “The new theatre languages to chaos theory, which assumes that reality consists of unstable systems rather than closed circuits, the arts respond to this with ambiguity, polyvalence and simultaneity, the theatre that fixes partial structures rather than whole patterns.”⁴ The classical notion of mimesis is then completely discarded, in that reality cannot be depicted when its very nature defies any possibility of accurate representation. Symptomatic of the notion of reality as a fragmentary experience is the inability to synthesize, as “The theatre of sense and synthesis has largely disappeared- and with it the possibility of synthesizing interpretation.”⁵ A sense of open-endedness and irresolution is then an inevitable component of postdramatic theatre, and is reaffirmed by the existence of fragmentation on various planes, whether it be intertextual or intratextual, literal or figurative.

² Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2006) 16.

³ Lehmann 82.

⁴ Lehmann 83.

⁵ Lehmann 25.

In the vein of Lehmann's classification of various terminologies and concepts, the terminology employed in this thesis also requires an introduction in order to establish the terms in direct correlation to the aim of the thesis. Firstly, the term "fragmentation" will be employed in addressing aesthetic features of Beckett's plays. Here, fragmentation refers to the fragmentation of the body, space, as well as the fragmentation of language and communication. Aesthetic fragmentation will then go on to serve in an analysis of abstract concepts such as time, identity, and reality. The term "disjointedness" will figure as an accompanying term to fragmentation. Its purpose is to help address separation and displacement and the resulting alienation and isolation that the characters of the four treated plays experience.

The dramatic texts that will be examined in regard to fragmentation and disjointedness, and within the context of Lehmann's postdramatic theatre, are: *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Happy Days*, and *Play*. The unifying thread of these plays, aside from their chronological proximity to each other, is that they all present the audience with multi-faceted fragmentation. Fragmentation is thus either revealed explicitly, in that certain elements are presented as fragments on-stage; or fragmentation is exposed as being a symptomatic result of the human condition. Lehmann's stance towards postdramatic theatre's inability to allow for a synthesizing interpretation is one of the primary driving forces in these four plays, as the characters' inability to find any sense of resolution or even finality, stems from the intrinsic nature of perpetual disconnection- whether it be the characters disconnected from themselves, from others, or from society. In all four plays then, nothing is presented in its entirety, as incompleteness and futility trumps the notion of resolution.

In this thesis, Beckett's employment of fragmentation and disjointedness will be examined and analyzed as it pertains to the four aforementioned plays. The second chapter will focus on the fragmentation of language and communication. Firstly, the usage and effect of language will be analyzed on aesthetic grounds, taking into consideration the impact of the characters' speech on the audience. Secondly, the implications that a fragmentary language produces will be discussed in regards to the claim that language is an inadequate vehicle of expression. This inadequacy is presented

in Beckett's works as either triggering a complete inability to communicate, or where communication is seemingly present, it is unsuccessful due to the multifaceted and paradoxical nature of language itself. The presence of multiple contexts in Beckett's plays paves the way for the inevitability of misunderstanding, as is exhibited by the characters. The issue of the inadequacy of language will also be placed under an existential light, delving into its role in relation to the subjectivity of meaning. Finally, language will be defined in its relation to Beckett and his desire to express the inexpressible. Given Beckett's adherence to the notion that not every thought can be expressed, he in effect works against language- on the one hand, he dismisses it as an inadequate vehicle of expression, yet his medium (dramatic text) requires language to carry his message. Beckett's plays thus evoke the paradox of expressing nothing and something simultaneously, as even silence has the power to communicate.

Using Lehmann's notion of multi-layered perception, the third chapter, entitled "Fragmentation and Subjectivity of Time, Identity, and Reality", will elucidate the inherent nature of human perception as fragmented and subjective, and as a result dispose of the possibility of objectively defining time, identity, or reality. Firstly, the fragmentation and displacement of time will be examined in regards to the oscillation between past and present, observing how different moments of time reflect on each other in the plays. Time becomes even more problematic upon recognizing its perception as subjective and individual. Time is then not defined by universally accepted units of measurement, but is instead defined by the characters' individual perception of it. Despite the characters' subjective perception of time, its existence as a consistent force is not only present, but is unsuccessfully combated by the characters, as they try to exercise control over it.

The concept of identity will be examined partially in relation to time, observing the role time has in changing and affecting one's character. This is reflected in the fragmented presentation of the characters, for instance in *Krapp's Last Tape*, where disparate fragments of Krapp's personality prove to be in conflict, although they are still accounts of the same character. Identity will also be examined in physiological terms, examining the conflicting needs of the body and mind; as well as in a figurative light,

observing Beckett's use of metaphor and figurative representation to elucidate the different elements of human nature. The crisis of a fragmented identity will finally be considered by way of examining the identity of both the character and actor, and how the two are reconciled in Beckett's plays. Identity thus proves to be an evasive concept, as different moments in time and different contexts present one character but multiple identities.

Equally subjective and elusive is the notion of reality within the plays, which will be examined on the basis of the characters' individual perception and approach to it. Reality is then perceived not as an external truth, but instead as an internal and individual fabrication. This notion of reality will be examined as it applies to various characters, observing their careful creation of reality. The characters are then seen as selectively excluding particular events or facts from their lives, presenting the audience and themselves with a version of reality they have constructed.

The fourth chapter of this thesis will be centered around Lehmann's claim that postdramatic theatre "does not add up to an Aristotelian dramatic fictional *whole* but is instead full of *holes*."⁶ Here, the term "holes" will function in correlation to the term "disjointedness", as the holes represent the distance that is created as a result of dislocation in Beckett's plays. This sense of distance is experienced by the characters as alienation or isolation in various forms: i.e. from society, other characters, as well as from themselves; and will be analyzed in the effects they have on the characters' psyches.

Lastly, the notion of incompleteness as grounds for irresolution will be examined in respect to the four treated plays. The lack of a clear ending and the abundance of repetition within the plays then give rise to the lack of resolve the characters experience. Martin Esslin recognizes irresolution as being inevitable and in need of acceptance:

The recognition of the illusoriness and absurdity of ready-made solutions and prefabricated meanings, far from ending in despair, is the starting point of a new kind of consciousness, which faces the mystery and terror of the human condition in the exhilaration of a new-found freedom.⁷

It is then necessary not only to reflect upon Beckett's illustration of the short-comings of

⁶ Lehmann 12.

⁷ Esslin 64.

human existence, but rather to expose these short-comings as a result of searching for meaning where there is none and looking for answers that do not exist. What Beckett communicates in *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Happy Days*, and *Play*, and what I will reflect upon in this thesis, is the necessity to recognize the limits of the concepts of language, time, identity, and reality and the subsequent necessity to redefine them.

Chapter 2: Fragmentation of Language and Communication

Samuel Beckett's dramatic texts explicitly seek out to communicate both the potential and drawbacks of the text in its written as well as staged form. Lehmann addresses the transformation of the text once it is manifested on stage:

For postdramatic theatre it holds true that the written and/or verbal text transferred onto theatre, as well as the 'text' of the staging understood in the widest sense (including the performers, their 'paralinguistic' additions, reductions or deformations of the linguistic material; costumes, lighting, space, peculiar temporality, etc.) are all cast into a new light through a *changed conception of the performance text*.⁸

Whereas the written form communicates the contents of the discourse to be performed, the performance conveys the manner in which the text is to be communicated, allowing for a radically different meaning, depending on the dramaturgy. Beckett's *Play* for example, effectively illustrates this very dichotomy between the spoken and written word, where the monologues on stage are at times scarcely audible without any reference to the actual text. In insisting that the actors of *Play* speak in a "toneless and rapid tempo"⁹ in the play's directions, the probability of misunderstanding or not understanding can then occur while viewing the performance. Language, namely spoken language in the case of theatre, is then introduced as a delicate and problematic mode of expression.

In his essay "Language, Communication and Culture", Max Kirch outlines the prerequisites that are necessary in order for verbal communication to be successful. He does so by defining the process of communication as a social activity:

"Language is a part of a process of communication which is culturally conditioned. A dialogue is usually not just an exchange of information, but an interaction of the participants."¹⁰ This seemingly banal observation is a crucial component of a functioning dialogue, and one which many if not all of Beckett's characters subsequently lack.

The characters' inability to successfully use language in order to express themselves or connect with others hints at the problematic nature of language itself. In his study of Beckett, Ihab Hassan comments on the degraded status of language, and

⁸ Lehmann 85.

⁹ Samuel Beckett, "Play", *Collected Shorter Plays* (New York: Grove, 1984) 151.

¹⁰ Max S. Kirch, "Language, Communication and Culture," *The Modern Language Journal* 57.7 (1973): 340.

elucidates how irrational it is to expect an inadequate linguistic system to evoke any sense of meaning or truth:

Beckett considers language a dead habit: his rhetoric cunningly demonstrates the point. Sentences end by denying the assertions with which they began. Questions receive further questions for an answer. Misunderstandings, contradictions, repetitions, and tautologies abound. The syntax is often the syntax of nonsense, the grammar of absurdity...¹¹

According to Hassan, Beckett then exploits language, just as language itself has been exploited; in that he brings all of the dysfunctional aspects of it to the forefront, creating an explicitly hyperbolized depiction of language as he sees it: tragically, comically, and irrevocably absurd. Beckett is then distinctly aware of the restrictions of language, though instead of disposing of it entirely, he does the exact opposite. Beckett, in effect, uses language as a means of exposing the inherent flaws of language.

One of Beckett's principal structural devices in elucidating the insufficiencies of verbal communication is his employment of fragmented speech. The disjointed and chaotic effect that the texts produce mirrors the chaos that often accompanies the process of communication, resulting in misunderstanding and a feeling of impotence and isolation among the characters. This is the case in *Play*. Here, the lives of three intertwined lovers are presented in often disparate monologues, creating a three-fold account of subjectivity. In Andrew Kennedy's essay on *Play*, the effect of a tri-partite narration is dissected, in that the unveiling of truth is not only skewed but also limited due to the form:

...the three series of information ultimately converge, even though they diverge in timing. There is no unison... For as the speakers are not allowed to tell their story either simultaneously or consecutively, the tale cannot unfold. It can be only presented as an oral mosaic. But the pieces of the mosaic are highly coloured from the start, giving an immediate image of marital crisis, with high-toned suspicions of infidelity.¹²

The very nature of the form of these monologues inhibits reconciliation on any level among the three characters. Not only is the story told simultaneously from three different standpoints, the manner in which it is told results in the audience being bombarded with a lot of information- information which is delivered with an extreme sense of rapidity and

¹¹ S. E. Gontarski, *Beckett's Happy Days* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Libraries, 1977) 18.

¹² Andrew Kennedy, *Samuel Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1989) 93.

urgency.

This results in oversaturation, which is analyzed in Susan Sontag's essay "Aesthetics of Silence". Here she discusses the limits of language, claiming that one of its downfalls lies in that "We lack words, and we have too many of them. It raises two complaints about language. Words are too crude. And words are also too busy- inviting a hyperactivity of consciousness that is not only dysfunctional...but actively deadens the mind."¹³ Solely from a structural standpoint, language proves insufficient in justly representing one's intentions, resulting only in an assault of the senses, akin to the effect of the rapid and chaotic monologues in *Play*. Beckett thus plays with the form of language in order to produce the cacophonous effect it has on the audience.

Looking beyond the form and manner of communication, Beckett also calls into question the function of language. One of the shortcomings of language instated by Beckett as a recurring motif, is the occurrence of two-ness, where one word or expression carries the potentiality for several meanings. In his study of "Language and Structure in Beckett's Plays", Clive Hart designates this very duality as an intrinsic element of language: "I recall first that language is inherently, fundamentally, binary. All possible utterances can or could be expressed with binary switching."¹⁴ The dual nature of language and the resulting ambiguity that can arise as a result is examined in *Play*. When W1 shouts "Get off me! Get off me!" it is not entirely clear whether she is referring to her attitude towards her unfaithful husband, or if it is directed at the spotlight. A similarly ambiguous scenario occurs when the man makes a statement and W2 begins to laugh, producing the effect that her laughter is directed towards the man, even though it is still merely a part of her own isolated monologue. The careful placement and subsequent alignment of these fragmented reactions provides a scenario where not even contextual evidence can provide one unanimous meaning or interpretation. In demonstrating the need to recognize language within an inter-textual as well as meta-textual framework, Beckett complicates the issue of interpretation, forcing the viewer to recognize the ambiguity of language, as one utterance can be a reaction to several realities.

Another issue of interpretation arises on the level of gender, and the functionality

¹³ Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence," *A Susan Sontag Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982) 96.

¹⁴ Clive Hart, *Language and Structure in Beckett's Plays* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1986) 11.

of communication for men and women. Lois Oppenheim highlights this in her essay on *Happy Days* as a means of reconciling the rift between Winnie and her husband, by way of defining miscommunication on a social and psychological level. She references linguist Deborah Tannen who states that “for most men, talk is primarily a means to preserve independence and negotiate and maintain status in a hierarchical social order, while for women conversation is a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships.”¹⁵ Oppenheim then goes on to conclude that “for men, since talking is about power, silence is the greatest form of intimacy. But for women, silence can be deeply insulting.”¹⁶ Winnie and her husband Willie exemplify this extreme polarity, as Winnie constantly tries to reach out to her husband by bombarding him with various sentiments, exclamations and questions, as a meager attempt to connect with him. The futility of her situation arises out of the impossibility of reciprocation, where Winnie’s efforts are neither appreciated nor are they comprehended by her husband. Jean-Jacques Mayoux articulates this very barrier which inhibits us from expressing ourselves, in his essay “Samuel Beckett and Universal Parody”, in his assertion that “Every language is a foreign language, and the voice that speaks in each of us is a stranger we cannot recognize.”¹⁷ Mayoux thus extends the dilemma of misunderstanding beyond gender, and addresses it as being universally problematic for all users of language.

The relationship between the form and function of language is then the crux of language’s insufficiency. Firstly, Susan Sontag addresses the form of language as problematic in that “it is the most impure, the most contaminated, the most exhausted of all materials out of which art is made.”¹⁸ As a result, the function of language is also compromised. In his book entitled *The Intent of Undoing*, Gontarski examines a case where language does not convey meaning, but instead inhibits meaning from being communicated: “Winnie is again saved from meaning by her habitual use of language and almost total lack of awareness. She sees no irony because words have little meaning

¹⁵ Oppenheim 168.

¹⁶ Oppenheim 168.

¹⁷ Jean-Jacques Mayoux, “Samuel Beckett and the Universal Parody”, *A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965) 91.

¹⁸ Sontag 189.

for her, other than sustaining sound.”¹⁹ Winnie thus demonstrates Sontag’s point about language being an “exhausted” material, as Winnie has exhausted it to the point where meaning has been stripped from her words. Similarly, Oppenheim defines speech as a hollow filler, possessing only the purpose of suppressing the potentiality for truth: “For Pinter’s (and Beckett’s) characters, words are often just a complex web designed to cover the terrifying possibility of silence.”²⁰ Winnie’s fragmented outbursts, which she perceives as a means of preserving her memories, prove to be a trivial attempt at employing the social rite of discourse as a meaningful process. Winnie’s tendency towards speaking solely for the sake of covering up silence then brings into question the significance of her words, as instead of serving as a means of intellectual and personal development, Winnie’s usage of words leads only to stagnancy. The link between the form and function of language is then weakened by the misuse and overuse of language.

In her study of Beckett, Shira Wolosky addresses the inherent inability of language to meet the expectations of its user. Wolosky thus delves into the futility of striving towards an unattainable goal by asserting that “language is considered a barrier between man and knowledge, since the truth beyond words is unreachable.”²¹ Beckett thus forces us to look beyond our comfort zones and acknowledge the existence of a truth that cannot be defined by our linguistic constructions, as according to Esslin “the (human) subconscious has a higher content of reality than the conscious utterance.”²² The relationship between reality and language is then imbalanced, as what is communicated is not necessarily the same as what is thought or intended. The characters of *Endgame* address the inability of language to suggest meaning in the lines: “We’re not beginning to...to... mean something?/ Mean something? You and I, mean something! (*Brief laugh.*) Ah that’s a good one!”²³ Hamm and Clov mock the efforts of mankind to discover a sense of purpose and meaning, recognizing it as a futile endeavor, with no adequate means (linguistic or otherwise) to attain it.

¹⁹S.E Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1985) 74.

²⁰ Oppenheim 163-164.

²¹ Shira Wolosky, “The negative way negated”, *New Literary History* 22.1 (1991): 225.

²² Esslin 297.

²³ Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (London: Faber, 1958) 27.

Lehmann's insistence on a "changed conception of the performance text"²⁴ to accompany postdramatic works then also subsumes the need to reevaluate the concept of language. In his work "Vision and Form", Kennedy comments on Beckett's role in the reevaluation of language: "From the start, Beckett inwardly appropriated the most vital creative principles of the modernist writer: the need for innovation, and with it the need for constantly re-creating form and language within and for each work."²⁵ This assertion is evident in the dramatic works treated in this thesis, as both the form and function of language are manipulated with in order to expose the shortcomings of language. In *Play* it is the tone, tempo and direction of the monologues which reiterates the chaos and oversaturation that language can produce. The notion of oversaturation is similarly present in *Happy Days*, where Winnie is constantly speaking solely for the sake of speaking, bringing into question the purpose of her words. The characters of *Endgame* scoff at the very notion of meaning, and their dialogues reaffirm the notion that language is hostile to meaning by way of repetitions, interruptions and double-entendres.

However, Beckett's approach to language and meaning ultimately results in paradox. Kennedy remarks on Beckett's tendency towards impoverishment where he "follows a curve of intense compression or 'lessness.'"²⁶ This tendency towards negation evolves into the complete repudiation of meaning, where in Beckett's *Three Dialogues* he speaks of "the expression that there is nothing there to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express."²⁷ The dilemma of communication is then traced back to the artist, as the significance of what is being expressed is called into question. The notion of speaking solely for the sake of covering up silence is then redirected to the artist, suggesting the possibility of expressing for the sake of expression. Kennedy articulates the paradox of expression in elucidating that "the attraction of the inexpressible- saying the unsayable, against a felt reality of nothing to be said- is matched by the irrepressible 'obligation to express', rather than choosing the total silence of blank

²⁴ Lehmann 85.

²⁵ Kennedy 11.

²⁶ Kennedy 11

²⁷ Kennedy 14.

pages.”²⁸ Given the problematic status of language, the stage space can then be perceived as providing some relief in regards to expression, “offering a degree of freedom from the linguistic strait jacket”²⁹ in the words of Ross Chambers.

²⁸ Kennedy 15.

²⁹ Ross Chambers, “Beckett’s Brinkmanship”, *A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965) 167.

Chapter 3: Fragmentation and Disjointedness of Time, Reality, and Identity

3.1: Time

Ross Chambers' insistence that Beckett is able to break away from the 'linguistic strait jacket' can be seen in Beckett's experimentation with the concepts of time, reality, and identity. The necessity to take an alternative approach to these concepts is echoed in Chambers' analysis of time in regard to Beckett: "Beckett requires emancipation from the spatial dimensions as well as from time."³⁰ It is by breaking away from the traditional forms of these concepts that Beckett is free to explore their intricacies, without being limited by form. Beckett then dismantles and assembles fragments of time in his dramatic works in order to analyze the disparity between the past and the present, proving that the two cannot and usually do not exist in perfect harmony. Beckett not only views time as fragmented, dislocated segments, but also as a concept of individual and subjective construction. In the eyes of Beckett then, time figures as an antagonizing force, being not only an inherent and inescapable component of existence, but also by partially being an elusive fabrication of the characters' minds. The characters' attempts to either conquer the very effects of time, or to unify the fragmented temporal components of their lives proves to be a futile exercise.

Beckett employs time as a means of exposing the fragmentation of existence in *Krapp's Last Tape*, where one single tape recorder transports Krapp, as well as the audience, into different moments in his past. The entire play then comprises of alternating snippets of dialogue from both the Krapp of the past and the Krapp of the present. Similarly, *Happy Days* functions as an exercise in nostalgia and memory preservation for Winnie, resulting in the constant oscillation between different moments in time. However, the inherent inability to conjure up the past in its entirety results not only in gaps of information about the past, but also in an ensuing incapacity to make sense of the present. What is more, this dilemma proves to spur a chain reaction in Winnie's perception of and reaction to time, as the past not only effects the present, but vice versa.

³⁰ Chambers, "Beckett's Brinkmanship", *A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965) 152.

In his essay on “Mind, Memory, and Time”, Thomas Postlewait examines how our present situation can effect our perception of the past:

The inner chronology of time in Beckett’s art functions not as an escape from the present by the means of the fullness of memory, but as a sad reminder of the present moment cut off from past experience...In Beckett, the past is usually erased or isolated in distant fragments because of the present sense of discontinuity. Things don’t quite connect.³¹

The past and the present then have a detrimentally reciprocal relationship, where a present state of chaos prevents any semblance of connection or resolution with the past; however, Postlewait’s account of discontinuity is rendered doubly problematic in the case that the past is also in a state of disorder, causing a troubling past to be the catalyst of an incomplete and fragmented present. This proves to be the crux of the dilemma in *Krapp’s Last Tape*, as his disconcerting past prevents him from being at ease in the present, and his presently resigned disposition and unwillingness to confront the past, prevents him from fully addressing and coming to terms with it. Neither the past nor the present can then be reconciled, because they are both inhibited from any chance of resolution.

The subjective nature of perceiving time further complicates the manner in which the characters deal with time. Postlewait succinctly elucidates the subjective and internal perspective of Beckett’s dramatic works:

Their actions are located in the minds of characters who are listening to the voice(s) of consciousness reeling out, like Krapp’s tapes, “ends and odds” of disjointed memories and stories: the fragmented awareness of being in time, but not in harmony with it. Measuring time and being measured by it are the basic topics.³²

Postlewait communicates the tension between time as an objectively intrinsic component of human existence, and the concept of time as a fabrication of the human mind.

Beckett’s characters exhibit an overt unawareness towards their position in time. For instance, the characters of *Endgame* are inflicted with a sense of spatial and temporal stasis, wherein their sense of isolation from the outside world also causes them to be estranged from the external notion of time. For Hamm and Clov, time seems to stand completely still, though for the most part any semblance of temporal order evades them

³¹Thomas Postlewait, “Mind, Memory and Time”, *Twentieth Century Literature* 24.4 (1978): 474-475.

³² Postlewait 473.

with questions like “what month are we?”³³ This same ambivalent attitude towards time is observed in *Happy Days*, where Winnie proves to be incapable of discerning between the different moments of time that have passed, rendering her unable to distinguish between past and present realities, in the lines “I say I used to say, Winnie you are changeless, there is never any difference between one fraction of a second and the next.”³⁴ Here, there is a duality in Winnie’s reaction towards time: firstly, she delivers the statement that all fragments of time are indistinguishable from one another, that neither time nor the people encapsulated in it can exhibit any signs of change. Secondly, the line “I say I used to say” creates not only a linguistic paradox, but an apparent sense of confusion in the speaker’s awareness of time. Winnie thus hints at the insufficiency of language to reconcile the past and the present.

One of the possible explanations pointing to the lack of resolve between the past and the present is then that of a grammatical insufficiency. Ross Chambers comments on the necessity of a tense between past and present, claiming that language presents us either with the ability to either express a past that is too far-gone, losing the connection between the past and present; or that the past is expressed in too direct immediacy to the present, creating a temporal whirlpool (as exhibited by Winnie in her blurring of past and present events):

The crowding together of the past and the present is a second important characteristic of the threshold situation: not only does time slow down and towards its stop, but as it does so, it loses its dimensionality and the events of a life-time draw together towards simultaneity. The sensation is thus, paradoxically, a double one of time expanding and contracting at the same time.³⁵

The situation described by Chambers is present in *Endgame* as well as *Happy Days*, where the presence of an imminent end heightens the characters’ awareness towards time, as the more they are aware of it, the slower it seems. Paradoxically, this awareness is countered by the blurring of past and present events, as is demonstrated by Winnie in her inability to distinguish between the past and the present. Chambers then views the act of linguistically expressing temporality as inadequate, as it results in estranging the past and

³³ Beckett, *Endgame* 43.

³⁴ Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days* (London: Faber, 1963) 44.

³⁵ Chambers, “Beckett’s Brinkmanship”, *A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965) 161.

the present or blurring them into one.

Winnie not only attempts to make sense of time, but tries to escape its inexorable clutch. In Ruby Cohn's analysis of *Happy Days*, she examines the subconscious reasoning for Winnie's actions, stating that "In Act I she begins her bell-bound day with prayer, but soon deity becomes a mere expletive as she marshals her resources for conquering the time of each day: objects and her husband Willie, composition of a story in Act 2."³⁶ Winnie's attempt to gain control of her relationship, life, and even time, is presented as an absurd and impossible feat, resulting merely in the deterioration of her character.

The effects of temporal evasiveness are examined by Postlewait in the isolating effects it has on Beckett's characters, surmising that "Beckett's characters suffer an unending temporal discontinuity and spatial separation- from self and others."³⁷ Time is posited then as a barrier between the characters as well as between the characters and themselves. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, Krapp is not only unable to connect with or resolve his situation with loved ones from the past, but recognizes that he cannot reconcile the gap between the Krapp of the past and the Krapp of the present. In this case, a rift in time alludes to a rift in character or identity.

³⁶ Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 2005) 264.

³⁷ Postlewait 490.

3.2: Identity

The issue of establishing a sense of identity can be accounted for by the dislocating effect of time, as Gontarski comments on the “inability of the self to perceive itself accurately in the present.”³⁸ The reasoning for this incapacity to neither examine nor fully identify the crux of one’s identity is its fragmentary nature. Beckett confirms the existence of the various dimensions and layers that make up a single individual in employing Krapp and his tape recorder as the only voices in *Krapp’s Last Tape*. The audience then hears segments of differing voices, isolated from one another due to time, age, and experience, yet they are still the voice of one physical being. Beckett presents the fragmented nature of identity in both a literal and abstract light; as it is either presented directly in the case of Krapp, or presented by way of symbolic representation in the case of Winnie and Willie in *Happy Days*. In presenting identity in a fragmented state, Beckett also elucidates the discordance between the various parts of a singular identity. The fragments of identity then do not form one balanced and harmonious entity, but rather prove to be in a constant state of conflict with one another.

Firstly, the staging of *Krapp’s Last Tape* conveys the intrinsic nature of duality of the self. In regard to the visual segmentation of the stage, a sense of duality is present in the portrayal of Krapp on stage and Krapp off stage, as he intentionally reserves different actions for different settings. Beckett extends the dual presence of Krapp’s to-and-fro stage routine into a more complex web of fragments, where the tape recordings prove that there are not merely two sides of Krapp, but rather dislocated fragments of his existence. Gontarski observes Beckett’s manipulation of technology in order to convey the multi-faceted nature of human existence, by collapsing two tapes into one:

The formal change was a brilliant stroke; a single tape could then capture more than one block of time, more than one level of character. Beckett could present his protagonist at three stages simultaneously, a sort of triple exposure: Krapp at sixty-nine listening to Krapp at thirty-nine, summarizing a tape made ten or fifteen years earlier. The result is a juxtaposing of elements that comment on and define each other like a montage...³⁹

³⁸ Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing* 59.

³⁹ Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing* 59.

Beckett however, does not simply convey the different stages of life, but rather posits the individual in different moments in time as if they were separate and autonomous entities, rendering them in a state of isolation from each other. Beckett comically illustrates this very sense of estrangement when old Krapp, upon hearing the word “viduity”, must look up the meaning of the word because he no longer understands it. The comic yet tragic nature of Krapp’s situation points to the fact that not only does time promote change, but that the different stages of life can progress or regress into something so drastically different, that an individual can become estranged from himself.

Beckett goes on to employ visual as well as figurative means in order to communicate the dilemma of internal fragmentation. Beckett posits the drawers of Krapp’s reels as an outward manifestation of his internal plight- the mere fact that Krapp wields a set of separate keys for each of his drawers, explicitly expresses that not only is his character divided up into fragments, but that these fragments are isolated from each other, each locked away in their own solitary compartment.

Whereas Krapp’s fragmented identity is a result of a shift in character, the characters of *Happy Days* exhibit fragmentation as the demarcation between one’s physical and mental being. Firstly, Gontarski generally identifies this phenomenon as the “Cartesian split”, the dichotomy between the soul and body. Gontarski observes the disparity between different elements of the body, depicting them as being in a constant state of conflict with one another: “Man, or Woman, has very little control over his actions because the system of mind does not control (or even work in harmony with) the system of the body. Winnie cannot put down her parasol even though holding it up serves no useful function and affords no relief. On the contrary it increases pain and wearies the arm.”⁴⁰ Winnie’s declaration (in response to the issue of umbrella holding) that “Reason says, Put it down, Winnie, it is not helping you, put the thing down and get on with something else... I cannot...I cannot move.”⁴¹, renders the attempt to reconcile the needs of the body with the logic of the mind as a futile exercise. The mere notion of an individual’s free will and autonomy is deemed absurd by Beckett, as the human self comprises of different elements, each with specific and often conflicting needs.

⁴⁰ Gontarski, Beckett’s *Happy Days* 28.

⁴¹ Beckett, *Happy Days* 38.

Gontarski examines Beckett's representation of the fragmented individual on a figurative level, where the characters themselves are employed as manifestations of the different aspects of human nature: "The visual image of the Cartesian split is, of course, reinforced in the characters themselves. Willie, wallowing along the earth on all fours, often naked, is the physical side of man's nature, while Winnie is the intellectual, albeit limited and defective."⁴² Here, individual characters are used to serve as representations of different aspects of identity. The conflict and dissonance between the characters then alludes to the inherent conflict between different aspects of identity.

The stage setting brings about an issue of identity that is not otherwise present in the written text- the identity of the actor. In *Happy Days*, Winnie is "embedded up to above half her waist in exact centre of mound"⁴³ according to the stage directions. However, Lois Oppenheim clarifies that it is not Winnie who is stuck in the mound, but instead the actress playing Winnie. Oppenheim thus elucidates the psychological impact this has on the actress:

He (Beckett) had created this hostile environment so that the actress playing Winnie didn't have to *act* being suffocated and constricted; she actually *lived through* these emotions every time she rehearsed or performed the play. It is hard to describe what it does to someone to be locked inside an unmovable wedge of dirt for hours and hours every day. Eventually, your mind snaps. It becomes unendurable.⁴⁴

The sense of discomfort and claustrophobia that is emitted is not acted but experienced, as according to Oppenheim, "there are not visual representations of characters but, rather, actual restrictions placed on the actor. Beckett uses the forms of life and thought as they can be composed with the actor's body and mental experience."⁴⁵ The literal immersion of the actress into her role creates a more visceral experience for the audience. By transferring the anxieties of the character onto the actor, the grotesque character is then infused with a sense of "realness", rendering her suffering not as a comical performance, but as a suffering that is immediate and real.

⁴² Gontarski, Beckett's *Happy Days* 28.

⁴³ Beckett, *Happy Days* 9.

⁴⁴ Lois Oppenheim, "Three Women and a Mound", *Directing Beckett* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1997) 166.

⁴⁵ Oppenheim 260.

However, an actor can never be entirely removed or involved in his character, as there is still a psychological oscillation between the actor's identity and the identity of the character. This is recognized by Beckett, resulting either in his decision to suppress or expose the actor behind the character. Oppenheim elaborates on the psychology behind performance, addressing the staged performance as an overt public display of the actor at his most vulnerable, rendering theatrical performance a kind of exploitation of intimacy:

First, Beckett denies the performer a character to impersonate, a fictional identity. The performer is therefore immediately aware at some level that the audience will be looking at and listening to him personally. He reacts with anxiety, fear. Beckett anticipates this and offers him a mask that slightly abstracts him, providing minimal privacy: his face is not visible, or parts of his body are not visible, or his face becomes a mask, or his voice becomes a mask. The performer feels a bit safer and, though still uneasy, recognizes the trappings of his art and takes the bait... In every case the fictional inner being, the subject of the story, threatens to disappear or die.⁴⁶

The line between actor and character is then blurred, as the actor does not so much play a character, as he does present himself as a vessel through which he tells Beckett's stories. As a result, where the character ends and where the actor begins remains an elusive and intangible boundary.

This gives rise to the problematic definition of identity on stage, wherein the actor is neither completely immersed in his role, nor is he free to act like himself. The question of what he or she is or is not is no longer subject to definition, as according to Oppenheim, the actor himself suffers from "a fragmentary experience of the life of the role."⁴⁷ This inability to articulate the very essence of identity is elucidated by Ross Chambers in "Beckett's Brinkmanship", as

the self in Beckett is something undefinable in space, something dimensionless, but *something* (we can call it consciousness), and something which, because it's dimensionless, exists outside the world of space and time and is by definition unattainable within that world.⁴⁸

The inherent paradox implied by Beckett, referring to something that both exists and does not exist simultaneously, is a standpoint which is often accompanied by the principle of

⁴⁶ Oppenheim 181.

⁴⁷ Oppenheim 266.

⁴⁸ Chambers, "Beckett's Brinkmanship", *A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965) 154.

negation. Just as Beckett scoffs at the futility of searching for meaning that does not exist, or at the attempt to communicate with a language that has an inherent inability to convey meaning, the attempt to identify identity is deemed just as absurd. In his essay “Trying to Understand Endgame”, Adorno infers that the multiplicity of fragments that make up an individual are in such a discordant state, that in working against each other they result in an inability to form something whole and complete. He describes this phenomenon as “a disassociation of the unity of consciousness into disparate elements-non-identity.”⁴⁹ This very elucidation of non-identity, non-meaning, non-existence dominates the thematic direction of Beckett’s dramatic texts. Moreover, the issues of meaning, truth, and identity are deemed non-existent in that they are unattainable. They are elements that exist, but due to our linguistic, mental, and spiritual insufficiencies, are rendered non-existent since they are not feasible to the human mind.

⁴⁹ Theodor W Adorno, “Trying to Understand Endgame”, *New German Critique* 26 (1982): 129.

3.3: Reality

Lehmann's notion of a "multi-perspectival form of perceiving" is reflected in Beckett's dramatic works, as perception in his plays is inherently subjective, allowing for many interpretations of a singular event. This gives way for the inability to locate one universal reality, resulting in a fragmented and often conflicting series of realities. The dilemma of reality exists not only among the characters, but also within the characters themselves, as they often find themselves unable to distinguish between reality and imagination. The reliance on memory is then deemed as an unreliable and inaccurate form of preserving reality, as memories themselves are but fabrications of an individual's mind. Reality is thus interpreted by Beckett's characters, but also created by them. In relying on suppositions in *Play*, and in literally skipping through undesirable segments of the past in *Krapp's Last Tape*, a new reality is formed by the characters, autonomous from the objective reality of past events. Beckett employs memories as fragments not only to show their incomplete and disjointed state, but also to illustrate how these fragments are either intentionally or subconsciously selected by the characters in their suppression, evocation, and creation of the past.

The role of representation in theatre is first dismissed by Samuel Beckett in his assertion of "the grotesque fallacy of realistic art".⁵⁰ This claim of the inability of art to reflect reality is coupled with Lehmann's definition of postdramatic theatre, in that "What becomes crucial for theatre is a trait it shares with literature: that it does not represent/reproduce but signifies. The theatre image has a low 'density', so to speak; it exhibits lots of gaps where the photographic image is without gaps."⁵¹ What is performed on stage is then not to be taken into account as a direct representation of reality, but is to be viewed as an interpretation of it.

In respect to Lehmann's characterization of theatre as signifying, Beckett examines the process of signification by playing with and challenging the notion of light as signifying truth and exposing reality in *Krapp's Last Tape*. Beckett employs light as a means of exposing merely the fragmented nature of reality, in that one complete reality is never and can never be presented at once. Firstly, the usage of a prominent spotlight is

⁵⁰ Esslin 22.

⁵¹ Lehmann 116.

established in the stage directions: “*Table and immediately adjacent area in strong white light. Rest of the stage in darkness.*”⁵², providing a clear demarcation of different parts of the stage. The actions performed by Krapp are then divided into the actions he performs on and off stage, reserving some of his more intimate and unflattering habits from the public eye. Light here is then not employed as a source of illuminating reality, but instead illuminates merely a part of it.

Secondly, light as a means of revelation is brought further into question in one of Krapp’s nostalgic accounts: “I asked her to look at me and after a few moments- (pause)- after a few moments she did, but her eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened. (Pause. Low.) Let me in.”⁵³ The classical notion of light as a source of profound illumination, bringing to the forefront the deep and hidden mysteries of the soul, is one that Krapp and Beckett at least partially dismiss. Just as Krapp only feels free to engage in certain activities when he is out of the glaring spotlight, the woman in Beckett’s recording is unable to literally open up (her eyes) to Krapp until she is in the dark. Her physical reluctance towards the sun mimics her inability to reveal a part of herself to Krapp, subverting the notion of darkness as a cloak of mystery and ignorance, into one of comfort and openness. Instead of condoning darkness or dismissing light, Beckett instead calls into question the roles of both, exposing them as having the potential for revealing but also concealing reality. Light and darkness then prove to expose some fragments of reality, albeit an incomplete one.

One of the main factors attributed to the inability to locate any one, whole reality is the nature of subjectivity. Subjectivity as the basis for a diverse and multifaceted reality is exhibited, as has been mentioned in Chapter 2, by the characters of *Play*. The inability to synthesize the isolated accounts of the three characters creates not only a block in communication, but a block in depicting a unified reality. The presentation of three disparate accounts of one single event reflects the inability to express any semblance of an objective reality. Although the characters only have their own accounts of reality to go by, they still possess an awareness that the nature of their reality is based on mere speculation. The lines “Perhaps she has taken him away to live . . . somewhere

⁵² Samuel Beckett, *Krapp’s Last Tape* (New York: Grove, 1960) 10.

⁵³ Beckett, *Krapp’s Last Tape* 22.

in the sun” or “Perhaps she is sitting somewhere, by the open window, her hands folded in her lap, gazing down out over the olives”⁵⁴ spoken by W1 serve, with the aid of ‘perhaps’, as linguistic reinforcement that speculation serves as the only type of reality in the play.

In his essay on “Beckett’s Theatre: Beyond the Stage Space”, Colin Duckworth addresses the issue of individual reality by characterizing an “inner space” as it pertains to the characters of the treated plays, observing that their own inner space is usually located away from the immediate situation of the performance:

In *Endgame*, Hamm’s physical centre is the centre of the refuge, but his inner space is dominated by stories of other people (or other selves) in other places and at other times. In *Play* the characters’ inner space is dominated by constant reference to a past elsewhere. The present is a fragmented limbo. In *Happy Days* Winnie seems to be literally rooted in the stage space, but again her inner space is occupied by reminiscences of past events and people and vaguely-remembered books. Krapp seems to be self-centred in the circle of light above his desk, but his inner space is always elsewhere. The here and now is empty, so he escapes into the there and then.⁵⁵

Here, Duckworth articulates the displacement of reality in these plays, as the individual reality of the characters differs from the reality of their physically implemented presence on stage. The assertion that “the present is a fragmented limbo” communicates the collective plight of the characters, as their sense of reality is often dislodged due to the presence of memories.

The memories themselves complicate the characters’ perception of the reality of their past, as according to Jean-Jacques Mayoux in his essay “Samuel Beckett and the Universal Parody”, “Memory is an exploration, and interrogation, discovery, a progressive invention.”⁵⁶ Memory can then not be defined as being fixed in the human mind, but as subject to flux. Memories are not representations of past events, but rather interpretations of them. Although memories prove to be unreliable, they still serve as a means of preserving the past for the characters. The elusiveness of memory is exhibited

⁵⁴ Beckett, *Play* 157.

⁵⁵ Colin Duckworth, “Beckett’s Theatre”, *Beckett and Beyond*, ed. Bruce Stewart (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1999) 94.

⁵⁶ Jean-Jacques Mayoux, “Samuel Beckett and the Universal Parody”, *A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965) 90.

in *Happy Days* via Winnie's inconsistency, as observed by Lois Oppenheim:

In Act 1 the romantic memories are sought out and savored; in act 2 Winnie runs from them because she is so far gone that she fears they are signs that she is losing her mind and that such events never happened at all: 'What day? (*Pause.*) What reeds?' ...the tension between the deliberate evocation of certain memories and the equally deliberate avoidance of others provided the conflict that carried Charlotte (the actress playing Winnie) throughout the play.⁵⁷

This tendency towards carefully selecting fragments of the past results in the characters' ability to create their own reality. The characters are then presented with the power to edit the contents of their lives, rendering the final result to be but a version of reality. This editing process is present in *Krapp's Last Tape*, in Krapp's manipulation with the tape recorder. He does not listen to his recordings in full, but often pauses the tape or even fast-forwards it. These acts are not carried out at random, as the fast-forwarding of various segments of the tape prove to exhibit Krapp's anxiety towards allowing certain moments from the past to resurface:

What I suddenly saw was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely- (*Krapp switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again*) – ...clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most- (*Krapp curses, switches off, winds tape forward, switched on again.*)⁵⁸

Andrew Kennedy addresses this exact segment in his study of *Krapp's Last Tape*, where Krapp seems to be on the brink of an epiphany, but chooses not to embrace it: "What is it that is suddenly so clear to young Krapp? And why is he suppressing it? The unfinished sentence is so constructed as to make some kind of conclusion possible...But now Krapp has lost interest in the vision that once seemed a turning point in his creative life."⁵⁹

Krapp skips over the potentially profound recordings of his younger self in order to get to the end of an erotic episode, which he then rewinds to hear again from the beginning. His recorded memories then allow him to construct a new past, a new reality, in which he has the power to cut out or repeat the events as he sees fit. Kennedy summarizes Krapp's role in this play as "Krapp is no passive listener, but his own 'programmer', re-arranging his

⁵⁷ Oppenheim 167.

⁵⁸ Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape* 21.

⁵⁹ Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape* 71.

minimal autobiography.”⁶⁰

Reality is observed by Beckett as a personal rather than collective experience, presenting each character as the creator of his or her own reality. The subjective presentation of reality in the treated plays results in the recognition of reality as fragile and susceptible to flux. Duckworth reinforces this subjectivity in his characterization of the ‘inner spaces’, elucidating the disparity between the physical reality of the stage, and the individual realities of the characters. The nature of reality as an individual and subjective creation proves that the notion of accurate representation is impossible, hence Beckett’s insistence on the “grotesque fallacy of realistic art.”

⁶⁰ Kennedy, *Samuel Beckett* 69.

Chapter 4: Postdramatic Theatre is not whole but full of holes

4.1 "...full of holes"

The title of this chapter is in reference to Lehmann's theorizing about postdramatic theatre, where he stresses the dismissal of unity, and emphasizes the structure of contemporary theatric works as comprising of "holes". In the treated plays, these holes allude to the sense of absence and emptiness experienced by the characters, as they are often immobilized or separated from the world around them, including other characters. This alienating distance then goes on to represent the sense of isolation that forms as a result. The characters in Beckett's dramatic texts are then subject to various degrees of isolation, rendering them estranged from civilization, from other characters, and from themselves.

One of the means by which Beckett conveys the notion of isolation is found in his usage of silence. In his study of *Krapp's Last Tape*, Andrew Kennedy comments on the alienating effect of silence: "The opening silence is as significant as the closing one. It is that long silent action (a miniature mime-play controlled by one of Beckett's longest stage directions) which creates the sensation of Krapp's isolation."⁶¹ Beckett thus employs silence as a theatric device which wields the same amount of power to communicate as dialogue itself. This brings about the need to analyze not only what is present on stage, but rather what is lacking, and the effect that this absence has.

Isolation is externalized and manifested on stage by way of the characters' physical state as well as the stage setting. Lois Oppenheim in her essay "Emptying the Theatre", describes all of Beckett's characters as either "dismembered, aphasic, physically restrained, or plunged into darkness."⁶² This description is exemplified in *Endgame*, where two of the characters are relegated to residing in dustbins, rendering them completely stationary with only their heads visible to the audience. While these characters are physically disfigured, the characters Hamm and Clov exhibit a motion-based inaptitude, where the former cannot stand, and the latter cannot sit. The characters' immobilized and stationary dispositions serve as a metaphor for the various forms of isolation that will be discussed in this chapter.

⁶¹ Kennedy 74.

⁶² Oppenheim 260.

The stage setting itself conveys the state of isolation the characters are in. Lois Oppenheim observes the impact of the stage setting in *Happy Days*, as she describes her conscious efforts to convey Beckett's apocalyptic vision: "Because of our feelings about the constricted nature of Winnie's environment, our production employed a black volcanic landscape upon which nothing could ever grow, rather than the more customary sandy slope."⁶³ What is then evoked is a sense of alienation from the outside world and from other life-forms. Oppenheim conducted an interview with German theatre director Walter Asmus, in which she discusses experimenting with the setting of Beckett's plays. Upon asking Asmus if *Endgame* could work in a subway tunnel, he expresses skepticism about its effectiveness. He comments on a production of *Waiting for Godot* in a parking lot as "having done damage to Beckett."⁶⁴ Asmus attributes this damage to the delicate nature of Beckett's plays, and the necessity of the audience's full attention to the performance. However, the setting of Beckett's plays is also important in establishing the characters' position to the outside world. Upon recognizing *Endgame* as a play which takes place in an apocalyptic setting, conducting it in an urban setting would then be a conflict of interests. A minimal and barren stage setting can be observed in all four treated plays, allowing *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Happy Days*, and *Play* to evoke the immediate sensation of solitude and isolation.

In *Endgame* and *Happy Days*, isolation from society is evoked by the stage setting as well as the dialogue. *Endgame* presents a case where the characters seem to be doubly isolated: Firstly, the window which Clov repeatedly peers through emphasizes the demarcation between the location of the characters and the outside world. However, the outside world of *Endgame* is perceived by the characters as no longer existing, as Clov's reports from his trips to the window consist primarily of "zero" and "nothing".

In *Happy Days*, the protagonist is also afflicted with a two-fold barrier to the outside world. Firstly, she is embedded in a mound of dirt, preventing her from leaving and making any contact with the outside world. Secondly, in light of Oppenheim's production of *Happy Days*, the description of the setting as "barren" elucidates the outside world is in a similar apocalyptic state to that of *Endgame*. Oppenheim comments

⁶³ Oppenheim 166.

⁶⁴ Oppenheim 47.

on how Winnie copes with being isolated from society, in that “she has a resolute faith in the power of conversation (even if one-sided) to keep herself alive. Having been away from ordinary human discourse for many years, Winnie’s words are ‘found objects’”⁶⁵ However, the longer she is away from society, the less effective her reliance on words becomes, as her ability to sustain herself as a human being without the help of the outside world is brought into question.

Isolation from other people can also be observed in Beckett’s treated dramatic works, and can be divided into the categories of intentional isolation, where the characters deliberately remove themselves from situations to seek refuge and solace away from others; and unintentional (or unwanted) isolation. In the first case, Clov and Krapp can be examined in their efforts to purposefully isolate themselves from others. Genevieve Chevalier, in her essay on Beckett’s characters, observes Clov’s usage of space as a means of deliberately isolating himself. She examines the status and role of the kitchen, as the non-existence of the outside world makes the kitchen the only source of reference outside of the stage space: “It could be a transitory space, a refuge for Clov out of the reach of Hamm, a place of his own, in which he doesn’t have to acknowledge Hamm’s authority.”⁶⁶ Similarly, Krapp uses the backstage in order to isolate himself from the audience- albeit only partially, since although the audience cannot see him, they still hear the sounds of glass clanking, and are thus able to deduce that he goes backstage to drink. Regardless of the effectiveness of Krapp’s oscillation between on and offstage, he still makes a concerted effort to retreat from the spotlight from time to time.

Unintentional isolation can be observed in *Endgame*, in an episode where Nagg and Nell attempt to kiss each other but “*Their heads strain towards each other, fail to meet, fall apart again.*”⁶⁷ Their physical immobility and inability to make contact serves as a manifestation of their isolation from each other, as they are presented as constantly bickering. The implication that Beckett then makes is that the years Nagg and Nell have spent together have caused them to grow apart, rendering their physical distance from each other as a metaphor for the figurative distance between them. The disjointedness

⁶⁵ Oppenheim 163.

⁶⁶ Genevieve Chevalier, “Pacing Absence”, *Beckett and Beyond*, ed. Bruce Stewart (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1999) 55.

⁶⁷ Beckett, *Endgame* 18.

that is elucidated by way of Nagg and Nell's dustbins is mirrored in *Play*, where three heads are embedded in three urns. Once again, their physical distance from one another is representative of the metaphorical distance between them, as the constant lying and deceiving causes them to be in the state of unawareness and isolation that they are in. W2 expresses her anxiety towards being cut off from others as she exclaims "Are you listening to me? Is anyone bothering about me at all?"⁶⁸ W2's concern can be directed towards M1 in the play, or it can also be perceived as a desperate cry towards the audience.

W2's outcry then also brings about the question of the audience's involvement in Beckett's plays. In her essay entitled "Ghosts", Oppenheim observes the manner in which the characters in Beckett's plays are presented onstage in relation to the effect it has on the audience:

What Beckett is after is a diamondlike hardness, brilliance, depth and mystery. The type of alienation achieved by this mask is, in my view, entirely original in the history of our medium...Beckett's masks lead us inexorably inward and downward into darkness and personal chaos.⁶⁹

By asserting that performers of Beckett's plays wield (figurative) masks, Oppenheim establishes a distance that is created between the actors and the audience. The strength of the actor's performance then lies not in the empathy that the audience finds in the characters, but in the isolating effect the performance has on the audience, as by being cut off from the actors they are forced to examine themselves instead.

Lastly, internal isolation is present in the treated plays, as the characters are depicted as being isolated from themselves. In respect to the problematic status of language, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the issue of internal isolation is brought to the forefront via language. In her essay on monologues in the works of Samuel Beckett, Lauren De Vos recognizes isolation of the self as a result of utilizing language: "Beckett stages characters that are separated from themselves as a result of their introduction to the linguistic world."⁷⁰ Beckett's employment of the word 'viduity' in

⁶⁸ Beckett, *Play* 6.

⁶⁹ Oppenheim 175.

⁷⁰ Lauren De Vos, "Little is Left to Tell", *Monologues*, ed. Clare Wallace (Prague: Literaria Pragensia, 2006) 113.

Krapp's Last Tape illustrates this very sense of isolation. In Krapp's case, he is isolated from himself due to the transformative effects of time. In *Happy Days*, isolation of the self is also present, though it is rooted elsewhere. Gontarski comments on Winnie's dilemma in relation to Beckett's view of habit as a means of dulling the human mind, and goes on to say that "Winnie adapts with the help of three habits: ritual, language, and hope. All three protect her from self-realization and self-awareness."⁷¹ Language then serves as a barrier in both *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Happy Days*, as its usage prevents the characters from achieving personal growth, and instead renders them in a state of arrested development.

⁷¹ Gontarski, Beckett's Happy Days 17.

4.2 “Postdramatic theatre is not whole...”

Another feature of Beckett’s plays that echoes the human plight of irresolution is referenced in the first part of the chapter title: “Postdramatic theatre is not whole”. Lehmann goes on to define (postdramatic) theatre as “a process and not a finished result.”⁷² It is then important to address the incomplete nature of Beckett’s productions, as it prevents the characters from attaining any sense of resolution. Incompleteness then leads to the problematization of the finite, as Beckett’s characters i.e. those in *Endgame*, exhibit an anxiety towards their inability to end. This lack of resolution is reinforced on a structural level, as in the case of *Play*, repetition is employed in order to elucidate the impossibility of a conclusive ending point.

In “The Intent of Undoing”, Gontarski examines incompleteness as it pertains to the characters of *Happy Days*:

The tableau, Winnie buried up to her waist and beside her the buttocks and legs of Willie, was to be held for thirty seconds...Presenting the audience with half of each character, Beckett would certainly have reinforced visually a familiar theme, a world where nothing is ontologically whole, where the sum of complimentary parts does not necessarily add up to a whole.⁷³

This lack of completeness and unity is also observed by Postlewait in his treatment of *Endgame*, as he addresses the classical concept of unity in relation to its function (or lack thereof) in Beckett’s dramatic works:

His (Beckett’s) plays are about temporality without efficient and final causality. In terms of the temporal sequence there is no orderly principle of cause and effect that unifies memory and expectation. *Endgame*, for example, may observe the traditional unities of time and space, but the events lack a well-unified beginning, middle, and end. Time and space may be a priori conditions for understanding, as Kant argues, but for Beckett’s characters neither things next to each other nor one thing after another provides a modal basis for demonstrating interconnection.⁷⁴

The very nature of the ending in *Endgame* elicits Postlewait’s concern about the lack of unity within the play, as Clov’s proposition to leave is merely declared but not carried out within the confines of the play. Gontarski and Postlewait are thus in line with Lehmann’s perception of postdramatic theatre and its “inability to synthesize”, as Beckett’s plays

⁷² Lehmann 104.

⁷³ Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing* 84.

⁷⁴ Postlewait 480.

prove hostile to any sense of unity- whether it be unity reflected visually on stage by way of dismembered bodies, or unity of concepts such as time.

Frustration and anxiety towards incompleteness is outwardly exhibited in *Play*, where the presence of a “half-light” rattles W1. Firstly, light is already established as an antagonizing force in the lighting directions: “The source of light is single and must not be situated outside the ideal space (stage) occupied by its victims.”⁷⁵ The particular wording of these directions makes a sense of apprehension and fear towards light tangible. In the case of *Play*, light is perceived as a menacing force, seemingly taunting the characters. The mention of a “hellish half-light”, particularly the word “half”, which resounds twice in the play, serves as a mirror reflecting the state of the characters after death. Although the grave stage setting and morose monologues do evoke a grim, hell-like aura, the sense of irresolution and ambiguity hints at a more transitory space than hell. The characters prove to be incapable of any type of resolution, confined solely to their presumptions and paranoia, allowing the “hellish half-light” to serve as an abrasive reminder of the limbo that they are in.

The employment of a transitory, in-between space is also present in *Endgame*. In her analysis of the kitchen as a place of retreat, Chevalier addresses the complex nature of the kitchen, in regard to its function in the play:

But Clov is trapped in it (the kitchen): it is neither ‘in’ nor ‘out’, as it is neither visible nor totally foreign to the stage, a mere annex to the room which it supplies with ladder, pain-killer, telescope, toy dog, alarm-clock, &c....What could be a creative space proves to be sterile, as there soon are no more bicycle wheels, no more pap nor Turkish delights, no more rugs, no more pain killers, no more coffins...and seeds no longer sprout...What could have seemed a way out is just a dead end.⁷⁶

Both *Endgame* and *Play* present the characters in a limbo-esque situation, as they are not completely in or outside, but instead lodged somewhere in between. In *Endgame*, the kitchen serves as a pseudo-exit for Clov, as although he is out of the audience’s sight, it is merely a symbolic exit, for the kitchen is only a dead space. In *Play*, the characters are analyzing and questioning a situation that they are no longer alive to resolve, but after

⁷⁵ Beckett, *Play* 158.

⁷⁶ Chevalier 55.

death, are still plagued by the inconclusiveness of their situation. What then plagues the characters of *Endgame* and *Play* is the inability to reach any sense of culmination, as there is no end in sight.

The characters of *Endgame* often respond to this sense of stasis by explicitly conveying their anxiety towards being near the end, but not being able to end. Clov's speech reflects his frustration at being so close and yet so far: "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. (*Pause.*) Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap. (*Pause.*) I can't be punished anymore."⁷⁷ This impossible heap is in reference to Zeno's notion of infinite divisions: "Take any finite quantity of millet, and pour half of it into a heap. Then take half of the remaining quantity again...and so on. In an infinite universe, the heap could be completed; in a finite universe, never, for the nearer it gets to the totality, the slower it increases"⁷⁸ Clov's frustration at being closer and closer to death is then made clear, as death seems both imminent and unattainable. The same situation is present in *Happy Days*, as the closer Winnie seems to be to the end, the more it seems that time is standing still, and the less effective her time-filling exercises become. Both Clov and Winnie are stunted in their inability to "end". Winnie is inhibited physically, allowing her literal state of immobility to reflect her helplessness in putting an end to her unruly situation. Clov, on the one hand, expresses a desire to be finished, as he constantly threatens to leave Hamm, yet he admits to the fact that "it's time it ended, in the refuge too. (*Pause.*) And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to end... Yes there it is, it's time it ended and yet I hesitate to- (*he yawns*)- to end."⁷⁹ In interpreting finality as death in *Endgame*, Clov then exhibits an ambivalent attitude towards it- on the one hand, he exhibits frustration towards waiting for the inevitable coming of death; on the other hand, he exhibits a fear of the unknown. Beckett's aversion towards what he perceives as the human tendency towards habit is then made clear, as the unwillingness to go beyond one's comfort zone, in Clov's case to leave Hamm, results in the very sense of stagnancy that the characters of *Endgame* and *Happy Days* endure.

⁷⁷Beckett, *Endgame* 12.

⁷⁸ Ruby Cohn, ed., *Casebook on Waiting for Godot: The Impact of Beckett's Modern Classic: Reviews, Reflections, and Interpretations*. (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 89-90.

⁷⁹Beckett, *Endgame* 12.

Beckett integrates the dilemma of irresolution into the language and structure of his plays by way of repetition. In *Endgame* Hamm repeatedly asks “is it not time for my pain-killer?”, and in the case of *Play*, the entire play is repeated, evoking the characters’ inability to come to a conclusion, as they are repeatedly forced to revisit their past. The cyclical nature of *Play* then mirrors Beckett’s absurdist notion of human nature, as according to Ross Chambers:

To approach the self is to embark on an infinite process comparable to attempting to express the value of a surd to the last decimal point. Life as the pursuit of the self thus becomes the endless, hopeless, task of pursuing an infinitely receding *something* which-resisting definition and being inseparable from what surrounds it- has the characteristics of nothing.⁸⁰

Firstly, Ross Chambers communicates the futility that arises out of being in constant pursuit of the self, without any hope of achieving a final moment of truth. He further explains this inability by referring to the elusiveness of the concept of the ‘self’, in that it cannot be adequately defined. The crux of futility then lies in the pursuit of something intangible to the human mind.

Beckett’s characters try to counter the futility of their situations in their attempts to seek out something that they can exercise control over. In *Endgame*, the characters’ decrepitude is illuminated by their compulsive need for order and precision in Clov’s “I’ll now go to my kitchen, ten by ten by ten feet, and wait for him to whistle me. (*Pause.*) Nice dimensions, nice proportions...”⁸¹ This overt fascination with measurement and proportions, along with Hamm’s comically obsessive need to be put directly in the middle of the room, illustrates the characters’ tragically futile desire for order and precision in a world of chaos.

Just as the characters of *Endgame* are obsessed with precision and order, Winnie attempts to gain control over her helpless situation by attempting to maintain a sense of control of her physical surroundings and her thoughts and memories via language. Winnie’s obsession over the trinkets in her purse elucidate the desperateness one becomes enveloped in when their sense of power is diminished. The attempt to

⁸⁰ Ross Chambers, “Beckett’s Brinkmanship”, *A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965) 154.

⁸¹ Beckett, *Endgame* 12.

symbolically endow these fragments from her life with a sense of meaning is one of the signs that she is losing control of her life.

The characters of *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Happy Days*, and *Play* are in permanent stasis, as they are in a constant state of isolation, whether from themselves, each other, or the outside world, and irresolution proves to be an intrinsic part of their existence. In employing characters who are either presented as immobile or are rendered stationary due to external factors, Beckett conveys the effects of isolation on the characters, as they become estranged from others as well as themselves, resulting in any attempt to connect or reach out as a futile exercise. Beckett's tendency towards the incomplete and inconclusive contributes to the notion of futility, as hostility towards resolution is communicated through the structure of the plays themselves, where inconclusive endings and repetition make it clear that resolution is impossible.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Samuel Beckett's dramatic works *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Happy Days*, and *Play* illuminate the delicacy and multiplicity of the concepts of language, time, identity and reality. In this thesis, these concepts are examined from various standpoints. Open to different modes of perception, these concepts are then subject to ambiguity, problematization, and paradox. This multifaceted mode of perceiving is deeply rooted in Lehmann's work on postdramatic theatre, where he states the need to redefine these concepts in order to analyze postdramatic theatre adequately. One of the driving forces of Lehmann's argument, and the main area of concern in this thesis, is then recognizing the fragmentary nature of these concepts- fragmentary, in the sense that adequately defining them requires addressing various methods of interpretation. A concept such as time can then not be defined solely by the laws of physics, but must also be taken into account in linguistic and psychological terms.

The medium these concepts are presented in plays a large role in their interpretation. It is for this reason that a conscious distinction has been made throughout this work to distinguish between the dramatic text and the performed text. Certain elements which are not present in the text, but which are fundamental for the aim of this thesis, are not only present but predominant in the performance. This dichotomy is most clear, as has been discussed, in *Play*, where the cacophonous and oversaturated effect of the monologues can only be perceived while viewing the performance. Similarly, the silence at the beginning and end of *Krapp's Last Tape* evokes a sense of anxiety for the audience while simultaneously reinforcing Krapp's isolation and solitude on stage. In both cases, the effect of the performances (assault of the senses in *Play* and isolation in *Krapp's Last Tape*) has no linguistic equivalent.

The problematization of language and communication is thus introduced, as language is either deemed as being a flawed or altogether inadequate mode of expression. It is necessary to note how Beckett represents language in the treated dramatic works, as well as what it says about language. Beckett then not only plays with the form of language, but also calls into question its function. It is thus important to note the rapid and monotone monologues in *Play* in terms of the chaotic and cacophonous effect they

produce. The assault of the senses induced by these monologues then serves as a commentary on the status of language as being overwrought.

Furthermore, the recognition of language within a subjective, contextual, and social framework reiterates the necessity of a multiperspectival way of perceiving, as one utterance can generate various meanings. In the case of *Play*, it is the unspecified addressee which creates a sense of ambiguity in the characters' lines. In *Happy Days* the functionality of language is defined by gender, where the purpose of communication proves to be different for men and women, resulting in the characters' subsequently disparate interpretations of communication. In both cases, language cannot be objectively interpreted.

The relationship between language and its user is further examined in how the user affects the functionality of language. In *Happy Days* it is Winnie's overuse of language which causes meaning to be stripped from her words, as her purpose for speaking becomes less aimed at communicating, and is instead employed as a means of covering up silence. One of Beckett's most prominent criticisms about language is then an imbalance between the form and function of language, as the link between the expression of the speaker and the interpretation of the listener diverges due to the multiple possibilities of interpretation. This is partially accounted for due to the inability of language to meet the expectations of its user. The speaker then finds himself trying to linguistically express something that stems far beyond the capacity of the human mind, rendering language an inadequate method of absolute and precise expression. Beckett himself faces this problem of expression, as the conjunction of the obligation to express himself as an artist and the recognition of language as inadequate creates paradox in his art. In order to at least partially evade this dilemma, Beckett utilizes visual reinforcement and other non-linguistic modes of expression (i.e. the tape recorder in *Krapp's Last Tape*).

The tape recorder allows Beckett to transcend the boundaries of time, and in doing so, the complex nature of time and the characters' perception towards it is revealed. The characters are then described as being unable to reconcile the past and the present, resulting in a character like Krapp as being perpetually afflicted with a sense of temporal

discontinuity. This inability to accurately perceive the past and the present in relation to each other can then be accounted for by a linguistic deficiency, as the past is expressed either in too distant or too close proximity to the present, creating a temporal whirlpool. The isolated positions of the characters also inhibit them from being aware of their positions in time. This brings about the recognition of the concept of time as an individual and subjective construct.

Time is also used in order to illuminate the fragmented nature of the self by way of Krapp's tape recorder, which exposes different versions of Krapp at different moments in time. The recognition of the disparate and often conflicting elements that exist within one individual is further explored in *Happy Days*, where Beckett uses the characters in order to signify the Cartesian split between the mind and body. Winnie's inability to connect with her husband then signifies the disparity between the intellect, as represented by Winnie, and the physical, as represented by Willie. An issue of identity that is not perceived in the dramatic text is that of the actor, and how his or her presence influences the character he or she plays. This brings about the issue of representation, as the actor is representing a character, though he or she is still exposed on stage as an individual. The exactitude of how much of the actor is represented on stage cannot be measured, as the point where the actor ends and the character begins is blurred.

The ability for Beckett's theatre to depict reality is repudiated by Beckett himself, in his insistence of the "grotesque fallacy of realistic art", as well as by Lehmann in his similar claim that theatre is unable to depict reality. Instead, the usage of signification is applied to theatre, allowing for characters such as Winnie and Willie to serve as vessels for signification. However, even the process of signification is delicate in Beckett's works, as can be seen in the usage of light in *Krapp's Last Tape*, which proves that light presents only a fragment of reality, and that darkness exposes elements of reality that cannot be seen in the light. The instability of reality is accredited to subjectivity and individual perception, as is elucidated by the characters of *Play*, who base their entire perception of reality on mere speculation. The characters' use of memories to preserve reality proves to be equally unstable, as memories themselves are but recreations of the human mind. The ultimate indicator of the subjectivity of reality is then the characters'

ability to create their own versions of reality, as in Krapp's case, the careful selection of fragments in his tape recorder shapes the reality he lives in.

The concepts of time, identity, and reality in Beckett's works then prove to be of a fragmentary nature, in that in order to examine and define them, different modes of interpretation must be applied. Upon recognizing these concepts in a linguistic, social, semiotic, philosophical and psychological light, it is made clear that these concepts cannot be defined with a singular and unitary definition, as the nature of these concepts is highly subjective and subject to flux.

Apart from fragmentation, Beckett's treated works also exhibit a sense of dislocation, as the characters are seen as being isolated from people and places in various ways. It is then just as important to examine what is present in Beckett's plays as it is to examine what is not there. The absence that isolation evokes in the treated plays then proves to have a significant impact on the characters' psyches. It is firstly imperative to note how Beckett integrates isolation into the performance, and not only in the text. The silence at the beginning and end of *Krapp's Last Tape* then makes the audience fully aware of Krapp's solitude, proving that silence has the potential to communicate just as much as words do.

The temporal discontinuity in *Endgame* and Winnie's deteriorating communicative abilities in *Happy Days* are seen as resulting from the characters' isolation from society, as society can be perceived as representing some semblance of order and stability. The issue of isolation however, is complicated by Beckett, in that the society that the characters are seemingly isolated from is alluded to as being non-existent. The often barren and minimal stage settings along with Clov's description of the post-apocalyptic world outside the window heightens the definition of isolation, as the characters have nothing to be isolated from.

The post-apocalyptic setting in *Endgame* and *Happy Days*, along with Winnie being embedded in the mound, is introduced without any reference to causality or explanation as to how it happened. However, the causality of isolation between characters is not only present but fundamental in determining the type of isolation between them. Clov and Krapp then exhibit intentional isolation from other characters and from the

audience respectively, where their isolation is a result of their desire to be free of the authority of Hamm in Clov's case, and to be free from the audience's gaze in Krapp's. On the other hand, isolation can be the unintentional product of unproductive relationships, as Nagg and Nell in *Endgame* and the characters of *Play* are literally and metaphorically isolated from one another. Lastly, the characters Krapp and Winnie experience internal isolation, which can be accounted for in both cases by their introduction to the linguistic world. All of the aforementioned cases of isolation then demonstrate the significance of exploring not only what is present but what is lacking. Silence is thus given the power to communicate and distance between two people can express just as much as interaction between them.

As has been mentioned, Winnie's static disposition and the apocalypse in *Endgame* are not accounted for by Beckett, though it is clear from the beginning of the play that some significant events had transpired prior to the reader's or audience's introduction to the play. Fragmentation is thus finally implemented in the very structure of the plays, as the events of the plays are not presented with a clear beginning or end. The repetition of *Play* as well as the repetition of utterances in *Endgame* then brings about the issue of irresolution that results from incompleteness and a lack of unity. This lack of unity is further represented by the existence of limbo-esque spaces, particularly in *Play* and *Endgame*, where the characters find themselves in spaces that are not entirely one place or another, but somewhere in between. Given the lack of structure and the presence of incompleteness throughout the plays, the characters, i.e. those in *Happy Days* and *Endgame*, are confronted with their inability to end. Whereas Winnie is physically restrained from resolution, Clov is preventing himself from resolution.

Lehmann's dismissal of unity and synthesis in postdramatic theatre can then be seen as the crux of the issues discussed in this thesis. The characters' inability to resolve their problems or their inability to reach any kind of ending point can then be linked to the motif of incompleteness that pervades the treated works. Utilizing fragmented characters and speech, incomplete and cyclical story lines, and by isolating his characters, Beckett elucidates the permanence of this incompleteness and irresolution. In seeking out new definitions of language, time, identity, and reality, it is then made clear that these

concepts themselves do not have a unitary definition or function. By being subject to various external factors (linguistic, sociological, psychological), these concepts are in a constant state of flux, and are thus never complete.

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