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BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Téma pohybu a stagnace v tvorbě Samuela Becketta

Movement and Stagnation in Samuel Beckett's Work

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Thesis Abstract

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat motiv pohybu, resp. stagnace (na fyzické i duševní úrovni) v kratší tvorbě Samuela Becketta. V jeho dramatech i próze je fyzický pohyb a nezřídka i neschopnost jej vykonávat často jedním z ústředních témat, které se ovšem vztahuje i k schopnosti osobnostního, duševního, duchovního atd. pokroku či transcendence. Jedním z hlavních záměrů této práce je právě objasnění vztahu těchto dvou aspektů pohybu. Protože by ani zdaleka nebylo možné obsáhnout všechna Beckettova díla, jichž se dané téma týká, ve své práci se zabývám jen novelou *First Love* a Beckettovou první rozhlasovou hrou *All That Fall*.

Dalším problémem, který souvisí s neschopností pohybu, je otázka komunikace, a to na úrovni obsahu textu i z pohledu samotného autora. Neúspěch v promluvě v zásadě znamená neschopnost sdělit příjemci určitou informaci, zprostředkovat pocity, ustanovit či udržet kontakt atd., podle toho, za jakým účelem byl daný komunikační akt realizován. Toto selhání může nastat jak mezi literárními postavami, tak i ve vztahu autora k obecenstvu – v Beckettových dramatech například počáteční situace často nedospěje k žádnému obecně očekávanému závěru nebo rozuzlení. Sdělení díla je zároveň často negativní, tzn. poukazuje na neexistenci či negativní kvalitu daného motivu. Tímto způsobem forma odpovídá obsahu – absence vyústění či vývoje situace je plně úmyslná a koresponduje s nepřítomností smyslu různých jevů v daném textu.

Novela *First Love*, napsaná francouzsky roku 1945, pojednává o lásce coby zásadní události v životě vypravěče a hlavního protagonisty v jedné osobě. Tento bezejmenný muž již před propuknutím milostné aféry pociťuje dualitu své existence, totiž nezávislost její tělesné a pudové složky na složce duševní. Pomocí různých technik se mu víceméně daří tento rozpor eliminovat až do doby, kdy se objeví dotyčná žena. Ačkoliv jsou city, které vypravěč vůči ní chová, poněkud neobvyklé, tato láska iniciuje nekontrolovatelnou fyzickou a smyslovou

aktivitu. Tuto neblahou změnu ještě prohloubí narození dítěte – jediným způsobem, jak uniknout křiku ženy a potomka, který vypravěč stále slyší, se stává chůze. Fyzický pohyb a aktivita vůbec jsou tedy v novele nežádoucí reakcí na smyslové, neovladatelné podněty, které nutně znemožňují dosažení alespoň přibližné osobnostní jednoty.

Rozhlasová hra *All That Fall* byla po dlouhé době prvním Beckettovým dílem napsaným opět anglicky. Kromě toho se vyznačuje poměrně dalšími poměrně nezvyklými rysy – velkým počtem postav, konkrétním umístěním na dublinském předměstí a jinými odkazy. Klíčovými tématy jsou zejména křesťanství, reprodukce a dilema mezi aktivitou a pasivitou. Hlavní postava, postarší paní Rooneyová, stejně jako vypravěč v novele *First Love*, podvědomě touží po jednotě, která má v jejím případě podobu spasení. Jelikož je ale toto vinou Boží lhostejnosti nedosažitelné, na rozdíl od zmiňovaného vypravěče vyhledává smyslové a citové impulzy, které by podněcovaly aktivitu nutnou k překonání neutěšené situace, způsobené mimo jiné dávným úmrtím dcerky. Manžel paní Rooneyové Dan naproti tomu proti nepřízni aktivně protestuje tím, že se pokouší jednat proti přirozenému řádu věcí.

Jak vyplývá i z jiných Beckettových textů, fyzický pohyb a aktivita nejsou prostředky vedoucími k transcendenci či skutečnému pokroku, ačkoliv je pro postavy lokomoce často velmi namáhavá. Naopak, fyzická aktivita odvádí (ať už je to žádoucí, nebo ne) pozornost od duševních, morálních nebo duchovních záležitostí a nikdy nemůže přesáhnout fyzický, smyslový svět.

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1. Introduction

Upon encountering the dramas and shorter prosaic works of Samuel Beckett, the reader or spectator will probably soon notice, apart from other characteristic features, the exceptional number of characters that limp, have various foot defects and pains, have problems with locomotion and balance, or who are even legless. In other cases, external causes impede the protagonists from moving, as for example in the play *Happy Days,* where Winnie is stuck in a mound of earth. Incapability of movement and stagnation, whether voluntary or forced, does not appear merely on the physical level; hesitation, inability to decide or act despite an urge to do so are themes frequently occurring in Beckett's texts; when we think of these manifestations of impotence in abstract terms, we realise that they represent stagnation as well: the inability to progress from one situation to another, further from one attitude or mental state etc. The characters often experience the ancient dilemma of activity versus passivity in human life; in many cases, Beckett illustrates it on motion.

Another level on which a certain form of immobility emerges is often the structure of a text; that is to say, the plot does not reach any conclusion; the situation presented therein, although usually close to unbearable, does not change, or becomes cyclic. The occurrence of these motives is evidently determined by Beckett's general artistic interests and beliefs, which will be treated with more detail in the first chapter. Therefore, it becomes clear that these themes are not only important individually, but also as a part of a complex of thoughts, which shapes the author's creative approach as well as the range of themes that he tends to be concerned with.

The objective of the thesis is to examine the above-mentioned, and, in particular, to attempt to analyse some of the connections between physical and mental (also spiritual, existential etc.) movement, respectively stagnation. Given the limited scope allowed by the format of a BA thesis, the focus will be on two shorter representative texts only: a novella,

First Love, and Beckett's first radio play, *All That Fall*. To provide a wider context, one theoretical chapter will be dedicated to various aspects of failure in Beckett's work, particularly concerning communication, both on the level of the contents of individual texts and Beckett's authorial approach. This part is predominantly intended to relate the mentioned inability of expression to the central theme of stagnation.

To analyse the issue in its full scope, a range of texts would have to be analysed. The choice of representative texts is rather difficult, since, as already discussed, the topic in question not only appears throughout Beckett's work, but it also takes various forms and is closely connected to other fundamental problems. Both texts examined in this thesis are chosen with respect to this fact, meaning that each includes some of the more common issues connected to motion and its absence. It is evident that both texts differ considerably in many respects, namely the year of origin, the language in which they were written, obviously in genre, in their setting, in the form, in their thematic range and other factors. The purpose of selecting such relatively dissimilar works is to illustrate the numerous themes and problems to which movement and stagnation can be bound and the different contexts and styles in which these occur. In addition, such analysis could enable further interpretations of other Beckett's texts, since it might illuminate some other connections that are not visible at the first sight.

To start with, it is rather advantageous that neither *All That Fall* nor *First Love* are among the best-known and most valued of the author's entire work; this means that they are therefore not burdened with a number of interpretations nor are they subject to generalised popular representation, as for instance *Waiting for Godot* tends to be.

The genres of both selected works are of course substantial when we consider the means of expression, in particular when concerning any sort of motion. That is to say, while drama on stage can represent movement in the most expressive manner, i.e. showing it, prose

and radio plays must employ other instruments to suggest physical movement, which by no means lacks importance in these texts; in this respect, especially *All That Fall* with its sound effects is interesting. Beside that, the genre of radio play is fundamental with respect to another fact: as will be further elaborated on, *All That Fall* is a drama in which there are surprisingly many characters and an unusually detailed and specific setting. This uncommon lack of minimalism could have been allowed due to the greater extent of control that the author has over the medium. Obviously, movement is necessarily expressed by language in the case of prose; and so it is in *First Love*. However, we may still find traces of relation of progress in the plot with the notion of physical movement indicated in the narrative.

Another factor that must not be forgotten is the language used: *First Love* was written in French and only later translated into English, whereas *All That Fall* was the first text after a long time that Beckett wrote in English again. Considering the fact that the author himself translated his own texts, the original language might not be so important regarding the meaning as it would be otherwise; nevertheless, it is perhaps more interesting to know why Beckett returned to English and how it influences *All That Fall*. As will be discussed in the relevant chapter, this radio play is in certain aspects unusually concrete compared to other Beckett's texts. Clas Zilliacus connects this to the language change, as well as to a renewed interest in English caused by numerous translations of his earlier works.[1] In other words, although *All That Fall* cannot be thought of as a play thematically deviating from Beckett's typical range of topics, there is definitely a shift in authorial intention in the sense that Beckett chose to prefer the dramatic possibilities of English to the absence of temptation to employ a particular style, which he associated with French[2]. The consequences of this will be dealt with upon comparing both texts; however, at this stage, a conclusion can be made that

[1] Clas Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting* (Abo: Abo Academi, 1976) 30.
[2] Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978) 149.

the language difference between *All That Fall* and *First Love* (and other texts, of course) is above all a shift in approach.

This is related to other aspects resulting from the difference: for instance, as was previously mentioned, the number of characters or the setting, which provides space for another comparison: that is, how the manifestations of the theme are related to a greater degree of concreteness as opposed to a more common minimalism and unspecified setting. In other words, the question is why absence of context was so important in Beckett's earlier plays and how it influences the works; respectively, how this factor takes effect in *All That Fall* and how it is related to the medium of radio.

Since the thesis will not deal at length with allusions, interpretations of whole texts and so on, the most important primary source materials will be both original texts (the English version in the case of *First Love*). Of course, secondary material will be used where it is relevant or necessary to support an argument or otherwise helpful, that is to say especially in the theoretical chapter, but also in other issues, such as the Cartesian split. It must be also noted that the conclusions will be made predominantly from analysing the two texts in question, as it is not possible to take into consideration all of the author's works. Some general informative value should, however, arise from the discussion that will be offered in what follows, because *All That Fall* and *First Love*, in spite of not being the most famous, canonical texts of Beckett's, do not divert from his typical thematic range.

2. Failure, communication and expression

In order to fully understand the question, it should be noted that the motives of inability, stagnation, ignorance etc. are not restricted merely to the contents of Beckett's works, however frequent they are therein; they are substantial for the author's perception of writing, literature and art in general, which is reflected in the writer's creative attitude towards his works and consequently mirrors in his texts as well. To be particular, narrative strategies, characters, setting, plot development and other formal features are necessarily influenced by the author's approach. For example, in many of Beckett's texts, the plot seems to be stagnating or going in circles; in other texts, not only the characters are hopeless and unable - equally impotent is often the narrator, and, importantly, even the writer himself in a certain sense. S. E. Gontarski in *The Intent of Undoing* deals with Beckett's approach to art and creativity, often contrasting it to Joyce's.[3] He quotes a statement by Beckett about his work: "If my work has any meaning at all, it is due more to ignorance, inability and intuitive despair than to any individual strength. I think that I have perhaps freed myself from certain formal concepts."[4] At this point, it is clear that there is an unusually strong connection among the contents of a text, its form, and the creative process itself in Beckett's work that relates to the theme in question, i.e. the inability to move and progress, if we understand these in abstract terms.

To examine the connection of the motives of immobility and stagnation to the higher levels of Beckett's work, we must discuss the notion of communication (general, literary, dramatic), its constituting factors and the problems which Beckett experienced while writing and which he presents in his texts. For the purpose of discussing human communication in general, it is suitable to become acquainted with the basic linguistic principles describing this

[3]S. E. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 6-10.
[4]Gontarski 6.

act in order to understand its nature. Literary and dramatic communication is based on these principles as well, but in addition has certain specific features which must be taken into consideration.

It is important that in the following text only verbal communication will be discussed. Although its non-verbal aspect definitely plays a considerable role in Beckett's drama, judging from his rather precise stage directions and the existence of several mime plays, the relationship between the form and the meaning is much more liable to be analyzed when language is used. Apart from that, it is obvious that the analysis of non-verbal factors would necessarily have to relate to a particular performance, while text analysis is independent of individual productions.

Most linguists agree on the basic distinction of two major communicative functions: the first (ideational-informative in Myer's terms) concerns conveying information, i.e. products of thinking and the second (social-emotional) serves to maintain and adjust human relationships. Some suggest the existence of a third one (interaction-regulating), which regulates the communicating process itself.[5] It is evident that each of these functions can very well fail; a speaker may not be able to communicate information, establish contact or influence the interaction process. In order to detect the exact source of failure, it is necessary to look closer at the individual components of a communication act.

The linguist Roman Jakobson describes several constituting factors present in every communication act: the addressor, the message, the addressee, the context, the code, and the contact. Jakobson further explains that there exist several basic functions of communication, which depend on the proportions of the individual factors rather than on the prevalence of a single one. Simultaneously, even though one function might be dominant in a text, the other

[5] Terry Myers, "Verbal and Non-Verbal Interactivity," *The Development of Discourse*, ed. Terry Myers (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979) 13.

ones are only rarely absent. The functions are determined by the prevailing focus on the individual factors. Thus, a communication act that is oriented towards the context has a referential function, the emotive function stresses the addresser's view, the conative function is focused on the addressee, the phatic stresses the contact, the metalingual deals with the code, and the poetic is targeted at the message.[6]

As was already mentioned, discourse usually has several of these functions; nevertheless, some are more crucial for its given purpose than the other ones. Therefore, it is possible that even though a communicative act has certain function and sense, it still may be ineffective or irrelevant because it fails in the very aspect(s) which are fundamental for the purpose of the discourse or without which it becomes pointless. In other words, such a communication act fails to convey information or emotional states, to maintain the contact, to transmit information about the code etc. Thus it does not allow any alteration of the very aspects of situation it was supposed to change; the data that should have been transmitted, whatever its nature is, does not reach its target. In this respect failure in communication can be considered a kind of stagnation. On the contrary, if communication maintains the functions which are not substantial (this may be intentional), it diverts the characters from the desirable effect, as well as purposeless activity distracts them from progress.

For instance, the dialogue of Mr. Tyler and Mrs. Rooney in All That Fall illustrates a failure in the characters' communicative intentions:

> MR. TYLER: Come, Mrs. Rooney, come, the mail has not yet gone up, just take my free arm and we'll be there with time and to spare.

[6]Roman Jakobson*, Selected Writings 3: Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry*, ed. Stephen Rudy (Hague: Moton Publishers, 1951) 22-25.

MRS. ROONEY: (brokenly). In her forties now she'd be, I don't know, fifty girding up her lovely little loins, getting ready for the change...[7]

In this passage, Mr. Tyler attempts to contact Mrs. Rooney and persuade her to continue on her journey, but his effort is in vain. Mrs. Rooney, on the contrary, fails to successfully communicate her emotions to the fellow citizens that she encounters on her way to the station, and their insufficient empathy contributes to her frustration.

Waiting for Godot also abounds in dialogues whose communicative function is rather untypical; to Vladimir and Estragon, conversation is a means of staying sane while waiting. In addition, the characters themselves are aware of that, so the discourse is intentionally pointless:

ESTRAGON: In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.
VLADIMIR: You're right, we're inexhaustible.
ESTRAGON: It's so we don't think.[8]

At this point, it is suitable to note that in literature and drama in particular, communication has slightly different qualities than in common usage. Keir Elam states several aspects in which dramatic discourse does not resemble everyday conversation: for example, unfinished phrases, frequent interruptions, phatic phrases and other features typical for casual spoken language are necessarily reduced in drama.[9] Another characteristic of dramatic language is its ability to constitute action. Elam distinguishes locutionary (creation

[7] Samuel Beckett *All That Fall: A Play for Radio* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957) 12.
[8] Samuel Beckett, "Waiting for Godot," *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990) 58.
[9] Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London and New York: Methuen, 1980) 180-181.

of a meaningful language unit), illocutionary (an utterance with a performative effect) and perlocutionary (an utterance which has some effect on the addressee) acts.[10]

In the example of *Waiting for Godot*, failure of the perlocutionary function is extremely frequent: it could be even said that the play to a considerable degree consists of suggestions that are never realised. Estragon and Vladimir talk about various actions, such as going away or hanging themselves, however, they do not find the courage to perform these. In short, in this play, although communication does have certain functions (phatic, poetic etc.), it fails in its perlocutionary function, i.e. to make the characters act; in this respect, it could be said that conversation is even counterproductive, because the very act of talking about taking active participation in their lives in fact prevents the protagonists from doing so. In this manner, the play becomes static and, by means of repetition, cyclic as a consequence of a communicative failure.

These examples of characters who do not only experience communication problems but also are aware of these are important on the level of the text, and in addition to that, their existence suggests that similar, acknowledged difficulties could be present on a higher level as well. For example, in *First Love* the narrator, who is at the same time the main protagonist, faces numerous problems in communication both as a character and as a narrator, for instance in the beginning of the novella, "I have enough trouble as it is in trying to say what I think I know."[11] This adds to the unity of the character/narrator figure, since the narrator has the very same problem with expressing himself as he does in the role of the character.

This is important because it suggests certain transferability of characteristics to other levels. That is to say, if there is an accordance between a character and narrator, it might imply that another authority – the writer himself – is not always immune against inability of expression or problems concerning the usage of language, which leads to an important point;

[10] Elam 156-159.
[11] Samuel Beckett, "First Love," *Collected Shorter Prose 1945-1980* (London: John Calder, 1984) 1.

in the case of the author, such difficulties cannot be expressed in the same manner as in communication between characters, because of the fact that all information present in a text is perceived by the audience as a sign, meaningful and intentional. The Prague School introduced the term "semiotization of the object" for drama; it means that every object or phenomenon on stage becomes a sign for the spectators.[12] That is why although characters in a play may have a trouble expressing themselves (and this will be acknowledged), the author does not have such options, since every mark of ignorance of hesitance will not be considered genuine but purposeful. The above mentioned theory of semiotization speaks about drama, but in a certain sense it could be applied to prose as well, because especially with the objective approach (i.e. perceiving the text as an autonomous unit without excessive emphasis on other factors, such as the intentions of the author or the context), the text itself inevitably becomes the only basis of interpretation.

Therefore, an author in fact cannot project his doubts about the accuracy of expression in the text directly. He can, however, as has been discussed, suggest it by the properties of the text, for instance by creating characters whose communication fails, by refusing to attempt the achievement of a certain function, such as mimetic or pragmatic. It is nevertheless necessary to add that this reluctance and inability of the author arises from his persuasion about the unstable nature of the factors on which the specific functions are based; it is definitely not a lack of skill that makes the achievement impossible. Beckett is known to have opposed to various productions that did not exactly follow his stage directions or description of characters,[13] which suggests that any absence of meaning is intentional and imposing a new sense on it is highly undesirable. One of Beckett's quotes about new tendencies in art[14] illustrates the multitude of elements with negative quality: "There is

[12] Elam 7-9.
[13] Katherine Worth, *Samuel Beckett's Theatre: Life Journeys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001) 152-153.
[14]Martin Esslin, "Beckett and His Interpreters," *Mediations: Essays on Brecht, Beckett, and the Media* (London: Abacus, 1983) 76.

nothing 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."[15] Some of these can be identified with the factors described by Jakobson, some are of a different nature.

To start with one of the most important and striking, "Nothing with which to express" refers to the code, i.e. language (and partly other dramatic devices in the case of theatre plays). The quote certainly does not suggest that language is non-existent; it is rather imprecise, unstable and therefore unfit to serve the purpose of the author. However, the inaccurate nature of language is not the only reason for its failure as a precise code; another factor is the individuality of both the addressor and the addressee, whose knowledge and understanding of the code (and also its referents, i.e. the world) inevitably differs. Together with the ambiguity of any language this practically ensures that a message (the nature of which is also an object of doubt, as will be discussed later) can hardly be transmitted without any distortion. Although Beckett did write several mime plays, it is questionable whether he could have in this manner solved the problem of the imperfect essence of language, since in that case it is the acting that functions as the only code, while in a dramatic text with words it is secondary. An actor can hardly be considered a more reliable instrument of expression than language; not speaking of the fact that the message must be somehow communicated to the mime and this process is another one that can fail, while in a play that uses language at least the words of the text can be conveyed exactly.

To conclude the argument, there is no way to escape the inevitability of an imprecise code. Unlike some of the other factors stated in the quote, this argument is in fact universal to a certain degree to any writer. Esslin adds another important point concerning language; as was already dicussed, Beckett intended to avoid redundant stylistic features (because these

[15] Gontarski 10.

would be nothing more than distortions in fact) and that tends to be regarded as one of the reasons he wrote many of his texts in a foreign language, namely French.[16]

"There is nothing to express" refers to the message; of course we cannot claim that there is no message in Beckett's texts. Gontarski interprets this statement as an "active phrase", which means that the essence of the message is negative; it deals with an absence of a certain phenomenon rather than with its presence.[17] Esslin explains the phrase similarly:

> "Only that Beckett, in addition, like many writers and visual artists of his generation, has reached a position of doubt, of agnosticism about the external world itself, which, reflected as it must be within the existential experience of the individual, has lost its reassuringly positive and generally accepted outlines."[18]

Both these quotes lead to the conclusion that, as Esslin further elaborates, the message does not concern the world and not even its inconceivability, but the individual's experience of existing there without any certainty about its form and order.[19] Therefore, such texts do portray something: perceptions and projections of the mind, even if these may be negative, that is to say unreliable, confused or unable.

This is where the issue of mimesis must be tackled. According to Gontarski, "From his earliest artistic years, Beckett struggled to reject mimesis, relying as it does on a fundamental empiricism, as an art of surfaces. The perfection of the illusion of reality interested him little."[20] At this point, an important question arises; whether mimesis is merely strict imitation of the external world or whether other model realities are included as well.

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[16]Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977) 38.
[17] Gontarski 10.
[18]Martin Esslin, "Beckett and His Interpreters," *Mediations: Essays on Brecht, Beckett, and the Media* (London: Abacus, 1983) 85.
[19]Esslin, *Mediations* 85.
[20] Gontarski 5.

Generally it could be claimed that objective imitation cannot exist, since it is always influenced by the perception of the particular imitator, however, this approach is not very productive for the purposes given, since it is applicable universally. Nevertheless, we can still distinguish between different kinds of mimesis. One of them might be the one described in the above-mentioned quote, "the perfection of the illusion of reality", or, further elaborated as "[…] any system that makes of art finally another set of conventions by imposing an artificial order […] on existence, on the self."[21]

Although some sort of order is always imposed on perceptions by sensual organs, further additional order consciously applied so as to meet conventions is undoubtedly the kind of mimesis that Beckett rejected. So, if for instance an absence of meaning in the world is a theme in a work, imposing a satisfying logic or usual narrative structures upon it would demean its sense by making it more cohesive, logical, likeable etc. than it was meant to be. In this respect, the meaning mirrors in the form, and this can be understood as mimesis, although it is realized on a different level than it is usual; namely in the relationship of contents and form.

This form of correspondence appears in some of Beckett's plays, perhaps most famously in *Waiting for Godot*, where an absence of a culmination or progress in the contents reflects in the form; the play itself does not end in any climax and so does not follow the usual structure. According to Elam, a play consists of a dramatic world which appears in many stages: the initial, the final and many transitional ones. These are connected by a series of events; these are, when in chronological order, called fabula. An event is defined by certain shift of situation[22], specifically: "there is a being, conscious of his doings, who intentionally brings about a change of some kind, to some end, in a given context." In contrast to that, *doings* include activities that are not intentional and do not result in any

[21]Gontarski 5.
[22] Elam 117-121.

major consequences.[23] When we take the example of *Waiting for Godot*, we realise that the activities that Vladimir and Estragon engage in during most of the play (chewing vegetables, manipulating parts of their garment and so on) are to be described as doings rather than events. Events as such (suicide, going away) are in fact only talked about without being realised. Therefore, the dramatic world at the beginning resembles the one in the end much more than it is usual; this is caused by the characters' hesitance, inability to perform any change and relying on external factors that are expected to intervene. Moreover, it is essential that even the author refuses to change the dramatic world by using any of the various possible devices and thus mediates the negative message in its full strength.

"Nothing from which to express" refers to the unstable character of the individual self; not only is its existence controlled by independent forces of a different nature,[24] it also constantly changes in time. This is a major theme for example in *Krapp's Last Tape*, *That Time* or *Not I.* The inability to identify with oneself can be well illustrated by a passage from *That Time*: "C: never the same but the same as what for God's sake did you ever say I to yourself in your life come on now"[25]. Here the personality split is so extreme that individual stages of the narrator's existence must establish contact with one another as if they were separate persons. It is obvious that a mind which is so heterogeneous in time cannot possibly express itself coherently.

The lack of power to express is, according to Gontarski, determined by the incompetence of the constitutive elements, i.e. the code, author, characters, narrator.[26] The impotence of characters to communicate effectively was already shown on the example of *Waiting for Godot*; that of narrator will be dealt with in more detail in the chapter about *First Love*.

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[23] Elam 121.
[24] This phenomenon, the Cartesian split, will be examined at length in the chapter concerning *First Love*.
[25] Samuel Beckett, "That Time," *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990) 390.
[26] Gontarski 10.

"No desire to express" does not mean a lack of determination to do so.[27] Again, this will be demonstrated on the example of *First Love*, where the narrator appears to feel the obligation; in other words, expression is the only option for him to deal with his situation, to face the reality; expression represents the only way to establish contact with the disintegrated self. As Hart explains it, "A good many of Beckett's plays are explorations of the past, attempts to use memory to understand the shape of experience."[28]

Considering all these aspects which tend to be of negative quality, it is obvious that both communication and expression are bound to face serious, if not unsolvable problems in Beckett's work. In spite of that, there exists the eternal will (i.e. the obligation) to communicate, which in a certain sense corresponds to an urge to act, even if the action is from the beginning condemned to failure and is, in its essence, meaningless. The value of such expression is based on its sincerity and authenticity, which becomes greater by means of the failure to communicate one's experience, rather than demeaned.

[27] Gontarski 10.
[28] Clive Hart, *Language and Structure in Beckett's Plays* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1986) 8.

3. *First Love*

The novella *First Love* is immediately remarkable for its narrative strategy as well as its elaborate language (namely syntax) and its metatextual features. Apart from that, themes which are connected with both physical and psychical movement and stagnation are crucial for the interpretation. Namely, the main problems presented in the text are existence and its forms, procreation and the dilemma of activity versus passivity. One of the most prominent features of the text is its complex narrative strategy, which, apart from its obvious function of mediating the plot, is in itself important for the interpretation.

First of all, the reader soon notices that the main character is not a very reliable narrator, since he from the beginning impugns his own claims and constantly demonstrates his ignorance of facts that tend to be considered basic. This, along with his unusual frankness in expression and particular use of syntax (not entirely dissimilar to stream of consciousness in some cases) allows the reader to picture the protagonist's personality, and, to a lesser extent, his motivations to narrate, even before the actual plot starts. Although the nameless man is unreliable as a narrator, he is the more believable as a character; the manner in which he narrates corresponds to his characteristics and in a certain sense clarifies his behaviour. By using the mentioned complicated syntax he endeavours to express his thoughts as precisely as possible, even in the cases when the essence of his message is the very impotence to express himself. In this respect, he at some stages, rather paradoxically, tries to successfully communicate the fact that he cannot communicate. This is similar to Beckett's own attitude to some of his texts, where his directions must be observed; otherwise an unwanted meaning could replace the intended absence of it.

Another reason why the narrative strategy is so important is related to the previously discussed notions of communication, its motivation and problems. This, however, must be dealt with in connection with the contents; apart from other reasons also because the reasons

for the narrator's communicating of his fate very probably result from the series of events described in the text.

It is evident that despite mentioning some previous literary attempts, the narrator does not tell the story for his own pleasure (nor for anyone else's) or for artistic purposes; after all, he states that his only text he does not dislike is his epitaph.[29] Throughout the text there are hints that suggest the narrative is performed out of the already mentioned "obligation to express" rather than any desire. This can be demonstrated for instance on the following extracts: "[...] I abandoned the bench, less I must confess on her account than on its, for the site no longer answered my requirements, modest though they were, now that the air was beginning to strike chill, and for other reasons better not wasted on cunts like you [...]"[30] or "[...] I returned to the bench, for the fourth or fifth time since I had abandoned it, at roughly the same hour, I mean roughly the same sky, no, I don't mean that either, for it's always the same sky and never the same sky, what words are there for that, none I know, period."[31] The first quotation, apart from revealing certain contempt for readers (which appears several times in the novella, as well as the doubt in other people's ability to understand him correctly), also implies the obligation; although the phrase "I must confess" can be otherwise considered a mere introductory device, the narrator tends to treat phrases rather literally (there are many other instances of that, e.g. "I put it out piece by piece, and even two at a time [...]"[32]). The second extract suggests certain spontaneity of expression together with the reluctance to change the statement or to be patient enough to find the correct expression (perhaps the narrator does not believe that a precise one exists at all). When we compare it to the protagonist's epitaph, which he is proud of and which he claims to have "composed"[33], it

[29] *First Love* 2.
[30] *First Love* 8.
[31] *First Love* 12.
[32] *First Love* 14.
[33] The epitaph could be likened to Dan Rooney's "composition" in *All That Fall* – neither of these is intended as a sincere expression.

is probable that he did not intend the text to be elaborate for its own sake and that other motives must have been present.

In order to detect these, it is necessary to discuss the main problems in the plot, some of which could be the impulses that urged the narrator to mediate the events. One of these is without a doubt the confusing and frustrating experience of human being, the full scope of which is disclosed to the protagonist by means of the central love affair. Existence itself is not a simple concept in many of Beckett's texts, including *First Love*; Davies describes its double nature as "Cartesian split":[34] Descartes' philosophy introduced the idea that mental and bodily[35] existence can be perceived separately. At the same time, these constituents, abstract reasoning and unconscious life-force can easily have opposing tendencies and preferences.

In *First Love*, the unity and separation of mind and body is one of the key problems; this can be shown for instance on the passage when the narrator meets his lover for the third time and she misunderstands his want to stretch out[36]; she obviously does not experience the Cartesian split and therefore thinks of physical stretching, while he considers his mental condition inherently superior to the bodily one. In addition to upsetting the narrator by misinterpreting him, Lulu/Anna also destroys all potential harmony in him: "One is no longer oneself, on such occasions, and it is painful to be no longer oneself, even more painful if possible than when one is."[37] This is where the protagonist's tragedy begins, since her disturbing influence is even greater when she is absent; therefore staying with her seems to be the best, although not ideal solution: "I did not feel easy when I was with her, but at least free to think of something else than her, of the old trusty things, and so little by little, as down

[34] Paul Davies, "Three Novels and Four Nouvelles: Giving up the Ghost Be Born at last," *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. John Pilling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 45.
[35] These terms are to be understood in their wider sense; conscious reason especially is meant by mental existence, and physical existence is not restricted to bodily phenomena: it in general includes phenomena beyond reason, such as instincts, etc.
[36] *First Love* 6.
[37] *First Love* 6.

steps towards a deep, of nothing."[38] In other words, she violates the desired harmony that he nearly experiences when concentrating on either nothing, or his pains. This harmony is of static nature, and the disturbing phenomenon, the so-called love, that is to say pondering about the woman or the noises he hears, urges him to act, thus unsettling the fragile almost-peace: to tear nettles, which he much dislikes, to write her name in cows' excrement, or to walk so as not to hear the cries.

Another aspect in which the narrator, to his resentment, fails to be stagnant is procreation; Paul Davies points out that it is frequent for Beckett's protagonists to feel strong aversion against reproduction,[39] the narrator of *First Love* being no exception. For a person who perceives the split of bodily and mental existence and considers mind superior, a descendant is an uncontrollable extension of the aspect of being that, when active, much disturbs the more important part, i.e. mind. Interestingly, the man, despite being abhorred by his relatives, had almost an idyllic relationship with his father, who acted as a mediator between him and outside world; he taught him names of lighthouses and stars and they both shared affection to plants. The fact that the protagonist does not associate disturbing thoughts with his father suggests that their relationship must have been harmonic in the sense that it did not evoke the feeling of personality split. Therefore, the father probably achieved something that his son could not: bring together both aspects of existence while (unlike Lulu and most other people) still recognizing them.

The love of weeds and vegetables confirms this; the narrator almost sentimentally remarks that "My father and I alone, in that household, understood tomatoes."[40] On the contrary, he claims that he understands neither women, nor men nor animals[41] and elsewhere, he states that he does not know what does the expression "living beings" (of whom he

[38] *First Love* 13.
[39] Davies 49.
[40] *First Love* 4.
[41] *First Love* 7.

allegedly never thought before meeting Lulu/Anna) mean.[42] All this leads to the supposition that the narrator likes plants for their immovability and lack of the opposition between physical existence and consciousness. On the other hand, living beings, inclusive of humans, are unknowable, at least so is their consciousness. Esslin explains consciousness as described in Beckett's works as perpetually changing; making it unable for the person who experiences is to create any definite image of the outer world.[43] Consequently, other living beings, whose essence is their permanently unstable consciousness, cannot be understood in any way. In this respect, plants are less confusing: they are, in fact, the most reassuring living organisms. The act of tearing nettles could be therefore perceived as a violation of the weeds' positive quality of stability; it could as well be seen as a kind of revenge to the unhappy nettle for being something that the narrator cannot at the moment even remotely become, i.e. an integral entity.

In conclusion, the "marriage", meaning the whole affair from its very beginning, is an irretrievable turning point in the narrator's life, since in spite of physical separation, he remains connected to his "wife" and child by the cries he hears; he recognizes this as love, although of a different kind than those he had read about. For him, love is a phenomenon which to a great extent restricts his ability to achieve the feeling of harmony that he longs for and that he only briefly and incompletely experiences when concentrating on his pains or nothingness.

Another important point worth discussing is the role of death, for a simple logic would suggest that the discussed disharmony or anxiety arises primarily from situations that are almost inevitable in life and can be thus avoided by death; moreover, in the text there is evidence that the protagonist definitely feels more sympathy to the dead than to the living: "Personally I have no bone to pick with graveyards, I take the air there willingly, perhaps

[42] *First Love* 9.
[43] Esslin, *Mediations* 85.

more willingly than elsewhere, when take the air I must."[44] Nevertheless, his attitude to death is not one-sided; at one moment at Ohlsdorf, he fears death and at the same time envies the already deceased.[45] This suggests that what he in reality fears is the transition between both stages, despite the fact he does not abhor the condition of death, or to be more precise, its imagined attributes, while he definitely despises some features of life. However, since consciousness obviously cannot perceive its non-existence, as Esslin notes[46], it is essential to realize that only thinking of nothing, not nothing itself satisfies the narrator. To really enter nothingness is thus not desirable. A parallel could be found in *Waiting for Godot*, where the idea of suicide serves as a stimulation of imagination and conversation rather than as a means of real dying.

Therefore, it could be claimed that the nature of the narrator's stagnation is chiefly ontological; on the one hand, he fails to reconcile with some aspects of physical existence: these begin to be unbearable as a consequence of him falling in love. On the other hand, the mental or reason-related aspect cannot exist without the physical and furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that even in physical existence, there are, however imperfect, positive matters for the protagonist. That is to say, his life before the union was rather bearable; therefore, love is seen as an extremely influential, unpleasant phenomenon. The experience shatters all his possible harmony of mind to such a degree that a profound feeling of ontological uncertainty arises in the narrator, as a consequence of which he feels the urge to express himself.[47] The expression is thus an attempt of the narrator to give shape to his much confused existential experience.

As was discussed above, it is clear that the narration is not performed in order to amuse, educate or please its readers; nevertheless, the very fact that the narrator takes the

[44] *First Love* 1.
[45] *First Love* 3.
[46] Esslin, *Mediations* 85-86.
[47] Esslin explains that when outer reality loses any shape, existential experience becomes "the only certain evidence of being", therefore the "obligation to express" originates (*Mediations* 85).

audience into consideration is noteworthy, since, as discussed in the previous paragraph, the motivation to express is purely personal. Therefore, a question arises why he addresses his readers at all, even though he obviously does not expect much understanding from them. One of the reasons of this surprising behaviour might be the narrator's cultural experience: he claims to have read in several languages[48] and, importantly, that is where he found out about the emotion which he experiences and which was until that time unknown to him. It is thus probable that the literary creation is, beside other things, an act of approaching humans, whose issues the narrator only recently came to know.

[48] *First Love* 9.

4. *All That Fall*

All That Fall, a play written especially for radio (namely the BBC) in 1957, does not at the first sight seem to be a typical dramatic text by Beckett. Some reasons for this claim are determined by the form of the play; obviously, it is not meant for stage and therefore the acting is limited to the use of voice only. Furthermore, the aspect of space in the physical sense is necessarily suppressed as well, which is not without importance when we consider the fact that Beckett's plays for theatre tend to abound in rather precise stage directions concerning the location of objects and the actions of actors. Fletcher and Spurling also comment on the number of characters present in *All That Fall*, "Voices must be clearly differentiated in timbre if they are not to be confused, so that Beckett's relatively large cast of eleven speakers is a gesture of defiance, a characteristic refusal to accept limitations timidly."[49] Interestingly, in comparison with most Beckett's plays, the description of cast is perhaps the most conventional, meaning that the characters, unlike in many other dramatic works, have names and surnames and are characterised by their occupation or age. In addition to that, *All That Fall* is the first play by Beckett in which the central character is a woman.[50]

Another distinctive feature of the play that is not very frequent within the framework of Beckett's work is its specificity in setting. While numerous texts are set in space very vaguely, in *All That Fall* we learn the name of the place and apart from that, several other indices place the play in a concrete location. For example, Mrs. and Mr. Rooney talk about a language, namely Gaelic,[51] currency is mentioned several times, there appears the name of the railway station, there is specific music playing, that is Death and the Maiden by Shubert, and so on. The influence of attitude and, together with it, language, has already been

[49] John Fletcher and John Spurling, *Beckett: A Study of His Plays* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972) 82.
[50] Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973) 161.
[51] *All That Fall* 35.

discussed in the introductory chapter. It is therefore likely that Beckett did not struggle with the referential function of language in this particular play as much as he did in his previous dramas; this might have been supported by the nature of the medium. As Kalb points out, radio enables the author to control the work much more effectively than theatre does.[52] Moreover, if Beckett attempted to write a play in which there would be no actors, only text,[53] a radio play is certainly more suitable for that goal than a stage play. In conclusion, more control over the performance might have been one of the factors that led author to partly abandon his earlier minimalism, as well as the use of English instead of French. Zilliacus cites a quote in which Beckett remarks that English is after all a language suitable for dramatic texts because of its good referential qualities,[54] which suggests he did not avoid referring to things, phenomena etc. while in some of his previous plays he, to a considerable extent, tried to refer to absences. Another reason for the characters' relative conventionality is the need to mediate the notion of space to the audience; a confused figure not able to orientate in time and space could not fulfil that task.

Even though the form of *All That Fall* may be relatively conservative for Beckett's merit, the motives presented in the play are no less characteristic for him than those in his better known works. The uniting themes in *All That Fall* are sterility, death, religious disappointment and the hopelessness and resignation connected to these. The heroine of the play, Maddy Rooney, had lost her only daughter decades ago, but she is obviously still very concerned with her own childlessness, advanced age and inability in various aspects; apart from that, she has adopted a rather pessimist view of life that is supported by her disillusionment with Christianity. The same can be said about some of the other characters; for instance, Mr. Tyler, after telling Mrs. Rooney that he is grandchildless, says "[...] I was

[52] Jonathan Kalb, "The Mediated Quixote: the Radio and Television Plays, and *Film," The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. John Pilling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 125.
[53] Bair 513 .
[54] Zilliacus 30.

merely cursing, under my breath, God and man, under my breath, and the wet Saturday afternoon of my conception"[55] when his tyre goes down. This slightly inadequate reaction evokes the feeling that Mr. Tyler has some other reasons to swear apart from the tyre. Mrs. Rooney's attitude to life and death also testifies to considerable frustration, which can be well illustrated by her remark after Mr. Slocum's car runs over a hen:

> What a death! One minute picking happy at the dung, on the road, in the sun, with now and then a dust bath, and then – bang! – all her troubles over. (*Pause*) All the laying and the hatching. (*Pause*) Just one great squawk and then... peace. (*Pause*) They would have slit her weasand in any case. [56]

In this passage, Mrs. Rooney clearly projects her own views into the hen, supposing that a quick death is a welcome refuge from the continuous process of reproduction (that was most probably purposeless in the case of this animal, just as it had been for herself) and other troubles that inevitably happen in life. The other figures appearing in the play, including Mr. Rooney, are not model examples of harmonious, healthy and religious lifestyle either (with the exception of Miss Fit, whose religious devotion is indeed exemplary), so Mrs. Rooney has good reasons for her approach. Yet what is important at this point is that the hen does not achieve the peaceful state of non-existence by its own will: death must be administered by another force. Similarly, it is practically impossible for Maddy to voluntarily enter a state of total passivity, since she is driven by a life force as well as the hen.

All this is closely connected to religion; Knowlson suggests that *All That Fall* reflects Beckett's disillusionment from Christianity and faith in general, which could have been

[55] *All That Fall* 11.
[56] *All That Fall* 15-16.

influenced by the recent death of his brother Frank.[57] Similarly, the main characters do not find much comfort in Protestantism; near the end of the play, the Rooneys laugh at the theme of the next day's sermon: "The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed down,"[58] which bitterly contradicts the situations presented in the play.

In fact, nevertheless, the hopelessness is caused not only by the numerous unhappy circumstances, for example childlessness, broken tyre, various diseases or the necessity to speak a decaying language. The actual reason of Maddy's desperation and subsequent resignation is that Lord does not really uphold all that fall and does not raise up all those that be bowed down. Brienza points out that Maddy realizes that all the characters are heading towards death;[59] throughout the play, and she deals with the dilemma how to approach the inevitable. For her, the problem is not only the unavoidability of death, but also the probable non-existence of salvation or the impossibility to achieve it. After Christy's hinny refuses to move, Maddy, perhaps inspired by its behaviour, reflects in this manner: "How can I go on, I cannot. Oh let me just flop down flat on the road like a big fat jelly out of a bowl and never move again! A great big slop thick with grit and dust and flies, they would have to scoop me up with a shovel."[60] A similarly resigned view is shown in the already cited extract about the hen. Mrs. Rooney does not stop to struggle between the active and passive attitude till the end of the play: on the one hand, she keeps complaining about the defects of her body as well as the insufficient empathy of her fellow citizens; on the other hand, she manages to transport herself to the railway station in order to greet her husband.

Of course, the physical journey to the Boghill station and back home is an illustration of a more complex issue. The whole plot could be understood as a base from which different

[57] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996) 429-430.
[58] *All That Fall* 39.
[59] Susan D. Brienza, "Perilous Journeys on Beckett's Stages: Traveling Through Worlds", *Myth and Ritual in the Plays of Samuel Beckett*, ed. Katherine H. Burkman (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987) 34.
[60] *All That Fall* 9.

situations arise and these situations gradually reveal the main points of the play and show the nature of the characters; thus, relatively banal incidents illuminate much more serious matters. As Zilliacus notices, all the transportation devices Mrs. Rooney meets on her way end up broken or stagnant.[61] This indicates that none of the Boghill citizens can undertake their journey easily; most of them are, accordingly, ill, frustrated and so on. However, these characters only contribute to the general mood; the second substantial figure beside Maddy is her blind husband Dan. First of all, his character brings new elements into the plot; it constitutes certain counterweigh to Maddy, who had until then dominated the play, and so the two spouses interact and together reach the conclusion.

Mr. Rooney's attitude differs considerably from the one of his wife. They both indeed agree on the question of the Lord and His help and Dan ponders on a passive lifestyle as well as Maddy, although his motivation is more practical than hers: "[...] and it is clear that by lying at home in bed, day and night, winter and summer, with a change of pyjamas once a fortnight, you would add very considerably to your income."[62] However, his frustration is demonstrated also by thoughts of a rather peculiar nature as it is evident from this extract: "Did you ever wish to kill a child? (*Pause*) Nip some young doom in the bud. (*Pause*) Many a time at night, in winter, on the black road home, I nearly attacked the boy."[63] Another rare pleasure that Mr. Rooney likes to enjoy is mathematics, namely counting steps, unlike his wife.[64]

When we accept the premise that what they are trying to do is fight with is the futility and helplessness of their journey toward death, the husband and wife form counterparts in a certain sense; Maddy endeavours to find comfort in human relationships, affection and any emotional situations in general: "Love, that is all I asked, a little love, daily, twice daily, fifty

[61] Zilliacus 40.
[62] *All That Fal*, 33.
[63] *All That Fall* 31.
[64] *All That Fall* 29.

years of twice daily love like a Paris horse-butcher's regular, what normal woman wants affection?"[65] Dan, on the other hand, prefers joys of a more precise and less emotional character, for example the counting. In short, the goal of their efforts is the same: to deal with the mostly unpleasant and unjust state of affairs with the help of the above mentioned devices, and subsequently to decide on the manner of their future lives. The means they use to reconcile with the situation are, however, different, and so are the practical consequences.

Maddy constantly oscillates between passive resignation and the will to actively participate in her life; this will is strengthened by rare moments of excitement caused by incidents such as Mr. Slocum's helping her into his car or, interestingly, the idea of a train collision. Generally, though, she is determined to endure the journey, motivated by Dan's birthday, which proves that there are still impulses strong enough for her to overcome her bodily problems as well as the psychic obstacles. Nevertheless, it is fundamental that it is not spiritual faith that helps Maddy to pursue her goals. Her repeated feelings of loneliness and lack of love point to that; if she were a true Christian soul, she should be as united with God as Miss Fitt, who, being so close to her Maker, even regularly fails to notice the church collection.

It should be added that there are certain hints in the text which suggest that Maddy in fact suffers from her inability to believe and also from her perpetual hesitation. For instance, this is how she reacts when Mr. Tyler, riding his bicycle, tries to keep pace with her: "Gracious how you wobble! Dismount, for mercy's sake, or ride on."[66] Further on, she refuses Mr. Tyler's idea of them being half alive. This explains her tendency to embrace extreme views; she is obviously not willing to take a compromise stand, especially if it meant self-delusion for her. That is to say it would be hypocritical of her to behave like Miss Fitt for example; at the same time, however, she thus loses a potential device that could help her in

[65] *All That Fall* 9.
[66] *All That Fall* 10.

her secular efforts. This is one of the reasons why her choice between stagnation and progress is so difficult, especially when she knows that her earthly activities are not much more than a way of passing time while waiting for death. Her helplessness lies in the fact that she herself cannot achieve death nor an absolutely passive state of body and mind, being prevented from doing so by the unconscious part of her personality. At the same time, actions motivated by that lack any deeper sense; consequently she is trapped between relieving passivity and purposeful progress, neither of which is attainable.

Mr. Rooney, unlike his wife and despite his physical handicap of blindness, manages to lead a fairly ordinary, productive life. His frustrations, nevertheless, emerge in the form of rather alarming infanticidal thoughts and possibly even actions. Knowlson suggests that Mr. Rooney's potential killing of a child might be only a human reflection of God's unjust behaviour;[67] in any case, it certainly is not an idea according to Christian faith. On the contrary, it is adversary to it; Mr. Rooney is well aware of that and he does not mind, maybe he even welcomes the un-Christianity of his thinking.

Therefore, the main difference between the central couple is that Mr. Rooney, unlike his wife, takes active steps of rebellion against God's order (whether only in his mind or in reality as well). The possible murder of a child is certainly one of them. It could be also associated with the Rooneys' guffaw at the Psalm quote; if Dan really made the infant fall under the wheels of the train, he in a sense proved that the phrase is far from true, since the Lord did not uphold the child. This might be a proof of greater importance than the other numerous misfortunes that happen to various characters throughout the play, because an infant is generally considered to be an innocent creature and therefore should be especially protected. Dan's heresy is also manifested in the passage when he suggests to Maddy that they go on backwards. If we understand this proposition as referring to spiritual rather than

[67]Knowlson 430. Knowlson cites Richard Coe here.

physical progress (which is likely due to its inspiration in Dante's damned), it is an act of defiance – instead of moving toward salvation, he intends to approach damnation.

Mrs. Rooney, contrary to her husband, merely considers boycotting active participation in her fate, since she realises that the final transcendence cannot be achieved by either of the two alternatives. The reason why she does not give up her movement is therefore purely earthly motivation of various kinds: affection, as was mentioned above; or pragmatic reasons. The latter can be illustrated by a passage from the beginning of the play where Maddy advices Christy to welt his hinny that is refusing to move: "Give her a good welt on the rump. (*Sound of welt. Pause.)* Harder! (*Sound of welt. Pause*.) Well! If someone were to do that for me, I should not dally."[68] It is at this point that she is in consonance with her husband; both of them live with the consciousness that their lives are fundamentally futile from the spiritual point of view. This knowledge is especially in Maddy's case aggravated by the fact of her childlessness. Since reproduction can be considered a form of continuity, progress and defying death, if Maddy's daughter had survived, she could have dealt with the spiritual stagnation much more easily, because she could be comforted by her affection. However, being childless means failing in both ways, not speaking about the fact that the death of Minnie obviously did not strengthen Maddy's religious beliefs and efforts.

Although it is evident that Maddy understands her situation in religious terms, the basis of the problem is not dissimilar to that presented in *First Love*; that is, as was mentioned in the previous paragraphs, she rationally longs for peace and stagnation; to be more precise, stagnation in a satisfactory, reconciled state, whereas the current situation is quite far from that. What, however, urges her to continue in her laborious mission is an unconscious force of a rather similar kind as experienced by the protagonist of *First Love*. In Mrs. Rooney's case, it is manifested as want of affection, a feeling of misery regarding her

[68] *All That Fall* 9.

dead child, and, not to be forgotten, her still surviving sexuality. Again, these aspects of earthly life, despite being unavoidable, represent sorrow, or lead to it, because they cause the already described tension and lack of control. Mrs. Rooney, due to her background, associates the resulting split or dilemma with an absence of God's grace rather than considering it an issue determined by the very human existence. In other words, salvation (a state of peace that is not much different from what the narrator in *First Love* longs for) is unattainable for the Rooneys because God, although probably existing, does not care to allow, let alone mediate it.

Another important issue in *All That Fall* is the motif of verbal communication, its function and problems. Mrs. Rooney in the beginning asks Christy how he perceives her speech, because she, for some reason, considers it to be strange. One explanation for that strangeness is her non-integral existence; logically, a personality which does not function as a whole can only hardly express itself without the result being confusing and bizarre in some way. Such expression is bound to be incongruous since the individual, often contradicting aspects of the person influence it.

An interesting instance of communicative act is Dan's "composition" about his thoughts in the train department. This relation, as Zilliacus describes it "[...] with its rhetorical cadenzas and select tropes, is clearly an essay in narrative art rather than a plain account of what happened".[69] In a passage between the individual parts of his narrative, he admits that he, as well as his wife, has the feeling of "struggling with a dead language"[70]. Therefore we can suppose that in his relation, he resigned to describe events, because he knew that the result of an attempt to express himself precisely would be less authentic than a carefully constructed composition. Another reason for his likely insincerity would of course

[69] Zilliacus 33.
[70] *All That Fall* 35.

be the possible crime of killing a child. Nevertheless, the passage shows Dan's general tendency not to attempt what he knows to be impossible and do what he pleases instead.

All That Fall, although its central themes are not uncommon in Beckett, bring new perspectives: first, the return to English and the temporary shift to specified setting and characters marks a certain change of authorial attitude; second, the dynamics of the central marital couple is remarkable. Maddy and Dan Rooney represent a dual attitude to a shared problem: while Maddy, out of habit and in order to stay sane, tries to preoccupy her mind with harmless activities that are basically purposeless, Dan, without much scruple and with obvious enjoyment imagines and perhaps also performs acts of revenge. Apart from that, it is important that lack of minimalism in setting and characters does not necessarily weaken the negative message; it only makes it less universal: in *All That Fall*, this is manifested for example on the use of the motif of Christianity as opposed to religiously neutral concepts in other texts, for instance *First Love*.

5. Conclusion

Generally, it can be concluded that physical movement in Beckett's work does not correspond to progress in the crucial matters of life, whatever these are in the individual texts, although the characters sometimes attempt to attain the latter by means of the former. This is, however, in principle impossible. Worton in his essay about *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* compares the events happening in these plays to a "diminishing spiral that will go on and on – to infinity"[71] When we employ this comparison, physical movement represents a progression on that spiral, while the genuine goal lies at its non-existent end or outside it. In other words, even though locomotion may be a feat that is difficult to perform for the characters, it is not a solution itself when not supported by another change in attitude and becomes merely a way of spending time (as well as other, more or less meaningless activities). What is significant is that physical movement often gives the characters an illusionary feeling of activity, although it never can ensure satisfaction.

This tension is of course a result of the ancient dilemma whether to prefer activity or passivity. In Beckett's work, purposeful activity seems to be essential; without it, protagonists are trapped in meaningless, cyclic existence. It is, however, mostly unattainable for various reasons. One of these is dependence on a higher power, so to say, which is nevertheless absent and thus causes lack of motivation for genuine progress (as in *All That Fall* or *Waiting for Godot*). In *First Love*, the impossibility of an active attitude to the situation is caused by the too deep-rooted split of personality, which is tragically determined by the nature of the narrator's consciousness. Motion, in this case, is meant to serve as a surrogate activity enforced by the subconscious part of the self; however, it does not solve the real problem. On the contrary, in a certain sense it helps people to partly and temporarily suppress the need to escape the immediate reality and thus it makes the real progress the

[71] Michael Worton, "*Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*: Theatre as Text," *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. John Pilling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 70.

more difficult. From another point of view, though, when we take into consideration the premise that the desirable escape from the given situation is impossible, physical motion and other activities become a purposeless, yet helpful device which many a character of Beckett's resorts to despite the pain and effort that it takes. This is for example the case of Maddy Rooney, the narrator of *First Love,* or Belacqua in *More Pricks Than Kicks*.

Another theme occurring in both analysed texts that is worth comparing is procreation. In both cases, it plays an important role in relation to existence and its possible sense. Although it might at first seem that each of the main characters in *All That Fall* and *First Love* perceives the phenomenon differently, its significance is quite similar in both works. While Maddy Rooney wails over the death of her infant and her consequent childlessness, the narrator of *First Love* abominates his offspring from the very beginning and feels hardly any sympathy and solidarity to the unborn child: "If it's lepping, I said, it is not mine."[72] He, however, can never be indifferent to the baby's existence, for he never ceases to hear its and its mother's cries, except for the moments when he walks. It is therefore clear that he, unlike Mrs. Rooney, considers the state of childlessness the better alternative. In spite of this discord, reproduction is a phenomenon which is capable of invoking life-long sensations in both characters. Furthermore, the result of reproductive behaviour (i.e. a kind of the previously discussed unconscious, instinctive aspect of existence) cannot be controlled in any manner. In this respect, procreation becomes extremely dangerous for any possible harmony that a person might have approached. This is evidently what happened in *First Love*, and perhaps less evidently also in *All That Fall*. The fact that Mrs. Rooney has parental instincts and longs for her dead child is irrelevant (or, to be more exact, can be simply ascribed to the prevalence of the non-rational part in her personality, while the male protagonist of *First Love* is an example of the opposite case).

[72] *First Love* 18.

Generally, it can be concluded that reproduction is one special, very powerful manifestation of the unconscious life-force; in both chosen texts it constitutes a major theme and unscrupulously controls the characters' further existence. The mentioned difference in attitude towards it demonstrates that the phenomenon itself is neither positive nor negative, since it can be perceived in either way; the essential information about it is that its nature is, like that of all matters not governed by abstract reason, highly unreliable and incalculable.

A similar statement could be made about love: whereas in *First Love* it is presented as a crucial turning point in the narrator's life, until then relatively balanced, in *All That Fall* Maddy Rooney understands affection as consolation in the omnipresent grief and motivation to persist in her daily routine. Of course, the forms of love these two characters experience significantly differ, but it still remains the same romantic sentiment. It also has a considerable power: first, it induces reproduction and second, provokes its subject to perform various activities. It occupies the mind of the affected person, which can be felt as both positive and negative. Although loving and helping one's neighbour is, as Miss Fitt acknowledges, "the Protestant thing to do"[73] and certainly brings people closer to salvation, romantic love including sexuality as it appears in both texts on the contrary diverts attention from any form of spiritual or mental concentration leading to salvation or any other kind of transcendence.

These two, love and reproduction, are key concepts that influence progress, i.e. a change of situation in *First Love* and *All That Fall*. In *All That Fall*, religious matters are substantial in addition, while in *First Love* the narrator mentions God only when attempting to placate his relatives. This is determined partly by the provinciality of the radio play, in which the problem of religion can hardly be neglected, and very probably faith was one of themes that Beckett intended to tackle. On the other hand, *First Love* is focused mainly on

[73] *All That Fall* 21.

purely existential issues; the reason-oriented atheist figure of the main protagonist corresponds to that.

A parallel can also be found in the central characters' relationship to non-human living beings, since it reflects some of their attitudes. As was discussed in the chapter dealing with *First Love*, the narrator of the novella claims not to understand men, women or animals; he, nevertheless, understands tomatoes and sympathises with nettles. Mrs. Rooney admires a laburnum each time she sees it, but hardly ascribes any special significance to it. Animals are a much greater preoccupation for her; first, she becomes upset by the look of Christy's hinny that refuses to advance, then she meditates on the run-over hen and finally she discusses hinnies' ability to procreate with Dan. She clearly identifies herself with these animals or relates their situation to her own. This fact confirms the difference in inclination of both main characters: the narrator in *First Love* prefers immobile, static organisms as plants are and resorts to destroying them only when his own relative stability of mind is disturbed. Mrs. Rooney, who unlike him prefers the stimuli of sensuous world, naturally inclines to creatures that are also driven by their instincts and whose behaviour in some way resembles her own. In this manner, although both have a similar problem, their perception of existence differs and, consequently, so does their attitudes to the surrounding world.

Thematically, neither of the two texts therefore deviates from the general framework of Beckett's canon. There are, however, some specifics: for instance the concreteness of setting and the main female character in *All That Fall*, or the quite radically reason-oriented narrator in *First Love*. The almost detective end of the radio play in addition reveals Dan's rebellious nature – a feature not very usual in Beckett's texts, especially if it involves criminal activity.

The theme of movement in Beckett's work can be understood as an issue connecting other key questions, meaning especially the discrepancy between aspects of personality,

mental, spiritual or moral stagnation, inability to act, failure in communication. Manifestations of these problems are, apart from other themes, often related to locomotion. Physical movement in most cases represents effort, although futile and leading to failure. On the other hand, it is a device that can employ the mind and body enough to alleviate frustration from the hopelessness of reality; paradoxically, pain and disease of lower limbs only ameliorates the effect. Coe illustrates this on the example of the figure of Belacqua Shuah, whom he considers a typical Beckett character[74]:

> To Belacqua, it seems that "reality" – that alien world which he fears and despises – is first and foremost something static [...]. It follows therefore that Belacqua's interstitial existence will be, by definition, one of movement – of futile, purposeless movement, leading nowhere.[75]

Coe further elaborates that this constant movement temporarily creates the illusion of escape from time and reality.[76] However, the final goal of transcendence (whose essence is unclear and takes various shapes in individual texts) is unattainable by this kind of activity and so are other, transitory aims of social or moral nature that demand firm conviction and definite decision.

Locomotion therefore has a quite paradoxical role: although it usually requires considerable effort from the protagonists and thus evokes the illusion of progress, it is in its essence purposeless and, moreover, diverts attention from genuine transcendence. Nevertheless, however useless the characters' constant struggle against stagnation may be, it represents a sincere account of true and non-idealised humanity.

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[74] Richard N. Coe, *Beckett* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1964) 6.
[75] Coe 8.
[76] Coe 9.

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