A STUDY OF MAJOR THEMES IN SELECTED WORKS OF

PIRANDELLO AND BECKETT

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Master of Arts

by

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1964

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To the Memory

of My Father.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I wish to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to my teacher and adviser, Professor Martha Morello-Frosch, for the inspiration and encouragement she has given me throughout my graduate study and especially in the planning and writing of this thesis—not only in her capacity as my Adviser, but also as my friend. Her comments and criticism, her keen insight, and most of all, her sustained support and enthusiasm, have been invaluable in the completion of this work. Most important, I am grateful to her for her high standards and excellence in teaching.

I wish to express also my deepest gratitude to my teachers, Professors Carlos Blanco, James Doolittle, and Bruce Wardropper, for their interest in my work and for imparting and sustaining in me an avid interest in the field of literature in the Romance Languages.

I would like to express also my gratitude and appreciation for the encouragement and support I received from my interim adviser, Professor Pierre Astier. I am grateful for his comments and suggestions, his interest and knowledge of contemporary literature, and also for his high standards
in teaching, which cannot help but impart the same aspirations in others.

To my friend, Yolanda Gutierrez, I remain grateful for her invaluable suggestions and assistance in preparing and reading the manuscript, for her comments and criticism, and most of all, for sharing my enthusiasm in our common field of interest.

To my father, Reverend George H. Zoganas, who passed away all too soon, on June 3rd, 1963, when my thesis was but vaguely taking shape and form, I owe forever my deepest gratitude, for inspiring in me, always, throughout my life, a love of letters, and for giving direction and encouragement to my inquiring mind. In his death, as in his life that was all too short, I have been able to find new meaning and inspiration. To his memory, I dedicate this thesis.

To my mother, for her support and encouragement, too, I am forever grateful. Without her love, her patience and understanding, my thesis would have never materialized. I am grateful to her also for the reading and assembling of the manuscript.

To my husband, I owe my deepest debt. His support and constant encouragement, his patience and understanding, his desire that I pursue my graduate work, and his sustaining love and interest in my work, were vital factors in the completion of this, my thesis.
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INTRODUCTION

Los que parecemos de carne
y hueso no somos sino entes de
ficción, sombras, fantasmas, y
esos que andan por los cuadros
y los libros y los que andamos
por los escenarios del teatro
de la historia somos los de ver-
dad, los duraderos.

Don Miguel de Unamuno,
Teatro completo, p. 771.

The theater is today, and has been from its
earliest beginnings, man's most powerful tool in ex-
pressing fundamental truths basic to understanding
his own contradictory being and the equally perplex-
ing universe in which he lives. It is one of man's
most valiant efforts to grasp the meaning of his tran-
sitory existence in the road of life—and having
grasped it, to relay the promethean torch to his fellow
man.

The theater, in short, is man's most valiant
effort to communicate the incommunicable—to express
internal realities that comprise the whole of humanity.
It is in communicating fundamental truths that the
playwright reveals his most profound humanity.

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The playwright's function in conveying the essence of truth is eloquently expressed in the words of Eugène Ionesco, when he said, "... mon personnage doit aller au-delà de sa condition temporelle, et à travers cette condition, il doit rejoindre l'humanité." 

Ionesco seems to speak not only for himself, but also for his contemporary, Samuel Beckett, and their illustrious precursor, Luigi Pirandello, when he expresses his own solitude: "J'exprime ma solitude et je rejoins toutes les solitudes; ma joie d'exister ou mon étonnement d'être sont ceux de tout le monde..." 

Through his own solitude, and because of it, the playwright and poet partakes of the solitude in every human being; through his keen awareness, of deepest anguish; through boundless love, of infinite pity and compassion. His vision approaches the universal:

... En exprimant mes obsessions fondamentales, j'exprime ma plus profonde humanité, je rejoin tout le monde spontanément au-delà de toutes les barrières des castes et psychologies diverses. 

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3 Ibid.
Before turning to a discussion of the major
pirandellian themes--their development, their evolu-
tion and subsequent recurrence in the works of such
contemporary writers as Samuel Beckett, we should stop
to concur on our definition of the entity that is
"theater." "Le théâtre," Ionesco insists, "c'est la vie."

Many definitions have been offered in this respect.
The earliest drama, at the time of the Greeks, had,
in fact, religious origins--celebrated as a kind of
sacrificial ritual akin to the fertility rites of later
times; gradually, it evolved into the morality and
passion plays of the middle ages. Harnessed at times
by the imposition of the "unities," curtailed in the
Middle Ages (and later) as "obscene," while dubbed
"incomprehensible" and "absurd" in the twentieth century,
drama has survived--even defying external definitions
to which it had been subjected. Often, as in the case
of Pirandello and Beckett, theatrical entities have
created their own rules for being, and written their
own "play within a play" (a practice older than Shakes-
peare, but increasingly more popular since the advent
of the twentieth century). Wallace Fowlie's definition
of theater is that "it is a world of forms moving about
on the stage."\(^4\) During the course of this mobility, "an action is performed, a willed action is exterior-
ized."\(^5\)

In the works of Pirandello and Beckett, as I hope to show in my discussion forthwith, very little happens in the way of action. Rather, it is the drama of physical immobility and inaction (especially so in Beckett). Mr. Fowlie had foreseen the reproach, it seems, and hastened to add, in his definition of theater and of action:

This action is of two kinds. When it is directed against some outside obstacle, it tends to be a physical or melodramatic action.

When it is directed against an inner obstacle in the nature of man, it tends to be a spiritual or psychological action.\(^6\)

The drama of Pirandello and Beckett is, of course, in terms of the above definition, psychological drama. It is also metaphysical drama.

Perhaps the most appropriate term, and the one most meaningful, to me,—the one most definitive of the metaphysical theater of our times, is Gide's own definition: "une pièce de théâtre, c'est une durée à animer."\(^7\)

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\(^5,6\) Ibid.

"Le théâtre est un acte d'amour ... tout n'est que besoin de communication et de communion." It is an experience that demands for its ultimate consummation the tripartite involvement of playwright, actor, spectator. The theater can be likened to a mystical experience, of which we could very well ask, "Que faisons-nous ici," as Vladimir asked in Beckett's Godot. "Voilà ce qu'il faut se demander," we affirm..., (without the philosophical intention this question will assume in our discussion later).

I should like, therefore, to consider, at the moment, the mystical experience involved in the participation of a theatrical representation—and, hopefully, arrive at a conclusion concerning the "mystique" of the theater.

Louis Jouvet, in his Témoignages sur le théâtre, suggests that: "Si tout ce public, les lumières baissées, est maintenant tendu et recueilli dans l'ombre, c'est pour se perdre, pour se donner, s'abandonner." Man's love for the theater, as told by Louis Jouvet, appears as a yearning that is bound in his inner being—in his very essence. It is, in short, a passion that stems from


10Ibid.

11"Témoignages..." in Fowlie, Dionysus in Paris, p. 27.
his raison d'être—or lack of it, as the case may be. Perhaps it is simply another rendition of man's longing for immortality, or merely "a sense for the dramatic," as Fowlie calls it, "an instinct," born from a ceremony, consecrating even today "the sentiment of destiny."

Man's passion for drama is described in still another way: To one who has never seen a play or been inside a theater, it appears, quite simply, that,

"L'homme s'ennuie, et l'ignorance lui est attachée depuis sa naissance.

Et ne sachant de rien comment cela commence ou finit, c'est pour cela qu'il va au théâtre."

In this deceptively simple formula, many age-old truths about the theater and man's refuge in it are stated.

The fact of man's going to the theater alone, however, is not by any means sufficient to rid man of his ennui. The playwright and the actors must be able to communicate with the spectator. For this, the playwright relies on

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12 Dionysus, p. 31.

13, 14 Ibid.

15 Claudel in L'Echange makes use of such a character in the person of a young, naive girl, who tries both to understand and define what she sees in "the theater"—and the significant aspect of theater for her seems to linger in the illusory aspect of it: "...et il arrive quelque chose sur la scène comme si c'était vrai." (italics mine).

16 Fowlie, Dionysus, p. 28. See also n. 15 supra.
many theatrical devices—mimicry, pantomime, gesture, stage effects or their total lack—, but of greater importance in the author's attempt to communicate with his audience is the use he makes of language—or its converse: silence, pauses, to convey the stillness of time (and not the opposite—passage of time, as men are wont to believe) as man changes on his road to destiny. Pirandello and Beckett both make it a point to involve their audience in the action (or inaction) of their plays, even drawing them onto the stage. More of this later.

The playwright's most important tool, like the poet's, is language, and the use he makes of it. In the words of that other theoretician of drama (and playwright as well) Eugène Ionesco: "L'effort de tout créateur authentique consiste à se débarasser des scories, des clichés d'un langage épuisé pour retrouver un langage simplifié, essentialisé, renaissant, pouvant exprimer des réalités neuves et anciennes, présentes et inactuelles, vivantes et permanentes, particulières et, à la fois, universelles."¹⁷ Which is another way of affirming the poet's commitment to what Apollinaire and the surrealists understood as

¹⁷ Eugène Ionesco, "Qu'est-ce que l'avant-garde en 1958," (enquête), Les Lettres françaises, 10-17 avril 1958.
"la recherche du nouveau"—that is, finding new ways of expressing old truths through the medium of language.\textsuperscript{18}

Pirandello and Beckett have reduced language to its basic essentials, much as the surrealists would have wanted it. In so doing, and in exploring new theatrical devices, staging techniques, and dialogue that often conceals more than it reveals,—they have imbued literature with new meaning, with a certain Apollinairean "nouveauté"; in brief, they have given us a new perspective in which to experience old, fundamental truths.

It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss in detail the numerous techniques introduced in the theater by Pirandello. We will be more concerned with major themes and ideas, rather than theatrical devices. It is our intention to discuss some of the dramatists' main ideas as seen through their works (though we cannot touch on all of them).

Some of the themes we shall treat, are the same in both authors—others show merely a similarity, a convergence of interests expressed in different ways.

\textsuperscript{18}Guillaume Apollinaire, L'Esprit nouveau et les Poètes: Advocates exploring simple things in life to find "nouveauté."

Both are dramatists of the twentieth century. And they both reveal a deep-seated anguish and concern for man's plight and his role in the universe. This fact alone is sufficient reason for my choosing Pirandello and Beckett--actually their themes, not the persons, as the topic for discussion of this paper. We will be interested especially in tracing the recurrence of certain themes that have survived today--in Beckett's day, in our day.

The passage that was quoted on page 6 from Claudel, concerning man's ennui, is not quite over. The young girl who was summarizing man's impression of the theater, finally concludes that man goes to the theater to see himself. Such a conclusion announces here and at the same time resumes some of the dominant ideas we will encounter in Beckett's theater and Pirandello's main thoughts. It evokes the trap of existence, from which no escape is possible, no reprieve even thinkable. A trap, as real in Beckett's world of irreality peopled by phantom-like characters who await their destiny in utter irresolve, as Pirandello's characters, trapped in the prison of their irreality, already transfixed and doomed.
Man's condition, as seen through the eyes of the young girl in Claudel's *L'Échange*, is a pitiful sight. Man is bored..., and so he goes to the theater:

Et il se regarde lui-même  
Et il pleure et il rit,  
et il n'a point envie de s'en aller.  

He does not go anywhere, because he cannot go anywhere. It is the same with Vladimir and Estragon, who resolve any number of times to leave their place of waiting, or even to part once and for all. Yet they are tied down:

Vladimir. -- Alors?  
Estragon. (... distraitement).  
-- On n'est pas lié?  
Vladimir. -- Je n'entends rien.  
Estragon. -- (...) Je demande si on est lié.  
Vladimir. -- Lié?  
Estragon. -- Lié.  
Vladimir. -- Comment lié?

Vladimir. -- A Godot? Lié a Godot? Quelle idée!  
Jamais de la vie! (Un temps.)  
Pas encore. (Il ne fait pas la liaison.)  

The two are tied down—to each other (just as Pozzo and Lucky are tied by a visible rope), to their place of waiting, and through their own inanition and inadequacy, to Godot. Over and over again they resolve to leave their "lieu d'attente" but to no avail. Repeatedly the comment is made, "Je m'en vais...," invariably followed by the stage direction, "...ne bouge pas," in *Godot* and in several of the Beckett plays.

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19Powlie, *Dionysus*, pp. 27-29. (See note 15, page 6.)  
20Ibid., p. 29.  
21*Godot*, p. 32.
Just as the two cannot live together, so they cannot do without each other. Estragon, being more philosophically inclined, wonders out loud:

Estragon. -- Je me demande si on n'aurait pas mieux fait de rester seuls, chacun de son côté. (Un temps.) On n'était pas fait pour le même chemin.

Vladimir. -- (sans se fâcher). -- Ce n'est pas sûr.

Estragon. -- Non, rien n'est sûr.

Vladimir. -- On peut toujours se quitter, si tu crois que ça vaut mieux. 22

Estragon decides it is not worth the trouble—too late.

"C'est vrai, maintenant ce n'est plus la peine," replies Vladimir. And again, silence. "Alors on y va?"—the perpetual question, receives the usual reply, "Allons-y." 23 And again, silence.

A similar scene takes place with the inclusion of Pozzo, as follows:

Pozzo. -- Je vais vous quitter.

..............................
Estragon. -- Alors adieu.
Pozzo. -- Adieu.
Vladimir. -- Adieu. (Silence. Personne ne bouge.) 24

Finally, Pozzo confesses: "Je n'arrive pas... (il hésite) ... à partir." 25 To which Estragon replies, "C'est la vie." 26

22Sodot, p. 90.
23Ibid., p. 91.
24Ibid., p. 78.
25Ibid., p. 79
26Ibid.
The final observation in the words of the young girl, "... Et ils regardent et écoutent comme s'ils dormaient," seems to summarize quite adequately the Beckettian world where characters seem to exist almost exclusively in pairs, juxtaposed—yet isolated—each in his own microcosm, co-existing, yet transfixed "comme s'ils dormaient," often resorting to acting out a play within a play or inventing stories, as a substitute for their illusive existence.

In this way, the young girl's description of the theater, seems to summarize for us much of the internal acting that is portrayed in Beckett's theater, and in Pirandello's much earlier, as characters attempt to affirm their existence.

In Beckett's play, Oh les beaux jours, Winnie has to resort to acting, playwriting, and storytelling as well, in her endless monologue. She must be both actor and spectator:

Autrefois...maintenant...comme c'est dur, pour l'esprit. (Un temps.) Avoir été toujours celle que je suis — et être si différente de celle que j'étais. (Un temps.) Je suis l'une, je dis l'une, puis l'autre. (Un temps.) Tantôt l'une, tantôt l'autre. (Un temps.) Il y a si peu qu'on puisse dire. (Un temps.) On dit tout. (Un temps.) Tout ce qu'on peut. (Un temps.) Et pas un mot de vrai nulle part.

Winnie exists, imbedded up to her waist in the ground, with Willie, her partner, situated behind her, so that

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27 Claudel, L'Echange, in Fowlie, Dionysus in Paris, p. 29.
29 Oh les beaux jours, pp. 69-70.
it is with a great deal of difficulty that she is able
to twist her body around to catch a glimpse of him.

As Winnie confesses, it matters little to her whether
Willie really hears her—what matters is that she be al-
lowed to perpetuate the illusion that, possibly, he is
aware of her existence. It is an illusion that Winnie
wishes to preserve—and for her, who knows, it may suffice...
possibly.

Having begun this Introduction with a passage from
Unamuno's "Del Sentimiento trágico de la vida," and since
his thought is pertinent to our topic under discussion,
it is only fitting that we conclude with his wisdom:

Si al morírseme el cuerpo que me sustenta, y al que
llamo mío para distinguirle de mí mismo, que soy yo,
vuelve mi conciencia a la absoluta inconsciencia de
que brotara, y como a la mía les acose a la de mis
hermanos todos en humanidad, entonces no es nuestro
trabajado linaje humano mas que una fatídica proce-
sión de fantasmas, que van de la nada a la nada y
el humanitarismo, lo más inhumano que se conoce. 30

In this procession of ghostly figures, "que van de la nada
a la nada" the Beckettian hero is easily discernible.
And in the search for reality and authenticity in an un-
real world, the Pirandellian hero has been introduced.

30 Miguel de Unamuno, Ensayos, Tomo II, S.A. de Ediciones,
Madrid, 1951, p. 767.
I.

LES PEINTRES DU BONHEUR

Theater of intellect and passion

Pirandello's theater has often been called drama of the intellect, as opposed to drama of passion or of action—and rightly so because it is essentially drama of ideas.

In other dramatists, emotions were allowed free play (think of Hugo's Hernani, for example, or Beaumarchais' Barber of Seville, to name only two)—with thought following close behind, often merely a sustaining thread. Here action was the most important element of the theater.

In the theater of Pirandello, however, the intellect is the fundamental "cause" of the drama—the pivot on which the drama turns, converting thought into passion and, consequently, into "theatrical action." The resultant effect is the dramatization of the author's metaphysical conceptions of life, reality, and irreality, using the stage as the transmitting medium. His theater is, in effect, a perpetual "malentendu" between life's happenings and
humanity's futile efforts to impose itself: to re-
arrange the world according to a logical, orderly
fashion, which is virtually non-existent, but of
which man has retained a vague, melancholy nostalgia.\(^1\) Therein lies the tragedy: man, fully cognizant of
his monstrous nature,\(^2\) and regretting his former
happiness,\(^3\) is consigned to exist in a hostile, apa-
thetic world—a reality that bears no relation to the
aspirations of man who finds himself in the untenable
position of accepting the irrational or, his only
alternative, despising his own and the universe's
incongruity. "...En un mot, l'homme connaît qu'il
est misérable: il est donc misérable, puisqu'il l'est;
mais il est bien grand, puisqu'il le connaît."\(^4\)

---

\(^1\) "Qu'est-ce donc que nous crie cette avidité et
cette impuissance, sinon qu'il y a eu autrefois dans
l'homme un véritable bonheur, dont il ne lui reste
maintenant que la marque et la trace toute vide,
et qu'il essaye inutilement de remplir de tout ce
qui l'environne..." (Blaise Pascal, Pensées et opus-
cules, Classiques Larousse, Paris, p. 49.)

\(^2\) "Quelle chimère est-ce donc que l'homme?
Quelle nouveauté, quel monstre, quel chaos, quel
sujet de contradiction, quel prodige! Juge de toutes
choSES, imbécile ver de terre; dépositaire du vrai,
cloaque d'incertitude et d'erreur; gloire et rebut
de l'univers." (Pensées, p. 53.)

\(^3\) "...déchu d'une meilleure nature, qui lui était
propre autrefois." (Pensées, p. 43.)

\(^4\) Pensées, p. 45.
How easily, indeed, the last statement could be attributed to Luigi Pirandello. It announces one of the major themes in the theater of Pirandello: the duality or, as I prefer to call it, the multiplicity of the self. Speaking of his own theater, Pirandello said, "people say that my drama is obscure and they call it cerebral drama." The validity of this statement will become apparent as we delve into his theater. It will also become apparent, I hope, that Pirandello understood, and at the same time regretted, the maxim, "Pensée fait la grandeur de l'homme," and adapted instead—perhaps even concurrently, the other definition of man:

S'il se vante, je l'abaisse;
s'il s'abaisse, je le vante et le contredis toujours, jusqu'à ce qu'il comprenne qu'il est un monstre incompréhensible.

Critics often reproached Pirandello for precisely that intellectual aspect of his theater, saying that most of

5... At Barcelona, in 1924, we listened with interest to Pirandello's answers on the subject of his theater..." Walter Starkie, *Luigi Pirandello*, Dutton and Company, New York, 1937, p. 33.

6Ibid.

7Pensées, p. 42.

8Ibid., p. 44.

his plays were a composite of well-defined puppets whose every move was directed by the author-manipulator, because his plays start with a fixed idea, conceived in the mind of the author and forced on the characters, allowing them no freedom—so to speak.\textsuperscript{10}

To quote Dickinson, "Pirandello's plays start with a fixed idea,"\textsuperscript{11} we are told, and the idea is allowed to dominate not only the characters, but also the events as they unfold before our very eyes. The old drama had as its basis passion; the new drama is the expression of the intellect. In converting the intellect into passion, Pirandello has given modern theater one of its primary novelties.

Pirandello's remarkable appeal resides, beyond any doubt, in the realm of ideas.\textsuperscript{12} Even today, in an age of increasing certainties in science and physics, man's primary question remains—the metaphysical question, the age-old riddle of the Sphynx—the only question.

\textsuperscript{10}Dickinson, opus cit., pp. 271-272.

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12}Thomas Bishop, Pirandello and the French Theater, New York University Press, New York, 1960, p. 11.
"Qu'est-ce qu'un homme dans l'infini?"¹³ The pessimism and feeling of the absurdity of life was already set forth by Pascal--precursor of twentieth century literature and especially of the Absurd.

"Ainsi la vie humaine n'est qu'une illusion perpétuelle...,"¹⁴ wrote the author of the Pensées. In the theater of Pirandello, we find expressed in dramatic form that same pessimism and feeling of absurdity--together with the other Pirandellian themes: the multiplicity of personality and the relativity of truth. Through these themes, Pirandello remains for us today a very modern author. It is of little consequence for us that his works appeared on stage for the first time almost a generation ago. Today, when absurdity has become the main ingredient of so much of our current literature, Pirandello can be said to be a contemporary.

With Pirandello, the theme of the insincerity of the self and the impossibility of authenticity enters the realms of European literature to appear over and over again, in its intellectualized form, in such contemporary writers as André Gide (Les Faux-Monnayeurs), in Sartre (Huis clos) and, of course, in the works of Samuel Beckett. Indeed it has permeated the whole of twentieth century literature.

¹³ Pensées, p. 21.
¹⁴ Opus cit., p. 31.
Metaphysical drama

¡Contradicción! ¡naturalmente!
Como que sólo vivimos de contradicciones,
y por ellas; como que la vida es tragedia,
y la tragedia es perpetua lucha, sin
victoria ni esperanza de ella; es contradicción.

Don Miguel de Unamuno,
"Del sentimiento trágico de la vida,"
from Ensayos, II, Aguilar, p. 740.

The recurrence of Pirandellian themes in contemporary literature is, in my opinion, nowhere so evident as in the works of Samuel Beckett. Here too, metaphysics invades the stage of the theater.15

A comparison of the two dramatists (and novelists) is, I think, both valid and appropriate. Both Beckett and Pirandello have given us, each in his own way—quite often in very different ways, theater that is universal. By universal, I refer to the condition set forth by Ionesco (See our Introduction), when he expressed the duty of the dramatist to "rejoindre l'humanité entière." Pirandello and Beckett both meet this criterion—their theater achieves the universality necessary for great drama.

__________________________

Not only does the drama of Pirandello and Beckett achieve universality in its humanism, but also—and what is more important in choosing Pirandello and Beckett as the topic of my Thesis—, is the convergence of thematic interests in their works.

Both writers are concerned with the metaphysical question. Their works repeatedly reflect the same pre-occupation with the contradiction involved in human tragedy, "que la vida es tragedia, y la tragedia es perpetua lucha," to which I referred at the inception of this chapter.

Both share the anxiety of the "only true and real question in existence—the human question, which is mine, and yours, and the other fellow's, and everybody else's," as Unamuno expressed it. The human question, as I understand it, is all that is meant or implied when we speak of personality: the search for identity, the search for the self and for constancy in the self, the search for God, the quest for immortality and the absolute. "Conciencia y finalidad," says don Miguel, "son la misma cosa en el fondo."


Awareness and finality, in short, are what Pirandello's and Beckett's characters yearn to find—as their only defense against eventual annihilation. In the words of don Miguel, "... entonces nada se me aparecía tan horrible como la nada misma. Era una furiosa hambre de ser..."\(^{18}\) An excellent summation of the "angoisse" felt by every Beckett character, as he feels irresolutely drawn to the great nothingness from whence he came!

The universality of Beckett, and I think of Pirandello too, is well expressed in the words of Vladimir in Beckett's *En attendant Godot*:

... Dans un instant, tout se dissipera, nous serons à nouveau seuls, au milieu des solitudes. (Il rêve.) \(^{19}\)

and elsewhere,

... L'appel que nous venons d'entendre, c'est plutôt à l'humanité tout entière qu'il s'adresse.\(^{20}\)

But the cry remains unanswered; the appeal, unheeded.

The metaphysical hero is man, who tries to find, if not the answer, at least the echo of his appeal somewhere in the universe around him—the hidden meaning to the riddle he seeks. But no answer is forthcoming.

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\(^{18}\) Unamuno, "Del sentimiento trágico de la vida," p. 736.


\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 134.
"La vie devient donc quelque chose d'artificiel, que l'on regarde avec ce sentiment d'étrangeté ... avec cette paresse ironique ... avec ce scepticisme ... avec ce dégoût pourtant courageux ..." From a feeling of emptiness such as this, metaphysical anguish is born. The absurd is born:

Etranger, c'est le mot qu'emploie Camus...
l'homme étranger à son rôle, ou le héros
s'aperçoit avec étonnement que les actes
mêmes qui sortent de lui, lui semblent
étrangers...

From this phenomenon, Albérès continues, "se détache un personnage de comédie" who is a stranger even to himself. He is equally a "stranger" to the pre-conceived image of him that others may hold. It is this kind of a perpetual "malementendi" with oneself, and with others, that Beckett's characters seek to obliterate—while on the other hand, Pirandellian heroes seem to be already trapped by events and sentiments that bind them, but are no longer correlated.

From this feeling of "étrangeté" arises the "sentiment tragique" of twentieth century man, and the feeling that man's existence is absurd and even "de trop."

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The feeling of "angoisse" arises from two factors: first, the fact that reality does not correspond to the aspirations of the hero; and secondly, the hero does not--cannot, adapt himself to reality, and so he ends up despising his fate and his own very transitory existence which, consequently, seems less real to him than the reality of the world around him. His anguish arises from despair, and vice-versa. This metaphysical anguish is the central theme of twentieth century literature and of the drama we are discussing.

Sentimentalité à rebours, ou "Les Peintres du bonheur"

In an informal discussion of his works, Eugène Ionesco once defended the title of one of his most prominent plays, saying: "Une des raisons pour laquelle La cantatrice chauve fut ainsi intitulée, c'est qu'aucune cantatrice--chauve ou chevelue, n'y fait son apparition. Ce détail devait suffire." For such a reason, I too have chosen to call this chapter, after the playwrights whose works we shall discuss, "Les Peintres du bonheur."

\[23\] Eugène Ionesco, causerie: "Comment je suis devenu auteur dramatique, ou La tragédie du langage."

\[24\] Ibid.

\[25\] "Peintres du désarroi, un Pirandello et un Moravia se trouvent par un autre côté, peintres du bonheur. ... ils prennent la sentimentalité à rebours." (Albéres, l'Aventure intellectuelle..., pp.194-195.)
This does not mean, however, that in failing to depict happy characters in the happiest of situations, Pirandello and Beckett should be considered writers of gloom. To the contrary, I find a great deal of truth in the statement by Albérès: "Il n'y a pas d'hommes heureux dans leurs livres. C'est pour cela qu'au-delà de leur amertume ils évoquent le bonheur, et au-delà de la comédie que se jouent les hommes et la vie, ils mettent en scène un certain sentimentalisme irréductible."  

Happiness, in the works of Beckett and Pirandello, is conspicuous by its absence (or by a kind of make-believe substitute for happiness, a self-deceptive pretense, as in Oh les beaux jours). Winnie anxiously awaits the excitement the new day will bring for her: "Oh le beau jour encore que ça va être!" Another day, no different than all the other miserable days of her existence. She is able to see clearly into her own self-deception:

Oh je sais bien, il ne s'ensuit pas forcément, lorsque deux êtres sont ensemble -- ... de cette façon -- ... parce que l'un voit l'autre que l'autre voit l'un, la vie m'a appris ça...aussi.  

Just to know that in theory Willie can hear her, even though in fact he doesn't, is all the reassurance Winnie needs.


27 Albérès, p. 194, (op. cit.).


29 Oh les beaux jours, p. 38.
to affirm her existence. Fear in the characters of Beckett is not so much fear of loneliness, but fear of being left alone, with no one to affirm their presence. For this reason Beckettian characters always come in doubles. Alone one could not bear the absurdity of non-being. Faced with the irreality of their existence, the characters persist in creating their own stories, whether writing or re-creating their own fiction that becomes reality.

If Pirandello and Beckett depict quite often a very sordid picture of humanity, far from being pessimists, these writers once more reiterate man's nostalgia for a paradise lost. But as the remembrance lingers, its attainment becomes increasingly impossible, "parce qu'il faut que soit tragique et violent ce conflit entre le bonheur et son impossibilite, pour que l'idée de bonheur nous émeuve..." 30

30 Albérès, Avent., p. 195.
II.
THE HUMAN QUESTION

Ne cherchons donc point d'assurance et de fermeté. Notre raison est toujours déçue par l'inconstance des apparences; rien ne peut fixer le fini entre les deux infinis, qui l'enferment et le fuient.

Pascal, Pensées, p. 24.

Perspective: Man's solitude

The human condition, that of total solitude, derives not solely from "la mort de Dieu," but also from man's having relinquished faith in his own power of Reason. "Ce n'est pas tant la 'mort de Dieu' qui fait la solitude du monde; il ne faut pas oublier l'autre reniement, il ne faut pas oublier que par peur du dogmatisme nouveau de la science, l'homme renia sa raison et voulut se placer au-dessus du monde qu'elle lui découvrirait."\(^\text{1}\) Man relinquished more than his own faith. "Avec la crise d'anti-intellectualisme qui ouvre le siècle, il cessa d'être un fils de la terre," the critic concludes, "pour y devenir un enfant perdu."\(^\text{2}\)

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\(^{1}\)R. M. Albérès, L'Aventure intellectuelle du XX\(^{\text{e}}\) siècle, Panorama des littératures europeennes, 3\(^{\text{e}}\) Edition, Albin Michel, Paris, p. 34.

\(^{2}\)Ibid.
The child became man, but remained unconsolable, regretting his faith in Reason, alone in a world devoid of meaning, left with the bitter after-taste, "une impression d'une douleur intense et d'une absurdité totale."³

For the dramatist, life, in all its nude reality, is portrayed on the microcosm of the stage. Man in his solitude becomes the hapless actor who is ignorant of his role in a hostile world. Uncertain of his quest, of ever finding the chalice, yet he is certain of the urgency that persist he must..., improvise he must, in the cosmic drama "dont le décor est effrayant et imprévu."⁴

If the setting is strange, the time of his drama is no less certain. "Life flows on, lives trickle slowly, till suddenly a terrible event erupts in the middle of the river of time... (...) this is the disappearance of Man in Time."⁵

³Albérès, p. 37, opus cit.

⁴Albérès, p. 67, opus cit.

From Solitude: Absurdity

"Ce divorce entre l'homme et la vie, l'auteur et son décor," in the words of Albert Camus, "c'est proprement le sentiment de l'absurdité." 6

This same antidote produced in other writers a similar effect—the same feeling of incertitude or overwhelming "nausea" at the prospect of perpetual non-existence.7 "Cette horreur et tous ces gestes pour rien, cette aventure grotesque, c'est la nôtre. Il faut la vivre. La mort aussi est absurde." 8

Characteristically, in the works of Pirandello and Beckett, the frailty of human existence is portrayed, together with a crying need for a certainty that is non-existent, a loneliness that is unrelenting. The tragic sense of life meets and becomes one with the comic—the comic of absurdity--, to produce a grim humour, a somewhat sordid representation of life in all its many facets.

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6 Le Mythe de Sisyphe, Gallimard, p. 18.
7 Sartre, La Nausée.
8 Jean Anouilh, "Roméo et Jeannette," in Nouvelles pièces noires, p. 347.
In Pirandello, dialectic becomes poetry in its dramatized version on stage. Pirandello portrays men and women who are capable of thinking and feeling—and by reasoning, they transfer their thoughts to a higher plane of complexity.

Beckett's hero, on the other hand, is capable of intense physical suffering, and this too defines his human quality: "Je souffre, donc j'existe" becomes the ruling equation in his "life." The only certainty in both playwrights is man's solitude, left alone in uncertainty, in the knowledge that everything is uncertain and insecure... No solutions are granted, the question mark is left unanswered.

God is gone, or silent, or deaf. Man's guilt has replaced the reassuring principle of a benevolent providence. And man is forever judged guilty by the eternal absence. Guilty of not having found Him. Even more guilty of having been born, as we can see in the works of Samuel Beckett.

The only entity to which man can turn is himself. But here too he is frustrated. Expecting to find constancy in the only visible (he thought) reality, there too he is disillusioned, finding inconsistency and contradiction. "Quelle chimère est-ce donc que
l'homme? Quelle nouveauté, quel monstre, quel chaos, quel sujet de contradictions..."9 "Y lo primitivo
no es que pienso, sino que vivo, porque también viven
los que no piensan," concluye Unamuno, "aunque ese
vivir no sea un vivir verdadero."10

Pirandellism

Pirandello portrays men and women who are indeed
capable of thinking and feeling, much like his pre-
cursors. He was among the first to depict portrayals
of characters whose actions and reactions could not be
foreseen. A real character, in the words of André Breton,
"n'étant pas un caractère formé, donné une fois pour
toutes, peut être réellement soulevé et emporté par les
vagues de la vie."11 Pirandello's uniqueness lies in
part in his not seeking to impose on his characters a
ready-made coherence and predictability of action which
is non-existent in real people. R. M. Albérès calls
it "cet art de ne pas peindre l'homme plus logique qu'il
est."12 In a universe that is incoherent, "une attitude
cohérente de l'homme, n'est que comédie."13

9Pascal, Pensées. (See n.2, p.10).
10Unamuno, Ensayos, p. 761.
11André Breton, Manifeste du Surréalisme, Kra, 1929, p. 19.
12Albérès, p. 184, opus cit.
13Ibid.
With the advent of Pirandello’s theater, plays and novels whose characters "d’un bout à l’autre du roman ou du drame agissent exactement comme on aurait pu le prévoir..." became a thing of the past. A character in the traditional theory of literature whose personality is foreseeable and pre-determined, is as lifeless as a puppet deprived of its creator.

This of course does not apply to Pirandello’s creations. Far from being puppets, they are in a continuous process of evolution, like real people, forming their essence as their life is lived. After all, there is no such thing as "a fixed personality"—rather, it is a continuous process, revealing a new or another aspect of the same person (whence the notion of the multiplicity of personality). According to Mirlas, "para Pirandello, vivir no es ser; es hacerse... Es la lucha del yo por perdurar su estéril esfuerzo frente al fluir del tiempo."  

Pirandello’s characters feel and think much too late, caught in the trap of events rushing ahead of them. Life in all its grimness is portrayed on the

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Pirandellian stage, while the playwright looks on "from the outside" without himself becoming personally involved (unlike Unamuno's personal intrusion in Niebla).

He is impassive, neither criticizing, nor condemning—not even justifying the least of his subjects. He sets forth life as it is: hollow, empty, a mere shell of the sincerity in which his characters desperately seek to cloth themselves—but ultimately and invariably fail to do so. "Ce sont d'humbles existences, avides d'un bonheur quiet qui se trouvent ruinées par l'erreur même et l'involontaire insincérité qui les minent." 16

Pirandello has often been compared to Maupassant in his descriptions of suffering humanity. It may be said, however, that Pirandello is more objective in his depiction. At the same time, he seems to be filled with "le sens de l'inutilité théâtrale et sans joie de tout," in the words of Jacques Vaché, 17 precursor and spiritual father of the surrealist movement in France—a movement not wholly unrelated to the Pirandellian technique.

We can assume with reasonable certainty that Pirandello too suffered from the "theatrical uselessness of

16 Albérès, p. 187, opus cit.

17 Wallace Fowlie, Age of Surrealism, Bloomington Indiana University Press, 1960, p. 23.
everything,"\(^\text{18}\) and in the words of Walter Starkie, was keenly aware that "every human experience ends in impossibility."\(^\text{19}\) This explains, in part, Pirandello's apparent pessimism and his "impotence and the feeling of sadness at this destiny of man."\(^\text{20}\)

In the world of Pirandello, it seems there is no one logic, no one reason, but as many as there are individuals. Truth, after all, is relevant. And this brings us to a fundamental philosophical problem, a very old one, and one that becomes almost an obsession with the author of *Enrico IV*, *Come tu me voy*, and *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*. And this is the problem of personality--its duality, even its multiplicity.

What is, after all, "a fixed personality," and is there ever such a thing. Is not personality a continuous process, one which continually reveals a new or another aspect of the same person? An individual is only one of many indefinite personalities which become apparent (and thereby definable) at any one given moment. The "self" is an illusive, transitory being, ever-changing.

\(^{18}\) Jacques Vaché, cited in Fowlie, *Age of Surrealism*, p. 23. (See note 17, supra.)


\(^{20}\) Ibid.
III.
THE ELUSIVE SELF

Je est un autre...

In this chapter I propose to discuss the very complex problem of the elusive self: a theme most prominent in the works of Pirandello by its multiplicity and complexity; and conspicuous by the very quest for unity in the self--and the apparent lack of it--in the works of Beckett.

The theme of personality is not a new one, since man has been preoccupied by his own definition from time immemorial. What is new, is the treatment it receives in the works of Beckett and Pirandello, and on this we shall attempt to elucidate.

We have suggested in an earlier chapter that Pirandello portrays life as he sees it, without passing judgement on his characters. On the other hand, it is his characters who justify, condemn and criticize themselves and each other--they even go so far as to pass judgement on their author.

At the same time, like their author, the characters too succeed in setting themselves apart to watch their
own lives, as it were—to think of themselves in the act of living, suffering, and tormenting each other's and their own lives. We need only point to an example from Pirandello's play, *Il Giuoco delle Parti*, to recall numerous other examples as well.

In this play, Leone, a characteristic Pirandellian hero, justifies his own cynical attitude, when he says, in effect, "we must watch others live and even watch ourselves from without."¹ Already the characters in the play are imitating their author, created in his own image, for this is, in fact, what Pirandello is doing—observing life from without.

The precedent had already been established for this type of splitting of the first person by the precocious precursor of the Surrealist school, Arthur Rimbaud, when in a letter to a friend, he confided, "...je est un autre ... j'assiste à l'éclosion de ma pensée, je la regarde, je l'écoute."² This practice subsequently became quite popular with the surrealist poets, among which Apollinaire.³ It has reached a point of maturity in Pirandello and in Beckett's numerous "plays within a play" where characters often hear themselves speak or write.

¹Cited in Starkie, p. 148, *opus cit.*
From alienation: substitution

A similar occurrence is told in an earlier Pirandellian story, called "E Due" from Novelle per un Anno.

In this story, a young man happened to be passing by a somewhat deserted city street, late at night, when quite by chance, he witnessed another man's suicidal leap from the bridge. All that remained of the stranger to testify to this man's existence was his hat, left unceremoniously on the parapet.

An interesting thing happened. The young man, who quite by accident happened to witness this horrible event, cannot drive it from his mind. That hat fascinates us, undoubtedly—as it did the youth. So perplexed was he, that, in essence, he became detached from his own self for a moment—his own self ceased to exist, as he imagined himself to be in the role of the man who leaped from the bridge. Or, at least, he wondered what it would feel like to be in the other person's self.

Later that evening, we find the same young man on the parapet of the bridge again. He has removed his own hat, placed it in the same place where the other had been, exchanging roles in fact with the man who preceded him, "trying it on for size"! Thus, he has proceeded from
...leaning over the parapet and looking at it, as if he himself was not there anymore... 4

Finally, the young man, for no apparent reason, other than the incredulously absurd picture he conjured of himself, "stuck up there like a cat behind the lamp, and his hat was the mouse..." 5 he faultered a little, then, "...Away, away with all this tomfoolery! He climbed over the parapet: he felt his hair stand on end--his hands quivered as they clung tightly on to the ledge. Then he loosened his grip and threw himself into the void." 6 And a more complete process of alienation, detachment, and substitution, leading to ultimate commitment in a final "acte gratuit," the theater of the absurd has not seen.

4 Starkie, p. 125, opus cit.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
Autonomy in Pirandello's characters

Pirandello's characters have feelings and thoughts of their own, and consequently a great degree of autonomy.

If, as some critics maintain, they are conceived as puppets, according to a pre-determined plan or idea, still they are allowed to "come alive" in the end, to argue out their own case, even against the author. All Pirandellian characters are "pseudo-philosophers" who are inclined, much like their author, to theorize on their own life—but after it is too late, since they are irrevocably bound in that one act—forever.

If birth is the initial step in the journey toward death (as we shall see in the works of Beckett), then the succession of moments in the journey can be said to correspond to man's existence, as opposed to his essence—which is still in the process of being formed. It is only after death that this "existence" is transformed into the definitive "essence," after the whole of life has been lived. The "actual," in the words of C. M. Hamilton, by which we understand all that is

7 Starkie, opus cit., p. 95. Also see F. L. Lucas on Pirandello in The Drama of Chekhov, Synge, Yeats and Pirandello, Cassell, Lonson, 1963.

8 Conversations on Contemporary Drama, Macmillan, New York, 1924.
transitory or subject to change, has then been transformed into the "immutable" or the realm of ideas.⁹ And in the case of Pirandello's theater, we might say the realm of "an idea." Only after death is the process of change consummated and the idea becomes defined as essence--being free from further change. The idea does not and cannot die as long as it exists in someone's consciousness. Preferably in the mind of an author!

The existence of a fictitious character, therefore, in the mind of its creator, can be more real, and is, than a living person. A character has a real life of his own, "avec des traits caractéristiques qui en font vraiment quelqu'un, tandis que l'homme n'est peut-être personne."¹⁰ In the words of the critic, "quand on naît personnage, quand on a le bonheur de naître personnage vivant, on se rit de la mort. On ne peut plus mourir..."¹¹ The idea of a character, once freed from the author's mind, achieves a reality that is never-changing. It can be said to be eternal!

⁹Opus cit., page 162.


¹¹Ibid.
It is often very difficult to "seize hold" of the Pirandellian character—his personality is elusive. So lifelike are the characters that Pirandello has painted, that they too seem to undergo the currents of life's ebbing and flowing. They refuse to be fixed or bound in one act. Pirandello's task in depicting life-like men and women in his theater is comparable to the artist's in attempting to paint his subjects in motion.

What then is this "personality" that we find it so difficult to grasp? Guy Dumur concludes, "le personnage n'est qu'apparence... mais la vie se réduit aussi à la somme des apparences."\(^{12}\) Personality is no fixed entity. Rather, it is the composite of a stream of total different persons flowing past us—or at least, divergent aspects of the same person, as a stone that turns, revealing its many facets.

We might then appropriately ask, what constitutes movement? "El movimiento no es sino una sucesión de estados de reposo,"\(^{13}\) we are told. Personality for Pirandello is no more than "...un fluir ininterrumpido, ... desde el cual nos ven los demás y que nos inmoviliza momentaneamente, proporcionándonos la ilusión de ser..."\(^{14}\)

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\(^{12}\)Dumur, opus cit., p. 52.

\(^{13}\)León Mírás, Panorama del teatro moderno, Editorial Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 1956, p. 94.

\(^{14}\)Ibid.
Thus, the law of "el eterno devenir de Heráclito"\textsuperscript{15} transforms us into another image of ourselves which is never consistent with what we were a moment ago or what we will be tomorrow. Hence the strange paradox, "Los demás no nos reconocen, justamente porque nos mantenemos iguales a nosotros mismos."\textsuperscript{16} Personality therefore cannot be static, but is in a constant state of flux. In Pirandello's theater there is no "fixed" personality. What interests Pirandello most is to portray the human soul in its reality\textsuperscript{17}--a reality that is immutable. In this sense Pirandello can be likened to Maeterlinck, as both dramatists contemplate the reality of life in the abstract: the abstractness of reality. Fictitious characters are more real than actual people, for reality is truth and transcends actuality.\textsuperscript{18} People have little or no permanent existence--so little of life is real. But the great characters of fiction continue to exist, because they are in a sense "really alive."\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{15}Mirlas, p. 94, opus cit.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17}Hamilton, Conversations on Contemporary Drama, p. 162.
\textsuperscript{18}The distinction of the two words "actuality" and "reality" is the same as set forth by C. M. Hamilton in his book.
\textsuperscript{19}At this point, a comparison with Unamuno's Niebla now is inevitable. In this "nivola," it is the insignificant character, Augusto Pérez, who in all his insolence dares to approach his maker--the author, to tell Unamuno that
As the drama of _Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore_ unfolds, we are immediately in the presence of a rehearsal by a group of disgusted actors of Pirandello's last play, _Il Giuoco delle parti_. Suddenly, amid all the confusion, six people enter the theater, walk on stage, and demand that they be allowed to act out their story. They demand the chance to fulfill their essence—and in so doing, they assume the autonomy of the character apart from the author who gave them life. They wish to live through their "piece à faire," only partially sketched out by their frustrated author who either could not or would not allow he was merely a pretexts for his own creation (for the character's reality)—simply a means by which the character and not the author achieved immortality.

(Even so, the author's immortality cannot help but be assured: it remains alive and kindled in those honest and to-the-point conversations he held with his characters, among which Augusto Perez.)

It is the insolent Augusto who addresses the author in the following terms: "O cree usted, amigo don Miguel, que seria el primer caso en que un ente de ficción ... matara a aquél a quien creyó darles ser ... ficticio?" (Niebla, p. 152).

Elsewhere, he pointedly reminds his maker, "mi señor creador Don Miguel, también usted se morirá, también usted, y se volverá a la nada de que salió ..., Dios dejará de soñarle." (Niebla, p. 154).

In the words of the critic, Manuel García Blanco, "se enfrentan y luchan un hombre de carne y hueso con un ser de ficción, y, pirandellianamente acaba por vencer este." (Unamuno, _Teatro completo_, p. 130).
them to fulfill their destiny. Conceived in the imagination of the author, their delineation was but half-sketches, their essence unfulfilled. They are bound and frozen in a state of semi-existence until they can live through the drama that is in them.

Thurs, bent on portraying on that barren stage the tragic scene in which they were abandoned by their author, the six characters, in the course of their stage presence, bring into play and demonstrate well all three of the major Pirandellian themes as set forth by Thomas Bishop in his book, Pirandello and the French Theater. The three themes comprise: the relativity of truth; the duality (I prefer to call it the "multiplicity") of personality; and the third theme, the eternal opposition as to the supremacy of the art medium (or form) that is immutable, over life that is ever subject to change and is thereby ephemeral.

The six characters who were "called to life" by an author and then cast aside unfinished have an immutable reality that cannot help but be forever attached to the degrading scene which the author had in mind. On the other hand, men have an ever-changing reality which is

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ruled by time; which, as stated earlier, is a fugitive and passing thing that may be one way today and another tomorrow.

The injustice involved in judging a man solely on the basis of a single aspect of his personality--one facet, as it were, is so aptly stated in the words of the father in the famous Sei personaggi. He is well aware that we each carry within us the illusion of being always "the same person for all people," and in all situations. Nothing could be more misleading than this illusion, as we fully realize when we are "unexpectedly caught suspended in the midst of one of our acts."

In the words of the father, the drama lies in the fact that each one of us has the mis-conception that we are one person for all people at all times:

"Le drame, selon moi, est tout entier là-dedans, ... dans la conscience que j'ai, qu'a chacun de nous d'être "un", alors qu'il est "cent", qu'il est "mille", qu'il est "autant de fois un" qu'il y a des possibilités en lui... Avec celui-ci, il est quelqu'un, avec celui-là, il est quelqu'un d'autre; et cela, tout en gardant l'illusion de rester toujours le même pour tous, cet être "un" que nous nous croyions dans tous nos actes."

To which he adds, "Alors que rien n'est plus faux!..."

Nous nous en apercevons bien quand, par malheur, un accrochage se produit au milieu de nos actes; nous nous apercevons que nous n'étions pas tout entiers dans cette défaillance et que ce serait

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22 Ibid.
The father's reality cannot be reduced to this simple one act in which his wife and daughter surprised him—a man's life is more complex than a mathematical reduction such as this. Yet, the step-daughter sees the father's essence fixed and defined by this incestuous lust. The father pleads his case well:

Comprennez-vous à présent la perfidie de cette fille? Elle m'a surpris dans un endroit, dans une attitude où elle n'aurait pas dû me voir, elle m'a vu tel que je n'aurais jamais dû apparaître à ses yeux; et elle veut m'attribuer cette personnalité, que je ne pouvais pas m'attendre à revêtir pour elle, cette personnalité qui a été la mienne dans une minute fugace, honteuse de mon existence!  

23 Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore, opus cit., p. 30.

24 Ibid.
the father has one reality for himself, another for the girl, and still others for the mother, the son, and the two small children. His own view may be the most tolerant one, but none can be said to be the "right one," since truth after all is relative.\textsuperscript{25}

\textit{Art is more real than life}

As the six characters go out in search of an author, they are confronted by an unbelieving audience--themselves actors, rehearsing a play. Confronted by the absurdity others see in them, the father replies:

\begin{quote}
--Oh! monsieur! Vous savez pourtant aussi bien que moi que la vie est pleine d'absurdités qui peuvent avoir l'effronterie de ne pas paraître vraisemblables. Et savez-vous pourquoi, monsieur le directeur? Parce que ces absurdités sont vraies!
\end{quote}

Donner l'apparence du vrai à ce qui ne l'est point, et cela, monsieur, sans nécessité, par simple jeu...
Enfin, oui ou non, votre profession n'est-elle pas de faire vivre sur la scène des personnages imaginaires?

And he proceeds to elucidate further:

\begin{quote}
--Mais oui, parfaitement, vous faites vivre des êtres vivants, plus vivants que bien des êtres qui respirent et figurent sur les registres de l'état civil! Des êtres moins vrais, peut-être, mais plus réels!... Nous sommes tout à fait d'accord.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

Just as "truth is relative," so too "appearances can be deceiving": witness Pirandello's moving play, \textit{Vestire gli}

\textsuperscript{25}Bishop, p. 23, opus cit.
\textsuperscript{26}Sei personaggi, opus cit., p. 14.
\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., p. 15.
ignudi, which deals with a woman's desperate attempt to make herself appear better than she is in order to acquire for herself some semblance of self-respect:

...C'est que tout le monde, tout le monde veut paraître beau... Plus nous sommes, plus nous sommes... (Elle veut dire "laid", mais elle éprouve tant de dégoût et à la fois tant de pitié qu'elle ne prononce pas le mot.) et plus nous voulons nous emballer. (Elle sourit.)

Mon Dieu oui, nous vêtir d'un habit un peu décent, voilà... Moi, je n'en avais pas pour paraître devant toi, j'étais nue... ...

Et alors je me suis trouvée... je me suis trouvée à la rue, sans rien... et... (...) ...oui, encore un peu plus de boue sur moi, pour achever de me salir. Dieu, quelle horreur! quel dégoût! -- Et alors... alors j'ai voulu me faire, pour ma mort tout au moins, un vêtement un peu joli. (...)

Un habit de fiancée... Mais c'était pour mourir, pour mourir avec, rien d'autre... (...) Ma robe de fiancée, on me l'a déchirée, arrachée comme les autres! Pas même ça! Mourir nu! Sans rien qui me couvre...28

Such are the final words of Ersilia before her death.

"At least for my death, I wanted to make myself a decent garment...," she utters plaintively. Here again, we might reiterate, the only fortunate ones are those who have been lucky enough to come into the world as "a character," for they will never change and can jeer even at death.29

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28Vêtir Ceux qui sont nus, opus cit., vol. 3, page 81.

29Reference is made here to a remark by Guy Dumur, quoted on page 39 (note 10) to the effect that: "Quand on naît personnage, quand on a le bonheur de naître personnage vivant, on se rit de la mort. On ne peut plus mourir..."
A much later play, Quando si è qualcuno, a play that is even more autobiographical than the others, illustrates well the third theme in Mr. Bishop's book: the strange paradox that art is more real than life.\(^\text{30}\) Life is fluid, ever-changing; but form being more rigid, is eternal, because it is not subject to the fluctuations of life and, therefore, can be said to exist forever. Quando si è qualcuno is a play concerning a poet whose name is never mentioned for he is so famous that he exists more truly as a public figure than as an individual. He is, we might say, in search of his identity. Pirandello uses three asterisks to show that he is speaking, and he is referred to by others as Maestro. In this play, * * * has not assumed a new personality--rather, he has developed another personality, co-existent with his own, when he wrote some love poems which were circulated anonymously, and because of their ardent, passionate language, were attributed to a much younger poet, under the assumed name of Delago. When * * * reveals that he is also Delago, the world will not accept this reality. Society has had its revenge, in that it is impossible to regain youth by inventing a younger man, no matter how genuine the feeling of youth may be.\(^\text{31}\) In the words of Thomas Bishop, "when a human being becomes someone of

\(^{30}\text{Bishop, pp. 34-42, opus cit.}\)

\(^{31}\text{Ibid., p. 34.}\)
importance, his reputation overwhelms and subjugates his individuality."\textsuperscript{32} This may be said to be the triumph of one's reputation which is unreal over the reality of his life.

Though by definition, a character, once conceived in the mind of the author is fixed, yet Pirandello's characters insist that they be allowed to come alive. Thus, the character Francesca in Dante's work, to use the example Pirandello himself used in his prologue to the \textit{Six Characters},\textsuperscript{33} is more real when she speaks to Dante in the Divine Comedy than she had been when she was alive:

If the Father and the Step-Daughter began their scene over one hundred thousand times in a row, always at the same moment, at the same instant when the life of the work of art must be expressed with that cry, it would resound always: unaltered and unalterable in its form, but not like a mechanical repetition...

on the contrary, each time alive and like new, suddenly born thus forever: embalmed alive in its unalterable form.

Thus, every time we open the book, Francesca will be speaking her words over again, never repeating them mechanically, but saying them each time for the first time with such a living and sudden passion...

Everything that lives, by the fact that it is living, has a form, and for that very reason it must die: except the work of art which is alive forever inasmuch as it has form...\textsuperscript{34}

An echo of this is expressed in the words of the Maestro when he tells his beloved, for whom the poems were written:

\textsuperscript{32}Bishop, p. 34, \textit{opus cit.}

\textsuperscript{33}The English version of Pirandello's prologue to \textit{Sei Personaggi} is quoted from Bishop, p. 35, \textit{opus cit.}

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid.
Prevalent in *Six Characters* is the expression of the truth that fictitious characters are more real than living people. The author takes this reasoning a bit further to suggest that living people are not only less real than the characters of fiction, but unreal altogether—with the inevitable conclusion that reality exists in the mind of the author alone, and is in sharp contrast with the unreality of theatrical representation, as seen when the actors attempt to portray the drama that is within the characters. Art, in fact, is more real than life. The question is raised, and left unanswered, "Do we really exist, except in dreams?" And if so, in whose dreams? Our own, or an author's? The whole scheme assumes a degree of relevance: if the character is fictitious in man's plan, man also may be no more than a fictitious character in God's plan—perhaps not even a plan, only a dream from which He too may suddenly awaken.

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35 *Quand on est quelqu'un*, opus cit., vol. 6, page 124.

36 *This question is treated in detail in a Thesis, El problema de la personalidad en ... Unamuno*, by Nelly Martinez, O.S.U., M.A., 1962. See especially p. 3.
The relativity of truth

What is truth? We need only recall *Cosi è (se vi pare)*. In this drama of ambiguity and deceit, truth appears in the person of Signora Ponza. Truth appears at the end—and is veiled. Truth is as one would have her! In the words of Laudisi, "What is truth? Truth does not exist: truth we have in ourselves." Truth is the representation that each of us makes of it. Madame Ponza appears at the end of the play, veiled, with the words, "Pour moi, je suis celle que l'on me croit!"

To which Laudisi replies, "Voilà, mesdames et messieurs, comment parle la vérité! (Il lance un regard de défi ironique.) Etes-vous satisfaits? (Il éclate de rire.)..." 37

In his quest for a semblance of truth and certainty, Pirandello seems to look on humanity much like his character Mattia Pascal when he returned to his village, wandering about, staring at the passers-by..., or like his other character, Serafino Gubbio in *Si Gira* who makes it a point to study people in their ordinary walks of life "to see if I can discover in other men what I lack in everything I do—the certainty that they understand

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37 *Cosi è (se vi pare)*, opus cit., page 141, vol. 1.
what they are doing." Men seem so sure of themselves! But to his dismay, he soon discovers that man's unrest is the cause of his unending torture because it never allows him to be satisfied with his existence. In these two earlier novels, *Si Gira* and *Il Fu Mattia Pascal*, Pirandello seems to sum up the qualities of the contemporary novel as an internal conversation carried on by an author and himself.

In further illustration of the relativity of truth and of the principle that "what makes life is the reality which you give to it," *La Camera in attesa* offers the following examples. Cesarino's existence in the room he occupied before his departure is more real for his loved ones than the fact of his death. For those he left behind, time is fixed immutable on that day when he first left on a military expedition. The illusion of life has ceased in that room for one day, and yet it seems forever. Only the clock, as in the works of Beckett, bears testimony to the constant flow of time in that endless waiting.

Once again, the testimony that humanity is caught in a trap--the trap of existence, and that our lives are only a slow and painful progression towards death, bears witness to the similarities in the worlds of Beckett and Pirandello.

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38 Bishop, p. 42, *opus cit.*
Pirandello and Shaw compared and the logic of illogic

In Pirandello, characters, we said, have feelings of their own; but they reason out their feelings—and by reasoning, they transfer them to a higher plane of complexity.

If we were to form a comparison of Pirandello's technique in the unveiling of life situations to Shaw's method, a strange "parody" would become immediately apparent.

Shaw delights in stripping, one by one, from his characters, the many veils of illusions shielding their eyes from the light of reality too glaring to gaze upon, until he forces them, finally, to behold the rational as he sees it.

For Pirandello, the converse seems to be true. He takes what seems to be a malign pleasure in proceeding from the rational and leading his characters astray, until they are hopelessly plunged into the abyss of the "triumph of irrationality." The process is effected through what often seems to be a most logical process. Indeed, the irrational may be entirely logical, as witness the case in his play, Pensaci, Giacomino.
We see here the elderly Professor Toti marrying a wife much younger than himself—all for the sake of revenge, so as to compel the Government (whose faithful employee and dutiful servant he has been for many years) to be in the precarious position of having to pay his youthful widow a long and costly pension after his death as "remuneration" denied him during his lifetime:

...Moi, je choisis une femme jeune, pauvre, timorée, de bonne famille, qui devra à l'état civil d'être considérée comme mon épouse, afin que l'État lui paie une pension. Ma femme vraiment et mariée!... Je suis et resterai un pauvre vieux qui aura encore pendant cinq ou six ans la consolation d'un peu de gratitude pour un service que j'aurais rendu aux frais du gouvernement, et amen. ...39

Upon learning that his bride-to-be, Lilline, is already with child, instead of becoming furious, the professor has nothing but words of praise for the welcome situation:

Mais moi je suis là, ma fille, je suis près de toi. Je ne vois pas ce que je pourrais faire de plus. Maintenant que je sais tout, je ne recule pas. Je deviens père et grand-père, que puis-je faire de plus? 40

In fact, he insists that Giacomino, the girl's lover, come and live with them:

Mais non, il ne faut pas avoir honte, ma fille! Tu peux considérer que tu te confies en ce moment à ton père. (...) je te réponds que Giacomino, oui, il y sera; mais moi, je ne dois pas le savoir; c'est-à-dire, je le sais, mais il faut que ce soit comme si je ne le savais pas. (...) Et je peux après tout l'aimer comme un enfant, pourquoi pas? 41

40,41Ibid., page 152.
The professor has nothing but kind words for his wife's lover—indeed, he is thankful to him for the great service provided him. Old Toti secures from the girl's lover, Giacomino, the promise that he will, in good faith, continue his rôle, even after Toti marries the girl.

When the youth decides to abandon this intolerable situation of the "ménage à trois," the professor immediately becomes angry and indignant, threatening the lad with exposure if he so much as dare refuse to return to the mother of his child.

Nowhere in the play is "public morality" upheld. Rather, the youth is warned that he has no right to break up the family and destroy the lives of three persons:

...Je t'ai protégé, je t'ai accueilli chez moi, je lui ai parlé de toi de telle façon qu'elle t'a aimé sans scrupule. Et maintenant qu'elle t'aimait en toute sécurité, mère de ce petit, maintenant, toi... tu... (Il bondit, brusquement décidé, convulsé.)

Mèfie-toi, Giacomino. Je suis bon, mais, précisément à cause de ma bonté, si je vois la détresse d'une jeune femme, sa ruine, la tienne et celle de ce petit innocent, de deviens capable de tout. Mèfie-toi! ...42

The professor resorts to anger, after having tried to reason with the youth earlier:

Mais tu as maintenant ta petite famille, dans laquelle moi seul suis de trop mais pas pour longtemps et je ne compte pour rien. Je suis comme le père de vous tous et je peux même... je peux même m'en aller. ...43

42Opus cit., page 191.
43Ibid., page 189-190.
In the end, as the title suggests ("Think of it!...Giacomino!") the lad accepts the quite rational (though illogical) solution whereby the husband forces his wife's lover to return to her and take up residence in the same household with the threesome.

In Sei personaggi, of course, the opposite had taken place. There, it was a case of the father trying desperately to organize his passion through logic (not only his incestuous act, but even the rationalization to send his wife away with her lover earlier). Whereas in Pensaci, Giacomino, we see passion being organized as logical, rational. In the world of Pirandello, we repeat once more, it seems there is no one logic, no one reason, but as many as there are individuals—for truth is relative.

The multiplicity of the self

In closing this rather lengthy chapter on "The Elusive Self," it is perhaps only fitting that we discuss another Pirandellian theme—the multiplicity of personality, on which we have but touched.

An excellent description of multiple personality is found in Pirandello's Il Giuoco delle parti. In describing the attributes of Silia, her lover is told:

Et peut-être ne sais-tu pas toute la richesse qui est en elle... certaines choses qu'elle possède, et qui ne sembleraient pas être à elle,
non parce qu'elles n'existent pas, mais parce que tu n'y fais pas attention, parce que tu la vois toujours et seulement sous l'aspect qui pour toi est le véritable! ...

Une autre femme! Mais quand je dis une autre, ce n'est pas une façon de parler. Une autre, positivement; et elle l'ignore! Une enfant qui vit une minute et chante, quand elle est absente d'elle-même. Si tu la voyais, parfois rester comme cela... avec une certaine lumière, un éclat lointain dans les yeux... (....)
Peux-tu me dire qui elle est à ces instants-là? 44

Léone answers his own question with the conclusion that she was "une autre elle, qui ne peut pas vivre, parce qu'inconnue d'elle-même," 45 she cannot know that this other self exists. "Parce que personne ne lui a jamais dit: 'je te veux ainsi, tu dois être ainsi.'" 46 For even if someone told her, "I want you to be so," she would ask distractedly, "Comment cela?" ... and "...comment étais-je?" 47 Silia does not recognize herself at all in the image of her that others may hold. She does not even suspect that another image of her exists in the mind of others.

...Elle n'en sait rien; elle te dira que ce n'est pas vrai. Elle ne se reconnaît pas elle-même dans l'image que tu lui proposes, telle que tu l'as vue tout à l'heure, à supposer que tu l'ais vue...

Quelle tristesse, mon cher! voici une délicate, une gracieuse possibilité d'exister, qu'elle pourrait avoir, et qu'elle n'a pas! 48

In spite of what Léone says, however, Silia is not totally unaware of the multiplicity in her personality. Earlier

44 Le jeu des rôles, in opus cit., vol. 9, pp. 28-29.
45,46,47,48 Ibid., p. 29.
in the play, she wandered, "Il ne t’est jamais arrivé de t’apercevoir à l’improviste dans un miroir, alors que tu vivais sans penser à toi, et ton image te semble être celle d’un étranger, qui brusquement te trouble, te déconcerte, te gâte tout, en te rappelant à toi, que sais-je..."

Another play that illustrates well the relativity of truth concerning one’s personality is the delightful Ciascuno a suo modo in which the actress Delia Morello seems to change aspects according to the person with whom she happens to be conversing at the moment—amending somewhat the old saying not "beauty" but "personality" lies in the eyes of the beholder. The actress seeks to identify herself with concepts others may have of her—because she herself does not know how she is, who she is:

...Mais, comprenez-moi, je me suis reconnue, reconnue dans tout ce que vous avez dit de moi, dès qu’on me l’a rapporté. (...) Oui, comme si vous aviez vécu en moi toujours; mais en me comprenant mieux que je n’ai jamais pu me comprendre...

And elsewhere,

Mon cher ami, depuis ce matin, je vis de votre divination, si bien que je me demande comment vous avez pu l’avoir, vous qui, au fond, me connaissiez si peu, et tandis que je me débats, que je souffre, comme si je n’habitais plus en moi-même, comme si je devais sans cesse poursuivre celle que je suis pour la retenir...

And so, the actress, Delia Morello, like so many Pirandellian characters, seeks her elusive self in others.

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49 Le jeu des rôles, opus cit., p. 16 (vol. 9).
50 Comme ci (ou comme ça), in opus cit., vol. 1, page 243.
51 Ibid., page 244.
Once again, we cannot help but be reminded of Unamuno's words in *Niebla*, "nadie es el que es, sino el que le hacen los demás."\(^{52}\)

Pirandello's works are filled with characters who seem to be born in him, spontaneously, and once they have been conceived in the mind of the author, as the *Six Characters* who were but partially delineated, they seek to verify their own reality--through others, often through their own selves.\(^{53}\) In searching for reality, the characters often find a hollow shell. In the words of the critic, Albérès, "vivre, c'est projeter hors de soi un acteur de comédie. Que serait alors la sincérité?"\(^{54}\) he asks, as Beckett also will ask in our next chapter.

*Elle serait la solitude, la vraie solitude, non seulement celle où les autres sont absents, mais celle d'où est absent ce double que l'on se crée pour les autres.*\(^{55}\)

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\(^{52}\) *Opus cit.*, p. 108.

\(^{53}\) Pirandello's characters, it seems, appear to him and take shape and form, much in the same way as surrealist images are delineated in the mind of the poet--and once formed, assume an autonomy all their own. In the words of André Breton, in his *Manifeste du Surréalisme*, "...il va des images surréalistes comme de ces images de l'opium que l'homme n'évoque plus, mais qui s'offrent à lui, spontanément, despotiquement. Il ne peut pas les congédier; car la volonté n'a plus de force et ne gouverne plus les facultés." (Maniféste, p. 58). "Il est faux, selon moi, de prétendre que l'esprit a saisi les rapports des deux réalités en présence. Il n'a, pour commencer, rien saisi consciemment." (Id.). "L'esprit se convainc peu à peu à la réalité suprême de ces images." (Ibid., p. 60).


It is precisely this type of reasoning and self-searching that Moscarda, a character in one of Pirandello's earlier Nouvelles, subjects himself to, seeking to find in the mirror's reflection of himself "le naturel de mes actes." He realizes he will never find what he seeks and ends up by convincing himself that the one whose image he sees reflected in the mirror is not himself but a comedian who has taken his place, when he says, "Je voulais me surprendre dans le naturel de mes actes, dans les alterations subites du visage à chaque changement d'humeur...

It is the same authenticity exactly that Sartre's Roquentin also seeks in the mirror, also in vain:

Au mur il y a un trou blanc, la glace, c'est un piège. Je sais que je vais m'y laisser prendre. Ça y est. La chose grise vient d'apparaître dans la glace. Je m'approche et je la regarde, je ne peux plus m'en aller. C'est le reflet de mon visage. Souvent dans ces journées perdues je reste à le contempler. Je n'y comprends rien à ce visage. Ceux des autres ont un sens. Pas le mien... 59

Hence, the dissolution of personality. We can never succeed in being truly sincere: "Nous n'arrivons jamais à être sincères, notre moi disparaît dans cet effort,

56 Luigi Pirandello, Uno, nessuno e centomila, Firenze Bemporad, 1926.
57 Albères, Aventure intellectuelle..., p. 189.
58 Pirandello, Uno, nessuno e centomila, pp. 18-19, cited in Alberes, opus cit., p. 189.
59 Jean-Paul Sartre, La Nausée, pp. 30-31
nous ne pouvons pas être quelque chose en soi, mais une image pour autrui, 60 a mere image for others, over which we have no control—so thinks Pirandello, even before Sartre. Thus men are incapable of ever revealing their true self, since everything they do always appears strange to them—"étranger à eux-mêmes, comme s'ils ne parvenaient jamais à manifester leur vrai moi, mais un moi de remplacement, un moi ironique, un moi faux." 61

The hero of Uno, nessuno e centomila, speaks in despair:

Je voulais être seul. Sans moi. Je veux dire sans ce moi que je connaissais ou que je croyais connaître.

Seul avec un certain étranger dont je sentais obscurément ne pouvoir déjà plus me séparer et qui était moi-même: l'étranger inséparable de moi-même. 62

Complete awareness of this "étranger," which will later appear in Camus, seems to be manifest in the words of Moscarda:

L'idée que les autres voyaient en moi un être que je n'étais pas, un être qu'ils ne pouvaient voir qu'en me regardant de l'extérieur avec des yeux qui n'étaient pas les miens et qui me donnaient une apparence destinée à me demeurer toujours étrangère...,

cette idée ne me donna plus de repos. Comment supporter en moi cet étranger? cet étranger que j'étais moi-même pour moi? 63

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60 Albérès, p. 188, opus cit.
61 Ibid., p. 189.
62 Pirandello, opus cit., p. 15.
63 Pirandello, opus cit., pp. 4-20.
Clearly, this theme of "étrangéité" felt by Pirandello's Moscarda, and later by the heroes of Sartre in which nausea best described this feeling of detachment from one's own self and from the world, and by the hero of Camus, whose alienation was wrongly understood as apathy by a wholly apathetic world, was surely to be taken up again by the anti-hero of Beckett.

We shall attempt to explore this theme in the following chapter, and at the same time an effort will be made to arrive at some conclusions concerning the recurrence of Pirandellian themes in the works of Beckett more concisely.
IV.

EL HOMBRE DE CARNE Y HUESO

Beckett retrouvé

When Unamuno defines man, if we may be permitted to have recourse to his definition once more, it is neither "lo humano" he depicts, nor humanity in general, "ni el adjetivo simple, ni el adjetivo substantivo, sino el substantivo concreto."¹ He defines man in his simplest yet most essential make-up: "El hombre de carne y hueso, el que nace, sufre y muere--sobre todo muere..."²

Because it seemed to me that this description of man fits perfectly Beckett's conception of the same man--who is born, suffers and dies, and above all, Beckett would insist on his suffering--, for this reason I have chosen Unamuno's words once more to head this chapter. Pirandello and Beckett both, indeed, depict a humanity that above all else is tormented--both physically and spiritually. In Beckett, it is through physical suffering that his subjects become exposed to metaphysical anguish as well.

²Ibid.
For Pirandello, as for Beckett, life is but "a second of illumination" and then all is over...
"un jour pareil aux autres,... un jour nous sommes nés, un jour nous mourrons, le même jour, le même instant..." ³
"Elles accouchent à cheval sur une tombe, le jour brille un instant, puis c'est la nuit à nouveau..." ⁴ Astride of the grave, man is born--there is light for a little while, then again--there is silence, or night, which is the same. In the interval, the wearied travelers try to form their essence in the road of life.

Both Pirandello's and Beckett's works abound with wearied travelers in a glum, hopeless world, in which they struggle with the bitter absurdity of existence. Suffering, in both authors, is the experience common to all humanity. The agonizing moment of truth--the much-awaited confrontation seems to be reduced to the "tragique de connaissance": the awareness or realization that fondest hopes are based on illusions.

In an earlier chapter we spoke of the law of "el eterno devenir de Heráclito" that transforms us into another image of ourselves--never being what we were a moment ago, nor what we will be in the future. It seems

⁴ Ibid.
this is precisely what the character presented to us as "l'inconnue" in *Come tu mi vuoi* is trying to state when she says: "...un jour d'une façon, un jour, d'une autre, telle que l'ont modelée les hasards de la vie!" (she speaks here of the other person she could have been)... "Être, être n'est rien, être, c'est se construire, et moi je me suis faite cette femme! Tu n'as rien compris de cela, toi!..."

In the interval between birth and death, between daylight and the recurrent darkness, the wearied travelers try to form their essence in the road of life. Speaking of Beckett's characters, "ces personnages sont à la recherche d'eux-mêmes" and their dwelling places are no more than undetermined "lieux de passage" which could very well be no more than the appointed places and time where each shall meet his moment of truth. Guy Dumur rightly calls Pirandello's theater "du théâtre à l'état pur." Need we point out that the same applies to the theater of Samuel Beckett?

Beckett's heroes, even more so than Pirandello's, show every sign of being imprisoned by Time--"le cancer du temps" as he himself called it in his study of Proust.

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5 *Comme tu me veux*, in *opus cit.*, vol. 2.
7 Guy Dumur, *opus cit.*, p. 67
Their repeated efforts to escape are futile. In *Fin de partie* as also in the two *Acte sans paroles*, the presence of Time on the stage is assured by the tolling of the bell and the ticking of the alarm clock—sounding every so often to bring back these hapless sufferers to the reality of their existence from which there is no escape. The sounds of the metronome and the regularity with which the horse's gallop recurs to the swelling of the sea in *Cendres* reinforce man's helplessness in the eternal flow of Time. Beckett's characters try all in their power to escape the limits of the Time trap— but only succeed in hurling themselves deeper into the abyss. They play their part as the actor in life's play, in the solitude of their "vie étroite"—in the little space which encloses them. Each is bound in his habitat—whether circumscribed chess board (*Fin de partie*), garbage cans (*ibid.*), or the seashore at the beach (*Cendres*), each has his own little waiting place where they await their destiny or their doom. They seem perched on the edge of the abyss, from which there is no recourse.

Walter Starkie in his study on Pirandello once expressed the opinion that there is no author who is able to impart a greater sense of terror at the instability and vanity of human wishes than Pirandello. To this we might add, none, perhaps—except Beckett.
Silence et solitude: equivalences

Throughout his theater, as well as in the novels of the Trilogy, if there is a unifying principle in the works of Samuel Beckett, that unifying element must be the complete lack of personality traits in the human beings who inhabit his world. His characters are as completely devoid of those traits that distinguish personality, as his plays and novels are of "denouement." In this sense too Pirandello and Beckett are similar, in that each of them have given us characters who are in search of themselves, who try to find the unifying principle they are convinced they must somehow possess. It stands to reason that the more unity and purpose life's heroes could find, the more convinced they would become of their humanity. But this is precisely what they do not find in this age of "angoisse." Not finding this unifying principle in themselves, they seek it elsewhere, convinced that somehow, somewhere it must exist—and so they wait (En attendant Godot); they are compelled to wait for they have nowhere else to go:

"Es concebible que el hombre pudiera vivir sin otra fe que la fe en sí propio; si le fuera dado sentirse en su identidad uno e indivisible, le sería fácil olvidar la eternidad."\(^{10}\)

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\(^{10}\) Samuel Putram, Unamuno y el problema de la personalidad (Revista Hispánico Moderna, 1934-35), I, p. 107.
Man searches in vain for a superior realm in life. And even if he does catch a glimpse of it (as in the two Acte sans paroles), it is destined to reveal itself useless, absurd, incommunicable, and unattainable. Man's frustration can only be assuaged when he learns that ultimate resignation is his only recourse--his only defense. Yet, in another sense too, these two dream-plays, conveyed solely through pantomimic gestures, seem to confirm the Calderonian principle, "la vida es sueño," whereas the other works of Beckett seem unduly to insist that life is not a dream, but rather constant suffering, as the characters call on their physical suffering to affirm their existence.

Vladimir and Estragon are the wearied travelers who cannot leave because, they affirm: "Nous attendons que Godot vienne... ou que la vie tombe..."\(^{11}\) thus equating the two in the endless waiting. A comment attributed to Estragon seems to summarize the whole of his existence: "C'est curieux, plus on va, moins c'est bon."\(^{12}\) But, as he says, "...ce n'est pas le vide qui manque..."\(^{13}\) And elsewhere, "On trouve toujours quelque chose, hein, Didi, pour nous donner l'impression d'exister?"\(^{14}\)

\(^{11}\)Godot, p. 134.
\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 32.
\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 33.
\(^{14}\)Ibid., pp. 116-117.
The only certainty in this endless waiting for someone to save them or to free them—thus suggesting the same "apaisement" that only death could bring, or a yearning for the absolute, to be finally fixed once and for all—is that they have plenty of time to fill in the gap.

Vladimir. -- Ce qui est certain, c'est que le temps est long, dans ces conditions, et nous pousse à le meubler d'agissements qui, comment dire, qui peuvent à première vue paraître raisonnables, mais dont nous avons l'habitude. . . .15

Adding, anti-climactically, "...Tu suis mon raisonnement?"16

Estragon is anxiously yearning to fall asleep, but of course, Vladimir will not allow this:

Estragon. -- Pourquoi tu ne me laisses jamais dormir?
Vladimir. -- Je me sentais seul.
Estragon. -- Je rêvais que j'étais heureux.17

Once more Estragon is reminded of his aching feet, his endless suffering, while it is Vladimir that seems to slip away in a very unamnesque soliloquy:

Vladimir. -- Est-ce que j'ai dormi, pendant que les autres souffraient? Est-ce que je dors en ce moment?

Demain, quand je croirai me réveiller, que dirai-je de cette journée?

Qu'avec Estragon mon ami, à cet endroit, jusqu'à la tombée de la nuit, j'ai attendu Godot?

15Godot, p. 135.
16Ibid.
17Ibid., p. 155.
Vladimir. -- (continued)

Que Pozzo est passé, avec son porteur, et qu'il nous a parlé?

Sans doute.

Mais dans tout cela qu'y aura-t-il de vrai? (...)

Lui ne saura rien. Il parlera des coups qu'il a recus et je lui donnerai une carotte. (...)


On a le temps de vieillir. L'air est plein de nos cris. (Il écoute.) Mais l'habitude est une grande sourdine. (Il regarde Estragon.) Moi aussi, un autre me regarde, en me disant, Il dort, il ne sait pas, qu'il dort. (Un temps.)

Je ne peux pas continuer. (Un temps.) Qu'est-ce que j'ai dit? 18

The answer to Vladimir's question is probably that without knowing it he has posed life's most vital question. What is life all about? The same question Pirandello characters seemed to ask over and over again. And further, is there a life after this? In their quest for the absolute, in seeking to become fixed so that they would be free from further change, so that they would be welcomed at last in the house of Godot, where it is warm and comfortable, the two tramps seem to be expressing humanity's desire for immortality or the return to the mother's womb.

18 Godot, pp. 156-157.
The Beckettian hero

If the dramatic works of Beckett portray the "anti-theater" and his novels the "anti-novel," then we could say with reasonable certainty that his heroes are the "anti-heroes" of life--of a life that leads progressively toward the void, "le néant."

Man as depicted throughout his works by Samuel Beckett is without identity--for he is every man or man "amorphous" as suggested by the various connotations evoked in the titles of his novels: Moran (or/Man), Mahood, Molloy, the letter M invariably symbolizing the "moi" of the ego and OILLOI from the Greek meaning "everyman" or all men. The connotations are endless. Beckett's Murphy, "amorphous" though he be, is "Everyman" just as easily as he is "The Other." For there must always be "The Other" in Beckett's novels and plays in order for "The One" to exist.

This explains perhaps why Beckett's characters invariably appear in doubles--another rendition of the not very Platonic "other half." This notion is conveyed in the numerous couples we find in his works: Pozzo-Lucky, Hamm-Clov, Vladimir-Estragon, whose shortened versions appear as Gogo, rhyming with the awaited Godot, and Didi, which further conveys the notion of the "twin" from the Greek "didimus"; and, of course, the fact that Gogo can
quite easily be confused with Godot may suggest further the notion that man created God in his own image. The parallels are many and this kind of guessing game could go on endlessly. The similarities are very striking; one cannot ignore them.

The universality of Beckett's hero is evoked in a passage from Ionesco, describing his own characters, the Smiths and the Martins, when he says: "Les Smith et les Martin ne savent plus parler, parce qu'ils ne savent plus penser. Ils ne savent plus penser, parce qu'ils ne savent plus s'émouvoir, n'ont plus de passions. Ils ne savent plus être, ils peuvent devenir n'importe qui, n'importe quoi, car, n'étant pas, ils ne sont que les autres. Le monde n'a rien de personnel, ils sont interchangeables."¹⁹ Pozzo informs us, "Remarquez que j'aurais pu être à sa place et lui à la mienne. Si le hasard ne s'y était pas opposé. A chacun son dû."²⁰ And yet, when the time comes that he could sell Lucky, he hesitates to do so. It is a chance he cannot take, not knowing which thief was saved.

Man for Beckett is without identity. He is "l'Homme absolu" confronted by the double mystery of birth and death, passing almost directly from the one to the other, "ayant juste le temps," in the interval that is life, "de proférer

¹⁹Eugène Ionesco, causerie: "Comment je suis devenu auteur dramatique, ou La tragedie du langage."
²⁰Godot, p. 50.
quelques mots qui n'ont guère plus ni moins de sens que les premiers vagissements et les derniers râles.\textsuperscript{21}

Life is a meaningless void in which the drama of human existence is staged in all its nakedness. Life is filled with motions of habit, idle talk and gestures devoid of meaning. "Habit is a compromise," said Beckett, "effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability, the lightning-conductor of his existence... Breathing is habit. Life is habit."\textsuperscript{22}

In Beckett's world the characters try as best they can to fill the emptiness around them--by gestures often reduced to mere mechanical ambulation, or by clinging tenaciously to objects, the proliferation of which simply reinforces the passage of unrelenting time and man's feeling of impotence.

It isn't much they crave, these poor unfortunate wretches. Only an impression--the impression of having lived. So much so, that they live in constant terror and fear. Fear of one day being judged guilty. They were judged guilty by the very act of having been born. They wait in fear for the dreaded day of judgment, that


is neither closer, nor more distant, for they live in a perpetual state of renewal that is equivalent to continuous non-existence—that is neither eternal approaching nor ever arriving. "Ce n'est pas le vide qui manque..." utter Gogo and Didi bound to the emptiness in their lives "parce qu'il faut attendre..." "Ce n'est pas le vide qui manque," echo Krapp in _La dernière bande_ and the heroes of the two _Acte sans paroles_, continuously tantalized and at the same time reminded of the emptiness around them.

"Tout est lié, depuis notre premier souffle..."23

Man is helpless, alone. "Nous ne pouvons nous changer ni vivre comme nous le voudrions..."24 In all his efforts to fill the void, man's only assurance is that he travels irrevokably toward death. Vladimir and Estragon try to sleep in vain, to escape the punishment that awaits them, possibly to regain peace and shelter in the mother's womb (Ma/hood is the name of one Beckett protagonist), but to no avail. Proof of their existence, their only proof, is an altered version of the cartesian principle: for them, "je souffre, donc je suis."

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23 Albérès, _Aventure intellectuelle_, p. 193.

24 Ibid.
A Summary, in brief

In summary then, Beckett's characters are universal, their solitude often depicted in utter silence. They possess none of the distinctive personality traits that real people have.

Estragon could just as well have been Vladimir, Pozzo could, by a slight fifty-fifty chance have been in Lucky's shoes. And yet, they are resigned not to exchange places, for it is known that only one of the thieves crucified with Jesus was saved—and by a mere stroke of luck. He happened to say the right thing, at the right moment. Of the four evangelists, only one seems to have recorded this incident. There is a chance that one out of two will be saved. But which one? Is it worth taking a chance? Pozzo could not take the chance of selling Lucky at the fair of St. Savior.

Beckett's characters seem to come in pairs, one dependent on the other. They cannot live together, threatening constantly to leave, yet unable to do anything about it either. Their actions cancel out their words and make language even more meaningless.

"I am leaving," says Clov (in Fin de partie), yet he stands motionless as the play ends. "Let's leave," Estragon pleads, yet the two remain together, as though they were planted in the soil—they are in fact attached.
Often the two halves are complementary, as are Vladimir and Estragon, who are just as closely tied as are Pozzo and Lucky with a visible rope. Besides, Pozzo and Lucky could be just another version, two other aspects of the same personality, so that the four of them together might form but one whole person.

Perhaps too Hamm and Clov were intended in the mind of the author to show the interdependence of body and soul, or the emotional self and the conscious self. Clov cannot leave Hamm because "hors d'ici c'est la mort." Thus the two live in close proximity with their ancestors as well as with a vague notion propagated in every Beckett play of progeny—perhaps their only chance at immortality—often merely a child they have spotted outside that will perhaps carry on when, for example, Hamm's tired body will have completely ceased to function. And yet, perhaps Clov did leave Hamm—after the curtain came down. We have no way of knowing, we can only theorize. Winnie too might have been in the place of her husband, and also Mrs. Rooney. Nothing distinguishes the male characters from the females, other than the objects they possess—the hat, symbol of masculinity, and the woman's purse, toothbrush or umbrella, but a feeble weapon against her own inconstancy.  

\[25\] "Ramener le silence, c'est le rôle des objets." (Molloy, p. 17.)
The hero of *La dernière bande* is the only Beckett hero who has no double—except that he too has a "former self," his younger self, which follows him as a traveling companion for life. He is pursued by his former self, just as surely as Henri is hounded by his past in *Cendres*.

*La dernière bande* is the one play in all of Beckett's theater that illustrates better than any other the problem of man's solitude in all its nudity. If "l'enfer, c'est les autres," an even greater dilemma is encountered when the self is confronted by a former "self" and the two are no longer compatible. An important Pirandellian theme—we have here the problem of the multiplicity of the self. Krapp is the character who most resembles all the Malones, Molloys, Murphies and the other "unnamables."

In this respect at least Pirandello and Beckett are similar. The instability of human life and of all human endeavour is well expressed in Pirandello's theater and novels—and indeed it carries over into the modern French drama as well. Though Pirandello's characters often seem to be trampled by the society of which they are a part, Beckett's on the other hand seem to be eaten away by their own solitude and by the incredible "cancer du Temps."
Recourse to madness and some conclusions

The mirror of dramatic form distorts and deforms life as it reflects it. This we have observed in the confrontation of Krapp with his younger self—when, not recognizing his own voice, he finally resorts to total silence. Also we see this in the speech of the Father in Six Characters when he does not recognize his own person in the representation of him portrayed by the actor (as Krapp does not recognize his own voice and language):

"...however the actor strive, with will power and art to assume my personality, his performance can hardly be a representation of me as I really am.

It will be an interpretation of me as he sees me—not as I feel myself in my inner consciousness to be."26

Yet we have seen in Vestire gli ignudi how an unreal world of fantasy can be imposed by Fate on an individual, who once trapped in it is forced to act his part.

Just as the Father sees himself trapped for ever "in a fleeting shameful moment" by the definition the author has given him, even more so is the elderly poet firmly bound to his role in quando sì è qualcuno, even when he wishes to depart from his own image. A play we have said very little about up to now, offers even more striking examples—and we have purposely postponed

our discussion of it. In Enrico IV,\textsuperscript{27} we have what has
been acclaimed by many as Pirandello's most complete
achievement, where man is alone in his solitude--where
the life-force continues to reproduce humanity, but where
age overtakes the individual and only illusions remain.\textsuperscript{28}
The paradox of the art form versus life is well expressed
by Lumley when he invokes Pirandello: "If life moved
eternally, it would never acquire consistency; if it
acquired consistency, it would never move; and yet life
must have both consistency and motion." The art form that
claims to surpass life must equally possess both consistency
and motion.

Enrico IV praises the happiness to be found in hav-
ing a fixed essence, as opposed to the uneasiness of
finding oneself in a perpetual state of becoming (like
Vladimir and Estragon), to live in ceaseless stress and
anxiety--he on the contrary has already found his place
in history.

Yet, Enrico too is bound by his assumed role, just
as much as the characters of Sei personaggi or the poet
of Quando si è qualcuno. He too speaks of roles that
might be inverted: "Je vous dis que les rôles, demain,
pourraient être intervertis! Et que feriez-vous alors?

\textsuperscript{27}\textit{Henri IV}, in opus cit., vol. 1.

\textsuperscript{28}Frederick Lumley, \textit{Trends in Twentieth Century Drama},
Ririez-vous, par hasard, d'un pape prisonnier?..."\(^{29}\)
Yet he realizes he is trapped, crystallized for all time in that mask of madness he assumed for an evening's entertainment. Society will not allow him to throw off the mask. The world will not accept him, except as the Emperor, and so he is forced to play his part. This is his essence—just as the Father's essence is as he has conceived in the mind of the author (as the protagonist of the scene in Madame Pace's shop). This is his essence from which there is no exit. He cannot, even for a moment, dissociate his being from that sordid event.

The play **Enrico IV**, apart from exposing the author's fundamental views with regard to reality and illusion, voices the aspirations of the individual to create his own world in a storm-tossed universe. In this respect, we may justly call it Pirandello's most all-encompassing and profound play. It is the tragedy of Life that is choked by a "form" assumed only for a moment that was meant to be ephemeral, but which engulfed Life altogether and the form imposed itself.

**Enrico IV** thus can be said to be an echo of an earlier Pirandellian play, **Tutto Per Bene**, where the individual suddenly finds himself confronted by his reflec-

\(^{29}\text{Henri IV, opus cit., p. 179.}\)
tion—but a distorted reflection, since he sees an image of himself not through his own eyes, but as others see him. In each case, there is nothing for the victims caught in the web to do, but espouse the mask and act their part, concealing as best they can their torment. Of Henry IV we can say that he has successfully broken every link with his past life. Henceforth, no one will be able to nail him to one form that was not true to all his nature—he has become immortal!

We cannot help but note the similarities called to mind by Sartre's _Huis-Clos_. In this play, the three characters who find themselves irrevocably committed by their actions, have no choice, but to accept the consequences of their lives, as Enrico IV had no choice but to accept his. They are as wholly bound by what their lives had been as the Father in Pirandello's _Six Characters in Search of an Author_. Sartre's Ines is the only one of the play's trio of characters to see clearly her own reality and to take upon her shoulders the responsibility for past events. She taunts the other two until all their illusions are unmasked. "Here we are stark naked," she says, referring to that same nakedness that Ersilia Drei and other Pirandellian characters seek so desperately to mask. "Hell is other people," only because they are bound together, unable to escape each other's conscience,
the constant reminder of their sordid reality—just as Enrico cannot escape his assumed reality and the Father his past. In this room without mirrors in which to see themselves, and unable to close their eyes, for their eyelids have disappeared—"il faut vivre les yeux ouverts... pour toujours"—they can only read their judgement in one another's eyes. As with the room, the windows of the soul are walled-up. There is no possibility to change the actions of their lives. Like Henry, they too might echo: "Now, of necessity... here together forever."  

In the foregoing pages, an attempt has been made to point out—often merely in passing, the major Pirandellian themes, and to suggest and discuss their recurrence in writers of our times, especially in the works of Samuel Beckett. We have but touched the surface. The possibilities are far from exhausted.

In closing we may recall an earlier comment that somehow seems appropriate now and bears repeating: "The art form that claims to surpass life must equally possess both consistency and motion." The theater of Pirandello possesses in abundance both of these attributes. Concerning the influence of Pirancello on the French theater, Bishop states, and I agree, that "of all the various forces that combined to mold the theatrical imagination of the French writers of our age (including, of course, Samuel Beckett), none was more widespread, none more penetrating,

\[30\text{Starkie, p. 187.}\]
and none more productive than Pirandello.

Beckett's first play, *Eleutheria* (written in 1947, but never published or produced), was very "Pirandellian." The characters refer to the play in which they are playing, and the first act is appropriately closed with the word "Rideau" spoken by one of the protagonists. *Fin de Partie* begins with the word "fini" at the beginning. But it matters little—reflected in the greyish light that permeates the scene, ending and beginning are one and the same thing. One could say that night is approaching just as easily as the fact that day is beginning. In between it is neither night nor day. Thus the words *finir* and *commencer* have lost their meaning. *Fin de partie* is an Endgame that never ends—it just goes one and it was never begun: "C'est fini, ça va finir, ça va peut-être finir..."\(^{31}\) and elsewhere, "...il est temps que cela finisse,... Et cependant j'hésite, j'hésite à... à finir."\(^{32}\) The ending is in the beginning—there is no beginning. There is only a state of existence in which men, actors, are poised over the abyss, at the edge of consciousness, seeking their essence, seeking the truth about reality and irreality, authenticity and sincerity in an age and place where it is often very difficult for the Beckettian hero to find these attributes. Yet they are the same ones sought by

\(^{31}\) *Fin de partie*, p. 15.

Pirandellian heroes—they too sought a unity in the self, and found in its stead, incoherence, multiplicity, elusiveness, distortion, irreality.

The final comments in Fin de partie seem, to me, to be especially appropriate in this respect:

...Puisque ça se joue comme ça (…)
...jouons ça comme ça... (…)
...et n'en parlons plus... (…)
...ne parlons plus... 33

* * *

33 Fin de partie, p. 112.

Cependant, l'oeuvre -- l'oeuvre d'art, l'oeuvre littéraire -- n'est ni achevée ni inachevée: elle est. Ce qu'elle dit, c'est exclusivement cela: qu'elle est -- et rien de plus. En dehors de cela, elle n'est rien. (Maurice Blanchot, L'Espace littéraire, p. 12.)
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