TRAGICOMIC FOOLS IN SHAKESPEARE AND BECKETT

DISSERTATION

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>PAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. A Sigh into a Looking Glass: The Trickster as Mirror in The Winter's Tale and Happy Days</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Expiating the Crime of Rhetoric: The Court Fool in King Lear and Waiting for Godot</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Snatching at Folly: The Center-Stage Fool in Hamlet and Endgame</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

The World is a weary old woman, leaning on her elbow, trying to think of a doctor that can free her from her chains. She rejects the Law as a possible saviour because the Law is too noisy. The Church is equally useless because it is too proud, and the Court is too stately to be of much help. Finally, in an effort to find a "Doctour to deliver her" and a "physick" to free her, she laboriously gathers up her trinkets and turns to Folly. Folly takes the shape of an old curmudgeon-philosopher named Sotto, and his cure for the World is to make her listen to his stories about fools. The Weary World had asked wisdom of fools for centuries before Robert Armin, an actor who played William Shakespeare's fools, penned this allegorical introduction to his Renaissance treatise on fools, *A Nest of Ninnies*. Although the text catalogs the adventures of particular fools, the Latin aphorism which appears on the 1600 version of the text, *Stultorum plena sunt omnia*, evidences Armin's belief that folly is not
relegated to a select few. The world Armin
describes is a world out of control, and its inhabitants
flail about without a clear sense of purpose.

Robert Armin had ample opportunity to demonstrate
his understanding of the world’s folly as he portrayed
the fools of William Shakespeare on stage, for
Shakespeare has a clear and unerring sense of the
absurdity of human existence. He knows it does not always
take a Puck to translate a Bottom into an ass, and he
paints a world that is as absurd as it is ordered.
Predictably enough, it is often the fool in Shakespeare
who embodies the absurdity of human existence, and like
Armin’s philosopher, Sotto, the fool forces those around
him to take a look at themselves.

Samuel Beckett shares William Shakespeare’s keen
sense of the absurdity of human existence. Although
Beckett’s universe does not hold the options of the
Shakespearean one, his characters reach for folly like
their Shakespearean counterparts. Thus, Krapp’s near-fall
on a banana skin in Krapp’s Last Tape as well as the
vaudevillian techniques of the one player in Act without
Words I serve as graphic representations of the
precarious nature of human existence. The capricious
Fortune and relentless Time which Shakespeare uses to
demonstrate the potentially pawn-like nature of our lives
in Beckett's hands become the inquisitor's voice of Bam in What Where and the inescapable camera (E) in Film or the seemingly omnipotent Godot. Beckett's characters, like Shakespeare's, are faced with forces they cannot control. In order to cope, they turn to folly.

Although two world wars and the nuclear threat have made the absurdity of twentieth-century existence tangible, we should not allow any facile description of Elizabethan England to mislead us into believing it was a world free from absurdity and chaos. True, Elizabeth's reign brought with it a stability unknown in the three previous Tudor reigns, but her continual refusal to secure the succession combined with the Catholic threat of Mary, Queen of Scots, created a constant fear of anarchy and revolution. In addition, the Christian humanism of the Renaissance brought with it a changed perception of man's role in life. During the Renaissance the theocentric hierarchism of the middle ages gave way to a growing belief that a person's life on earth was important in and of itself. While still believing the earth was but a ship not a home, the Renaissance mind conceded that we could give glory to God in this life by using our reason and creativity to rise from our assigned rank to the rank of the angels. The focus on the importance of this life altered man's fundamental view of
existence.

This altered view combined with Henry VIII's soul-splitting break with the Catholic Church in 1534 raised questions about the very nature of human life. Henry's severance from Rome cut to the lifeblood of thousands of believers who suddenly found themselves grappling with fear and uncertainty. This religious turmoil only agitated an existence that was already scarred by the constant fear of plague and pestilence. Perhaps the modern fear of nuclear destruction touches millions rather than thousands, but the Renaissance fear of the plague was a horrid, foul-smelling reality of daily life.

Individual helplessness in the face of overwhelming and mysterious odds felt the same in the Renaissance as it does in the twentieth century. And while Renaissance England, like our own world, enjoyed the fruits of prosperity and reaped the benefits of cultural and territorial expansion, it was still dogged by threats which could cancel the prosperity with lightning swiftness. Faced with the possibility of annihilation or loss of control, human beings try to accommodate the fear in any way they can. Folly becomes a way of accommodating the chaos, and the fool becomes the symbol of our attempts to make sense of absurdity.

This dissertation examines the ways in which both
William Shakespeare and Samuel Beckett use fools and fooling to expose the absurdity of human existence. Focusing on the tragicomic connection between these two playwrights, I will discuss the similarities and differences between Shakespeare's and Beckett's use of the fool in *The Winter's Tale* and *Happy Days*, *King Lear* and *Waiting for Godot*, *Hamlet* and *Endgame*.

Incorporating both textual analysis and performance history into my predominantly rhetorical approach to these six plays, I will explore the ways in which Shakespeare and Beckett portray the fool as one who recognizes, demonstrates, and then transcends the folly of the world.

Because the fooling tradition is most evident in physical movement and language, I did not choose to examine those Beckettian works which are minimalist in the extreme. *Breath*, a play lasting only seconds in which breathing is the primary activity, is not an appropriate work for this study, nor is a play like *Not I*, which has virtually no physical movement. Similarly, *Eh Joe*, a verbal recounting of past loves and *Rockaby*, a work heavily dependent on one woman's voice for effect, do not lend themselves to the study of corporate folly I have undertaken here. For their rhetorical richness and relatively expansive physical movement, the three
Beckettian works I have chosen, Happy Days, Waiting for Godot, and Endgame, were virtually self-selective.

Given Shakespeare’s belief that foolery, like the sun, shines everywhere, almost any one of his plays could serve this study well, but the strong thematic links which yoke The Winter’s Tale to Happy Days, King Lear to Waiting for Godot, and Endgame to Hamlet, strongly influenced my Shakespearean selections. While I have had to forego detailed study of such arresting fools as Feste in Twelfth Night and Touchstone in As You Like It, their spirits inform much of what is written here.

Most of the fools in Shakespeare’s canon are readily identifiable as such—they wear the traditional motley coat or cap and bells and acknowledge their roles with varying degrees of bittersweet irony. Before reading Malvolio’s letter to Olivia’s court in Twelfth Night, Feste announces, “Look then to be well delivered when the fool delivers the madman” (5.1.281). Once Lear has given all to his daughters, the Fool tells him, “I am better than thou art now: I am a fool, thou art nothing” (1.4.181).

The fools of Samuel Beckett, on the other hand, blend into the Beckettian landscape. Occasionally, someone like Clov says, "Ah what a fool I am" (73), but
Beckett's fools are seldom as clearly labeled as Shakespeare's. Still, when we place Shakespearean fools next to Beckettian ones, a pattern emerges. The fool first reflects, then embraces the folly of those around him. Subsequently, his folly is snatched by others who need it to cope with chaos and absurdity.

**The Tradition of the Fool**

William Willeford in his classic study, *The Fool and His Scepter*, sounds a necessary note of caution in explaining that we should not define ourselves into oversimplification when discussing fools. Although we all recognize fools when we see them, it is not easy to formulate a workable definition. Willeford puts forth the following one:

> The fool is, in short, a silly or idiotic mad person, or one who is made by circumstances (or the actions of others) to appear a fool in that sense or a person who imitates for nonfools the foolishness of being innately silly or made to look so. (10)

The definition may seem too pliable to be of much use, but it is informed by the rich tradition of fools and fooling which dates back to primitive societies. Willeford's definition has the very real advantage of encompassing the primitive trickster as well as the court fool, the buffoon as well as the clown.
There has traditionally been a distinction between a natural fool and an artificial fool. A natural fool is one who is congenitally retarded or mentally impaired and thus has no control over his folly; conversely, an artificial fool is one who adopts the role of a fool in order to gain employment or to gain a desired end. Feste, for example, is an artificial fool, who is clearly not mentally deranged in any way, and his fooling is his means of employment.

Francis Douce describes the distinguishing dress of the traditional artificial fool:

The coat was motley or parti-colored and attached to the body by a girdle with bells at the skirt and elbows. . . . The breeches and hose close, and sometimes each leg of a different color. A hood resembling a monk's cowl . . . covered the head entirely . . . It was sometimes decorated with asses' ears, or else terminated in the neck and head of a cock . . . This fool usually carried in his hand an official scepter or bauble, which was a short stick ornamented at the end with the figure of the fool's head, or sometimes that of a doll or puppet. (Willeford 22)

In discussing the fool's bauble, Willeford explains that the jester "carried on conversations for himself and the bauble and sometimes the whole company to hear . . . the bauble . . . could start an argument with the fool. The fool could also address the bauble as though it were a
particular person and treat it with respect, although the reduction of that person to a bauble had already made a fool of him" (34). Thus, the bauble allowed the fool to reflect the folly of others.

The artificial fool's costume is of more than historical interest here, because its very disordered and unpatterned appearance make it a concrete symbol of the chaos and absurdity the fool represents. Leslie Hotson in his *Shakespeare's Motley* takes issue with the traditional understanding of the word *motley*, but there is ample evidence to suggest that the fool's costume was always a disordered one (2ff.). Charles Kean's Costume Book contains over 600 watercolor drawings of costumes and theatrical props which were drawn with great historical detail by Hamilton Smith and his daughter. All of the jester's outfits illustrate the absurdity embodied in fools.

Within the broader definition of artificial fools, which will include such characters as Hamm and Hamlet, there are two specific kinds of fools which are of importance to this study—the trickster and the court fool. The trickster, according to John Townsen, is "a mythological clown figure appearing in the legends of most cultures. He's often seen as an amoral schemer but also a visionary" (380). Paul Radin, in his definitive
study, *The Trickster*, explains that this fool figure is "at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped" (ix). Although "laughter, humor, and irony permeate" everything the trickster does, it is difficult, Radin points out, "to say whether the audience is laughing at him, the tricks he plays on others, or at the implications his behaviors and activities have for them" (x). Even in his primitive stages the fool's importance rested largely on his ability to involve others in his folly.

The trickster myth is an almost universal one, and it is to be found in all cultures from the North American Indian to the Scandinavians. The trickster is a crude character, "corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level" (Towsen 5), and he gives vent to universal psychological aberrations. Shakespeare's trickster in *The Winter's Tale* announces, "My father nam'd me Autolycus, who being, as I am, litter'd under Mercury, was likewise a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles" (4.3.26-27). The classical Autolycus, known for his thievery, was a trickster who always duped those around him.

Not as primitive as the trickster is the court fool whose sketchy history has been preserved in literature
and art. We have come to associate the court fool with medieval and Renaissance Europe, but the office has been a common one throughout history. When "Cortes conquered the Aztecs in the 1520s, for example, he discovered fools, dwarfs, and hunchbacked buffoons at the court of Montezuma II" (Towsen 22). Most of the standard discussions of the court fool, i.e. Goldsmith, Willeford, Towsen, and Welsford—concede that the court fool's history is erratic; nonetheless, there are some facts about which we can be fairly certain. The earliest references to court fools date from the twelfth century; subsequently, the practice of keeping a fool in residence gained in popularity throughout the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. By the time the practice of keeping a court entertainer died out in the mid-1600s, the figure was firmly established in literature and art, thereby guaranteeing the immortality of the tradition. Although a court fool was sometimes a natural idiot who entertained by his sheer grotesqueness, he was most often a facile-witted entertainer who was kept on hand to amuse the monarch and the monarch's guest. His position was sometimes a precarious one, and if he overstepped his boundaries he could be executed, but in the main, the court fool was allowed great freedom of expression. When Goneril
complains to her father about his "all licensed fool" (1.4.187) in *King Lear*, she expresses a frustration felt by many members of the court who became the brunt of the fool’s sharp wit. A fool, because he was licensed, enjoyed a freedom of speech not shared by many members of the court.

We have to leave a wide margin for individual interpretation when defining fools, even a fool as stereotypic as the court fool. Charles Kean inadvertently draws attention to the potential for disagreement in the introductory comments of his 1859 edition of *King Lear*. Of Lear’s Fool Kean writes unequivocally:

> The fool in this play is the genuine buffoon; but notwithstanding his sarcastical flashes of wit, for which we must give the poet credit, and ascribe them in some degree to what is called stage effect, he is a mere natural, with a considerable share of cunning. (28)

To some scholars, Lear’s Fool is one of the clearest examples of an artificial court fool that we have, yet Charles Kean, whose sense of historical accuracy was painstakingly acute, does not hesitate to label him a buffoon, a mere clown. The discrepancy between the two views demonstrates the ambiguity which has to mark any definition of a fool. In speaking to this point William Willeford suggests, "we will finally reach a point where we experience folly as a reality that cannot be captured
in a description, as it belongs to the basic texture of our lives" (xvii).

So intrinsic to human experience is folly that the medieval and Renaissance church, with all of its authority, could not squelch the fool societies which developed in twelfth-century France and lingered on until the 1600s. The fool societies grew out of the annual Feast of Fools celebration which Harvey Cox describes in his book, *The Feast of Fools*:

> During the medieval era there flourished in parts of Europe a holiday known as the Feast of Fools. On that colorful occasion, usually celebrated about January first, even ordinarily pious priests and serious townsfolk donned bawdy masks, sang outrageous ditties, and generally kept the whole world awake with revelry and satire. Minor clerics painted their faces, strutted about in the robes of their superiors, and mocked the stately rituals of church and state. Sometimes a Lord of Misrule, a mock King, or a Boy Bishop was elected to preside over events. In some places the Boy Bishop even celebrated a parody of the Mass. (3)

Problems developed, however, when the celebrations grew increasingly debauched and obscene and could not be contained to one day of absurdity a year. The church did succeed in forcing the festivities out of the church doors, but even an institution as powerful as the pre-Reformation church could not suffocate the human
need for folly. Lear's Fool complains of those around him: "They will not let me have all the fool to myself; they'll be snatching" (1.4.133). Such snatching would appear to fill a basic human need.

The Italian commedia dell’arte represented this same human need for a spontaneous celebration of folly. No one is certain of the origins of the commedia dell'arte, but its manifestations are still with us today. Enid Welsford explains that all we can be sure of is that "in the latter half of the sixteenth century certain companies of Italian actors became famous all over Europe for their skill in improvisation, their store of amusing stage tricks or "lazzi", and their characters who became stock comic types, most of whom were caricatures of certain classes or nationalities" (293). Some of these stock comic characters--Harlequin, Pierrot, Pantalocn, Pulcinella--are still alive today; and they are one of the strongest signs of the continuity of the fooling tradition.

In identifying the modern descendants of the commedia, Martin Esslin cites the works of Bertolt Brecht whose ideology is subordinate to the poetic truth which permeates the "clowning and music-hall knockabout humor" in such plays as Man Equals Man and The Wedding. Clov's opening ladder routine in
Endgame, as a modern derivative of the ladder lazzi, is yet another contemporary manifestation of the comic tradition. Without sacrificing vitality or spontaneity, the commedia codified the human expression of and need for folly.

It is against this backdrop of the fooling tradition that the tragicomic connection between Shakespeare and Beckett emerges, for the fool is most often a tragicomic character who deals in death and life, tragedy and comedy. Both Shakespeare and Beckett use the fool simultaneously to portray the tragic nature of life and humanity's continual struggle to overcome the dark forces which would allow death and blindness to have the final say. The fool almost never succumbs to a senseless death—he rides out the storm—and as such he represents the strong will to endure which marks even the most absurd Beckettian characters.

The connection between Shakespeare and Beckett was first argued by Jan Kott over a decade ago in Shakespeare Our Contemporary which categorically claims that Beckett and Brecht are closer to Shakespeare in spirit than any other playwrights in the intervening centuries. Kott accepts as a given that Shakespeare's vision of the world is similar to the absurdist's. While anyone studying Shakespeare and Beckett must
begin with Kott, I am not ready to accept the dark vision which invades Kott's understanding of Shakespeare and Beckett, a vision which allows him to dismiss Touchstone and Feste as "jeering and bitter" (163) and to ascribe desperation as the motivation for much of human endeavor.

John Russell Brown identifies a less bleak connection between Shakespeare and Beckett in his article, "Mr. Beckett's Shakespeare." Brown believes that in oversimplifying Shakespeare we reduce him to categories which are arbitrary and infertile. In writing of the connection between Shakespearean and Beckettian symbolism, for example, Brown explains:

We have been so schooled by the critics who hunt for 'significance' that Beckett's momentary symbolism may appear thoroughly un-Elizabethan, a kind of drama that Shakespeare could not have attempted. Yet occasionally, even these critics seem to recognize something in Shakespeare's plays that is very similar... Beckett can present men in relation to each other and at the same time suggest a symbolic pattern they do not wholly or consistently follow. This is a kind of dramatic illusion that Shakespeare might have discovered for himself. I believe he did, and that this accounts for divergent qualities that have been observed in his plays. (318, 319)

Martin Esslin also addresses the problem with our traditional understanding of Shakespeare when he writes in The Theater of the Absurd, "Most of us are too
familiar with Shakespeare to notice how rich his plays are in precisely the same type of inverted logical reasoning, false syllogism, free association, and the poetry of real or feigned madness that we find in the plays of Ionesco, Beckett, and Pinter." There is in Shakespeare, Esslin continues, "a very strong sense of the futility and absurdity of the human condition" (233-34). In an early and tentative article, "Beckett and Shakespeare," Ruby Cohn argues along similar lines when she identifies the "quest for being" that marks the Shakespeare-Beckett connection (230). We are just beginning to make the connections between William Shakespeare and Samuel Beckett, and this study attempts to demonstrate with reference to specific plays, the manner in which both authors use the fool to portray the tragicomic nature of life.

All of the fools under consideration in this study are artificial ones; that is, they have chosen folly as a response to life. In The Winter's Tale and Happy Days, Autolycus and Willie are tricksters whose existence mirrors the folly of Leontes and Winnie, respectively. "If Leontes is an imaginary cuckold," writes Northrop Frye "Autolycus, the thieving harbinger of spring, is something of an imaginative cuckoo" (333). Hence, Autolycus serves as a dramatic mirror for
the play's central folly which belongs to Leontes. Willie, who lies in a hole behind the mound in which his wife is buried up to her waist in Act I and up to her neck in Act II, utters only 52 words in *Happy Days*, yet each word reflects the concerns of his wife. Similarly, Autolycus' ballads, with their sharp interest in sexual perversity and marital folly, deepen our understanding of Leontes' misjudgment. The struggle to endure which is pivotal in *The Winter's Tale* and *Happy Days* is reflected in Willie who finally does come round to the front of the mound and Autolycus who promises to reform. They are like Winnie who sustains her hope for yet another happy day, and Leontes who changes from jealous tyrant to loving husband.

If Autolycus and Willie serve as mirrors to reflect the folly of the plot, in *King Lear* and *Waiting for Godot* the fool steps through the mirror to become an expiator. Yoked as they are to Lear and Pozzo, the Fool and Lucky are intimate partners in the folly of their masters. By drawing their master's suffering onto themselves, both fools are able to help their masters gain the insight which saves them from a blind death. The court fool has traditionally been associated with the ancient scapegoat ritual, and Beckett joins Shakespeare as he draws on the long tradition which
gives birth to Lucky.

Wylie Sypher explains the ritual origins of the scapegoat figure, who suffers for the collective sins of the community, in his essay, "The Meanings of Comedy". At the same time he clarifies the tragicomic nature of the scapegoat, who is symbol of life and death. Sypher writes:

Behind tragedy and comedy is a prehistoric death-and-resurrection ceremonial, the rite of killing the old year (the aged king) and bringing in the new season (the resurrection or initiation of the adolescent king). Associated with killing the old king was the ancient rite of purging the tribe by expelling a scapegoat on whose head were heaped the sins of the past year . . . At this public purging or catharsis the scapegoat was often the divine man or animal . . . to whom were transferred the sins and misfortunes of the worshippers. Eventually the divine character of the scapegoat was forgotten. (216)

Both Lear's Fool and Lucky are tied to old kings who must be purged if life is to continue rather than be snuffed out, and it is the fools who help facilitate the rebirth. Lear dies and Pozzo is reduced to a stumbling blind man, but Lear does admit his folly before his death and Pozzo continues his struggle for life even when all of his external props have been diminished.

With Hamlet and Endgame we encounter two fools, Hamlet and Hamm, who actively pursue folly as a means of dealing with very present pain. Polonius and Clov are the "allow'd fools" in these plays, yet Hamlet and Hamm
snatch at the fool's hat until it becomes their own. In taking the cap and bells from Polonius and Clov, Hamlet and Hamm erroneously believe they can return the costume at will; however, they do not understand the staying power of folly. "The fool will stay," Lear's Fool tells us, and the line reveals more than even the jester knows (2.4.77). We cannot just play at folly without in some way becoming that which we would seem to be. Joseph Grimaldi, one of the greatest English comics, addressed this issue in his farewell to the world of pantomime which he gave at the Drury Lane in 1828. Grimaldi said:

I cannot describe the pleasure I felt on once more assuming my cap and bells tonight— that dress in which I have so often been made happy in your applause; and as I stripped them off, I fancied that they seemed to cleave to me. (Towsen 159)

Folly does cleave to Hamlet and Hamm even when they believe they are done with it. Unlike Willie and Autolycus who reflect folly; unlike Lucky and Lear's Fool who expiate it, Hamlet and Hamm choose the role of fool in order to endure the diseased universe they inhabit. Their choice, however, has broader implications than they realize, and they become enmeshed in the fool's show. Yet even as they are implicated in their own fooling, their bauble turns away from the jesters and out toward the
rest of us.

Just as the fool often engages his bauble in word-play, so too he involves those around him in his rhetorical excursions. Ruby Cohn suggests that the verbal patterns of both Shakespeare and Beckett move from "studied rhetoric to garbled fragments" (203). It is in examining both the studied rhetoric and the garbled fragments that we move closer to the fool's vision.

That vision is not always immediately accessible to us because Shakespeare and Beckett engage their fools in word-play that wreaks havoc on our syntactical expectations. In Act III of Twelfth Night Viola asks Feste, "Art not thou the Lady Olivia's fool?" and Feste shoots back, "I am not her fool, but her corrupter of words" (3.1.26,34). The corruption of language which marks the fool is often a necessary tool to free us from rational expectations. Jan Kott argues, the "Fool knows that the only true madness is to regard this world as rational" (167); to avoid madness we must release ourselves from all expectations of rationality--linguistic or otherwise. We may be puzzled by the Fool's riddles in King Lear and Willie's terse cynicisms in Happy Days, and we have to accept the possibility that we may remain puzzled.

Shakespearean and Beckettian fools understand that
language is often misleading, and that even the seemingly clear communication is distorted somewhere between sender and receiver. Leontes' reaction to the Delphic oracle offers a striking representation of such distortion. Leontes has promised to heed the oracle's judgement on Hermione's innocence or guilt, yet when the oracle clears Hermione in the most straightforward language possible—"Hermione is chaste"—Leontes refuses to believe it. "There is no truth at all i' the oracle!" he shouts. "This is mere falsehood!" (3.2.131,135-35). If the fools rob us then, of our syntactical expectations, they are doing what we often do for ourselves. They use language for their own ends, strip it of predictable patterns, and force us to experience it in a new way. Moreover, because thought and words are so inextricably mixed, we are forced into viewing our existence differently. Mrs. Rooney asks Christy in Samuel Beckett's All that Fall "Do you find anything . . . bizarre about my way of speaking? (Pause)

I do not mean the voice. No, I mean the words. (Pause. More to herself.) I use none but the simplest words, I hope, and yet I sometimes find my way of speaking very bizarre" (13). Beckett's interest in the uses of rhetoric is as keen as Shakespeare's.

It has been wisely argued that all literary
analysis is rhetorical criticism because rhetoric in its broadest sense is synonymous with language; however, a specific definition may prove more satisfying. In the classical tradition rhetoric is the art of persuasion and in the modern tradition the definition extends to the art of using language in a way to produce a desired result in an audience (Woodson 50). The fools under discussion here all manipulate language to achieve a desired end; consequently, their language, which reflects the tragicomic nature of human nature, fits both the classical and modern definition of rhetoric.

It is Wylie Sypher’s essay on "The Meanings of Comedy" which identifies the links between comedy and tragedy. He acknowledges that the comic and tragic views of life do not exclude each other; moreover, he readily identifies the tragicomic elements in Shakespeare: a Falstaff who raises a "laugh at once brutal, loving and wise", "Hamlet’s disturbed laughter" (203). If we cannot isolate tragedy from comedy, Sypher argues, it is not "because tragedy and comedy are identical, but rather because comedy often intersects the orbit of tragic action without losing its autonomy . . . comedy, in its own right, boldly and illogically, lays claim to some of the values that traditionally are assigned to tragedy"
alone" (213). All of the plays under examination exist in the tragicomic realm where birth and death dwell alongside each other and laughter and tears are twin heartbeats.

Willie's nonresponsiveness in *Happy Days* causes Winnie great pain, yet his occasional words bring her joy; ultimately, it is the hope that her husband will come around to her side of the mound which sustains Winnie. And it is in the words and actions of Willie, the trickster, that we see Winnie's pain and joy, her life and death, reflected. Autolycus serves as a similar tragicomic mirror in *The Winter's Tale* where he is a distant mirror for Leontes' folly. Because the Beckettian stage by its very nature is more minimalist than the Shakespearean one, Willie serves as a proximate mirror while Autolycus serves as a distant one. At a far remove from Leontes' court, Autolycus' folly reflects the actions and words of the king whose rash behavior catapults his entire kingdom into a death-in-life existence. Autolycus will finally undergo a transformation which gives him a chance at new life, just as Leontes comes to realize the folly of his ways. Their paths never intersect, but the pastoral trickster and Leontes share the same tragicomic pattern of renewal.

Lear's Fool and Lucky are perhaps more tortured
representations of tragedy and comedy in their roles as scapegoats. Lucky serves Pozzo in much the same way Lear’s Fool serves his master, and both fools suffer as they do because they are yoked to crippled human beings who are largely blind to their own folly. Neither Lear nor Pozzo gains a Pauline epiphany, yet each master gains insight which is, at least momentarily, redemptive. It is the role of Lucky and Lear’s Fool to move through the mirror of folly until they embrace the suffering of their masters.

Perhaps the tragicomic nature of Shakespeare and Beckett is nowhere more apparent than in Hamlet and Endgame, for the plays represent diseased worlds whose infection threatens to pollute all life. Hamlet struggles to save himself, his mother, and his father’s kingdom from death. Not until he stares into the face of the fool Yorick’s skull and jumps into Ophelia’s grave is he reborn. Death and life are inextricably interwoven in this play just as they are in Endgame in which Hamm struggles to break free of his parents while simultaneously clutching at Clov for support. Like Hamlet, Hamm finally must be stripped of all external emotional props before he can come to terms with his own mortality.

The tragicomic mirroring in these three plays moves
closer and closer to center stage as we move from Happy Days and The Winter’s Tale to Hamlet and Endgame. Willie and Autolycus are background figures throughout most of their respective plays; consequently, their realm is on the dramatic periphery. Hamlet and Hamm, however, are center-stage fools whose actions dominate and control much of the dramatic movement. That a fool can dominate center stage is one of the clearest links between Shakespeare and Beckett.

The fool must come center stage. As we run out of alternate courses of action, we reach for the antic disposition to deal with the chaos around us. The turning to folly signals the endurance of the human spirit, because a turn to folly is a turn away from resignation. Faced with disease and death, Hamlet and Hamm fight back. Trapped in a world that demands their suffering subservience, Lear’s Fool fights to maintain the King’s sanity and Lucky will not allow himself to be snuffed out by Pozzo, or even Didi or Gogo. None of these fools heave a sigh of despair and sink into a welcome oblivion. They keep going. Hamm finishes his story.

These plays are not easy tales of endurance; consequently, the characters wade through the labyrinths of hell in order to gain what is at best a momentary release. But both Shakespeare and Beckett insist that the
movement toward life and insight is stronger than the one
toward despair and death. We do not know what will become
of Hamm tomorrow, for that is a question the play
does not ask. What we do know is that through folly,
Hamm, like the others, gains the strength to go on.
NOTES

1 Although the Armin text is largely anecdotal and humorous, it conveys a clear picture of the Renaissance notion of fools and folly. It is available in a more modern edition than the one I have used in this study. See Robert Armin’s Collected Works, J.P. Feather, ed. New York, London: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972.

2 The edition used throughout is the Kittredge Ginn volume. See bibliography.

3 The editions used for all of Beckett’s plays are the Grove Press volumes. See bibliography.

4 The Doran and Douce texts listed in the bibliography provide historical and dramatic anecdotes about court fools. Although such information does not bear directly on this study, it does help clarify the historical role of the fool.
WORKS CITED


A Sigh into a Looking Glass:
The Trickster as Mirror in The Winter's Tale and Happy Days

... nothing to break the silence of this place. Save possibly now and then, a sigh into my looking glass.

Winnie, Happy Days

As tricksters in The Winter's Tale and Happy Days, Autolycus and Willie serve as dramatic mirrors for the central folly of their respective plays. At a far remove from Leontes' court, Autolycus' words and actions dramatically reinforce our understanding of the disorder which infects Sicily. Unlike Hamlet, whose center-stage position allows him to purge his kingdom at the same time that he reflects its folly, Autolycus is consigned to the dramatic periphery. Willie, the trickster-husband in Happy Days, is more of a central presence than his counterpart, Autolycus, but he commands nothing like the dominant position of Hamm in Endgame. His words, all 52 of them, are a dramatic microcosm of his wife's concerns, and his existence is
vitaly important to Winnie; yet we sense his importance more than we dramatically experience his presence.
Samuel Beckett keeps Willie hidden behind his wife's mound in much the same way that Shakespeare secludes Autolycus in the hills of Bohemia. But, as I hope to demonstrate through an examination of the rhetoric and actions of Autolycus and Willie, even a hidden trickster can serve as a looking glass.

When Autolycus the trickster appears in William Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale, we have already experienced Leontes' folly. Leontes, the jealous king of Bohemia, had banished his wife, Hermione, and his best friend, Polixenes, the king of Sicily, from the Bohemian court sixteen years earlier. His erroneous belief that the two were having an affair resulted in a breach between Sicily and Bohemia, and in the ultimate banishment of Leontes' infant, Perdita, whom he believed to be the illegitimate result of his wife's adultery. Autolycus enters the play just as a sixteen year old Perdita, unaware of her royal blood, is discovered to be in love with the son of the Bohemian king, Polixenes. Autolycus romps his way into this Shakespearean romance just as the two young lovers are about to become the second-generation victims of Leontes' jealous folly. This trickster figure appears in only three of the
play's fifteen scenes, and he never even comes into contact with Leontes whose folly he ultimately mirrors.

Conversely, we are almost always aware of the presence of Willie, the trickster in Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*. As the play opens we see Winnie "imbedded up to her waist" in a mound of earth. Behind her in a hole lies her husband, Willie, "lying asleep on the ground, hidden by mound" (8). Our awareness of Willie's presence ebbs and flows throughout the play as he chooses to respond or ignore his wife's many questions and comments; yet Beckett never totally removes this trickster from our dramatic imagination.

To label Autolycus and Willie as tricksters is to assign them one of the earliest roles in the fooling tradition. Writing of fools and tricksters in a volume in honor of Enid Welsford, Paul V.A. Williams explains:

> . . . the fool and the trickster, far from having utterly separate identities, resemble each other to a marked degree . . . The curious thing is that the fool figure in . . . literature, the fool illuminated in medieval manuscripts, the folkloric fool, and the tribal trickster, if not exactly the same animal, all show signs of belonging to the same species. (*The Fool and the Trickster* 1)

Paul Radin accepts this parallel as a given as he describes the trickster as one who "is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself" (ix).
Although "laughter, humor, and irony permeate" everything the trickster does, it is difficult, Radin points out, "to say whether the audience is laughing at him, at the tricks he plays on others, or at the implications his behaviors and activities have for them" (x). The trickster has roots in American Indian mythology where his name means the "foolish one" (Kerenyi in Radin 174) and in Greek mythology which assigns Mercury as the patron of tricksters--"I was litter'd under Mercury, "Autolycus glibly tells us when we first meet him in the fourth act of The Winter's Tale (4.3.25). William Willeford accepts as a given that the trickster is a special mythological form of the fool, and Radin acknowledges that the trickster is "perpetuated in the figure of the medieval jester and has survived right up to the present day in the Punch-and-Judy plays and in the clown" (ix).

In discussing the trickster figure in her book, The Absolute Comic, Edith Kern locates him right at the tragicomic nexus which blends laughter and tears. As such, the trickster is pivotal to any discussion of the Shakespearean-Beckettian connection which is grounded in that region where tears and laughter are inextricably mixed. Kern writes:
Originating in that mythical stage of the human race and its subconscious, the trickster figure provides us, indeed, with insights that reach beyond life as we daily live it. By turning the world playfully upside down, by putting down the mighty from their seats... the trickster makes apparent the frailty of human existence and the proximity of laughter and tears. (190)

Kern's argument also rests on her belief, supported by Otto Rank and Freud, that the trickster acts as a double, part of a divided character, "each part of which is incompletely understood unless the two are combined into a unity" (190). Just so, Autolycus' folly in The Winter's Tale is a reflecting microcosm of Leontes' folly mirroring the irrational self-destruction that catapults both Leontes and those around him into a death-in-life existence. Similarly, Willie serves as a reflector of his wife, who imagines that life without her Willie would be monotonous drudgery. If Willie ever leaves her she believes there would be:

... nothing to break the silence of this place. (Pause) Save possibly, now and then, every now and then, a sigh into my looking glass. (21)

The trickster's parameters, as defined by both Radin and Kern, encompass the ambivalent realm of human existence where life is at once creative and destructive, whole and incomplete. Sometimes he is able, like us, to
balance on the fine line of absurdity and not fall into
the abyss, but at times, he is destroyed by those very
forces that he himself has set in motion. When Autolycus
glibly informs us that he is a "snapper-up of
unconsidered trifles," he is being engagingly honest
about his profession as a thief (4.3.25-6). He steals
those material possessions that people momentarily leave
"unconsidered." But this thievery makes him an
outsider to the very society he longs to re-enter. He
tells us that at one time he was a servant to Prince
Florizel, and at the play's end he has hopes of
returning to that service; but in the meantime, he hurts
himself as well as others by clinging to the life of a
thieving rogue.

Willie, in Happy Days shares in the trickster's
ambivalence. His existence alone makes him part
creator of his wife, Winnie, who cannot imagine life
without him, and she suffers his laconic replies and the
ever-present threat of violence because she believes she
would fail to exist without him. Yet Willie is
victimized, also. He apparently thinks of himself as a
"castrated male swine" who has been "reared for
slaughter," and he willingly returns to his wife's hand a
parasol which she has used only moments before to bash
him on the head (47). Willie, like Autolycus, is both
victim and victimizer, and both Beckett and Shakespeare use the trickster tradition to expose the ambivalent nature of existence which continually threatens to disorient us. Kerenyi writes, "Disorder belongs to the totality of life, and the spirit of this disorder is the trickster" (Radin 185).

The spirit of disorder invades the most basic human relationships in these plays, and the thematic interest in disordered and dysfunctional families is one of the clearest links between Shakespeare and Beckett. Hamlet struggles with his own disintegrating family structure; Hamm fights to be separate from his parents; Lear banishes his most beloved daughter; and Didi and Gogo are virtual orphans. In The Winter's Tale and Happy Days, we view two disintegrating marriages whose diseased state permeates all life around them.

Once Leontes levels his lethal accusations in the first act of The Winter's Tale, his wife is robbed of claim to motherhood and marriage. In an attempt to vindicate his judgment, he sends messengers to the Delphic oracle for confirmation of Hermione's guilt. The oracle, however, rather than confirming Leontes' suspicions, clears Hermione of any wrongdoing. In plain rhetoric we hear the oracle's words: "Hermione is chaste; Polixenes blameless . . . Leontes a jealous
tyrant" (3.2.2, 130-31). But the plain rhetoric does not find a credulous listener in Leontes, and he blurts out, "There is no truth at all i' th' oracle! . . . This is mere falsehood" (138-39). Immediately following this outburst a servant rushes in to announce that Mamilius, the young son of Hermione and Leontes, has just died from his overwrought anxiety at his mother's plight. Hermione swoons and is helped off stage by Paulina, her chief lady-in-waiting, and some other servants.

At this point, Hermione makes a decision that unites her with Samuel Beckett's Winnie. Hermione decides to let Leontes believe she has died from grief, and she retreats to Paulina's chapel to await the return of her banished daughter, because the oracle which cleared her of any guilt also proffered the hope that Perdita might one day be found. Her decision locks her into a death-in-life existence that will span an entire generation. She will remain dead to the world for a full sixteen years before she is reunited with her daughter and husband. In many ways, Happy Days is a dramatic projection of life inside of Paulina's chapel. Winnie in her mound is reduced to a sexless object much as Hermione has been robbed of all maternal and marital rights. Both women wait out their husbands' folly and neither one knows when, if ever, they will be called forth. Hermione
lives on the hope born in the oracle, and Winnie lives on the hope that she expresses to Willie: "That you'll come round and live this side where I could see you." Willie is sure such an action on Willie's part would make her a "different woman" (46). Winnie, like Hermione, bides her time, waiting for an external circumstance to liberate her. By choosing waiting as a response to the absurdity of life, Winnie is like her Shakespearean counterpart, Hermione, who feigns death, rather than face Leontes and a life without her daughter. Winnie, of course, is not feigning her death-like existence; for she is truly "caught" (38) in the earth. Still, her existence is a way of "signifying how death is constantly claiming us all" (Brustein 55).

Perhaps Hermione's preservation in the chapel is less dramatically repugnant than Winnie's earthbound confinement, but the years take their toll on both women. Hermione's wrinkles in the last scene of The Winter's Tale testify to the ravages of time. "Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing/ So aged as this seems," Leontes tells Paulina as he sees the statue of his supposedly dead wife (5.3.26-7). Shakespeare draws attention to Hermione's wrinkles just as Beckett draws attention to Winnie's aging body not so much
to highlight their age as to remind us of the years these women have wasted waiting.

Traditional theatrical interpretations of the statue scene in *The Winter's Tale* sometimes allow us to forget the horror story that is Hermione's. Assuredly, the final scene of the play in which Leontes' sees a statue of his "dead" wife transformed into a living Hermione is heart-rending, and the reunion of Hermione and her banished daughter, Perdita, moves all but the stoniest heart. But we should not be like the neoclassic director, Charles Kean, whose well-intentioned but wrongheaded attempts to transform Shakespeare's panoramic romance into a neat Grecian drame, allowed his audiences to remember only the touching reconciliation scene and to forget the sixteen anonymously painful years that precede it (Folger 24). Shakespeare clearly does not want us to lose sight of the length of time it takes to effect a rebirth, for he makes Time a character in the play, and the play suffers thematically when a given director, like John Kemble in the age of Romanticism, drops the lines assigned to Time's chorus at the beginning of Act IV (Bartholomeusz 42ff). In just over thirty lines, Time, portrayed by a dottering old man, rehearses what has transpired in the sixteen years since Leontes banished friend and wife and
daughter from his court. As with all his late romances, Shakespeare here dramatically underscores the importance of Time in working out the terrors of existence. Time, himself, announces at the beginning of his speech that he tries both "joy and terror" (4.1.1), and we are made to understand that the past sixteen years have had their share of both. The chorus does not dwell on the individual fate of any one character; rather it suggests that Leontes and his court and family have to suffer the passage of time before their terror can turn to joy.

Because there are no easy rebirths in life, there can be no easy rebirths in Shakespeare and Beckett. The assiduous rebirthing process is no less painful if one is buried alive in a chapel or a mound of earth. Our view of the rebirthing process in The Winter's Tale and in Happy Days differs radically, of course, because we assume, with Leontes, that Hermione is, in fact, dead; still with both women, we are ultimately aware of the pain that attends their reaching out for life.

As tricksters, Autolycus and Willie highlight and alleviate that pain. At the same time that their pathetic humanity draws us into their folly, their acerbic wit lances us just enough to keep us distant. We are like the Clown in the The Winter's Tale who has gotten close enough to Autolycus to know that there's not a "more
cowardly rogue in all of Bohemia," but yet understands that there is danger even in a coward (4.4.97). The Clown runs into Autolycus shortly after he has made his first appearance in the fourth act of the play, and Autolycus convinces the simpleton-Clown that he has been beaten and flayed alive by a conniving highwayman. "What manner of fellow was he that robb'd you?" queries the Clown, to which Autolycus mischievously replies:

A fellow, sir, that I have known to go about with troll-my-dames. I knew him once a servant of the Prince. I cannot tell, good sir, for which of his virtues it was, but he was certainly whipp'd out of the court . . . having flown over many knavish professions, he settled only in rogue. Some call him Autolycus. (4.4.81-4,93-4)

The Clown is blissfully ignorant that Autolycus is describing himself, and it is presumably not until the Clown realizes that his own pockets have been picked that he will know he has been in the company of the master thief. The trickster's duplicity has pulled the Clown into compassionate proximity at the same time that it has exacerbated the distance between the role of the trickster and the rest of society. It is in maintaining the dramatic tension between proximity and distance that Autolycus, the Shakespearean fool, and Willie, the Beckettian one fulfill their mirroring function.

Autolycus and Willie's mutual concern with the written word is yet another dramatic manifestation of
their mirroring functions. Autolycus has his printed ballads and Willie has his old newspaper, and they are both concerned with the veracity of the information contained in the printed medium; but Autolycus peddles his ballads at a far remove from Leontes' court. In many ways the ballads reflect the perverse sexual imagination that catapulted Sicily and Bohemia into a sixteen year breach, yet the jealous tyrant, Leontes, never hears them. Conversely, the lines Willie reads from his newspaper echo every concern of his wife's existence, and she is right there next to him as he reads his blurbs aloud. Willie is not like Autolycus, who is at a far remove from the folly he mirrors; he is never more than a mound of earth away from Winnie, and even his emotional absence throughout most of Act II is a center-stage absence; Winnie's remarks constantly remind us of his presence.

Autolycus' ballads are indeed like Willie's newspaper in that they reflect some of the central concerns of the play, and they also bring into the pastoral fourth act of The Winter's Tale a tragicomic reminder of the outcome of sexual perversity. Autolycus comes peddling his ballads at the sheep-shearing festival which is hosted by the Old Shepherd who has acted as Perdita's father ever since he discovered her as an
abandoned infant on the seashore sixteen years earlier. Perdita is serving as hostess to the festivities and has been pronounced the "queen of curds and cream" by one of her admiring guests (4.4.160). Her young lover, Florizel has disguised himself as Doricles, a rustic, in order not to reveal the royal heritage which would keep him from Perdita. The sheep-shearing festival is in full, festive swing when a servant comes running in to tell the Old Shepherd:

O master! if you did but hear the pedlar at the door, you would never dance again after a tabor and pipe; no, the bagpipe could not move you! He sings several tunes faster than you'll tell money; he utters them as he had eaten ballads, and all men's ears grow to his tunes. (4.4.180-86)

And the Clown, once again about to be duped by Autolycus, cheerily announces:

He could never come better. He shall come in. I love a merry ballad but even too well, if it be doleful matter merrily set down, or a very pleasant thing indeed and sung lamentably. (4.4.187-190)

In Autolycus' subsequent performance, he provides both types of ballads, and they allow him to make the clown his prey for the second time. Autolycus has come selling printed ballads in order to make money, but his primary motivation is to divert the festival crowd's attention long enough to pick every available pocket. After he has
cleaned out the lot of them, Autolycus positively gloats as he tells us:

Ha! Ha! what a fool honesty is! and Trust his sworn brother, a very simple gentleman. I saw whose purse was best in picture; and what I saw, to my good use I rememb'rd. . I pick'd and cut most of the festival purses. (4.4.585ff)

The ballads with which he diverts people's attention are fairly crass, and as such they reflect the disembodied and perverse sexuality which is one of the marks of a trickster. One recounts the tale of a "usurer's wife who was brought to bed of twenty money bags at a burden, and how she long'd to eat adder's heads, and toads carbonado'd." Another records the plight of a woman who scorned her lover's advances and was subsequently turned into "a fish that appeared upon the coast on Wednesday the fourscore of April, forty thousand fathom above water." Still another captures the tale of "two maids wooing a man" (4.4.253ff.).

All of the ballads refer to some type of bizarre activity, thereby reminding us of Leontes' earlier interest in Hermione's supposed sexual dalliance with Polixenes. None of Autolycus' ballads tells a story more far-fetched than the one that was precipitated upon Leontes' own sexual imagination which allowed him to place his wife in bed with his best friend.
But it is not just the sexual perversity of Autolycus' ballads which remind us of Leontes' folly; it is Autolycus' insistence that every word of his ballads is true. Like Leontes, who earlier insisted that his view of Hermione was the right one, even in the face of a Delphic oracle which declared her chaste, Autolycus proclaims to his festival audience that his tales are "very true" (4.4.257). After the recital of two separate ballads, Autolycus is asked, "Is it true, think you?" (4.4.274) and each time he replies with convincing candor. To the first query about a ballad's veracity, he says:

Here's the midwife's name to't, one Mistress Taleporter, and five or six honest wives that were present. Why should I carry lies abroad? (4.4.260-62)

To the second inquiry he replies: "Five justices' hands at it, and witnesses more than my pack will hold" (4.4.275). His audience is willing to believe his tales, because they want to, and he is able to play on their willing imaginations. Their susceptibility in the light of his duping trickery casts a somewhat sinister light on the festivities, and in a limited way, his trickery foreshadows the rupture that will shortly occur when Polixenes, who has visited the festival in disguise, discovers that his son is cavorting with a shepherd's daughter. Certainly, Autolycus' tales are lighthearted
and comical, but there is an edge to their comedy which makes them a tragicomic microcosm of the broader concerns of the play.

Autolycus is sometimes dismissed as a non-integral part of The Winter’s Tale, and indeed his part has often been cut and altered until it bears little resemblance to Shakespeare’s creation; but this role well-played reinforces the thematic concerns of the play. In speaking of the late romances, Northrop Frye sounds a cautionary note that is well-taken here:

If we find in Shakespeare a passage of dialogue which seems pure blither, stuck in to fill up some spare time, we should congratulate ourselves, because that is likely to be where some of the deepest and most central themes of the play are to be found. (Frye "Something Rich and Strange")

Thus, Autolycus’ movement from creator to destroyer to creator again follows his trickster heritage at the same time that it reflects Leontes’ pattern of development. Before we ever lay eyes on Leontes, we hear Camillo tell Archidamus:

Sicilia cannot show himself over-kind to Bohemia. They were train’d together in their childhoods; and there rooted betwixt them such an affection which cannot choose but branch now. (1.1.16-17)

Archidamus’ response to Camillo’s praise of the affection between the two kings, although it will later sound like an ironic foreshadowing, only appears to affirm Camillo’s
appraisal of the special bond between Sicily and Bohemia. Archidamus says: "I think there is not in the world either malice or matter to alter it" (1.1.29-30).

This deep bond of affection between the two kings is a central feature in Robert Greene's Pandosto, which is Shakespeare's source for this play. Shakespeare's decision to stress, as does Greene, the affection between the two kings underscores Leontes' essential good nature. There is no doubt that Polixenes has been royally entertained at the court of Leontes and Hermione, and his stay has only been marred by its impending end. Leontes' hospitality toward Polixenes is not like Macbeth's to Duncan's, sinister and deadly. There is great love between these two men; consequently, when Leontes stabs at the friendship with his jealous imagination, he is ruining a jewel of great value.

Leontes' foolish jealousy has no justification in reality at all. His listing of the sexual misdemeanors he supposedly sees—"leaning cheek to cheek," "kissing with inside lip," "horsing foot on foot,"—is nothing more than a rhetorical indication of his psychological frenzy (1.2.285ff). The Bohemian king in Pandosto has ample cause for jealousy; his wife spends long solitary hours with his boyhood friend and even visits him in his bedroom. It would take a cold-blooded fish to remain
unruffled by such familiarity; but Shakespeare's king has no such justification for his folly. He simply gives in to human emotion and destroys the harmonious household he has created.

Autolycus' romping first appearance in the fourth act of the play bears a resemblance to the first mention of Leontes. It is filled with affirmation and life and fecundity. This trickster-rogue bursts on to the stage with his light-hearted song:

When daffodils begin to peer
With heigh! the doxy over the dale--
Why, then comes in the sweet o' the year,
For the red blood reigns in the winter's pale.

(4.3.1-4)

Even after he admits he is a "snapper-up of unconsidered trifles," his zest for life bounds out of every pore, and we are as warmed by his exuberance as we were by the recounting of the warm bonds between Polixenes and Leontes.

Yet within minutes of his first appearance, Autolycus, like Leontes before him, throws himself into a feigned, near-death state. He grovels on the ground in front of the approaching Clown and moans: "O, that ever I was born . . . O, help me. help me! Pluck but off these rags; and then death, death!" (4.3.48,50). On a simple level, he has chosen a role of folly as Leontes did earlier by giving in to his emotions. The Clown
is as taken aback by this apparent madman as Hermione and Polixenes are stunned by Leontes' sudden venom in Act I. It will immediately be argued, of course, that Leontes cannot control the "paroxysm of jealousy" which overwhelms him; G.L. Kittredge, for example, maintains that the very perplexity of Hermione and Polixenes indicates that Leontes' "jealous fury is virtually a fit of madness" (Kittredge 1513). Yet Kittredge's plea of temporary insanity does not square with the text; for when Polixenes and Hermione question Leontes about his seeming anger, his response is as cognitive as it is volitional:

No, in good earnest.
How sometimes nature will betray its folly,
Its tenderness, and make itself a pastime
To harder bosoms! Looking on the lines
Of my boy's face, methoughts I did recoil
Twenty-three years, and saw myself unbreeched,
In my green velvet coat, my dagger muzzled,
Lest it should bite its master and so prove
(As ornaments oft do) too dangerous.
How like, methought, I then was to this kernel,
This squash, this gentleman. Mine honest friend/
Will you take eggs for money?
(1.2.150-60)

Not only is Leontes questioning the legitimacy of his own son, regretting his lost innocence, and denying his jealousy; he is also being willfully self-destructive. He knows that the muzzled dagger of his youth is now unmuzzled and it is hurting him. Yet he chooses to wade into the quagmire of his jealousy until he is over his
head in an emotion that could hiss him to his grave. Leontes is at the crossroads here, and he chooses the path of folly.

Of course, Leontes is under the sway of a powerful emotion, and it would be wrongheaded to assume that his overstepping the bounds of reason is a purely volitional act. It is equally wrongheaded, however, to absolve him of any cognitive guilt by stressing the overwhelming paroxysm of jealousy which seize him. He is caught, like many another tragicomic figure, at an existential crossroads, and again, like many others, he makes a choice that will have devastating consequences. His choice may be clouded by an overwhelming emotion, but it is his choice, nonetheless. To rob Leontes of his own free will is to make of him a pawn, which is far from Shakespeare's intent. Leontes will ultimately undergo sixteen, long years of penance for his mistake. In Act V Cleomenes pleads with the repenting King:

Sir, you have done enough, and have perform'd A saintlike sorrow. No fault could you make Which you have not redeem'd; indeed, paid down More penitence than done trespass. At the last Do as the heavens have done; forget your evil; With them, forgive yourself. (5.1.1-5)

But Leontes cannot forgive himself because he understands better than anyone the wrong he has done. Thus, he replies to Cleomenes:
Whilst I remember
Her and her virtues, I cannot forget
My blemishes in them, and so still think of
The wrong I did myself; which was so much
That heirless it hath made my kingdom and
Destroyed the sweet’st companion that e’er man
Bred his hopes out of. (5.1.6-12)

Leontes is willing to admit that he made a wrong choice
by twisting appearance until it fit the tortured reality he
fashioned for himself.

Autolycus’ actions mirror this same ability to
manipulate appearances, and Lee Cox argues that his
constant swapping of clothes with other people is
central in this regard (288 ff.), but her analysis does
not go far enough in its attempt to pinpoint Autolycus’
role in the ever present Renaissance concern with
seeming vs. being. This rogue captures in his ballad-
singing soul the dichotomy that obsesses the Renaissance.

At first glance, he is just what he appears to be—a lighthearted trickster out to steal other people’s
money, and we don’t believe we need to waste much time
on him. Like Thomas More’s citizens of Utopia, who view
the visiting Anemolianes as "some of the ambassadours
fooles," we are momentarily led astray by his outward
appearance (More 182). But if we attend to his words
and actions, we realize he is not merely a prank-loving
gamester; he is a fearful fellow who feels as vulnerable
and alone as Didi and Gogo. He has fallen from royal
service ("I have serv'd Prince Florizel and in my time wore three pile, but now am out of service" 4.3.14), and he feels the effects of his dismissal. He may be related to the cony-catchers that Robert Greene catalogs in his Renaissance treatise *A Notable Discovery of Cozenage*, but Shakespeare is not attempting here to give us a picture of the Elizabethan underworld. Merritt Hughes does not see any inherent social criticism in Autolycus. In his article, "A Classical vs. A Social Approach to Autolycus," he takes to task the critics, Samuel Taylor Coleridge among them, who insist on viewing Autolycus as a symbol of a corrupt society which could produce such a vagabond. For Hughes, Autolycus is a "tragicomic rogue" (Hughes 225), and any attempt to turn him into a social commentary is wrongheaded. He is not one of the street kids from *West Side Story* who wail to Officer Krupke that they are misunderstood and in need of social programming. He could choose to be other than he is, as his later conduct shows, but when we first meet him, he is a trickster.

But then, just like his royal counterpart, he assumes a self-destructive stance; for when the Clown asks Autolycus, "What manner of fellow was he that robb'd you?" he answers with words I have cited earlier in a different context:
A fellow, sir, that I have known go about with troll-my-dames. I knew him once a servant of the Prince. I cannot tell, good sir, for which of his virtues it was, but he was certainly whipp’d out of the court. (4.4.80-84)

The parallel to Leontes continues beyond this seeming mutual self-destruction into Autolycus’ actual thievery. Right after he dissembles to the clown, he robs him of his money. Just so, Leontes misleads Polixenes and Hermione and then robs each of them of their rightful place. Hermione loses rank as wife and mother, and Polixenes loses his position as loyal friend and is forced to flee for his life. Leontes’ dissembling theft robs his wife and friend of their emotional and social security in much the same way that Autolycus robs the Clown of his marketing money.

This fourth act reenactment of Leontes’ first act folly dramatically reinforces our understanding of the play’s concern with the difference between what is and what seems to be—between Hermione’s innocence and her husband’s belief in her infidelity. Autolycus does appear, after all, in the lovely country of Bohemia when the sheep-shearing festival is getting under way, and we are likely to be swept up in the same unreality which allows Florizel and Perdita to believe their love will blossom undeterred by the press of the real world. Into this idyllic scene, which parallels the
earlier idyllic scene which Camillo and Archidamus discuss as the play opens, steps Autolycus who seems to augment the festivity but in reality undercuts it. He is like the Beckettian fool who will not let us forget that the abyss yawns in front of us.

Autolycus also mirrors Leontes' final transformation from sinner to faithful penitent. The King's penance lasts for sixteen years before he is ready to respond to Paulina's command, "It is required you do awake your faith" (5.3.95). He prays and suffers through an entire generation of guilt, before his redemption can occur, and it takes a stone heart not to be moved when his penance leads him to the embrace of his forgiving wife. In the scene immediately preceding the final one, Autolycus has undergone a similar transformation. It has not taken him a generation to achieve it, and we have no real evidence that it will be long-lived, but he verbally agrees to become a changed man to the extent that he is able. When the clown promises to try to gain royal favor for Autolycus, he assures the rogue that he will swear to his bravery in front of the Prince, if only Autolycus will promise to live up to the clown's word. Autolycus makes a simple statement of faith to the Clown, "I will prove so, sir, to my power" (5.2.158), and that is the last we see of him.
Although this interpretation gives major emphasis to Autolycus' final line, both the text and the performance history of this play support such a reading. After Polixenes invades the sheep-shearing festival, his son, Florizel and Perdita, flee for safety to Leontes' court. Autolycus is instrumental in bringing the Old Shepherd and the Clown aboard the young lovers' ship so that they can reveal the mysterious circumstances surrounding Perdita's discovery on their seashore sixteen years earlier. In addition, Autolycus is genuinely interested in the subsequent reunion of Polixenes and Leontes which occurs when Polixenes arrives at Leontes' court in breathless pursuit of his recalcitrant son, Florizel. When the final knot is unravelled and Perdita's true identity is learned, the Old Shepherd and the Clown are advanced to royal favor, and poor Autolycus feels very left out. We have to feel sorry for the fellow who at one point seemed so in charge of his destiny that he could pretend to kill himself. He is feeling vulnerable and alone and turns for support to those very people he has earlier robbed. He is more than willing to be brave rather than fearful, honest rather than thieving, if it will put him back in the graces of the prince.

There have been some performances of this play in
which Autolycus robs the Clown and the Shepherd in his final encounter with them, and such an action would seem to undercut the theory that he is transformed. But those very productions which keep him a rogue to the end are those in which his role has been so minimalized and adapted that it bears little resemblance to Shakespeare's original creation. His role is cut until it becomes little more than a frolicking diversion to the rest of the play, and some adaptations of the play give to Dion, one of the Sicilian lords, Autolycus' lines in the second scene of Act V. Autolycus speaks these lines to a gentleman with whom he is discussing the reunion of Leontes, Polixenes, Perdita, and Florizel. "Beseech you sir, were you present at this relation?" Autolycus asks his companion (5.2.1). After the gentleman retells a portion of the reunion tale, Autolycus pushes him further with, "I would most gladly know the issue of it" (5.2.7). The lines cannot be assigned to Dion without doing serious damage to Autolycus' role, because they reveal his heartfelt interest in the outcome of the meeting between Polixenes and Leontes. The adaptations which minimize Autolycus also omit his final line, "I will prove so, sir, to my power." He cannot say the line and then steal from his companions because the line signifies a true
change of heart which will allow no further dissembling. In Autolycus then, we see a brief, concentrated movement from trickster-rogue to transformed courtier. At the play's end he will be able to resume his former role of courtier, just as Leontes will resume his former role of loving friend and husband.

Like Leontes, Autolycus' final transformation is effected by circumstances beyond his control. Autolycus boards the ship ready to reveal everything to Florizel—the trickster wants to expose the duplicity of the Old Shepherd and his son. But Autolycus is denied this victory for a reason that Shakespeare does not make clear. All we know is that at one point Autolycus seems to have all the cards in his hand, then they are inexplicably taken from him. He must rely on others to help him live a changed life. Autolycus' good intentions would amount to little at the end were it not for the gracious intercession of the Old Shepherd and his son. Just so, Leontes' sixteen years of pain and guilt and penance could not have effected Hermione's rebirth were it not for Paulina. Certainly, Autolycus and Leontes are transformed because they want to be, but in each case there must be a human agent to facilitate the change.
The transformations in Happy Days are not as clear cut nor as definitive as those in The Winter's Tale, and Willie's role as the trickster who simultaneously creates and destroys is more complex. The harsh terrain which encompasses Willie is at a far remove from the kind expanse of the Bohemian hills through which Autolycus romps. In writing of Happy Days in her book, Back to Beckett, Ruby Cohn explains:

The text is largely spoken by a partly buried woman, under a blazing sun. The Image is immediately arresting, but its cruelty only slowly etches itself upon our consciousness, as our eyes begin to ache in the unrelieved brightness, as we learn that this sun never sets, as we watch it victimize Winnie. (178)

Although more complex than Autolycus' role, Willie's function in the midst of the physical drought of the terrain and the emotional drought of his wife, is much like Autolycus' role in the midst of Leontes' furious folly and long penitence--Willie serves as a gauge, a dramatic mirror for Winnie's emotional sterility and perseverance. Because this Beckettian terrain is a shrunk, scorched one, Willie's mirroring function is not accomplished through wide, expansive movement; rather it is through Willie's limited language that we get a clear sense of Winnie in this play.

Willie speaks only nineteen times throughout
Happy Days, for a total of 52 words; and over half of those (28) are read from his old newspaper. We get a clear indication that all of this is old news, just as the story of Leontes and Hermione is an old tale. Only three of his responses are voluntary comments while a full eleven are answers to questions posed to him by his wife. It is ironic that the word he says most often is yes—a word normally associated with affirmation. But in Willie’s mouth the word becomes more like a bullet than an affirmation as he lives out the fool’s role of being a corruporter of words.

The great attention Samuel Beckett pays to Willie’s words when he directs Happy Days is an indication of the importance he attaches to them. In his notebook for the 1975 Old Vic production of Happy Days, for example, Beckett has extensive notes about the difference between the voice Willie uses to read the words from the newspaper and the voice he uses for his other words. The words read from the newspaper, according to the author, are to sound markedly different in tone than Willie’s other verbal contributions (MS 1202).

While Willie’s language patterns are a fascinating rhetorical study in themselves, they are most intriguing in terms of the relationship between husband and wife. We get a sense throughout this play,
perhaps as we do with Albee's George and Martha, that there are rules established here that we know nothing about; and that husband and wife are fighting a war in which we have no stakes. Willie's words are his arms in that battle.

As linguistic bullets and arms, Willie's words are the metaphors for the physical weapon, a revolver, that is present throughout this play. About one-quarter of the way into Act I, Winnie begins to rummage through her purse and Beckett's stage directions tell us that she "brings out revolver, holds it up, kisses it rapidly, puts it back" (13). At this early point in the play, all we get is the unsettling vision of a woman fondling a gun. But as the play progresses, and we sense the potential violence that marks Willie and Winnie's marriage, the gun becomes a much more dominant symbol. The second time Winnie rummages in her bag to produce the revolver, she spends more time with it. In disgust she looks at the revolver and says:

You again!(. . .brings revolver front
contemplates it. She weighs it in her
palm.) You'd think the weight of this thing
would bring it down among the . . .last
rounds. But no. It doesn't. ever uppermost.
Like Browning. (pause) Brownie. . .(turning
a little toward Willie.) Remember Brownie,
Willie? Remember how you used to keep on at
me to take it away from you? Take it away
Winnie take it away, before I put myself
out of my misery. (33)

With these words the gun inserts itself between man and wife in a tangible way. We learn of its history, and of Willie's violent threats. The last mention of the gun in Act I comes near the end of the act as Winnie is tidying up for the day. She carefully puts all her material possesions back in her bag, and she begins to do the same with the revolver. Instead, she changes her mind and lays the revolver on the mound to her right where it will remain throughout the rest of the play—a stark symbol of the destruction that is one thread of Willie and Winnie's existence. By keeping the gun visible and within reach, Winnie is able to remind herself that she still has choices.

This self-destructive element of human existence is omnipresent in Beckett's work. In writing of Beckett's thematic concern with death in her book, *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut*, Ruby Cohn states:

Beckett's first hero, the poet Belacqua Shuah, dies quietly enough on the operating table. His second hero, Murphy, is in a rocking trance when he is burned to death in his garret retreat. . . . In living we slowly kill ourselves; however agonizing, however farcical, life kills time. It is a cruelly comic Beckett paradox: While we live, we die; we must compose, while we decompose. (284)
It is in Willie's laconic responses to his wife that we become aware of just how indigenous is the death-in-life conundrum to Beckett's world.

Before we ever hear a word from Willie, the major themes of the play are before us. We've listened to Winnie long enough to understand her concern with sexuality, religion, youth, and the nature of existence. All of Willie's 52 words echo some concern of Winnie's, for he never offers a thought that is not somehow precipitated by one of her concerns or comments.

Take, for example, his very first line in the play which he reads from a newspaper that is so old it is yellow:

"His Grace and Most Reverend Father in God Dr Carolus Hunter dead in tub." (53)

There can be few images of organized religion more irreverent and repugnant than the image of an over-titled cleric dead and naked in a bathtub. All the unctuous bombast and meaningless patter that comes from such a cleric in life is reduced to pathetic irony in a bathtub. And that pathetic irony has been obvious in Winnie's speech long before we ever hear from Willie that one more symbol of religion is dead. After all, Winnie's first waking dramatic action is praying. We see her inaudible motions of prayer, and then we hear, "For Jesus Christ's
sake Amen . . . World without end Amen" (8). The efficacy of such prayer is brought into question by the woman’s earthbound plight, and we know immediately that the kind of religion that proffers such prayer has not done much good for Winnie. Decaying or dead religious artifacts are a central concern of Beckett in this play, and Willie’s first line is indicative of the concern.

Religion is one of Winnie’s emotional underpinnings, but it has done nothing for her. There is even more than a hint that her stunted sexuality stems, in part, from an early abusive experience with the man she affectionately refers to as "Charlie Hunter"(15) but whom Willie calls, "The Reverend Dr. Carolus Hunter". In thinking of this symbol of religion Winnie muses: "Ah yes. . .then... beechen green. . .this. . .Charlie. . .kisses... deep trouble for the mind" (51). Winnie’s pathetic insistence, "prayers perhaps not for naught"(12), is never very convincing, because we know that all she can really do is try to find the silver lining in the clouds that surround her; religion is one of the tried-and-true tools she uses to locate the silver lining. And she really is fairly adept at naming her many mercies. It is just that her husband highlights and undercuts her genuine attempts to accept her lot in life by revealing religion in its most abysmal absurdity.
The decayed rhetoric of Willie's yellow newspaper also gives him a chance to poke fun at Winnie's obsession with her own youth. As he apparently reads from the classified ads, Willie blurts out "Opening for smart youth,"(16) and later, "Wanted bright boy"(17). Both classifieds could have been placed by Winnie in her own youth, or sadly enough, they could be the requests of her emotionally sterile adult years. We always get from Winnie the sense that her youth was too fleeting and unfulfilled, and once it was cut short by Willie's proposal, she never regained her emotional potential. All of her attention to her physical state dramatically accentuates her concern with the decaying body. As a matter of fact, one is left wondering if it is not her physical state that concerns her more than her emotional one. Her teeth, her hair, her bosom, her lips--all are sources of real concern for Winnie because they evidence her age. Her description of the Cooker/Shower couple, who are the last living people to have passed her way, includes the observation: "Getting on. . . in life. No longer young, not yet old"( 58). In speaking of the natural laws, she tells her husband: "All I can say is for my part is that for me they are not what they were when I was young and. . . foolish and. . . beautiful" (34). She associates the fullness of youth with folly (her remark
incidentally marks the only instance when any form of the word fool is used in the entire play), and as much as she regrets her lost potential, she dreads any sign of recurring life. Like Emily Dickinson who writes, "I dreaded that first robin so," we have a Winnie who says "What a blessing nothing grows." She sacrificed her youth for foolish reasons, and any real genuine signs of growth now are simply painful reminders of her lost potential. Willie's laconic recitation of two classified ads which stress the need for youth intensifies the dramatic effect of Winnie's own obsessive concern with her lost innocence.

In what is perhaps his most humorous line, Willie responds to Winnie's dilemma about what to call the hairs on one's head. She is insistent that he answer her: "The hair on your head, Willie, what would you say of the hair on your head, them or it?" Willie replies with one word: "It" (23). His baldness makes both her question and his response reductively silly, but his answer is coldly indicative of the existence between these two people. There is probably no more impersonal word in the English language than our third person, singular, neuter pronoun, "it." Willie's response to the specific question about hair points to more than just Winnie's query. It is a microcosm of life around the mound. Winnie has been
reduced to a sexless object. Her husband is little more than a relic of ages past, and we have to look long and hard to see any signs of life. This impersonal pronoun captures the neutral nothingness which characterizes the relationship between husband and wife.

Autolycus abounds with verbal nonsense and we may lose his drift because we are not fast enough to catch the facile fecundity of his wit, but Willie’s guttural responses are seldom difficult to follow. They land on our ears with deadening predictability. It is Winnie’s preoccupation with objects that Willie reflects here, too. Her handbag is filled with stuff—a toothbrush, a gun, lipstick, a mirror—all of which are objects that she clings to for meaning. Willie’s reductive use of the word it simultaneously mirrors his wife’s reduction to the status of an object as well as her own concern with objects. When natural laws change, and youth slips away, and religion decays, we are left with mere materiality to allay our fear of existential chaos. Willie speaks volumes in one word. "It."

Many natural laws have changed for Winnie, and the primary manifestation of that change is her own diminished sexual attractiveness. She wishes she were the golden haired, blue-eyed lass who received her first kiss in a toolshed, yet such a dream is beyond her
grasp; and she settles for the occasional sexual allusion and sexual compliment to sustain her sense of herself as a sexual being. Three of Willie's responses rhetorically echo Winnie's frozen sexuality. "Eggs"(30), "Formication"(30), and "Sucked up"(34).

Winnie becomes momentarily fascinated with an ant crawling around in front of her, and she notices he is carrying a little white ball in its arms. Her husband, with customary terseness, simply says, "Eggs." The word with its reproductive echoes underscores Winnie's own sterility. Even an ant, an emmet, is more vital than she is. But Willie is not done with his lacerative fooling yet, for he quickly adds, "Formication." That the word sounds almost exactly like fornication is evidence enough that Willie is bringing the sexuality issue dead center. But the irony is heightened by the word's literal meaning which is the spontaneous sensation of insects like ants running over the skin. In other words, Winnie may just be imagining the entire incident.

Winnie's laughing response to her husband's comment is precipitated on her assumption that he is making a sexual remark, but then it dawns on her that perhaps they are laughing at two separate things. She consoles herself with the thought, ". . . well, what does it matter?"(31). It matters a great deal to her though,
because she wants to believe that she and Willie still have the ability to share a joke, one that implicates the "Almighty" (31) no less. Yet she fears such is not the case. When she subsequently asks Willie if he ever has the feeling of being "sucked up," his response is almost cruelly pointed. "Sucked up?" (34) he says with just the amount of sexual derision to drive his point home. There can be only perverted hints of sexuality between these two people, and while the wife leaps at any suggestion of shared sexual understanding, the husband dashes such suggestions. The entire episode with the ants and Willie's response to it, coupled with his derisive response to Winnie's question about being sucked up, draws our attention to Winnie's very real concern with her sexuality.

In writing to James Knowlson of her experience playing the role of Winnie, Beatrice Manley Blau remembers:

I realized it is Winnie who fervently remembers and misses the physical life. Willie looks at dirty pictures. Winnie has put away her memory of sexual intercourse as firmly as the dream and when that memory snakes its way back into her mind, it's devastating. (Reading MS 1227/1/2/13)
It is important to her that Mr. Cooker/Shower notices her bosom wasn't a bad one in its day. She wants Willie to remember that he was physically attracted to her once. She makes every available effort to keep herself looking attractive, even though she knows she's fighting a losing battle. We know all of these concerns are fairly pathetic, and we are as sure as we are of anything that her attractiveness to Willie diminished soon after their marriage; but Willie's comments focus our attention on his own almost pornographic interest in matters sexual. That pornographic interest throws his wife's sexual emptiness into dramatic relief. And when he finally solves the toothbrush riddle with "castrated male swine. Reared for slaughter," (47) the sexual line between them is further demarcated. Willie's own sexuality, we are to believe, has been diminished and thwarted by a castrating female, who now is fighting to maintain some sexual identity of her own.

In directing Happy Days Beckett has Winnie feel for the magnifying glass in order to clearly see the pornographic postcard her husband gives her. She never takes her eyes from the card, as she feels around on the mound for the glass which will enlarge the picture. The direction intensifies our experience of Winnie's sexual longing.
Perhaps it is Willie’s repeated line "Fear no more" (36) that best captures the feeble thread which binds Winnie’s existence. His response is supposedly only his answer to her testy questioning of his ability to hear her, yet the nasty urgency of his reply almost catapults the very fear she is to avoid in front of her face. Beckett’s stage directions indicate that the first time Willie repeats "Fear no more" he is irritated, and the second time he is violent. He practically spits out the words that are supposed to be reassuring, "Fear no more." His violence is a forceful reminder that all is not well, and Winnie has many things to fear, not the least of which is her agitated husband. Like the abusive parent who simultaneously proffers love and welts, Willie’s tone belies his content.

Both Ruby Cohn and Stanley Gontarski draw attention to the literary source of the phrase, "Fear no more." It is, in Gontarski’s words, "from Shakespeare's romance, Cymbeline, part of a funeral dirge sung by Imogen’s lost brothers who believe Imogen is dead." Gontarski argues that although it has a happy ending, the "bulk of Cymbeline recounts a love frustrated by sinister forces" (67). His emphasis here is wrong, however, for it casts an unequivocally negative pall over the phrase as well as the whole exchange between husband and wife. True,
Cymbeline is a tale of frustrated love, but like The Winter's Tale, it is one of Shakespeare's late romances; and like all of the late romances Cymbeline dwells on a love tested, tried, and triumphant. It is resurrected love that wins the day in the late romances, not negation—-and that thought should inform our reading of the "Fear no more" exchange—-the "audibility exchange" as Beckett labels it—-between Winnie and Willie, as well as our reading of the entire play. It is, indeed, the potential love in the midst of sinister forces which is evident in Willie's final coming round which occurs just as Winnie finishes her story.

"In Act I Winnie has many escapes," Beckett tells us. "In Act II the only escape mechanism is her story" (Reading MS 1202 p.26); as such it gives her the ability to endure which is so essential in the Beckettian as well as the Shakespearean universe. Just as her husband's words reflect each of her concerns, Winnie's story is a mirror in itself as it captures all of the tensions of her simultaneous desperation and endurance. The abandonment Winnie experienced as a child is repeated in Willie's emotional withdrawal. In the midst of a sexual trauma as a girl of four or five, Winnie tells us, she "began to scream—-and screamed, and screamed—-screamed and screamed and screamed and
screamed till all came running" (59) Alone and terrified in the dark, she had to endure her solitary fear until her family responded to her continued screaming. Even as a child, her emotional needs were not adequately met, for she tells us that by the time her family arrived, it was "Too late" "Too late"(59). Right after she makes this admission, she softly calls "Willie", but he does not respond.

Within the story itself the doll becomes an inanimate representation of Winnie. The doll wears a hat and a necklace; she even has "undies" "a complete set" (55)---Thus, the answer to Mr. Cooker/Shower's question: "Has she anything on underneath?" (58). Her eyes even open and shut in much the same way that we see Winnie's operate as she prays or wakes up. But when Winnie is traumatized in the night as a child, she drops her beloved doll; thus, the doll suffers the same fate as the person she represents. She is abandoned.

Although Willie does not immediately respond when Winnie calls to him at the close of her story, he does ultimately come around to her side of the mound and name her. He calls her "Win"(64). The name is as affectionate as it is baffling, for it can clearly indicate that she has won by virtue of his finally coming round. It can indicate that he has won his own battle against inertia
and purposeless movement; after all, he has finally managed to do something beside crawl in and out of his hole. But I think, more importantly, this final word is an act of affirmation in a negative world. Like Autloycus' transformation at the end of The Winter's Tale it is a turning point, albeit a temporary one.

Once Adam was given the power to name the creatures in paradise, the act of naming assumed significance; subsequently, when we name something, it becomes precious to us. Willie's ability to name his wife affirms her existence at the same time that it indicates his residual affection for her. He has dressed up for his coming round, and he has mustered all the energy he can to come courting once again. Winnie begins to sing after he names her, and there is the chance that she has not sung prematurely which is a fear she voices earlier in the play. There are dangers in singing too early in the day, because then there is no trick left to pull out of the bag when the loneliness of evening approaches. Winnie is not immediately joyous when Willie approaches her, and her initial response to him is cryptic and sardonic: "Well this is an unexpected pleasure" (61), but she cannot avoid being genuinely moved by his attention; and the song wells up in her.

Willie's entire rhetorical contribution in Act II is
one word, and it is his wife’s name. His naming of her succinctly summarizes the entire second act because we have been watching a woman try to establish her identity. We have listened to her reenactment of her childhood trauma. We’ve listened to the memories of Charlie Hunter, we’ve listened to her existential musings. All of these are her attempts to make sense of her universe, to impose an order on a life which has been reduced to controlled neurosis. She is fighting to establish her identity, and her husband’s final naming of her validates her identity. Even in the stripped down Beckettian world, human beings must rely on others for affirmation of existence, and Willie’s final coming round affirms Winnie’s life.

There is, of course, negation in the affirmation; and it is that negation which makes Willie’s final coming round more complex than Leontes’ or Autolycus’ final transformations. In the final moments of the play, we are unsure, as is Winnie, of Willie’s intent. As Willie crawls around the mound to Winnie, she is shocked and utters: "What ails you, Willie? I never saw such an expression" (63). But the fear quickly gives way to the sarcasm which has obviously been her emotional crutch for years, and she turns into a sharp-tongued cheerleader who says to her crawling husband:
Oh I say this is terrific. Come on, dear, put a bit of jizz into it. I'll cheer you on. (Pause.) Is it me you're after, Willie? . . . or is it something else? (63)

The something else is the gun which is lying very close to Willie on the mound, and in these final dramatic moments, she is as caught by fear as she is by hope. She begins to hum tentatively, before she can muster the courage to actually sing because she is not sure what her husband really wants. As the play ends, Willie and Winnie, two halves of one whole, are staring into each other's faces. The looking glass has come center stage and Winnie is finally able to see how it reflects her existence.

As Willie stares into his wife's face he is the epitome of the trickster as Paul Radin has defined him: "at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator." His coming round has given Winnie a burst of hope, but it has also stirred up the dread that always lurks within her. He is like Autolycus in The Winter's Tale who simultaneously symbolizes folly and transformation. In an absurd world, we learn to accommodate the contradictions of life while we search out the answers to the answerless questions. "Is it me you're after, Willie?" Winnie asks. "Is it true, think you?" the festival crowd asks Autolycus. We seldom know what we are really after; we almost never have a grasp
on unassailable truth, but our ability to frame the questions gives us enough reason to endure the absurdity.
Notes

1
It has not been customary to include Autolycus in the list of Shakespeare's fools, although the classic treatises on Shakespearean fools (e.g. Warde's, The Fools of Shakespeare and Hotson's, Shakespearean Motley) mention him in passing. Lippincott concedes in his 1972 dissertation that the fool character is clear "in an earlier transitional clown like Launcelot Gobbo and may extend to late roles like Autolycus"(xxx). Although R. Chris Hassel's new book, Faith and Folly in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies, does not address Autolycus in particular, it is a contemporary discussion of Shakespearean folly. See Kenneth Muir's, Shakespeare: The Winter's Tale for a good summary of the criticism relating to Autolycus.

2

3
I have followed the numbering of the Folger Shakespeare Library in referring to the Shakespearean promptbooks in their collection. Because individual promptbooks are often not paginated and because they often contain miscellaneous playbills, clippings, etc., it is not always possible to cite exact pages.

4
A given actor's interpretation of this minor role has saved an otherwise dismal performance from death at the hands of an indifferent or hostile audience. When W.E. Burton produced The Winter's Tale at his new theatre in the 1850s, he cast himself as Autolycus; and the choice seemed to be a wise one. Most reviews of the performance claim Burton stole the show. One reviewer wrote of the Burton production:

The great part of the piece, as represented here, however, is the rogue Autolycus. It is one of those characters which, in the hands of the generality of actors would not be likely to rise above the level of mediocre low comedy. It requires the thorough discrimination of the artist. (Folger 12)
Another reviewer of Burton's performance lamented "the only fault we have ever been able to find with Autolycus is that he does not appear before the fourth act, and our regret at this circumstance was heightened last night" (Folger 12).

Almost thirty years after Burton's production, the role of Autolycus still saved the day. A review in the London Herald on September 11, 1887 described the rowdy crowd which came to see Mary Anderson's performance of Hermione. "The pit at the outset was disorderly, with signs of disturbance, all because six new rows of stalls encroached on its demesne but...the broad fun of Autolycus restored peace" (Folger 11).

A century later the newly-opened Festival Theatre in Stratford, Ontario produced The Winter's Tale, and Autolycus rather than salvaging the production, detracted from it. More than one review suggests that all the busy theatrics and acrobatics of Autolycus, the Shepherd, and the Clown marred an otherwise acceptable performance. One reviewer, perhaps in an attempt to be kind, wrote of Autolycus: "Sometimes, his diversions proved too remote and drawn out. But that is probably the fault of the play" (Stratford).

Such distractions are not the fault of the play; they stem from a misconception of the fool's role. Edward Atienza of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival maintains that an overly theatrical fool fails because of a misplaced emphasis on the externals of the role (Atienza). If a given interpretation of Autolycus has him bouncing about the stage, arms and legs splaying, spouting unmotivated gibberish, then, of course, the role will distract. But as I maintain in this chapter, the role of Autolycus, well-performed, reinforces the thematic concerns of the play.

5

See Felperin, Shakespearean Romance and Palmer Shakespeare's Later Comedies for representative critical discussions of Leontes' jealousy.

6

Early reviewers of the play suggested that Willie's long absence added to the dragging pace of Happy Daysgin performance. John Simon is representative when he writes: "And there are moments, indeed minutes, when the play lapses into longeurs, when the existential ennui becomes plain, old-fashioned boredom (589).
In discussing Beckett's minimal use of language in *Happy Days*, John Pilling writes: "In *Happy Days* the trivial and clichéic have taken over the foreground as in *Play* and *Come and Go*, where the important is reduced to a guarded whisper, and utterance assumes a formulaic stance. . .Beckett is now content to concentrate on playing as few notes as possible" (85).

S.E. Gontarski lists all the literary allusions identified by Beckett. See pages 76-77 of *Beckett's Happy Days: A Manuscript Study*. 
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Expiating the Crime of Rhetoric:

The Court Fool in *King Lear* and *Waiting for Godot*

In scene one Lear suffers The Great Vice
Fear
And so commits The Three Great Crimes
Cruelty arrogance and rhetoric

Edward Bond

When Edward Bond suggests that Lear commits the
crime of rhetoric, he cuts to the arterial pulse of both
*King Lear* and *Waiting for Godot* because it is in
language that the degenerate state of both Lear’s
kingdom and Godot’s universe is manifest. Both
Shakespeare and Beckett draw attention to the uses and
abuses of rhetoric in these plays, and the Fool in *King
Lear* and Lucky in *Waiting for Godot* are central
characters to examine in this regard. They are both
court fools who lead isolated, miserable lives and
nearly die in service to their masters. Their use
and abuse of language reflects the larger rhetorical
concerns of their respective plays. Their places in the
court fool tradition, their misery, their isolation, and their near death help give full meaning to a rhetorical analysis.

We run into difficulty as soon as we try to trace the historical development of the court fool because it is not possible to pinpoint his exact origin. The function, if not the origin of the role, however, is clear. Contrary to the chameleon-like trickster who transforms into myriad shapes in order to wreak havoc on an unsuspecting humanity, the court fool’s primary function is to entertain his master and to protect him from the nasty tedium associated with daily life. The Fool in *King Lear* and Lucky in *Waiting for Godot* are both court fools whose primary job is one of entertainment; yet their entertainment is painful and paining. Lear’s Fool and Lucky reflect the folly of the King and Pozzo in much the same way that Autolycus and Willie mirror the folly of Leontes and Winnie. But in *King Lear* and *Waiting for Godot* the court fool steps through the mirror and embraces the pain and suffering of his master, thereby becoming a scapegoat who partially expiates the crimes of those around him. By drawing suffering onto themselves, both Lear’s Fool and Lucky open the way to redemption and release for their masters. The expiation can never be
complete, and both Lear and Pozzo will suffer the consequences of their own folly; yet their fools absorb enough of their pain to earn for them some degree of redemption.

As Enid Welsford points out, the function of the scapegoat is part of a court fool's role. By drawing bad luck onto himself, the fool is able to dissipate the suffering of those around him. If the court fool were to live his life solely for himself, then his vital sacrifice might be pointless; but because his life is essentially lived for others, his sacrifice can count as theirs. Thus, his life is essentially one of service.

We know, then, that court fools led lives of service, but we can be sure of little else. Sooner or later every author who attempts to delineate the history of the court fool has to concede that there does not exist one verifiable, court fool tradition. John Doran's The History of Court Fools has to rely largely on anecdotes as it attempts to trace the history of the court jester. Even Enid Welsford in her classic work, The Fool: His Social and Literary History, concedes that her discussion of the court fool is highly speculative. What we do know is this: The earliest references to court fools date from the twelfth century; subsequently, the practice of keeping a fool in residence at the court gained in
popularity throughout the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. The tradition of maintaining a court fool peaked in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; thereafter, it subsided. However, by the late sixteenth century the court fool had been immortalized in art and literature; thus his immortality was assured.

In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the court fool was employed by a European monarch to entertain guests and to serve as a talisman of sorts. Because fools, who were often misshapen or dwarfed, were considered to be lucky, they could transfer their good luck to a King while the King transferred his bad luck to them (Welsford 74). Such transference assured the fool permanent employment even if he could do little more than sing and juggle.

A court fool was given great license to speak his mind, and if he were so disposed he could keep his master wise and honest by verbalizing the truths that others would never dare to utter. Will Sommers, for example, Henry VIII’s famous fool, could chide Henry about his marital affairs and financial fiascoes in ways that would cost most people their heads. Like every other court fool, Will Sommers had to be verbally dextrous and sometimes verbally cruel in order to fulfill his role as advisor. Such honesty often
cost the fool great pain because he would be punished for his forthrightness. Fools had to endure the whip as punishment for their quips and puns, and their suffering helped to expiate the collective crimes of the kingdom.

Wylie Sypher explains the ritual origins of the scapegoat figure, who suffers for the collective sins of the community, in his essay, "The Meanings of Comedy." At the same time he clarifies the tragicomic nature of the scapegoat who is symbol of both life and death. Sypher writes:

Behind tragedy and comedy is a prehistoric death-and-resurrection ceremonial, the rite of killing the old year (the aged king) and bringing in the new season (the resurrection or initiation of the adolescent king). Associated with killing the old king and devouring his sacrificial body was the ancient rite of purging the tribe by expelling a scapegoat on whose head were heaped the sins of the past year . . . At this public purging or catharsis the scapegoat was often the divine man or animal . . . to whom were transferred the sins and misfortunes of the worshippers. Eventually the divine character of the scapegoat was forgotten (216)

Both Lear's Fool and Lucky are tied to old kings who must be purged if life is to continue, and it is the fools who must facilitate the rebirth.

Lear's Fool fits squarely into the court fool tradition, and no doubt William Shakespeare's audience would immediately recognize him as a representation of fools they had heard about and seen. When Lear first
calls for his fool in the fourth scene of the first act, the King has already been pushed to distraction and he is in need of diversion and tempering. "Where's my fool?" Lear asks, "I think the world's asleep" (45). The fool's initial appearance yokes him immediately to his master, for he begins to quip and jab at the King as soon as he comes on stage. There is little doubt in our minds that the Fool's role will be inextricably tied to the King.

Lucky is no more able than Lear's Fool to break free of his master, and the chains that bind him are painfully visible in his initial appearance. Our first glimpse of Lucky reveals a fool literally tied to his master, in this case Pozzo. Beckett's stage directions for the initial appearance of master and fool are as follows: **Enter Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo drives Lucky by means of a rope passed around his neck, so that Lucky is the first to enter, followed by the rope which is long enough to let him reach the middle of the stage before Pozzo appears**" (15).

Lucky is the modern descendant of all the court fools, who were thought to be lucky by virtue of their position or grotesque shapes. He performs for his master, and he performs for his master's guests, in this case Vladimir and Estragon, the two tramps who are waiting for Godot. Pozzo's mental health is determined in part by
Lucky's abilities; for we learn as the play progresses that Lucky is both boon and bane to his master. Perhaps at one time Lucky taught Pozzo beautiful thoughts, but he has also refused to serve him at least once, thereby causing Pozzo great grief. Pozzo may hold the whip, but the choices Lucky makes affect Pozzo in much the same way that the Fool's choices affect Lear.

Their shared function as court fools who have mutually dependent relationships with their masters may be the most striking parallel between Lear's Fool and his modern counterpart, Lucky, but it is by no means the only parallel. A bond of misery links their souls. Lucky's misery is not hard to identify. Beckett presents him from the start as a character whose life no one would envy. Before we even see the miserable wretch, we hear "a terrible cry close at hand" (14b), and we know by Estragon and Vladimir's reaction to the cry that it is not a sound to which they are accustomed. Unlike Macbeth, who has "supped full with horrors" and thus is no longer moved by shrieks, Didi and Gogo are terrified by Lucky's heart-wrenching cry. Their reaction is our signal that we are not to be numb to Lucky's pain because they are not.

From the first moment that we see Lucky with a noose around his neck, we know that he leads a subjugated life. But as we continue to view the seemingly senseless
torture Lucky is subjected to by Pozzo, and as our ears are continually assaulted by the sheer clank and clamor of his rattling bones, we begin to understand that his very soul is chained as well as his body. Even when Lucky disappears from our view, we hear the noise of Lucky falling with all his baggage or the noise of Lucky getting up and picking up his baggage" (15-16). Pozzo barks orders at his servant with a harshness that assaults us as well as Didi, Gogo, and Lucky. He barks "Coat" (16b), and Lucky puts down the bags long enough to supply his imperious master with his coat. Particularly telling at this point is the mute obeisance which marks Lucky’s taking of the whip into his mouth. When Pozzo needs both hands to put on his coat, rather than placing the whip temporarily on the ground, he snaps at Lucky, "Hold that" (16b), and Lucky takes the whip into his mouth. There the fool stands, hands weighed down with bags of luggage, a noose around his neck, and a whip in his mouth. The image is dramatically arresting, and we are never in doubt about Lucky’s misery.

Yet there is more than a touch of comedy in Lucky’s plight which parallels the mix of the tragic and comic in Lear’s Fool. It is Henri Bergson who tells us in his classic essay, "Laughter," that the "attitudes, gestures, and movements of the human body are laughable in exact
proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine" (79). Certainly, Lucky's jerky actions, which are often divorced from any immediately apparent motivation, invite our laughter, for we see in Lucky's gestures "something mechanical encrusted on the living" (84).

We may sometimes lose sight of the fact that Lear's Fool is in a miserable state that is just as bad as Lucky's, yet the 1982 Royal Shakespeare Company production of King Lear stressed the Fool's misery from the moment the audience came into the theatre. Before the play even began, the audience saw Cordelia and the Fool sitting together on Lear's throne. They were absolutely motionless, like two limp rag dolls. A noose joined their necks together. Once the performance actually began, the two sprang playfully to life, but the initial image of the Fool and Cordelia joined by a noose haunted the entire production. Lear's Fool lives his life with a noose around his neck just as surely as Lucky does.

William Empson stresses the Fool's misery in his work, The Structure of Complex Words. In describing Lear's initial meeting with the Fool in the fourth scene of the first act, Empson writes:

Lear greets him affectionately as 'my pretty knave' and threatens him with the whip before he has spoken ten lines; there are six references to the whip during this short period
of their comparative happiness together, and at least two of them are threats. The position of Lear’s Fool is clearly meant to be a miserable one; we are to believe him when he says 'I would rather be anything than a fool, and yet I would not be thee, nuncle'.

(130)

The Fool has to endure the abuse of Lear’s daughters, and he has to wander around the countryside in the company of a deteriorating monarch until finally he is emotionally and physically depleted at the end of Act III. When we last see the Fool, he is apparently incapable of any further independent action, for Kent must order him to help bear Lear. Such an order would have been unnecessary earlier in the play, but the Fool has reached the end of his emotional reserve and has little more to give his master.

It is important, I think, to underscore the actual price that both Lear’s Fool and Lucky pay for their roles as court fools. At the end of Waiting for Godot Lucky is dumb. His inability to respond voluntarily to Lear’s need at the end of Act III may suggest the Fool’s virtual death. The 1982 Royal Shakespeare Company production of King Lear, to which I referred earlier, deviates from Shakespeare’s text and has the demented Lear accidentally stab and kill his Fool in the hovel. Such a departure from the text, although questionable, pivots our attention on the actual price Lear’s fool pays for his service. When Edward Atienza of the
Stratford Festival Theatre in Ontario plays Lear's Fool, he always interprets the end of Act III, the hovel scene, as the Fool's death scene. Because the Fool is emotionally and physically depleted from following Lear, he cannot follow his master any further. Lear has slipped into insanity, and the Fool will not pursue him there. By sacrificing their vitalism to their masters, both Lear's Fool and Lucky embrace, with varying degrees of willingness, the role of scapegoat which is so clearly defined by Wylie Sypher when he writes:

The fool is vicarious Sufferer. He is reviled beaten, and stricken; but he has the privilege of vilifying the Prosperous Man; he is free to humble the exalted by mockery. The fool saves the hero from the awful sin of pride. (232)

Although the Fool's suffering saves those around him, precious little benefit accrues to the fool himself; rather, as in the case with Lucky and Lear's Fool, they are relegated to a life of isolation. That isolation is evident in the limited physical contact the fool characters have with other characters in the play. Of the 26 scenes in King Lear, the Fool appears in only seven. In those seven scenes he relates almost exclusively to Lear and Lear's supporters. He almost never carries on a direct conversation with Lear's daughters nor does he directly address those who are in direct opposition to Lear. He spends most of his time
with Kent when he is not in intimate contact with the King.

Just so, Lucky's dramatic contacts are limited. Lucky is present for about half of Act I and about one-third of Act II. His chained status limits his range of motion, and he cannot truly encounter Vladimir and Estragon. There are, of course, a few abortive exchanges between Didi, Gogo and Lucky, but they are never sustained ones. Lucky is tied to his master, and his one assertive attempt to break free of Pozzo's restraint -- during his speech -- results in utter chaos and confusion. Lucky never initiates any interaction with Didi and Gogo. If pushed beyond where he wants to go, he will strike out at them as he does when he kicks Estragon in the shin, but he will not break the barrier that separates him from them.

The clearest link both Lear's Fool and Lucky have with the rest of their respective societies is a verbal one. The rhetoric of both fools reflects the degradation and abuse of the worlds they inhabit. The topsy-turvy language of Lear's Fool is a barometer of the upside-down world he inhabits, just as Lucky's garbled rhetoric which eventuates in silence, is an arresting representation of the meaningless jabber that consumes those around him. Lear's Fool and Lucky are really quite adept at verbal
games, and their facility results in utter nonsense. When language is reduced to nonsense, to sheer babble, humanity has stooped to its lowest benchmark. It is through a close analysis of the rhetorical concerns and patterns of Lear's Fool and Lucky that the thematic links between *King Lear* and *Waiting for Godot* emerge. The verbal nonsense that these fools promote is no more idiotic than the language of those around them, for the Fool's antic ravings are certainly no less alarming than Lear's heath-rhetoric. Lucky's babbling inanities are no more mysterious than the endless dialogues between Didi and Gogo which are used just to pass the time. Both Lear's Fool and Lucky have identifiable speech patterns which draw our attention to the thematic concerns of the play.

The issue of language in both of these plays is a central one. To commit a crime of rhetoric means to violate what it means to be human. We may sometimes tell ourselves that it is our ability to reason which separates us from the animals, but it is the ability to speak which sets humans apart. Rhetoricians through the centuries--Aristotle, Quintilian, St. Augustine, Hugh Blair, Richard Weaver--have stressed that our humanness is linked to our language. If we violate our language, we are violating our very nature,
or to quote Socrates from Plato's *Phaedo*: "To misuse words is not only a fault in itself; it also corrupts the soul" (LXIV). In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the speech act is tied to the act of creation, for in the book of Genesis God spoke as he created the world; subsequently, Adam was allowed to name the animals. From the inception of the human species, we knew that our ability to talk was sacred.

There are repeated and blatant references to the devaluation of language in *King Lear* and *Waiting for Godot*, and it is within such devaluation that the Fool and Lucky draw attention to disintegrating language. In *King Lear* William Shakespeare anticipates the Beckettian distrust of the word. Anne Barton comments on Shakespeare's affinity with absurdist drama when she writes:

Certainly the word in Shakespeare is not allowed an unexamined triumph. At the heart of his drama lies an ambiguity of attitude towards the transformations effected by language which links him, surprisingly, with the outlook characteristic of our own theatre. Although his plays celebrate words, exploit their capacities fully, they also include and foreshadow something of the twentieth-century distrust. (20)

In a similar vein, Barton pokes fun at Sir Phillip Sidney who can go on for 14 lines about how only one word, *Stella*, is sufficient. She suggests that the same
contradictory attitudes toward language are evident in the opening scene between Lear and his daughters.

Certainly, as Edward Bond suggests by his Platonic use of the word rhetoric, the crime of rhetoric is evident in the very first scene when manipulated words violate language, truth, and humanity. It was the potential for such manipulation which made Plato shun the study of rhetoric. The aging Lear has decided he will divide his kingdom among his three daughters; consequently, he asks his three daughters, Regan, Goneril, and Cordelia, to make a declaration of love.

. . . Tell me, my daughters
(Since now we will divest us both of rule,
Interest of territory, cares of state),
Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth with merit challenge. (1.1.46-52)

Both Goneril and Regan trip over themselves in an attempt to prove their love for their fathers. As such they join their father in crimes of rhetoric because they misuse the very gift of speech which makes them human. Neither Goneril nor Regan hesitates to manipulate language until it distorts the truth. Goneril, for example pumps her soul into false words:

Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter;
Dearer than eyesight, space and liberty;  
Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare;  
No less than life, with grace, health,  
beauty, honor;  
As much as child e’er loved or father found;  
A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable;  
Beyond all manner of so much I love you.  
(1.1.54-60)

Goneril stresses the fact that mere language is inadequate to her present needs; she is unable to put into words all that she feels for her father. Ironically, it is precisely her words that convince her father of her love, for she uses the very element—language—which she labels insufficient. She makes her tongue speak words she does not mean in order to get what she wants from her dottering father.

Regan is as devious as her sister, and we as an audience know immediately that these two sisters are not truthful, for the nature of their language betrays them. As they protest that their love cannot find words, we realize that the words their love has found are the instruments of deceit, and Regan’s protestations then strike us as stridently repetitious of her sister’s deceit. Regan tells Lear:

Sir, I am made of that self metal as my sister,  
And prize me at her worth. In my true heart  
I finds she names my very deed of love;  
Only she comes too short, that I profess  
Myself an enemy to all other joys  
Which the most precious square of sense possesses,  
And I am alone felicitate
In your dear highness' love. (1.1.68-74)
When Regan announces, "I am made of that self metal as
my sister," we agree with the pointed irony. When she
tells Lear, "I find she names my very deed of love," we
know that Regan is here speaking a truth that her father
will not perceive, but we do. Her words send verbal
signals to her older sister, Goneril, which suggest that
Goneril's deceitful statement to Lear has not gone
unnoticed. Regan's speech allows her to pick up the
gauntlet her sister has thrown down while at the same
time assuaging her father's needy ego. Knowing that her
father's mental stability is in question and having
little feeling for him, she lies to him in order to gain
his land and wealth.

Cordelia knows that her sisters' speeches are more
bombast than truth, and she chooses to take an extreme
course in order to avoid identification with them.
Bolstered by the protestations of overwhelming love he
has just received from his first two daughters, Lear
turns to his youngest daughter, Cordelia and asks:

    . . . Now our joy,
    Although our last and least . . .
    . . . what can you say to draw
    A third more opulent than your sisters? (1.1.80ff.)
Cordelia responds: "Nothing". Rather than try to match her
sisters' statements, Cordelia retreats into silence,
and when her father grows angry she tells him:
Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth. I love your Majesty
According to my bond; no more no less.
(1.1.90-92)

Her answer is not sufficient for Lear, and he banishes and disowns her over the strong protestations of members of his court. While it is true that Cordelia refuses to play Lear’s game in his foolish terms, she is also refusing to give language its proper place. She knows perfectly well what her father wants from her, and she is capable of declaring love without falling into the rhetorical excess of her sisters. Samuel Beckett once said: "It is all very well to keep silence, but one also has to consider the kind of silence one keeps" (Blair 120). Cordelia’s silence may have a purer motive than her sisters’ speeches, but she abuses rhetoric all the same.

To be unnecessarily silent was less than human to the Renaissance mind. Thersites, in reaching for words to describe Ajax’ degenerate state, says of him: "He’s grown a very landfish, languageless, a monster" (4.1.260). Erasmus’ widely used rhetoric, De Copia, stresses the importance of developing copious expression in order to please one’s audience. Erasmus does not promote the purely sophistic use of language which so
offends Plato; rather he upholds the Renaissance belief that the ability to create varied and persuasive language is one of humanity's fundamental activities. Cordelia, by refusing to grant language its expansive realm, also refuses to accept her responsibility to enlighten her father. While it may be true that his specific question to her demands that she say something to "draw a third more opulent" than her sisters, she understands that he is really asking a declaration of love; and she denies both her father and her humanity by remaining "languageless."

It is the King himself, of course, who commits the major offense. Not only does he misuse language himself in this first scene, but he elicits dreadful responses from others. Their own frailty notwithstanding, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia are doomed from the start because their father forces them into an unnatural position. Such declarations of love as Lear needs are normally proffered in circumstances a little more intimate than an open meeting of the entire court, but even leaving the lack of privacy aside, the daughters are literally forced to put emotions into words or lose their inheritance. Lear lays too much stress on words which, as Goneril tells him, simply cannot "wield the matter." Lear chooses to believe the speeches of his two eldest daughters, but he
will not believe Cordelia's less demonstrative speech. By accepting the false language speech, Lear chooses a course of action which rends his kingdom.

Shakespeare thus confronts us early in the play with the issue of language and its ends, and it is an issue he does not abandon throughout the entire play. Again and again the issue of language is raised, and almost always we are shown how the abuse of language signals a decay in humanity. When we are our best selves, we do not abuse language either explicitly or implicitly. Many of the characters in King Lear abuse language through blatant lying, but the crimes against rhetoric are not always so heavy-handed and deceitful; consequently, we are sometimes simply confronted in this play with a failure of words.

In writing of Lear and words Josephine Waters Bennett suggests that Shakespeare needs the Fool because the playwright has chosen not to use his normal means of letting us in on a character's thoughts. She explains:

Because of the nature of Lear's internal conflict, his stubborn resistance to the humbling forces unleashed against him, the devices of self-revelation so commonly used by Elizabethan dramatists--soliloquies, asides and conversations with a confidant--are not open to Shakespeare in this play. Lear cannot debate within himself nor surrender his pride so far to confide in anyone. (143-44)
We have, then, a King who is in such chaos that words fail him much as they do his youngest daughter, and the Fool's function is to be the outward manifestation of Lear's internal conflict.

One of the ways Shakespeare rivets our attention on words in King Lear is through the use of letters. Edmund, Goneril, and Regan are continually writing letters, and they are three of the most sinister forces in the play. Initially it is Edmund, the bastard son, who uses a falsified letter to achieve his own purposes by making his father, Gloucester, believe that his legitimate heir, Edgar, is out to kill him. Edmund concocts an elaborate scheme whereby Gloucester comes to believe that Edgar has written a letter to his bastard half-brother detailing a plot to get rid of their father. Obviously, it is not to Gloucester's credit that he falls for such a ruse, but Edmund has used language for false purposes, nonetheless. It is another of his letters which contains Cordelia's death warrant. As Edmund lays dying he confesses. . ."my writ/ is on the life of Lear and on Cordelia"(5.3.245-47).

Goneril is similarly adept at using the written word to her advantage and the disadvantage of others. In the third scene of the play she writes to Regan in order to gain her sister's support for cruel treatment of Lear.
Subsequently, she writes an adulterous love letter to Edmund plotting against both her husband and her sister. Just as she could not be true to the spoken word in the first scene, Goneril can not be true to the written word in subsequent scenes. There is a rather satisfying cruelty in one of Albany’s lines to Goneril in Act V. She is speaking to Edmund and Albany snaps at her: "Shut your mouth, dame, Or with this paper shall I stop it" (5.3.153-54). The paper he wants to stuff in her mouth is one of her love letters to Edmund.

Whether the word is written or oral, it is often abused; yet the word does have a transforming power which can resurrect whatever glint of good remains. Edmund is so moved by Edgar’s speech in the final scene of the play that he tries to rescind his order to have Lear and Cordelia killed. He says to Edgar: "This speech of yours hath mov’d me/ And shall perchance do good" (5.3.199). In a touching speech Lear envisions an idyllic life in prison for himself and Cordelia, and his vision dwells on the delights of language. Lear dreams:

... Come let’s away to prison.
We two alone will sing like birds i’ the cage.
When thou dost ask me blessing, I’ll kneel down
And ask thee forgiveness. So we’ll live,
And pray and sing, and tell old tales... . .
... and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news; and we’ll talk with them too,
Who loses, who wins, who’s in, who’s out--
And take upon ’s the mystery of things
As if we were God's spies. (5.3.7-17)

Most of the joys Lear envisions are verbal ones: asking blessings, receiving forgiveness, telling stories. Such activity will lift Lear and his Cordelia to heaven where they will be the spies of God. Language is indeed a sacred trust, and while Lear's vision as articulated here proves false, the play at least holds up the hope that the proper use of language can also resurrect.

It is the hint of resurrection in King Lear which points toward the tragicomedy that links the play to Waiting for Godot. "There are no definitive rebirths in Shakespeare's tragedy; just as there are no carefully delineated resurrections in Beckett's, but both playwrights weave birth and death, tragedy and comedy into the fabric of these plays; consequently, we are left believing that all is not lost. Pozzo and Lear are eventually deflated and diminished, but they both gain insight. Sidney Homan addresses this admixture of birth and death when he writes in Beckett's Theaters: "Tragedies, when all other definitions have been offered, are about death; comedies are about life, about the interrelation between mankind and creation" (49)

Certainly in both Lear and Godot the elements Homan describes are inextricably interwoven in the character of the Fool and Lucky. Julian Markels
attributes the Fool's presence in *King Lear* to Shakespeare's customary blending of tragedy and comedy. In his article, "Shakespeare's Confluence of Tragedy and Comedy," Markels comments that many of "Shakespeare's solemn dramas have an admixture of comic stuff, and some of his ostensible comedies affright our risibility by their oblique seriousness. We find in the tragedies not only various shades and quantities of comic relief, but a comic posture in great men at their moments of intensest spiritual pain" (75). Markels then goes on to explain that the fool character in both the comedies and tragedies becomes the symbol for the mixture of laughter and tears.

From his very first appearance, Lear's Fool manifests the tragicomic elements in the play. Like Lucky he is pathetic and vulnerable enough to make us feel sorry for him, but his antics are comical enough to dull our awareness of his misery and isolation. As I mentioned earlier, the Fool makes his first appearance after Lear has already been goaded into irritation by the disrespectful Oswald. "Where's my Fool?" Lear asks when the world begins to assume an unfriendly air. In the recent Laurence Olivier interpretation of this play, Olivier rather whimpers the question like a desolate child in need of comfort. The world is turning against this man "who has ever but slenderly known himself," and
he needs the diversions of his Fool.

The Fool is immediately diversionary, drawing the tension away from Lear as he offers to give Kent his coxcomb. "Here's my coxcomb," he says to Kent (1.4.89). Then again, "Sirrah you were best take my coxcomb" (1.4.90) Becoming the center of attention, the Fool explains that any person, namely Kent, who purposely befriends the addled Lear, is a Fool. This initial exchange between Kent and the Fool is directly reminiscent of Feste's exchange with Olivia in Twelfth Night. In the Feste- Olivia exchange, Feste labels Olivia a fool because she mourns for a brother who she believes to be at peace in heaven. In both the scenes the fools are brazenly articulate as they demonstrate, to paraphrase Lear's Fool, that they cannot keep all the fooling to themselves. Everyone else is always snatching at it.

The Fool's primary technique for demonstrating everyone's implication in his fool show is a rhetorical one. He almost never speaks in straightforward lines which are readily understood by all. Rather he reaches for the riddle, the conundrum, the song which arrest our attention long enough for him to make his point, and in his riddles and songs and quips, he reminds us that words do not always mean what they say, and life is not always
as it would appear to be. He is like Feste who tells the
disguised Viola in the opening scene of Act III in
Twelfth Night "...words are grown so false I am loath
to prove reason with them" (24), and subsequently
rejecting the title of Olivia's fool, Feste says that he
is "but her corrupter of words" (34). The corruption of
words is a task Feste shares with Lear's Fool, who in his
initial appearance, announces to Lear, "I'll teach thee a
speech"—a blatantly rhetorical goal if there ever was
one. But the speech he purports to teach does not bear
the classical marks of a speech that any Renaissance
audience would expect. Instead we get a series of
proverbial quips. The Fool speaks:

Have more than thou showest,
Speak less than thou knowest,
Lend less than thou owest,
Ride more than thou goest,
Learn more than thou trwest,
Set less than thou trwest;
Leave thy drink and thy whore,
And keep in a -door
And thou shall have more
Than two tens to a score. (1.4.108-17)

Every line advises a control which Lear, to this point,
has not evidenced and a kind of wisdom that only the
worst characters in the play have in full measure and
that the Fool himself does not practice. We cannot make
immediate sense out of the Fool's advice, so we are left
more confused than advised as the confusion creates in us
the turmoil that the Fool feels and Lear has already begun to experience. Using language to recreate the confusion that is beginning to erupt, the Fool advises control, knowing full well that it will shortly be too late for the moderate restraints he suggests.

The Fool plays with language here to make his point, and it is Kent who immediately replies, "This is nothing, fool" (1.4.119); yet the Fool knows his words have import and that he is simply doing what Lear and his daughters did earlier, manipulating language to his own ends. The Fool cannot scheme like Edmund, nor disguise himself like Kent. He has to rely on the only means he has—language—in order to achieve his desired end. All he wants, and here he is faithful to the court fool tradition, is to protect Lear from himself and the evil that is closing in on him. On one level Lear is already beyond the Fool’s saving reach, but he must persist in trying to force his master to view the situation clearly. [The only redemption left to Lear at this point is insight, and although he can never completely redeem himself, his final insight into his folly will prove more redemptive than his previous inability to know himself.]

It is no wonder that as Empson points out the King threatens the Fool with a whip several times in their
first few exchanges. The Fool will not waver from his opinion that Lear has lost his wits. Even when the King barks in anger, "We'll have you whipped" (1.4.168), the Fool will not cease. He accepts Lear's threat, but he explains to Lear what a winless situation he is in:

I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are. They'll have me whipped for speaking true; thou'lt have me whipp'd for lying; and sometimes I am whipped for holding my peace. (1.4.170-73)

Lear may miss the force of the Fool's words, but we as audience can scarcely do so. [In a disintegrating kingdom, language becomes a pawn and loses its ability to promote truth.] Neither Lear nor his daughters wants to hear the Fool's nonsense because they know his verbal acrobatics point at their folly and their errors. As a court fool, he was "all-licensed" to speak the truth as he saw it, and there was no clause in his license to indicate that those around him had to appreciate him for the truths he uttered.

Despite Lear's constant threats, we understand as does the King that the Fool is an integral part of the King's soul. Like Lucky and Pozzo this master and servant are tied to each other. They cannot break free of their bondage them without great cost.
One of the clearest indications we have of the Fool's inextricable place in Lear's soul in particular and the play in general dates from the 17th century. In 1681 Nahum Tate revised Shakespeare's *King Lear* and made it resemble one of the late romances by turning the story into one of thwarted love between Edgar and Cordelia. Cordelia, knowing full well that her father will disinherit her if she does not make a fervent declaration of love, purposely gets herself disinherited so that she will not have to marry Burgundy or France. The first part of her plan works well, but she has not banked on the scheming bastard son of Gloucester, Edmund, who forces Edgar into hiding, thereby helping fate to twist and turn before Edgar and Cordelia are reunited at the end of the play. Once reunited, the young lovers rule the kingdom at Lear's request and Lear lives on as a sort of King-emeritus; Tate does not include the Fool in his revision, moving toward a fairy-tale ending which does not require a fool in the role of suffering servant. It was not until the mid-1800s that the Fool was restored in the fullness of his role to *King Lear*, and for over a century Lear's Fool lived only in the archives of the folios because he had been rendered unnecessary on the stage. It is not surprising that Tate thought the Fool's role was an expendable one.
After all, he only appears in a total of seven scenes throughout the entire play, and his words do almost nothing to advance the action. After his first appearance in the fourth scene of the first act, we do not see the Fool again until the fourth scene of the second act. He is with Lear as the King first spots Kent in the stocks, where he has been placed by Regan and Cornwall, and Lear cannot believe that one of his servants would have been so ill-treated by his daughter. In the Olivier production of this play, the Fool played by John Hurt, compassionately takes Lear's elbow as the King dissolves into incredulity at the sight of his trusted servant in the stocks. But the Fool shows Lear more compassion than he does Kent, because he senses that Kent is not so much in need of compassion as release. When he starts riddling and rhyming, Kent who is still in the stocks, asks "Where learn'd you this, fool?" (2.4.81). The Fool shoots back with "Not i' th' stocks, fool" (1.4.82). Lear's Fool may be taunting Kent here, yet his words acknowledge that Kent is of a kind with him; for Kent has willingly tarried in service to Lear and is now suffering the consequences. As the suffering reaches out to embrace one person after another and as Lear begins to understand the consequences of his actions, the Fool becomes almost
desperate.

In this fourth scene, then, what we have is a King who is beginning to sense the treachery of his daughters. Fresh from the rebuffs he has experienced at the hands of Goneril and her household, Lear comes to Regan assuming she will be kinder. When he sees that Kent has been punished, he senses that Regan’s heart will not be any softer than her older sister’s. Lear argues with Kent initially, because he does not want to believe his daughter’s cruelty, yet he soon learns from Regan herself that she did indeed punish his messenger.

This scene is an important one in that Lear finally begins to feel the full import of what his actions have cost him, understanding that his actions have been little less than folly. The majority of the scene is taken up with Lear confronting first Regan, then Goneril. Like a bargain-hunting customer, he barters with his daughters to ascertain how much of his retinue he can maintain and still be welcome in their homes. As it becomes increasingly clear that his daughters want to rob him of everything, including his dignity, Lear rails out against them.

Shakespeare does not indicate to us where the Fool is throughout much of this scene, so individual directors through the centuries had to make their own
assumptions about where to place the Fool. In those mid-to-late-nineteenth century productions which finally restored his role in its entirety, the Fool is treated in this scene as if he were an extraneous walk-on, expendable in every sense of the word. In contemporary productions, however, like the Olivier production and the 1982 Royal Shakespeare Company production, the Fool is an absolutely integral part of this scene. He does not fade into the background as Lear confronts his daughters, but is rather part and parcel of his master's pain and suffering. The 1980s productions actually show marked Beckettian influence in their staging of the play, especially the Royal Shakespeare production. The Fool, as symbol of all that is absurd and senseless, cannot be relegated to a peripheral position on stage. He must be an intimate partner in his master's demise. Like Lucky, Lear's Fool is permanently yoked to his master, and only death will free him from his expiating bonds.

One of Lear's most painful lines in this fourth scene comes when he has realized the full cruelty of his daughters' intent. He rails, he fights tears, he curses in utter despair, he moans, "O Fool I shall go mad" (2.4. 283). Even in nineteenth-century productions, this line is spoken directly to the Fool, for several
nineteenth century promptbooks indicate that right before Lear speaks this line the Fool runs and kneels at his feet. Lear virtually explodes in grief directly into the Fool's compassionate face. The King's fear of madness must be expressed to the only character who can understand the frightening implications of such a fear. The Fool has known all along that his master's sanity was in danger, and the King has been marginally aware of the Fool's knowledge; thus, when the madness begins to weigh down the monarch, he must reach for his partner in suffering.

The Fool's final scenes occur when Lear has virtually slipped into the madness that he feared would overwhelm him. Early in Act III Kent, learning that Lear is wandering the heath like a demented vagabond, wants to know who is with the King and is told: "None but the fool, who labours to outjest/His heart-struck injuries" (3.1.15-17). In Act III the Fool pours all of his energy into trying to maintain Lear's sanity. When we first see him in this act, he is pleading with his master to come in out of the storm which is raging on the heath. He tells Lear that to "court holy water" in a dry house is better than the dreaded storm they are being forced to endure outdoors. Lear, however, is beyond the reach of reason and straight talk, so the Fool has to resort once again to his riddles and rhymes. He chants about
codpieces and corns—all in an attempt to divert Lear and at the same time instruct him. Lear increasingly leans on the Fool in this raging heath scene, although we have little indication that the King is heeding a word the fool says. He tries to rally long enough to enquire after the Fool’s mental and physical state, but he cannot sustain the rallying effort and so sinks further and further into insanity.

This heath scene forms a connection with Waiting for Godot in its representation of nature in chaos. In writing of Beckett’s world, Jan Kott says: “Nature has evaporated almost completely...objects have now been raised to the status of symbols of human fate, or situation, and perform a similar function to that played in Shakespeare by forest, storm, or eclipse of the sun” (134). The disordered heath with its violent rains and gusting winds screams out at us that the world is awry. While nature does not scream in Waiting for Godot, it is disordered nonetheless, and as such it reflects the unpredictability of life.

It is more than happenstance, I am sure, that Ronald Howard sets his play, The Dresser, in a charred England in the midst of World War II air raids. In Beckettian fashion, Howard portrays the relationship between an dying actor who plays King Lear and his
dresser. One by one the acting company drops off until there is only a rag tag group of actors left reminiscent of Didi and Gogo, and there is never any secure hope that the production will go forward because the threat of destruction is always imminent. Nature is not balm in an absurd universe; moreover, it is an embracing symbol of all that has gone awry.

The Fool's rhetoric in the third act combines all of the tricks we have come to expect from him. He mixes plain speech with witty riddles and folksy tunes, and he even speaks a prophecy at one point. He tries to manipulate language in every possible direction in order to rouse Lear into cognizance, but Lear has slipped beyond his reach; consequently, the Fool's role as scapegoat becomes all the more pronounced. As Lear recedes into insanity, there is little tangible good the Fool can render, but his suffering can count as Lear's, thereby opening the way for the momentary insight Lear gains at the play's end.

The Fool's suffering is pronounced as he pleads with Lear in Act III to seek shelter. He is physically and emotionally exhausted from trying to hold on to Lear's emotional reins, and he needs rest. Sadly, when the Fool finally does enter the sanctuary of Edgar's hovel, he is so distraught and frightened by the sight of Edgar that
he runs screaming to Lear. The Fool's reaction to Edgar is an indication of how much his service to his master has cost him. Previous to this, the Fool has stared down the wicked daughters, has bandied quips with noblemen, has risked the King's wrath, and has been shaken by little. Yet here he comes face to face with a seeming half-wit who cannot really harm him, and he dissolves into panic. Given the circumstances Edgar would be a frightening fellow, but the Fool cannot regain control of himself.

The mock-trial which the Fool and Edgar and Lear stage in the cottage is as pathetically revealing as it is painful. Safely hidden from his vicious daughters, Lear can finally arraign them and question their humanity before the jury. The Fool becomes the bailiff who brings the derelict daughters forth and Edgar/Tom becomes part of the condemning jury, thus allowing Lear to say aloud what we and the Fool have long known--his daughters are heartless aberrations with little humanity in their bones. The Fool serves his master well in this scene, by joining in the mock-rhetoric which attends the trial. But this trial is the last service the Fool will render, for in order to join Lear in his play-acting the Fool has to summon up all of his remaining energy. When the scene is done, the Fool is also. Lear ends his trial scene by
saying: "Make no noise, make no noise; draw the curtains. So. So. So. We'll go to supper i' the morning" (3.6.80-81). To this the Fool replies: "And I'll go to bed at noon" (3.6.82). The line is the Fool's admission that the world has turned over, and the normal order of things has been disrupted. We do not hear from the Fool again.

Gloucester appears shortly after the Fool's line to send Lear on to Dover, and he tells the Fool to follow because he must not stay behind. There are productions, however, which omit Gloucester's line and allow the Fool to remain behind. More than one actor has gasped out the Fool's last line with a consumptive whisper that sounds more like a death rattle than anything else. Having no more rhetorical tricks, he is spent and silenced. He has become, to use Thersites' word, languageless.

In that regard Lucky is much like Lear's Fool, for he is able to speak in the first act of the play, but by the second act he has been rendered mute. Lucky's muteness is Beckett's most blatant statement about the inefficacy of language. It is impossible to read or see Waiting for Godot without grappling with the rhetorical concerns Beckett raises because the playwright displays language at all angles. Most often, language is found wanting,
but Beckett is not content to display linguistic emptiness. Speaking directly to Beckett's concern with decaying language, Herbert Blau writes:

If Waiting for Godot is another testament to the decay of language, it was no mere pantomime of impoverished rhetoric, a mere autotelic gobble of words, words, words. Beckett worked like an engraver or a diamond cutter. And in the best classical French tradition, he was purifying the language of the tribe... Despairing of communication, some of us were getting our kicks from silence. (120)

Blau goes on to explain that Beckett will not settle for the lazy silence, but rather pushes and prods until he returns language to its pristine state. We are not to let ourselves off the hook in this play, or any of Beckett's plays for that matter, and assume that the characters are speaking nonsensical gibberish because Beckett does not throw words away. Given the fact that Waiting for Godot, an early work, is absolutely verbose compared to Beckett's most recent dramatic efforts, it is all the more worthy of rhetorical study.

Just as Shakespeare uses a court Fool to epitomize the rhetorical concerns in King Lear, Beckett uses a court fool in Waiting for Godot to draw our attention to the uses and abuses of language. Lucky is no more sole heir to folly in this play than is Lear's Fool in Shakespeare's play. While it is true that Vladimir,
Estragon, and Pozzo do not line up in the same sharply divided camps as the characters in Lear, they still snatch at Lucky's folly in much the same fashion as Lear's Fool describes. Vladimir and Estragon as well as Pozzo are all, in some sense, fools, and can easily be placed inside of the fooling tradition. Lucky's folly has to reflect theirs or he is failing in one of his primary functions.

Lucky's suffering, however, is the most blatant and the most obvious. Like Lear's Fool, Lucky has little to gain for himself. He chooses to suffer, and his suffering expiates. John J. Sheedy stresses this very point when he writes: "Lucky is by choice. . .the slave who hopes to please through the extremity of his suffering, the Carrier who because he insists upon his burdens, can be likened to. . .the scapegoat of creation" (161). There is no quid pro quo in the ritual relationship between scapegoat and society, no exact tallying of how much suffering expiates how much guilt, yet the scapegoat's function is to relieve, at least partially, the suffering of others through his own pain. We may not be able to measure the success of the scapegoat's suffering, but we accept that his presence among us is sacrificial.

Lucky is the scapegoat, and we know that immediately because of the existence he endures with Pozzo; moreover,
we come to understand his suffering through his speech and his ultimate muteness. Critics have often focused right in on Lucky's speech as the definitive comment about language that Beckett offers in this play; however, Beckett stresses rhetorical concerns all along. Lucky's speech is the most arrestingly dramatic comment about language, but it is by no means the only hint we receive about Beckett's views of language.

Waiting for Godot has barely begun before Beckett draws our attention to tired language. We have not yet learned that Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for someone named Godot, nor have we learned that they are in the habit of waiting for him. All we know in the opening dialogue is that they have spent the night away from each other. Vladimir begins to wax eloquent about the human condition as Estragon tries to remove a boot. Estragon stops Vladimir's rhetorical flourishes with one line: "Ah stop blathering and help me off with this bloody thing" (7b). Vladimir retorts shortly thereafter with the line: "Boots must be taken off every day. I'm tired telling you that" (7b). Immediately, we know that these two fellows, who affectionately refer to each other as Didi and Gogo, are fairly hardened to the effects of language. Gogo is not about to be moved by Vladimir's musings; he simply labels such language "blathering."
Didi, on the other hand, has little tolerance for the earthier matter of stubborn boots because he is tired of having to use language to convince Gogo that ill-fitting boots are merely a fact of life. Both tramps draw our attention to weary language before we are five minutes into the play.

Many of the exchanges between these two friends concern words in one way or another; for example, at one point Vladimir struggles with a Biblical quotation: "Hope deferred maketh the something sick, who said that?" (8a). All he has left is the debris of a Biblical aphorism, and he wants his friend to help him remember the phrase in its entirety. Estragon, however, is still too busy fussing with his boots to help his friend jog his memory. Vladimir persists in his attempts to describe the human condition, even without Estragon's help; yet within a few lines he is again stuck for words. He is trying to express an emotion he sometimes feels, and he pauses and asks: "How shall I say? Relieved and at the same time . . . he searches for the word . . . appalled" (8a). The stopping and starting of language becomes a standard means of expression in this play. Sidney Homan draws attention to this sporadic expression when he writes:

To start talking is difficult, as Vladimir observes, but that observation is countered by Estragon's 'You can start from anything'.
By conversation we make something . . . out of nothing . . . (40).

The continued attempt to make something out of nothing reaches its fullest exhibition in Lucky's speech, but the initial stops and starts between Didi and Gogo are our initial exposure to the larger rhetorical concerns of the play.

Vladimir and Estragon need to find ways to pass the time while they are waiting for Godot, and we learn that they have become quite accustomed to whiling away the hours and days in anticipation of a visit from him. One of the greatest ways to whittle away the time is to bandy words about. Vladimir and Estragon are living out Lear's vision of a happy verbal realm which the King so poignantly describes in Act V, but the Beckettian manifestation of that realm is so choked and dysfunctional that it points toward the falseness inherent in Lear's vision. Vladimir and Estragon do sing, and ask forgiveness, and tell old tales, and hear court news, but their rhetorical excursions still leave them lost and helpless.

At one empty moment, for example, Vladimir suggests that he tell the story of the two thieves crucified with Christ. Estragon seems totally disinterested in the tale, but Vladimir insists that it will, at the very least "pass the time," if he tells the story. Estragon remains
purposefully disinterested even as Vladimir begins to relate his frustration over the fate of the thieves. He has never been able to understand why the story of one saved thief and one damned thief has been universally accepted when only one of the four Evangelists relates the story. When Estragon will not even pretend to be interested, Vladimir pleads with him: "Come on, Gogo, return the ball, can't you, once in a way?" (9a) It is not so much that Vladimir wants Estragon to be vitally caught up in the story, he just wants his friend to join in the verbal game he has started. Vladimir is, I think, genuinely bothered by the story of the two thieves, but he is more pressingly bothered by Gogo's complete indifference to the rhetorical diversion. Once Estragon finally allows himself to be pulled into the conversation, he remains only half-hearted and ends up saying: "Let's stop talking for a minute, do you mind?" (11a). Incidentally, Beckett's fascination here and elsewhere with the story of the two thieves illuminates the crucifixion's place in the scapegoat ritual with Christ as the quintessential servant suffering to expiate all of humanity's crimes.

Estragon feels particularly weighted down by unnecessary words, and the issue of excessive talking is one that Beckett keeps ever before us. In imagining the
many people Godot must consult before he can make a given decision, Didi and Gogo run through a comical list. In addition to checking his books and bank account, there are family, friends, agents, and correspondents to consider. Godot must obviously surround himself with words, before he can make decisions. The sheer lunacy of such encumbrage hits us immediately, for we know that talking to all of those people, reading the words in multiple books will do nothing but add to the mountain of meaningless chatter which is already present in the universe.

Pozzo and Lucky's appearance near the middle of the first act provides its own diversion, and as soon as they are gone, Didi and Gogo fall back into their rhetorical routines. Estragons says: "Let's make a little conversation" (32a), and there ensues an entire dialogue about the identity of Pozzo and Lucky. The conversation is nonsensical and seemingly pointless, but it allows the two men to fill in the empty spaces of their lives; moreover, they know that they are compelled to talk, that they are "incapable of keeping silent" (40a). That knowledge makes them self-consciously aware of language and their use of it.

The appearance of Pozzo and Lucky goes a long way toward underscoring the abuses of language. Pozzo appears
driving a human being as if he were an animal, and we are prepared to dislike any word that emerges from his mouth. Pozzo calls Lucky cruel names, "Pig" and "Hog", and he barks monosyllabic orders at him that are to be obeyed instantly. In Pozzo's mouth the most flowery phrases burn like acid, and he remains pompously unaware of his own folly. His overbearing appearance alone might not render him so heinous, but once he opens his mouth and we hear his words, we are certain that he is a monument to human cruelty.

Just as in Happy Days, words are barbs and filler for the void, weapons and anesthesia, seldom in Waiting for Godot are they the harbingers of truth that they are meant to be. There are few moments in this play which draw our attention to the sacred nature of language. Rather Beckett continually forces us to examine how decayed and decaying language has become. It is not, however, the decay that has the final word. As Herbert Blau points out, Beckett is clearly not just writing a tired play about the decomposition of language. He is not like Gustave Flaubert who harbored a rather misanthropic desire to mock the sheer idiocy of daily speech. Beckett instead demonstrates how ineffective language can be, but the very demonstration carries with it the knowledge that language does not have to be dead
or dying. Lucky's speech contains both the actual decay and the potential hope of language.

Beckett clearly places great dramatic and thematic emphasis on Lucky's speech. Because we do not hear from Lucky until his speech, we have wondered all along if he is capable of language. The speech itself is prepared for as if Lucky were a classical orator. Pozzo suggests to Didi and Gogo that they tell Lucky to think. They cannot muster the wherewithal to give such an order so Pozzo treats Lucky with his usual cruelty and orders him to think. Lucky initially misunderstands Pozzo's command and begins to dance, but once Pozzo repeats the command "Think," Lucky knows what is expected of him, and he pours forth his words.

Until Lucky actually begins to speak, we are not quite sure that he will actually use words. Pozzo has insisted that Lucky be given his hat before he begins to think, and we wonder if thinking is solely a cerebral activity for him. His first stuttering phrase, however, lets us know that he is capable of creating language.

The speech is a microcosm of the thematic concerns of the play, for there is not one theme or idea in Waiting for Godot which is not rhetorically echoed here. Like Willie's words in Happy Days which mirror his wife's concerns, Lucky's speech reinforces the concerns
of his master as well as Didi and Gogo.

For example, Lucky repeats the phrase, "I resume," several times. The repetition serves to remind us that Lucky is making a great effort here, and the phrase also reminds us of Lucky's need to keep on talking. He will not be silenced, and indeed he struggles fiercely when the others try to stop his flow of words. In addition to the repetition of "I resume," there is Lucky's repetition of "but not so fast." The phrase is a common cliché, and as such it represents the dead language which so concerns Beckett, but the phrase is more than that. It allows Lucky to pace himself as he speaks, and it is a reminder to us that he is very aware of how his words are being spoken. These words are not total gibberish to Lucky nor to his listeners. He also repeats the phrase, "in a word" more than once. This particular phrase is fairly comical in its effect, because it would seem to indicate a certain control of language that Lucky is not demonstrating. Normally when a speaker says, "in a word," he or she is reducing a complex concept into one clear word, and the single word helps the listeners to grasp the meaning of the speech. Lucky never follows the phrase, "in a word" with anything like clarifying speech. The phrase merely sets up an expectation it cannot fulfill, for in Lucky's world, he cannot distill one word and make
it carry the full weight of a given concept. These tag phrases which draw attention to the speech as speech are linguistic crutches for Lucky, at the same time as they are reminders to us. This is an utterance as Lucky reminds us in his first line, and we are to hear it as such. It is not nonsensical gibberish. I am not suggesting here that Lucky’s speech does not in some way point toward nonsense, for it most certainly does; it is just that the rhetorical stopings and startings are not to be interpreted as meaningless filler.

The elements in Lucky’s speech which point toward the nonsense of our existence are blatant and manifold; indeed, his speech takes shots at almost every institution we have consoled ourselves with since the creation. God is irreverently mentioned immediately, "a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions" (28b). Lucky’s nonsensical phrasing reduces the concept of an all-loving and all-knowing God to a farce. The idea of an aphasic God who loves capriciously is at a far remove from the standard Judeo-Christian God which organized religion has set forth. But God is not the only institution that Lucky’s speech implicitly ridicules.
The social sciences are reduced to "anthropopopometry" (28b), the academy is reduced to researchers with imbécilic and offensive names like "Fartov and Belcher" (28b)—one by one Lucky's speech pokes fun at all of our golden calves—Shakespeare, Latin, philosophy. Any intellectual or emotional pursuit that has lulled us into a security is diminished in Lucky's speech.

Partly then, Lucky's speech stresses the emptiness and banality of our language and our existences. We have accrued layers of meaningless words and meaningless activities in order to avoid facing the charnel house of our existence. Yet even as we hear echoes of our lives in Lucky's words, we also come face to face with this poor fool's sorry lot. The speech demonstrates his suffering and isolation, as well as his misery and death-like existence. Like Lear's Fool he utters his words at a great cost to himself. It is equally difficult to speak with a noose around the neck as it is to speak under the threat of Lear's whip. Lucky's audience, Vladimir, Estragon, and Pozzo are never simultaneously interested in what he has to say, just as the Fool's words are often disallowed. His words are like those of Lear's Fool—diversionary and ineffectual. In order to silence Lucky, his audience must subdue him and nearly choke him to death.
death.

To Lucky, however, this speech is very important. He may have been ordered to think upon command, and he may be unable to finish a thought; yet he has to try to communicate with the limited vocabulary open to him. His ultimate muteness at the end of the play signals exactly what his effort to speak has cost him.

When Samuel Beckett directed Klaus Herm in the role of Lucky, he paid more attention to Lucky’s speech, Ruby Cohn tells us, than to any other part of the play.

Usually rushed through as nonsense, this monologue became a miracle of intelligibility as delivered by Klaus Herm, on Beckett’s instructions. . . . The whole monologue lasts six minutes, Herm haranguing with earnest conviction while his onstage audience register distress. (Just Play 264)

The speech was never intended by Beckett to be "eschatological gibberish" or a mere foaming at the mouth. We are to pay close attention to what Lucky says, even if we, like his onstage audience, are more distressed than edified.

Lucky does not die in this play, but he is as significantly diminished as Lear’s Fool. The diminished lives of these two court fools, however, is not without reward. Because they have absorbed so much pain and suffering, they have paid the price for those around
them. Certainly, all the characters in these plays suffer great anguish, but their collective crimes are too great to be expiated without an intercessory figure. The fool becomes the intercessor. He is a relatively innocent creature whose primary function is to draw suffering onto himself in order to gain for others a chance at a vital and a redeemed existence.

Although neither King Lear nor Waiting for Godot is primarily a tale of rebirth, there are elements of redemption in both works, and the tragicomic connection between the two works is manifest in the slim glimpses of hope available to us. Unlike Shakespeare’s late romances, there is no holistic sense of a world renewed, and there is not, because there cannot be, any assurance that all will be well; but there is determination to continue. That same determination colors Waiting for Godot. No one dies in the play; moreover, all four characters doggedly nurture the scraps of vitalism left them. Lucky falls, but he always rises, sometimes against some weighty opposition; Didi and Gogo flirt with suicide, but it is never anything more than a diversion to pass the time. Even Pozzo who is deflated and blind, continues to move at play’s end; in fact, he is freer to move and act once he is rid of all the clutter he cherished in the first act. Both Shakespeare
and Beckett portray the absurdity of life, and Lear's Fool and Lucky are the prime representatives of that absurdity; yet both Shakespeare and Beckett give evidence of the indomitable human urge to persist in a world in chaos. The Fool and Lucky try to impose order on chaos by using words to describe the absurdity they experience—thereby transcending and expiating the chaos of those around them.
NOTES

1 Program from 1982 Royal Shakespeare production of King Lear.

Both Welsford and Doran trace the development of the court fool, although Welsford is admittedly speculative in her discussion of the character while Doran is far more anecdotal and historical. Welsford devotes a chapter to the fool as scapegoat, and Doran devotes an entire chapter to a discussion of specific, historical court fools, e.g. Sommers, Tarleton. See also the Goldsmith text.

For recent discussions of Shakespeare and rhetoric see Donawerth, Trousdale, Lanham and Danson. Among the classic discussions of the topic are: Sister Miriam Joseph's text and that of T.W. Baldwin.

Erasmus wrote his influential De Duplici Copia Verborum as Rerum (De Copia) to coincide with the opening of Dean Colet's St. Paul's School in April of 1512. T.W. Baldwin explains: "The texts which Erasmus wrote for St. Paul's and elsewhere became almost universally the grammar school texts of England" (I, 77).

Danson's Tragic Alphabet devotes an entire chapter to the issue of language in King Lear.

The promptbooks to which I refer are in the Folger Shakespeare Library. I have listed their catalog numbers in Works Cited.

Ruby Cohn's Casebook on Waiting for Godot provides a partial overview of the criticism of this play. The casebook combines theatrical reviews of various performances with critical articles--some written specifically for the Cohn study.

Lucky's speech has been analyzed by many different critics who, predictably, understand it in many different ways. Anselm Atkins' brief note in Modern Drama was an early attempt to break the speech into three parts, and he maintains that "Lucky's speech is a carefully wrought poetic structure" (309). In 1972 Eugene Webb, writing in The Plays of Samuel Beckett maintained that "Lucky's speech is a window into the charnel house and
the vision proves intolerable" (34). Edith Kern takes a more positive approach when she suggests that we "chuckle rather than bristle" as we hear Lucky's words. She believes that "like a medieval fool, Lucky truly leaps from topic to topic, juxtaposing the sacred and the divine with the profane and the scatological" (58-9). Finally, in 1980 Frederick Busi has written: "The slave's outburst is the dramatic highpoint of the piece; all other word play pales in comparison with this torrential hemorrhage of knowledge streaming from the lips of Lucky. And when heard onstage the slave's tirade is, superficially, a mockery of human vanity attempting to impose order on chaos" (55).
WORKS CITED


Snatching at Folly:
The Center-Stage Fool in *Hamlet* and *Endgame*

"...they will not let me have all
the fool to myself; they'll be snatching".
Lear's Fool

Lear's Fool complains that everyone snatches at his folly, and it is a complaint to which every fool, Shakespearean or otherwise, can lay claim. The complaint is not merely aimed at those who are implicated in the fool's show, for any fool delights in his ability to point out the folly of others. The sharpest edge of the complaint cuts at those who willfully snatch at the fool's techniques thinking they can use the techniques and then be done. It is possible, such snatchers believe, to don the fool's cap while it suits their purposes, return the cap to the fool, and then dispense with folly. In *Hamlet* and *Endgame*, we have clear examples of the wrongheadedness of such thinking. Hamlet and Hamm reach for folly, snatching much of it from Polonius and Clov, only to realize in the end that they cannot return the cap and bells.
But if Hamlet and Hamm snatch folly from Polonius and Clov, they also reflect the larger absurdity of their respective worlds. Claudius, the arch-deceiver; Ophelia, the genuine madwoman; Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Osric, the foolish courtiers--are mirrored in Hamlet's antic disposition. Similarly, Hamm throws into relief not only Clov but his dying parents. Reaching out for folly, Hamlet and Hamm are able to confront existential disease and decay, thereby gaining an acceptance of their own mortality. In order to achieve that acceptance, as well as a chance at rebirth, they must come to terms with the people who gave them birth. On one level that means Hamlet must save his mother and Hamm must break free of the cyclical cruelty perpetuated by his progenitors. Thus, Hamlet and Hamm's snatching of folly from Polonius and Clov is a direct, center-stage manifestation of several layers of dramatic complexity. The fooling here adds another dimension to that in The Winter's Tale and Happy Days or King Lear and Waiting for Godot.

Autolycus in The Winter's Tale and Willie in Happy Days are trickster-fools who reflect the folly of Leontes and Winnie respectively. Leontes does not in any way intentionally borrow the techniques of the trickster to promote his insidious disruption of his home, nor does
Winnie knowingly adopt the trickster-rituals of her husband. Autolycus and Willie remain dramatic mirrors who intensify our understanding of the central action of *The Winter’s Tale* and *Happy Days* while remaining peripheral characters.

With Lear’s Fool and Lucky the fool takes one step closer to center stage, but he only commands our attention as long as he is in his master’s shadow. Like Autolycus and Willie, Lear’s Fool and Lucky mirror the pain of those around them, yet they are able to embrace that suffering in a way which is not available to Autolycus and Willie. We are interested in Lear’s Fool and Lucky primarily because of their relationships to their masters. Shakespeare and Beckett allow us to see Lear’s Fool and Lucky as fools whose primary purpose in life is to serve their masters, for they function almost totally within a universe circumscribed by Lear and Pozzo. The absence of Lear’s Fool and Lucky throughout a sizeable portion of *King Lear* and *Waiting for Godot* keeps them from commanding center-stage attention. While it is true that Didi and Gogo reminisce about Lucky when he is not on stage and Lear occasionally mentions the Fool in the jester’s absence, these two fool characters have little dramatic existence of their own. They exist to serve their masters.
Such subservience is a standard characteristic of an "allow'd fool," and none of the fools under discussion to this point has been a person of high rank. Autolycus could never rival Leontes in power any more than the Fool could encroach on Lear's authority, which will eventually evaporate as others encroach on it. Just so, Lucky and Willie are diminished human beings whose only dignity flows from their own endurance rather than an external societal rank. But with Hamlet and Hamm, the rules change; and we find the complaint of Lear's Fool substantiated in the Prince who adopts an "antic disposition" and the would-be autocrat who insists on being placed "right in the center."

With Hamlet, a character who has sometimes been played in white clown-face, and Hamm we have two characters who actively pursue the role of fool in order to try to accommodate the chaos of their lives; both men use fooling to try to control a universe that is beyond control (Mack 40). Anne Paolucci illuminates Hamlet's affinity with Hamm when she suggests that in Hamlet we see "the beginning of that dissolution of character which is the trademark of the Absurd" (236). Much earlier Edwin Booth suggested the affinity Hamlet has with all of us when he said that Hamlet "is the epitome of mankind, not an individual; a sort of magic
mirror in which all men and women see the reflex of themselves" (Phelps 63). While both the dissolution Paolucci notes and the mirror Booth sees are manifest as Hamlet adopts a cloak of folly so that he can trap the incestuous murderer, Claudius, he also needs the folly to express himself and to act out in words the torment that eats at him. As he playacts, he gains insight. Such playacting gives the young prince a sense of control because he believes he can slip in and out of folly, or "double as the Fool" to use Hotson's phrase (92), as his purposes dictate, without becoming enmeshed in the folly himself. That he is wrong in this regard proves to be one of his fatal weaknesses. Similarly, Hamm reaches for the ritualized action of foolery in order to control his disintegrating world.

There will be no final controlling, however, for either Hamlet or Hamm, for all one can hope to gain is an acceptance of one's own fate, and ultimately, both Hamlet and Hamm work their fool's way to such an acceptance. Martin Scofield has argued effectively that even if Hamlet comes to accept his fate, his self is not completely "unfolded" at the play's end. Following Kierkegaard and Claudel, Scofield writes:

The world of Hamlet, for all the characters in the play, is a world of signs, and they
remain enigmatic. None of the characters, in answer to their question, What may this mean? ever discovers fully what is going on and how much others know. (128)

Scofield continues by listing all the questions that remain unanswered as the curtain falls, and the plethora of unanswerable questions begins to have Beckettian overtones. Both Hamlet and Hamm will use folly to come to terms with their own fates, but coming to terms does not suggest that all the questions are answered. The frame of Harry Levin's, The Question of Hamlet rests on questions, answered and unanswered in the play. Pointing out that the word question appears more frequently in this play than in any other Shakespeare wrote and reminding us that it is the final word in Hamlet's most famous line, Levin suggests "we may well regard it as the key word of the play" (20).

Hamlet's antic disposition and Hamm's foolery draw much of their power from the presence of Polonius and Clov. Both the "tedious old fool" who is Claudius' chief minister and the father of Ophelia and Laertes, and Clov, who twice says of himself "O what a fool I am," betray the marks of a fool. Clov's vaudevillian routines with the ladder and the telescope and the flea powder echo the lazzi of the commedia dell'arte, while the officious babbling and intrusive nature of Polonius, who never considers himself a fool, reduce him
nevertheless to the stereotypic buffoonery often associated with clowns.

Hamlet labels the freshly-dead Polonius, a "wretched, rash, intruding fool", and no matter how heinous Hamlet's murder of such a man is, it is hard to disagree with his assessment of Polonius' character. What Hamlet fails to realize, and what we come to learn, is that his own actions are often as rash and intrusive and wretched as Polonius'. When he does label himself an ass—"Why, what an ass am I" (2.2.568)—it is because of his inaction rather than his overt rashness and misjudgement. Hamlet assumes all along that he will assume an "antic disposition," thereby seeming the fool rather than being one. But as he so readily snaps at his mother, Hamlet "knows not seems"; consequently, his game of folly transforms him until he becomes on one level that which he would seem to be.

In commenting on the advice Hamlet gives his mother, Barbara Ostwald sheds light on Hamlet's inability simply to play the fool's role. She writes:

'Assume a virtue if you have it not,' Hamlet tells Gertrude; put on the livery of good actions and they 'will lend a kind of easiness to continued virtue.' In other words a habitual role-player may eventually become the thing he seems to---the pretender may become the doer.

(279)
Thus, almost by habit the fool's role becomes Hamlet's role without his knowledge.

Similarly, Hamm's cruel treatment of Clov as his menial does not seem to carry with it any attendant recognition that he is in many ways like his servant. With a testy nastiness reminiscent of Hamlet's attitude towards Polonius' excessive concern with the players, Hamm ridicules Clov's interest in his kitchen.

Clov: I'll leave you, I have things to do.

Hamm: In your kitchen?

Clov: Yes.

Hamm: What, I'd like to know.

Clov: I look at the wall.

Hamm: The wall! And what do you see on your wall? Mene, mene? Naked bodies?

Clov: I see my light dying.

Hamm: Your light dying! Listen to that! Well, it can die just as well here, your light. Take a look at me and then come back and tell me what you think of your light. (12)

In short, Hamm cashes in on the foolish qualities of Clov without in any way admitting that the very folly at which he scoffs has surrounded him. Like Hamlet, Hamm believes he can play at folly without becoming transformed by it. Paradoxically, it is, in part, his transformation through folly, which helps him
grow into an acceptance of his fate, for both Hamlet and Hamm work toward a rebirth which culminates in their recognition, however fleeting, that the only true control rests in acceptance.

There can be little doubt that Polonius is a fool, a rather stereotypic buffoon who is very sure of himself and his own wisdom, but who nevertheless bungles most of what he endeavors. He is unaware of his own weaknesses, however, and that ignorance combined with his bungling costs him his life. But if Polonius is unaware of his foolishness, Hamlet is more than willing to announce Polonius a fool to anyone who will listen. In Act II just as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter, Hamlet says of Polonius in exasperation: "These tedious old fools" (219). Speaking of her father to Ophelia in Act II, Hamlet says: "Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool nowhere but in his own house" (3.2. 131-32). Even when Hamlet has just murdered Polonius, he cannot refrain from referring to the old man's folly. The first words from his mouth when he realizes it is Polonius he has killed are: "Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell" (3.4. 32), and as he drags Polonius' body off stage he refers to him as a "foolish, prating knave" (215).

Hamlet's disgust for Polonius' foolishness never
seems to carry with it the acknowledgement that he is like the old man in many ways. The prince seems to believe that he is capable of playing at folly without actually being caught in its web, when in fact his folly becomes an integral part of his character. While it is true that Hamlet lives many roles--lover, son, stepson, friend--he shares with the more simple-minded Polonius the role of a manipulator who loses the ability to deal with people on a completely rational basis.

Consider for a moment Polonius' overriding concern with orchestrating the lives of those around him. As a man "who was accounted a good actor" (3.2.96), he is like Hamlet who wants to arrange little scenes for people to play out. This tendency becomes apparent very early in the play when he gives Reynaldo spying instructions. Because Polonius is not quite sure that Laertes will follow a virtuous path in France, he wants Reynaldo to spy on the young man and ascertain his living habits. Not content to dispense Reynaldo with general advice, Polonius gives specific directions on how Reynaldo is to gather information about Laertes. He says:

Take you, as 'twere, some distant knowledge of him; As thus, 'I know his father and his friends, And in part him.' Do you mark this, Reynaldo? (2.1.13-15)

The father then gives Reynaldo specific examples of the
kinds of questions he may or may not ask in order to
gather information about Laertes. Resembling Claudius
who also uses his son’s friends as spies, Polonius
reaches for the theatrical and the manipulative.

The same tactic marks his attempt to convince
Claudius of Hamlet’s love for Ophelia. Apparently,
Polonius never thinks of asking Hamlet directly if
his daughter is the cause of his distemper, nor does he
consider allowing Claudius to interview Hamlet on the
matter. It must be said in Polonius’ behalf, of course,
that the direct approach has not seemed to work with
Hamlet, for almost everyone has tried to talk to him with
little success. Yet Polonius’ absolute delight in trying
to trap Hamlet into revealing his true feelings evidences
more than just his frustration with Hamlet’s lack of
response to more traditional methods of coercion. He acts
very much like a stage manager on opening night as he
assigns Claudius and Ophelia their places in the first
scene of the third act. To his daughter he says:

Ophelia, walk you here—Gracious, so please you
We will bestow ourselves—Read on this book
That show of such an exercise may colour
Your loneliness. (3.1.43-45)

As soon as he hears Hamlet’s approach, he marshals
Claudius out of view so that the two of them, a pair of
concerned fathers, can watch the interplay between their
two children. The little scene Polonius has arranged does little to convince Claudius that Hamlet is mad for Ophelia's love, but it reconfirms the King's suspicion that Hamlet must be watched; however, Polonius, who remains undaunted in his belief that it is the lack of his daughter's affection which has driven the young Dane into such a state, comes to believe in the fantasy he creates.

Sadly, it is the foolish old man's belief in the efficacy of such scenes which leads to his death. Polonius convinces Gertrude to speak with her son while he eavesdrops on the conversation from behind the arras. In typical fashion, he tells the Queen how she must act:

A' will come straight. Look you lay home to him. Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with. And that your Grace hath screen'd and stood between Much heat and him. I'll silence me even here. Pray you be round with him. (3.4.1-4)

Although there is little evidence Polonius has ever been successful with such ploys, he urges Gertrude to follow his advice. Unfortunately, he has badly misread both Hamlet's emotional state and Gertrude's ability to control her son. Polonius dies because he is blind to his own folly.
Hamlet shares the same blindness, and he is very much like Polonius in his fondness for playacting. When Hamlet’s world is out of his control and he wants to rein in the chaos which whirls around him, he self-consciously reaches for an actor’s role in order to cope. Unlike Polonius, who is not acting, he will pretend to be disordered in order to effect his desired ends. Hamlet, who seldom directly confronts an issue or a person, is similar to Polonius who is forever orchestrating scenes. For example, until the very end he is never as direct with Claudius as the ghost is with him; moreover, he waits a very long time before he confronts his mother with a direct accusation. By the time he does confront her in the closet scene, his fury is too far advanced to be controlled; consequently, he unknowingly becomes the fool he has only been pretending to be. Polonius dies physically in this scene, and Hamlet partially loses his hold on the artificial life he has fashioned for himself.

Previous to this scene, however, we have witnessed the supreme parallel between Polonius and Hamlet. Indeed, the two actors come face to face as the players arrive at court. Hamlet is very interested in the players’ arrival as is clear from his conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, yet when Polonius arrives in an excited
bluster to tell him of the news, Hamlet labels him a "great baby" and replies "buzz, buzz" to Polonius' announcement. If Hamlet's mousetrap is to work, he must not appear overly interested in the actors, but his indifferent nastiness to the old man stems from his strong need to disassociate himself from the foolish figure of Polonius. Polonius' excitement over the arrival of the actors is little different from Hamlet's, yet the young Prince has to poke fun at the old man's keen interest in the thespians. Throughout the introductory scene with the players Hamlet and Polonius directly vie for the managerial role. Hamlet gives the players an example of the speech he'd like to hear and when he finishes, Polonius credits the performance: "Fore God, my lord, well spoken, with good accent and direction" (2.2.455). When the First Player continues the speech, Polonius finds it too tiresome and curtly announces: "This is too long" (486). The retort from Hamlet is sharp and quick as he threatens to take Polonius' beard along with the speech to the barbers. Polonius continues to comment on these initial speeches of the players, obviously believing that he is qualified and able to comment on theatrical performances. While Hamlet seems either unmoved or irritated by Polonius' jangling, he evaluates the performances in his own way.
He is sizing up the actors as potential pawns in his trap to catch the conscience of the king, and he needs to know if their acting will be effective. What we have in this scene then is Polonius, the natural fool, face to face with Hamlet, the artificial fool—both of whom are acting in strikingly similar fashion.

As the players gather for the actual performance in Act III, Polonius is still very interested in the art of acting and Hamlet uses that interest to divert the King’s attention. Hamlet gives Polonius the cue to start talking about his own acting career as he turns to Ophelia’s father and says: "My lord, you play’d once in the university, you say?" (3.2.95) Polonius is happy to mention his role as Julius Caesar, thus allowing Hamlet to poke fun at the old man’s theatrical efforts. Yet Hamlet was actively interested in the theatre while at the university himself; indeed, it was at the university that he first became acquainted with these players whose presence in Denmark has become so vital to his scheme. He treats Polonius as if he were an alien and foolish being, who can be held up for scoffing, but he is blind to his affinity with the Lord Chamberlain.

Once the play has worked its poison on Claudius, it is Polonius who curtails the play. "Give o’er the play," he announces; then, "Lights, lights, lights" (3.2. 256.
The actual play may have been orchestrated by Hamlet, but Polonius does not even hesitate to cancel the play without consulting the Prince. Hamlet believes he is in control of this performance, but it is a belief he unknowingly shares with Polonius. Hamlet is so proud of the theatrical coup he has staged that he positively crows to Horatio after the King has fled in terror, for he is convinced that his performance should earn him a "fellowship in a cry of players" (3.2.265). As Scofield points out, Hamlet uses this jest "to lighten the burden of the moment" (126); moreover, Hamlet, like the "tedious old fool" he so despises, has used playacting to achieve his desired end.

If Hamlet is unaware that his dramatic intrigues are similar to Polonius’, he is equally unaware that his words echo the old man’s. Hamlet correctly believes Ophelia’s father speaks like a fool, and he enjoys pulling his potential father-in-law into linguistic games. In the fishmonger exchange in Act II, for example, Hamlet quips with Polonius, and at the end of the dialogue labels Polonius a "tedious old fool." He finds Polonius tiresome on many fronts, I suspect, but the old man’s ability to be duped by Hamlet’s foolish language is particularly laughable to the prince. Hamlet deliberately baits him into a conversation which
will make him appear mad because Hamlet wants to perpetuate the spreading rumor that he has lost his wits. At this early point in the play, Hamlet is still fairly in control of himself, and he is able to draw Polonius into a senseless conversation which Polonius takes far too seriously, for by accepting the appearance for the reality he is duped. Hamlet’s interest here, of course, is not just in poking fun at a vulnerable target, and his word play is a release for his own raging emotions. Confused and uncertain about which path to take, the prince reaches for folly.

Subsequently, when Polonius summons Hamlet to Gertrude’s bedchamber after the mousetrap has done its damage, the prince pulls Polonius into another verbal fencing match, which once again demonstrates Hamlet’s intense need for emotional release as well as his intentional baiting of Ophelia’s father. Although the cloud exchange is not as long as the camel exchange, it marks a fatal flaw in Hamlet because he still believes that he can gain the upper hand with Polonius by luring him into pointless verbal duels. While it may seem that Polonius plays right into Hamlet’s hand in this scene, Hamlet fails to realize how intent Polonius is on catching him in his madness. Believing he is making sport as he pulls Polonius into a discussion of
the shapes of clouds, Hamlet is actually feeding the fire which will lead to his first murder. He absolutely misreads the seriousness of Polonius' intent in this seemingly innocent verbal exchange; consequently, it will only be a few minutes before Hamlet stabs and kills Polonius as he hides behind the curtain in Gertrude’s chamber. Were Hamlet not so intent on proving someone else a fool and were he not so torn by his own conflicting emotions, he might mark the passionate concern rising in Polonius and thus avoid his first murder. But Hamlet unwittingly steps into a trap which he helped to fashion.

Hamlet’s subsequent murder of Polonius does not seem to affect him immediately because he lays the blame for the death squarely on Polonius’ head. Because Polonius chooses to be an intruding fool, he dies. So Hamlet believes. The larger irony here escapes him because he has been fooled by appearances—a trait he decidedly abhors in the man he has just killed. Shortly before Polonius’ death, Hamlet has a chance to kill Claudius, who is his real prey. After all, in killing Polonius he announces, “I took thee for thy better” (3.4.34). The only reason Hamlet did not kill Claudius when he had the chance was because he wrongly believed that Claudius was repenting when he saw him in an attitude of prayer.
Not wanting to send his father’s murderer to heaven, Hamlet refrains from killing Claudius. What Hamlet does not know is that he would have killed an unrepentant man had he murdered Claudius at his prayers because Claudius cannot bring himself to abandon all "those effects for which he did the murder" (3.4.55). He will not give up the crown, the queen, or his ambition; thus, he cannot truly repent. Hamlet, seeing his attitude of prayer, assumes he is asking forgiveness and thereby misses the chance for revenge. "When Claudius is at prayer, Hamlet is led astray by silence" (Calderwood 89). He does here what he so faults Polonius for doing—he accepts the appearance as the reality.

Hamm’s relationship to Clov in *Endgame* is similar to Hamlet’s relationship to Polonius. Clov is the "allow’d fool," the fellow who by pattern and design follows the traditional path carved out for the fool. He is subservient, comic, prone to vaudevillian routines. As such he is the prime repository of the "burlesque comedy" which Stanley Gontarski sees as the counter to all the dissimilar elements in *Endgame*. The very elements Gontarski names—"memories of war, family deaths, disastrous sexuality, the failure of religion"—are those things over which Hamm has no control (54). So while he appears to disdain Clov, he clings to the same
patterns of existence which mark Clov's life. Hamm, like
Hamlet, is the nominal superior, but he has little more
control than Clov.

Clov is an easy mark for the label of fool. His
opening routine with the windows, the ladder, and the
telescope comes straight from traditional comedy. Unable
to see out of the windows because of their height, Clov
fetches a step-ladder and repeats the routine of looking
out the window three times before turning his attention
to the ashbins and Hamm, all of which are covered with
sheets. He is, from the very start, clearly the menial who
is in charge of domestic duties, and he plays the role of
suffering servant.

A self-acknowledged fool ("Ah what A fool I am"),
Clov has little to do with the life in the ashbins. He
never speaks directly to Nell or Nagg unless in an
intercessory role. When Nagg first appears, for example,
Clov is offstage; subsequently, he has to be ordered by
Hamm to give Nagg the pap he is demanding. Clov is not
onstage during the "tailor story". When he subsequently
reappears, it is to shove Nell back into her bin at
Hamm's insistence. Later Clov will negotiate a
sugar-plum for Nagg if he will listen to Hamm's story,
yet Clov does not remain to listen to the story. This
relative isolation is a typical mark of the fool whose
attachment to one person limits his interactions with others. Lear's Fool, for example, interacts with only a limited number of the people in Lear's universe because his primary focus is on Lear himself. Lucky is clearly more interactive with Pozzo than he is with Didi and Gogo, for the nature of his existence is to be yoked to his master. One senses with Clov that his non-interaction with Hamm's parents stems from Hamm's pretended indifference to them. Because Clov takes most of his cues from Hamm, he pays only as much attention to Nell and Nagg as Hamm dictates; thus he is not interested in them except as satellites of Hamm's existence.

Beckett's recent directorial decisions have limited Clov's freedom of movement, thereby making it easier to see Clov's isolation as an outgrowth of his inability to move. In his 1980 production notebook for the San Quentin Drama Workshop production of Endgame, Beckett jots down the following notes about Clov's movement:

C's walk, posture: stiff, sore at knees, waist, stooped. When still tries to straighten, restoops

Moving painful as economical as possible--when possible none (Reading MS 1975)

The actual text for this production bears similar marks of Beckett's intent. For example, Hamm's line to Clov
which reads "But you can walk" (36) is altered by Beckett. The word walk is crossed out, and above it Beckett writes the word move.

Anyway, Clov is more interested in things than people. He is always fussing with material objects, sometimes at Hamm's insistence but sometimes of his own free will. It is a preoccupation he shares with his creator. Beckett's own interest in objects becomes strikingly apparent with even a cursory examination of his own production notebooks. In a 1974 Endgame notebook, he writes the words no more, then lists all the items in the play whose supply has run out. The list consists of almost entirely material objects: bicycle wheels, pap, rugs, painkiller, etc. For Beckett, as for Clov, much of reality is grounded in the condition of those objects which surround us. Clov, for example, is preoccupied with his kitchen. Whenever he has the freedom to leave Hamm, it is to the kitchen he retreats. Clov does not tend a garden, nor does he disappear to read books, nor does he "think" like Lucky in order to pass the time. Rather he putters around in a kitchen which in a traditional sense is filled with material objects which warrant practical and immediate attention.

Clov's preoccupation with objects is, of course, precipitated by Hamm, who always needs some thing which
Clov is obliged to go and fetch. With very little exception, Clov's entrances and exits are dictated by the need for some material object. After his initial exit, for example, he returns with a ladder, and subsequently, Hamm will send him off in search of flea powder, a dog, a gaff, and the alarm clock. The objects are not important in themselves but rather for the life they engender and the diversion they represent. In many ways, Hamm and Clov are like Didi and Gogo who strive for diversions to fill the time which stretches before them. Indeed, Beckett once said to Roger Blin: "You must realize that Hamm and Clov are Didi and Gogo at a later date, at the end of their lives" (Gontarski 42).

One of the primary differences here, of course, is that Hamm believes he is in control of the diversions and therefore of his world. It is only on his orders that a diversionary routine evolves, and he feels secure in his ability to orchestrate events. But like Hamlet, he often fails to realize how the scenes he orchestrates loosen his control of events. The ritualistic killing of the flea is a good example.

Clov suddenly announces: "I have a flea"

HAMM: A flea! Are there still fleas?

CLOV: On me there's one.
(scratching)
Unless it's a crabouse.

HAMM: (very perturbed) But humanity might start from there all over again. Catch him, for the love of God!

CLOV: I'll go and get the flea powder. (Exit)

HAMM: A flea! This is awful! What a day!
(Enter Clov with a sprinkling-tin)

HAMM: Let him have it!
(Clov loosens the top of his trousers, pulls it forward and shakes powder into the aperture. He stoops, looks, waits, starts, frenziedly shakes more powder, stoops, looks, waits.)

CLOV: The bastard!

HAMM: Did you get him?

CLOV: Looks like it. (34)

The dramatic spectacle here, of course, is a comic one. Clov and Hamm both pit their energies against a flea whose major offense is its vitality. Unlike God, who will subsequently share the title of bastard, the flea does apparently respond to the wishes of Clov and Hamm. It dies. The sheer physicality of the scene demands a lot from Clov who has increasing difficulty with movement; moreover, it is Clov who is charged with the responsibility of snuffing out the flea. Hamm gives an order and Clov responds. There is no discussion, and Clov is not asked for his opinion or his advice. He simply does what Hamm tells him to do. What is telling is the fervor with which Hamm enters into this little game,
for he loses his cool control as he becomes vitally interested in Clov's success or failure. In his fervent desire to extinguish the flea, Hamm momentarily loses his superior position of controller and joins Clov in a mutual attempt to snuff out life. He does not realize he has relinquished control, and once the ordeal is past he resumes his role as prime-mover by suggesting a southern trip for Clov and him.

That Hamlet shares Hamm's grim horror of fertility is evident in the virtual nihilism of his outburst to Ophelia in Act 3, Scene 1. As he rages, "Get thee to a nunnery! Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners" (121-22), his antipathy for life reduces his love to a lady "most deject and wretched" (155). Hamlet's outburst is as much against himself and his immobilization in the face of absurdity as it is against the unfortunate Ophelia, whose major offense, like the flea's, is her potential fertility.

The dog routine, like the flea routine, carries with it an almost pathetic statement of Hamm's vulnerability in the face of a disintegrating universe. He puts Clov through comic paces with the dog which clearly keep Clov in a subservient position, yet his own involvement with the dog belies the seeming superiority with which he orders his menial around. Hamm asks: "Is my dog ready?"
(39), and Clov implies that because the dog has a missing leg, he is not nor will he ever be ready. Hamm, however, asserts his authority and orders his servant to "Go and get him!" (39). As Clov leaves to fetch the dog, Hamm says to himself, "We're getting on." He is temporarily pleased that he has been able to work his will, but Clov's return with the dog only highlights Hamm's lack of control. He wants the dog to be finished, complete with ribbon, sex, and white color, but the dog possesses none of these qualities, and Hamm can only urge Clov to make the dog gaze imploringly at his master. The scene dramatically pits Clov, the accommodating servant, against Hamm, the demanding master. Clov has physically to tend the dog, has to make it stand, has to help Hamm feel its head, all the while knowing that the dog is a poor excuse for a canine and will never fulfill Hamm's need for an adoring mongrel. So while it is Clov who must enact the physical clowning routines, it is Hamm whose emotional involvement with the dog renders him as foolish as Clov.

While Clov is the immediately recognizable fool, Hamm borrows his folly without realizing he is doing so, and the borrowed folly becomes crucial to his own existence and creative efforts. He cannot even finish his story without forcing Clov into the role of straight man.
At one point Clov asks Hamm, "What is there to keep me here?" (58) and Hamm tells him: "The dialogue. I've got on with my story." Clov does not pick up his cue on time, however, and Hamm has to harass him into asking the necessary questions to further the dialogue. At Hamm's insistence, Clov feigns interest in the story and its creative progress, and suggests that when this story is finished Hamm will begin another. Hamm bullies Clov into pretending he is interested in the story, but then becomes painfully engaged in the outcome of the ensuing dialogue. Like Hamlet he forces those around him into a game without realizing that he cannot distance himself from it.

Ultimately, Hamm comes to realize he can exist without Clov and it is only by dispensing with him that he can come to terms with his own fate. Only when Hamm believes he has been denied his fool, his existential prop, does he find the inner resolve to go on alone as fools do. As the play closes, Hamm believes that Clov has left him. We know that Clov remains in the background, dressed and ready to leave yet still present, but Hamm believes he is alone because his final request that Clov cover him with the sheet remains unanswered.

Exposed as he is without the sheet for his shroud,
Hamm takes stock of what remains. Slowly, he relinquierishes all of his props—the gaff, the dog, the whistle—until all that remains is his handkerchief. Neither his Father nor Clov respond to his calls, and he accepts the fact that he is alone. It is in these last few moments, devoid of all emotional props, that he is able to finish his story. Hamm understands he is able to endure alone if that is what remains for him to do. There is strength, not wretched resignation, in his final moments when he says to his handkerchief: "You... remain" (84). Alan Schneider, Beckett's American director, says of moments like this one: "It is Sam Beckett's exaltation of the spirit that has taught me the one basic truth, that in spite of everything or whatever, one goes on" (289). Like Hamlet, Hamm comes to the realization that he cannot control the universe. His father will not always be there for him and Clov may ultimately abandon him, but what he can do is finish his own story and that is no small feat.

Just as Hamm's final ability to accept his own mortality rests in part on his severance from his cruel parents, so too Hamlet's redemption of his mother helps him effect his own rebirth. Both Hamlet and Hamm inherit a diseased universe from their parents, and their attempts to survive without succumbing to the infection is at the heart of the dramatic action.
Hamlet returns from Wittenberg for his father's funeral only to discover that Claudius, his uncle and the late King's brother, has assumed the throne and married Hamlet's mother, Gertrude. The swiftness of the marriage disturbs Hamlet even before he learns from his father's ghost that Claudius murdered the King. He cynically suggests to Horatio the reason for such swiftness:

"Thrift. Thrift, Horatio. The funeral baked meats! Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables" (1.2.180-81). The ghost-supplied knowledge of Claudius' lethal duplicity sets Hamlet on a course to purge his kingdom of the disease which races through its veins.

Similarly, Hamm exists in a bleak world that is not entirely of his own making. We never know what catastrophic event has ended the natural order, yet we do know that little recognizable life remains. Contrary to Hamlet's situation, is the suggestion in Endgame that Hamm's cruelty has kept the world's light extinguished. Clov tells Hamm:

When old Mother Pegg asked you for oil in her lamp and you told her to get out to hell, you knew what was happening then, no? (Pause.)
You know what she died of, Mother Pegg? Of darkness. (75)

Hamm's reported cruelty to Mother Pegg does not surprise us, for we have watched his cruel treatment of Clov as
well as his parents.

Nagg: Me pap!

Hamm: Give him his pap!

Clov: There's no more pap.

Hamm (to Nagg)
   Do you hear that? There's no more pap.
   You'll never get any more pap. (9)

In production Beckett alters Hamm's response to his father's subsequent request for a sugar plum, and Hamm says: "You'll never get any more sugar plums" (MS 1974). There may be sugar-plums, such alteration suggests, but Hamm is not about to give any to his father. Unlike Hamlet, Hamm appears to perpetuate motiveless cruelty.

Our first exposure to the melancholy prince is akin to our first experience of Hamm. Hamlet is already deep in the mire of his own depression when we see him in the second scene of the play. The first words from his mouth—"A little more than kin, and less than kind"—let us know he is at odds with the king whom we have no reason to suspect at this early point in the play. As the scene continues we watch as Hamlet is surly first with the King and then his mother. It is not until Hamlet is left alone on stage that we begin to understand why he is so morose because we hear the soliloquy in which he laments his father's untimely death, his uncle's
accession to the throne, and his mother's hasty marriage. As he contemplates suicide, he raves against a world gone mad, an unnatural universe. He rails:

   How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
   Seem to me all the uses of this world!
   Fie on't! Ah, fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden
   That grows to seed; things rank and gross in
   nature/Possess it merely. . . (135-139)

Hamlet can only conclude his listing of the ills that beset him and Denmark with the tight-lipped lines: "It is not, nor it cannot come to good/ But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue"(157-59). While he may be feeling Denmark's pain, he is clearly suffering great anguish himself, and his whirling emotions have to find ultimate expression even if his present course is silence. Eventually Hamlet will become an actor, and he will direct a play-within-the-play in order to find release. His role as an actor is one of his clearest links to Hamm.

The first words from Hamm's mouth establish him as an actor. "Me to play" he tells us at the very start, and although we are uncertain exactly what he means, it is clear that he intends to adopt a role of some sort. The role which he adopts is eerily reminiscent of the Danish Prince. Hamm, who also has contemplated suicide, does not believe that anyone suffers as he does—not even his father and mother. He quickly establishes himself as one
who is at odds with those around him, yet as one who will not give up the battle to remain in control.

Although Hamm initially talks as if he is alone on a sea of misery, we have known from the beginning that there is at least one other person in his universe. Clov has executed an almost classic fooling routine at the very start of the play. He has carried a ladder back and forth between the two stage windows, busily checking the view, he has checked inside the two dustbins which rest on the stage; and he has punctuated all of this activity with "brief laughs." He informs whoever is listening that he will return to his kitchen and wait for Hamm to "whistle him." We know immediately then that Hamm is not isolated, for he has a servant who is at his beck and call. Although we cannot be certain at first what kind of a servant or companion Clov is, we are sure that Hamm is not as isolated as his opening words would indicate. Like Hamlet he sets himself apart from the life he has inherited, in an attempt to control his own rising fear and confusion.

Shakespeare provides the image of a diseased kingdom to color all of Hamlet's talk of suicide and despair, and Yorick's skull "holds a mirror up to the human nature of the audience and shows them a death's head" (Alexander 164). In Endgame Beckett joins Shakespeare by providing
an almost palpable image of decay in designing a set that hauntingly resembles a skull. The early reviews of the 1964 London run of Endgame described the Endgame set as a "huge skull, pitted and corroded with human decay, reminiscent of a prison cell" (Theatre Records 120). With its bare, grey interior, and its two windows, functioning as eyes to the world, Beckett’s set is a grisly reminder that no matter how myopic Hamm’s view of his own suffering, he is certainly in the midst of decay and death. His response to that decay and death will form the central dramatic action of Endgame, just as Hamlet’s chosen course determines the action of Hamlet. Both men will journey through disorder until they reach a calm acceptance of their respective fates. They will ultimately come to terms with their parents and themselves; thus, paving the way for a rebirth. Katherine Worth aptly describes the struggle for rebirth in Endgame which lies beneath the more obvious symbols of decay and death. Her view is worth quoting at length:

The sense of Genesis gets strongly into the play: the echo of that voice we all know from childhood, sounding out of the Book of Genesis, calling the dry land earth and the gathering together of the waters, seas, and finding creation good. The echo merges with the echoes of Noah and reinforces them: not just the part of the myth that deals with the Deluge as destruction but the other part, the climax, the ending which is also a beginning, everything starting again, all freshly washed
by the waters that poured out. . .from
the windows of heaven. Perhaps the stillness
outside that Clov describes hasn’t after all
to be seen in his terms—of leaden waves and
nothingness—but as the hushed expectancy
of a universe waiting for creation, for the
breaking of the waters. (190)

Inherent in Worth’s view is the acknowledgement that no
authentic birth takes place without travail, and Hamlet
and Hamm have to struggle through the mire of a diseased
universe before they come into the momentary light.

The diseased state of Denmark and Hamm’s universe is
manifest in many ways, but perhaps none is more telling
than the corroded familial relationships. Hamlet has lost
a father, hates his stepfather, and is estranged from his
mother. This alienation with its attendant emotional
chaos propels Hamlet deeper into folly.

The prince’s disdain for his mother is in direct
opposition to his father’s wishes. In urging Hamlet to
revenge, the Ghost tells his son:

But howsoever thou pursues this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven.
(1.5.85-87).

The Ghost knows that Gertrude will suffer enough on her
own and does not need the goad of a revenging son, yet
Hamlet chooses to ignore his father’s advice and torment
his mother, thereby perpetuating the very disease he is
trying to cure. His cruelty to his mother is a constant
of the play, and its most undistilled poison is evident
in the closet scene. Like Hanno who feels he has control
over his parents because they are enclosed in dustbins,
Hamlet initiates his most vitriolic attack on his mother
when she is confined to her closet; hence, she is
vulnerable and unprepared to defend herself. As the Fool
does with Lear, Hamlet parries with his
mother, mercilessly forcing her to look at her own
folly. Even his killing of Polonius does not
stop his attack on his mother, for it is not until
his father appears and urges compassion that Hamlet
realizes the toll he is taking on his mother. "How is it
with you, lady?" (3.4.115) he asks his mother, and she
is composed enough to reply:

Alas, how is't with you.
That you do bend your eye on vacancy,
And with th'incorporeal air do hold discourse?
(3.4.116-19)

Hamlet’s discussion with the Ghost in his mother’s
chamber unnerves him, and his mother’s concern for him
mounts, as she realizes that his hold on reality is
slipping. When he cautions her to avoid Claudius’ bed,
she does not put up an argument; she laments the fact
that Hamlet must go to England, and she agrees not to
mention their encounter to anyone. Although her
acquiescence to her son’s demands is motivated by
maternal concern, she also concedes her guilty
liability for Denmark's disease as she tells her son:

O Hamlet, speak no more!
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct. (3.4.89-91)

We can only guess what Hamlet's relationship with his mother was like before his father's death, but it is clear that the loss of his father and his mother's hasty marriage has so altered the Prince's estimation of his mother that he can barely bring himself to be civil to her. Hamlet feels, in effect, as if he has lost both parents, and he acts as if he were a distraught orphan without birthrights.

It is only in the graveyard scene that Hamlet is reborn, thereby shedding his immobility and his orphan status. Having reclaimed his mother in the closet scene, he has gained more sense of control. As he watches the gravediggers tossing skulls about, he comes face to face with death; and although his bones initially "ache to think on't" (5.1.86), he eventually feels comfortable enough with death to take Yorick's skull into his own hands. The skull, an image which so dominates Endgame, touches a chord in the melancholy prince, and as he fondly remembers the court jester as a "fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy" (5.1.172-3), he is no longer paralyzed. In looking into a fool's skull,
Hamlet is freed. Thus, his leap into Ophelia's grave becomes a statement of self-actualization, as he announces, "this is I/Hamlet the Dane" (5.1.244).

Having been reborn, it is ironically Hamlet's mother who rallies to her son in the graveyard scene when all others are outraged by his seemingly extreme behavior. After Hamlet emerges from Ophelia's grave and threatens Laertes with the words, "Why I will fight with him upon this theme/ Until my eyelids no longer wag," rather than berating her son for his foolish behavior or avoiding him out of fear, Gertrude asks Hamlet, "O my son, what theme?" (5.1.253-55). No longer playing the fool's role, Hamlet responds to his mother's question by announcing his fervent love for Ophelia. Gertrude also remains Hamlet's loyal supporter in the final duel scene, and it is her death which spurs Hamlet on to finish the task he began in assuming an antic disposition.

In the final scene once the Queen swoons, Hamlet asks, "How does the Queen? and Claudius dissembles and announces she has fainted from the sight of blood. The Queen, with her last breaths, will not let such a lie stand. "No, no!" she cries out to her son. "The drink, the drink; O my dear Hamlet/ The drink, the drink! I am poison'd" (5.2.295). Nigel Alexander views Gertrude's
last words as a warning to her son; and as such, the Queen's last words are a "measure of the victory won by Hamlet in the duel of wits and words that is the closet scene" (157). Part of his rebirth is the reclamation of his mother and her final words are a testament to the accuracy of Hamlet's vision. Denmark has been poisoned. Hamlet's response to his mother's death is immediate and swift, and in short order he kills the King and Laertes, before succumbing to the poison that is already in his own veins. Hamlet's death is his release and Horatio, whom Hamlet dissuades from suicide, is Hamlet's guarantee that his story will be given an accurate rendering. He does not die in vain, for he has purged Denmark of its disease, and has effected his own rebirth in the process.

Hamm's attempts to make his parents miserable ultimately redound on his head as he, like Hamlet, strikes out at the parental figures in an attempt to control his life. Hamm relishes giving the order, "Bottle him!" (10a) whereby Clov pushes Nagg back into the dustbin. He has never quite forgiven his father for having spawned him, and he continually berates the old man for having done so. Indeed, the first words Hamm speaks in reference to his bottled father are: "Accursed progenitor"(9). But there is pain in this epithet and
like the Danish prince, Hamm has to reach for comedy in order to cope with the presence of his aging parent. Just as we’ve seen Nagg for the first time and he pops up out of his bin, Nagg demands: "Me pap!" (9). Hamm curses him, then quips, "The old folks at home! No decency left! Guzzle, guzzle, that’s all they think of" (9). The humorous lines temporarily dispel the gloomy reality of Nagg’s bottled existence, and we chuckle, perhaps unwillingly, at Hamm’s cavalier attitude towards his father’s need for food. Hamm’s subsequent order to bottle Nagg is followed by an instruction to Clov that he sit on him. Clov’s laconic reply, "I can't sit" (10) plays right into Hamm’s game as it helps render the absurdity of the situation comically obvious. Hamm wants to be able to control his father’s appearances and demands, but there are few external aids to help him. Clov may be able to bottle Nagg on demand, but that’s as far as it goes. He cannot sit on him; thus, Hamm’s wishes are only partially fulfilled.

In a subsequent scene Hamm once again tries to stifle Nell as well as Nagg. The geriatric pair has been chatting and flirting and reminiscing, while Hamm has grown increasingly irritated with the cacophony. He wearyly tells them, "Quiet, quiet, you’re keeping me awake" (18), and he drifts off into a reverie of his own
in which he thinks of making love and running and being free. One suspects that it is not just his parents' chatter that has pained Hamm, it is their calling up past events and past pleasures which he finds so painful. An introductory note to an 1843 edition of *Hamlet* describes the young man as one who views the "past with fond regret, and the future with doubt and apprehension" (Folger 42). Surely these same words can describe Hamm who finds the memories of his parents so unbearable and the possibility of future life a source of dread. Initially, he curses his father for having begotten him, and what he does in this scene stems from the same agitated impulse to squelch all reminders of fertility. Like Winnie who is so grateful that none of the "stuff" around her starts to grow, Hamm can cope best in a sterile existence, because then there are no frightful reminders of life. The concluding lines of Hamm's reverie, "There's something dripping in my head. A heart, a heart in my head"(13) cause his father to chuckle, thereby reminding us that we are never far from the comic in this play. Even when Hamm grows wistful, he evokes laughter at his condition. Hamm may see his parents as just an irritating nuisance, but their presence in the play keeps his lamp burning. As Vivian Mercier points out in *Beckett/Beckett*, it is the "mutual feeling of these
moribund amputees" which redeems Endgame from total pessimism (191). Thus, while his parents may laugh at him, they are vital to his existence.

Silenced by the laughter, Hamm sits passively while his parents renew their conversation until he can stand it no longer and he explodes into one word: "Silence!" (23). Whistling for Clov, he orders him to "Clear away this muck! Chuck it to the sea!"; then, as if such words were not emotionally final enough, he instructs Clov to screw down the lids on the dustbins. Clov does not obey the instruction, presumably because he has heard such rhetorical rage before and knows it will pass just as this spasm of anger does. "My anger subsides", Hamm announces, and he turns his attention to his own bodily functions. His intolerance for his parents flows in part from their refusal to die and be done with existence. They insist on telling stories and relating to each other, even though they are crippled both emotionally and physically. They are signs of life to which Hamm does not want to attend, yet when Hamm wants an audience for his story, he insists that Clov awaken Nagg. The father reminds his son at one point that Hamm's insistence on waking his parents from a sound sleep started in childhood. Nagg relates:

Whom did you call when you were a tiny
boy, and were frightened, in the dark?
Your mother? No. Me. We let you cry. Then
we moved you out of earshot so that we
might sleep in peace.
(Pause)

I was asleep, as happy as a king, and you woke
me up to have me listen to you. It wasn’t
indispensable, you didn’t really need to
have me listen to you.
(Pause)

I hope the day will come when you’ll really
need to have me listen to you, and need to
hear my voice, any voice. (56)

Thus, Hamm’s present need to have his father hear his
story is part of his lifelong relationship with this man
who wants to put his son out of earshot once again.

It is the act of losing their parents which releases
both Hamlet and Hamm from their obsessive need to
control, and they are freed from the folly which
surrounds them throughout much of the dramatic action.
Hamlet’s final release from folly is partially
effected by his reclamation of his mother and Polonius’
death just as Hamm’s ability to let go of folly is
enhanced by Clov’s seeming departure and his father’s
nonresponsiveness. Once the "allow’d fools" are no
longer proximate and they have struggled free of their
parents, Hamlet and Hamm are able to accept mortality
without the aid of a coat of motley.
NOTES

1
D. J. Gifford explains the connection between tricksters and the prince-fool character in his article, "Iconographical Notes Towards a Definition of the Medieval Fool" (Fool and Trickster 18-35). Gifford writes: "The depiction of rapine and slaughter with the fool as an evil prince superintending rapine and carnage, appears very early indeed, preceding it may seem--both the fool as disputant or even as naked and mad... Now whether or not there be a line of direct descent between the prince-fool and his carnage, and the naked fool, and the disputer fool, they are to my mind all illustrations and iconographical consequences of one particular prototype, that of the trickster figure" (31).

2
There have been a number of studies dealing with Hamlet as fool. William Willeford's standard text includes a chapter entitled, "Hamlet: The Tragic Dimension of Folly." The chapter offers Willeford's own view as well as a brief historical summary of criticism relating to Hamlet's disposition. See also, Michael Graves, "Hamlet as Fool," Hamlet Studies 4 Summer/Winter 1982 (nos. 1 & 2).

3
To be fair, I should mention an 1806 promptbook I examined in the Folger Shakespeare Library. In it George Joseph Bell comments on various performances of Hamlet, and he gives his own views of specific scenes and characters. Next to Polonius' lines in the Ophelia book-reading scene, for example, Bell writes: "This is not the speech of a buffoon". Later in Act III, Scene 2 Bell writes: "This again is not a buffoon. The character of Polonius well-played will give a new character to the whole--as showing in his real thought of Hamlet's difficulties."

4
At times scenic designers have graphically underscored Hamlet's orphaned status, as did Stewart Chaney who used a stone effigy of the senior Hamlet as the focal point of his entire scenic design. In explaining his decision, Chaney writes: "I felt the motivating impulse throughout the play was the death of Hamlet's father. For this reason, a stone effigy of the dead king acted as a keystone to the scenic production" (Simonson 162). Yet another designer fashioned an enormous translucent ghost that hung from
the fly space throughout the performance. The ghost was so fashioned that a grieving and distraught Hamlet could be cradled in its arms like a lost child in need of comfort.

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CONCLUSION

When Edward Atienza played Feste in *Twelfth Night* during the 1985 season of the Stratford Festival Theatre in Stratford, Ontario, he assumed his fool's role in view of the audience. In the fifth scene of the first act while Maria warned him of Olivia's displeasure at his extended absence, she held out a bag of flour into which Atienza thrust his face. Atienza patted the bag to his face and when he reappeared, his face was clown-white. He then dusted off his patchwork clothes, put on his fool's cap, and he was ready to face his irritated mistress.

Edward Atienza convinced his director that such an overtly theatrical technique is justified because when Feste becomes the fool, he represents all of us; therefore, we should watch as he puts on our folly. Believing the fool's role to be a central one, Atienza, who has played both Shakespearean and Beckettian fools, explains that just as Feste literally holds the strings of his lute in his hand, so too the fool figuratively holds the strings of our existence in his heart and mind (Atienza).

Such an understanding of the centrality of the
fool’s role is essential to this study which discusses the fool, who blends laughter and tears, as a central reflector of human existence. Whether a trickster like Autolycus and Willie, a court jester like Lear’s Fool and Lucky, or an existential fool like Hamlet and Hamm, the fool is a mirror and his bauble represents the collective folly of us all. Through word and action the fool draws attention to the disease and infection which threatens and corrodes even the most intimate relationships; simultaneously, his life is a testament to the human ability to endure even in the face of such corrosion and absurdity. It is this ability to endure, to come to the end and go on, which links the fools in Shakespeare and Beckett.

Autolycus in The Winter’s Tale and Willie in Happy Days are distant reflectors of folly and they remain, for the most part, on the dramatic periphery. Although they sometimes garner center-stage attention, Autolycus remains far from the Sicilian king whose folly he mirrors and only once does Willie come face to face with his wife in Happy Days. With Lear’s Fool and Lucky, however, the mirroring becomes more intimate as we see the court jesters who are yoked by suffering to their masters. Lear’s Fool and Lucky do not merely reflect the folly of those around them, they step through the mirror
to embrace and ultimately expiate the suffering of their masters. They become, to quote Francis Fergusson, sufferers "for the hidden truth of the human condition" and expositors of that truth (127). Although they are not court fools, Hamlet and Hamm suffer for the human condition also, and in their suffering they turn to the "allow'd fools," Polonius and Clov, in order to snatch at their folly. With Hamlet and Hamm, folly commands center-stage attention. No longer is it buried in the pastoral hills of Bohemia or in a hole dug out of scorched earth, nor is it predominantly centered on a master-servant relationship.

Of the fool's movement to center stage, Walter Kaiser writes:

...when he finally does begin to play the protagonist, he denies certain of our assumptions about him and to some degree violates our sense of decorum: we are aware that something extraordinary has happened. Yet move to the center of the stage is precisely what he does. . . so the fool as protagonist has the audacity to claim that to be a fool is to act the play of life. (4)

Although Kaiser goes on to chronicle the traditional history of the medieval and Renaissance fool, he joins the ranks of Willeford and Welsford when he refuses to limit his discussion only to those who wear the cap and bells, for he claims that the "contribution of the
Renaissance to this figure was precisely that of making him just like everyone else, claiming that folly was the quintessence of humanity and that all men were fools in one or another sense of that word" (14).

That all of humanity is implicated in the fool's show is a given in any discussion of the fellows in motley. Hamlet snatches at Polonius' folly and thus, Lord Chamberlain and Prince of Denmark are paired fools; moreover, Hamlet reflects the folly of Ophelia who really does go mad, as well as such minor fools as Osric, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. And it is through gazing into the skull of Yorick, the court jester, that Hamlet finally comes to terms with what he must do. Hamlet adopts folly as a strategy and his blatant adoption of the role rivets our attention on those who share in his folly. Just so, Hamm engages in Clov's fooling, but his foolish old parents are likewise implicated in the show. As he fights to break free of his cruel father, Hamm casts light on the absurdity which marks his parent's existence, and as Hamm struggles to finish his story, we hear Nagg's tailor story which was finished long ago.

Similarly, Lear's Fool and Lucky reflect the folly of Lear and Pozzo at the same time that they point toward the larger absurdity of the worlds they inhabit.
It may be Lear's perverse lack of wisdom which unleashes the dormant chaos in his kingdom, but there is no doubt that the disordered souls of Goneril and Regan and Edmund are ready to pounce on the first crack in Lear's foundation. And while Lucky and Pozzo are a startling representation of a master and his comic foil wending their way through an unfriendly universe, their journey also encloses their fellow pilgrims, Didi and Gogo, who reach for fooling while they wait for Godot.

The fool's ultimate position as a center-stage reflector of folly alters our understanding of his status as an outcast. A fool gains the freedom to ridicule and to mimic by abandoning any claims to membership in good society, for his voice could not be heard above the silent din of conformity were he part of the mainstream. Sometimes, as with Autolycus and Lucky, the fool is forced out of the mainstream, and at times, as with Hamlet, he purposely sets himself apart. In either case the fool lives on the periphery of society even though he may occupy the dramatic center. In writing of the fool as outcast, Leszek Kolakowski explains:

The jester is he who moves in good society without belonging to it; and treats it with impertinence; he who doubts all that appears as self-evident. He could not do this if he belonged to good society; he would
then be at best a salon scandalmonger. The jester must stand outside good society and observe it from the sidelines in order to unveil the nonobvious behind the obvious. (Kott 165)

Predictably enough, it is through language that the fool can most immediately unveil the "nonobvious behind the obvious". Both Shakespearean and Beckettian fools engage in word play; however, it is not just the self-conscious crafting of words that is important. It is the entire issue of rhetoric—the human ability to manipulate words toward a desired end. In discussing Renaissance definitions of language in her recent study, Shakespeare and the Sixteenth-Century Study of Language, Jane Donawerth points out that Shakespearean audiences talked about going to hear a play much as modern audiences talk about going to see a play. Donawerth writes:

The Elizabethan idiom for attending a play further illustrates the difference between their theatre and ours. 'There is a lord will hear you play tonight,' the actors are told in the induction to The Taming of the Shrew; and they are warned not to wonder at their patron's odd behavior, 'For yet his honor never heard a play'(1.96). Elizabethans went to 'hear' a play, not as we do to 'see' one (3).

Martin Esslin believes that it is Beckett's belief
in the importance of language which forces him to compose much of his work in French. In Esslin’s words:

As Beckett told a student writing a thesis about his work who asked him why he used French, ‘Parce qu’en français c’est plus facile d’écrire sans style’. In other words while in his own language a writer may be tempted to indulge in virtuosity of style for its own sake, the use of another language may force him to divert the ingenuity that might be expended on mere embellishments of style in his own idiom to the utmost clarity and economy of expression. (8)

In All That Fall we learn that Mr. and Mrs. Rooney share their creator’s concern with language as we listen to the following husband-wife exchange:

Mr. Rooney: . . . Do you know Maddy, sometimes one would think you were struggling with a dead language?

Mrs. Rooney: Yes indeed, Dan, I know full well what you mean, I often have that feeling it is unspeakably excruciating.

Mr. Rooney: I confess I have it sometimes myself, when I happen to overhear what I am saying.

Mrs. Rooney: Well, you know, it will be dead in time, just like our own poor dear Gaelic, there is that to be said. (34)

The words of the Mouth in Not I convey this same urgent
concern with the making of language. The Mouth tells us that after a lifetime of virtual silence, she realized on an April morning that "... words were coming ... imagine! ... words were coming" (219). Much like Lucky who struggles to speak and Lear's Fool who will not be silenced even by the threat of the whip, Mrs. Rooney and the Mouth struggle to make language even in the midst of absurdity. Even Beckett's concern with silence and his repeated use of the dramatic pause, focus our attention on rhetorical concerns.

Hamlet, too, maintains a vital concern with language in the midst of his diseased kingdom. His soliloquies aside, he writes numerous letters throughout the play, he writes a speech for the First Player, and he forestalls Horatio's suicide because he wants his "wounded name" vindicated by the truthful recounting of his story. All of the fools under consideration here rivet our attention on language--its uses and its limitations. By Willie's minimalist 52 words as well as Autolycus' bizarre ballads, we are continually reminded of the power of language. Willie does not utter one word that is not reflective of his wife's chained yet hopeful existence, and Autolycus' insistence that his words are true in the face of common sense which labels them false, reminds us of a foolish Leontes who acted on his
belief in his own false story.

Everyone has a story to tell, whether it is Hamm or a raging Lear who forces his daughters into a "competition of rhetoric" (Kott 130). Winnie's story is one means of forestalling emptiness, and talking is a standard diversion for Didi and Gogo. Feste encircles all of us with the claim that a fool is a "corrupter of words," for each of us, like Hamlet and Hamm, like Lear's Fool and Lucky, like Autolycus and Willie, uses words to achieve our desired ends. The fool simply mirrors our own activity.

The fool's mirror almost by definition has to be a tragicomic one, for our lives are lived in that region where tears and laughter are inextricably mixed. G. Wilson Knight addresses this point in his essay, "King Lear and the Comedy of the Grotesque".

Though its impact usually appears vastly different from that of tragedy, yet there is a humor that treads the brink of tears, and tragedy which needs but an infinitesimal shift of perspective to disclose the varied riches of comedy. Humor is an evanescent thing, even more difficult of analysis and intellectual location than tragedy. . . . Sometimes a great artist may achieve significant effects by a criss-cross of tears and laughter. A shifting flash of comedy across the pain of the purely tragic both increases the tension and suggests . . . a resolution and a purification. (160)
Such an understanding of tragicomedy is not reflected in didacticism, and Shakespeare unlike his contemporary, Ben Jonson, and Beckett, unlike his contemporary, George Bernard Shaw, do not use the stage as a pulpit. Although Shakespeare and Beckett want to guide our responses through their presentation of life as they see it, neither playwright is primarily concerned with teaching a moral lesson. We have little record of what kind of a director William Shakespeare was, but there is ample evidence of Beckett’s directing style. His thrust is always aimed at the precise orchestration of his plays not at the evocation of a desired response from the audience.

Even with tragicomedy and its mere suggestion of resolution and purification, there is no escaping pain and death. The Winter's Tale with its stereotypic romantic ending is scarred with the senseless deaths and pointed cruelty which precede the joyous family reunion. And there is little need to point out the tragic elements in a King Lear or an Endgame or a Hamlet. Still, it is the human need to rise above the wretchedness of life which makes folly so attractive, for it gives us a means of coping with very present pain. In discussing our need for folly, Erasmus
writes in *Praise of Folly*:

... if you could look down from the moon ... on the countless hordes of mortals, you'd think you saw a swarm of flies or gnats quarrelling amongst themselves, fighting, plotting, stealing, playing, making love, being born, growing old and dying. It's hard to believe how much trouble and tragedy this tiny little creature can stir up. (143)

While readily listing the ills of human existence, however, Erasmus asserts that folly can provide us with the necessary contempt for adversity which allows us to gain control of our lives.

In both Shakespeare and Beckett tragicomedy comes to rest on an individual's ability to endure given the inevitability of human mortality. Lucky and Pozzo, although mute and blind, continue to stumble on, and Lear manages to gain a fleeting insight into his own failings before he dies. Hamlet will never reign in his Denmark, yet he purges it of its sickness and simultaneously accepts the fact that "if it be not now, yet will it come; the readiness is all" (5.2.208). Like Hamm, the young Dane realizes he must die, and it is folly, in part, which helps these men to gain an acceptance of their own mortality.

In a startling departure from the text, Adrian Noble in his 1982 Royal Shakespeare Company production
of *King Lear* introduced an additional death to an already lethal play, and it is a death that encourages us to understand both the price and the power of folly. As Lear played by Michael Gambon, rages against his daughters in the mock trial scene of Act 3, Scene 6, Antony Sher as his Fool, leaps into an ashcan brandishing a pillow as if it were Regan. The Fool holds the pillow up to his chest, and as Lear says, "Then let them anatomize Regan. See what breeds about her heart," he makes a playful stab at the Fool's pillow with his dagger. We know immediately, as Lear never does, that he has mortally wounded his Fool. The jester uses his last bit of energy to stay attuned to Lear's words, and he forces his ebbing vitality into his final line, "And I'll go to bed at noon", When Lear is carried out of the hovel, the ashcan is covered with a sheet. The Beckettian symbol of death in a dustbin notwithstanding, the Fool remains an invisible presence throughout the subsequent blinding of Gloucester which is executed on the same set. Our horror at the Fool's death is still raw as we watch Regan and Cornwall torment the loyal Gloucester, and the Fool's invisible presence serves as a still mirror. Even in death the Fool has the power to intensify our understanding of the cruel absurdity of human existence.

Yet as painfully tragic as the Fool's death is in
Noble's production, it is also redemptive, for the Fool, like Gloucester, suffers because of his loyal love for Lear. That such a redemptive emotion as love can still exist in a universe as bleak as Lear's gives cause for hope. In his play, *The Dresser*, Ronald Harwood depicts a dying actor, Sir, and his dresser. Set in 1942 in a war-torn England, the play recounts a particular performance of *King Lear* in which an understudy named Geoffrey is called upon at the last minute to play the Fool to Sir's Lear. After the performance Sir tells Geoffrey, "Very fine in the storm scene, my boy. Felt your love, that's what matters" (86). William Willeford echoes this belief in the conclusion to *The Fool and His Sceptre*. Willeford maintains that the "fool among us is a perpetual link to the light and life" in the darkness (235). It is in the reflecting light from the fool's mirror that we see endurance as an alternative to despair and death. Neither Shakespeare nor Beckett holds forth a vision of a world made new by the fool's presence, yet the works of both men reveal a belief that as long as Feste holds the strings of his lute, we will endure.
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