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Blindness in the Beckettland of Malfunctioning

ABSTRACT

Many of Beckett characters suffer from different kinds of disabilities and impairments, this being one of the ways of punishing them for “the eternal sin of having been born.” The article discusses blindness in *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *All That Fall*. In the first of these plays blindness afflicts Pozzo during the interval between the two acts, that is during a single night. Combined with the loss of his watch it is indicative of his entering the subjective realm of timelessness. The blindness of Hamm in *Endgame* and his inability to walk make him dependant on Clov who is unable to sit, which recalls Pozzo’s dependence on Lucky in the second act. Similarly, the blind Mr Rooney also must get help from other people to be able to move around. In the case of all three plays blindness must be perceived on a literal, as well as metaphorical level.

Keywords: Beckett, drama, blindness.

One of the characteristic features of Samuel Beckett's *œuvre* are the numerous different impairments and disabilities of his characters. They suffer because of various mobility restrictions, both concrete and real, indicated in the most obvious case by a wheelchair, as in *Endgame*, but also represented by such simultaneously emblematic and symbolic impediments as the heap of sand in *Happy Days*. The tree in *Waiting for Godot*, on the literal level, denotes the concrete meeting place of the two tramps with the mysterious Godot, while its leaves growing overnight acquire a symbolic meaning. The characters have problems controlling their speech or making it sound reasonable, a disability of which Lucky's speech provides the most obvious, extreme case. His utterance, becoming more and more chaotic, is finally ended, when his hat is taken off. The titular character of *Not I* seems unable to stop the never-ending flow of speech and will, most probably, go on speaking until she confesses that the character from the story she is telling is, in fact, herself. She is not willing to do so, however, and thus is sentenced to go on speaking infinitely, this being a kind of disability, an inability to stop. Beckett's protagonists often cannot remember the past, as *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett's most explicit example of a memory play, clearly demonstrates.

The main focus of the article is blindness, an impairment which started being recognized as a disability a long time ago and which is a motif that reappears in a number of the Nobel Prize winner's dramas: *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *All That Fall*. In all of these plays, the deficiency is a literal reference to an actual kind of disability but also acquires a symbolic status, enriching the overall figurative vision of Beckettland.

Waiting for Godot, Beckett's first play to be published (1951) and staged (1953), has puzzled critics, viewers and readers alike for more than sixty years now. This astonishing drama, in which "nothing happens, twice" (Mercier 145), introduces a great number of different deficiencies and disabilities. Vladimir has problems with his bladder and prostate; he eats garlic which is good for his kidneys yet makes his breath bad. In the case of Estragon, it is his feet that stink and his foot seems to have shrunk during the night separating the two acts. All characters seem to suffer because of memory failures which afflict a great number of other Beckett characters. Furthermore, two of the characters undergo a rapid, overnight change: Lucky turns dumb and Pozzo becomes blind. The speed with which they become invalids is shocking yet may be explained by examining the specific double-scale of time in Beckett's output. There are, as it were, two different kinds of time in this drama and in Beckettland in general.¹ On the one hand, there is the dominant psychological, subjective time of the two tramps, who often complain: "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody

¹ For a discussion of this issue, see Uchman 1987.

goes, it's awful" (41). They are at a standstill, as it were, as no significant change in their life situation takes place; they are there, waiting for Godot, who will, most probably, never come. For them—stuck, as it were, in the eternal present of waiting—physical time, characterized by change, does not seem to exist. Sometimes they make references to it, though: "We should have thought about it a million years ago, in the nineties" (10). Even then, however, psychological time (a million years) is dominant over physical time (the nineties).

The drastic change that Pozzo and Lucky undergo overnight is accompanied by other unexplainable sudden alterations which happen simultaneously: a completely bare tree, even with no sign of buds, acquires a few leaves, and Estragon's shoes, which were too small for him at the end of Act I, now fit. It could be argued that the great speed at which all these transformations occur is indicative of the fact that, in spite of the accelerated physical time, the basic situation of the two tramps remains unaltered. Taking into account Pozzo's rapid blindness, it can be noticed that his unexpected disability in a way symbolizes his abandoning the real, objective, physical world and entering the realm where subjectivity is most important.

In Act I, Pozzo, the absolute master of Lucky—his slave, is confident, self-assured and dominant even over Vladimir and Estragon, as well as proud and threatening. While on the stage, he is, most of the time, one might say, the centre and focus of the action, dominating the other characters and also, simultaneously, playing the role of the leading actor. He seems to be aware of the flow of physical time, this being indicated by his repeatedly consulting his watch. Is he, however, really fully aware of what physical time is? There are strong reasons to doubt it. He takes out his watch on three occasions. In the first case, there is nothing extraordinary about the action because he checks how long his journey has lasted and states that it has been six hours (24). In the second instance, he uses it, again, to specify the passage of time and argues that the event took place "nearly sixty years ago" (33). One can only wonder whether a timepiece alone can be really helpful in this case. The third occasion of Pozzo's looking at his watch deserves more attention. He is about to leave the tramps yet, hesitating to do so, makes Estragon ask him to sit down:

POZZO: [. . .] (He sits down.) Done it again. (Pause.) Thank you, dear fellow. (He consults his watch.) But I really must be getting along, if I am to observe my schedule.

VLADIMIR: Time has stopped!

POZZO: (*cuddling his watch to his ear*). Don't you believe it, sir, don't you believe it. (*He puts his watch back in his pocket.*) Whatever you like, but not that. (36)

Taking into account the above quoted scene two things must be considered. On the one hand, Pozzo argues that he should stick to his timetable, to the rules of the flow of the objective, physical time. On the other hand, however, even though voicing such a need, soon afterwards he postpones his departure, behaving like an actor and delivering a lyrical speech about the sudden coming of the night during which, once more using his watch, he checks the passage of time (37). Still later in Act I, just before the departure, fumbling in his pockets for some time, Pozzo discovers that he cannot find his watch and the following dialogue ensues:

POZZO: [. . .] . . . what have I done with my watch? (*Fumbles.*)

A genuine half-hunter, gentlemen, with deadbeat escapement! (*Sobbing.*) 'Twas my grandpa gave it to me! (*He searches on the ground, Vladimir and Estragon likewise. Pozzo turns over with his foot the remains of Lucky's hat.*) Well now, isn't that just—

VLADIMIR: Perhaps it's in your fob.

POZZO: Wait! (*He doubles up in an attempt to apply his ear to his stomach, listens. Silence.*) I hear nothing. (*He beckons them to approach. Vladimir and Estragon go towards him, bend over his stomach.*) Surely one should hear the tick-tick.

VLADIMIR: Silence!

All listen, bent double.

ESTRAGON: I hear something.

POZZO: Where?

VLADIMIR: It's the heart.

POZZO: (*disappointed*). Damnation!

VLADIMIR: Silence!

ESTRAGON: Perhaps it has stopped. (46)

It seems that in Act I Pozzo is desperately trying to stick to the symbolic representation of the passage of physical time, that is the moving hands of his watch. He uses words connected with the time-flow—hours, days, years—yet, while trying to verify their validity by means of his watch, he does not notice how ridiculous his actions are. Not having found his watch, he is deeply disappointed because he will no longer be able to verify his subjective feelings by means of an objective mechanism. Estragon's remark "Perhaps it has stopped" refers to the watch but is simultaneously an exact repetition of Vladimir's earlier statement concerning time. It may be argued, therefore, that the loss of the timepiece is indicative of Pozzo's having entered the world of subjectivity. Objective, physical time can no longer be verified and any belief in the possibility of evaluating and describing objective reality, however imperfect, is gone. Objective reality, along with one of its constituents—physical time—has been replaced by

subjective, existential reality and the psychological time characteristic of it. The tick-tick of a watch has been replaced by the tick-tick of an individual heartbeat. Harvey comments on this situation, conceding: “Chronometric time has been replaced by existential time” (148). Writing about the two couples, Torrance contends:

These are the two opposed modes of being which cross paths in Godot: that of waiting, where time is a series of disjointed presents and there is no history because there is no true sense of past and future, the mode of sameness and ennui; and that of a chase, where time is a downward plummeting through history towards darkness, the mode of retrogressive change and senseless suffering. (89)²

126

These remarks are undoubtedly true of Act I, yet, when Pozzo and Lucky enter in Act II, we can notice a number of changes both of them have undergone during a single night, all of which may be indicative of the growing similarity of the predicament of the travellers and the tramps.

The most obvious of the alterations in the travellers in Act II are Pozzo’s blindness and Lucky’s becoming dumb. Their relationship has altered slightly as well. In Act I Lucky’s rope was “*long enough to allow him to reach the middle of the stage before Pozzo appears*” (21). In Act II the rope is “*much shorter, so that Pozzo may follow more easily*” (77). Even though they are still a master and a slave, the stage image indicates a change in their mutual correlation. In Act I, Lucky’s position was reminiscent of a dog on a leash, the rope being meant to keep him with his master, to prevent his possible attempt to free himself. Now, the piece of string has yet another function to fulfil—Lucky is needed by the blind Pozzo as a guide. That is probably why Pozzo does not mention his wish to take Lucky to the market to sell him, which was his plan during the previous visit.

In Act II, when asked whether he recognizes Vladimir and Estragon, Pozzo answers that he is blind, which makes Estragon wonder whether he “can see into future” (84). Slightly later on, Vladimir having asked about Pozzo’s blindness, the following dialogue ensues:

VLADIMIR: I’m asking you if it came on you all of a sudden.

POZZO: I woke up one fine day as blind as Fortune.

(*Pause.*) Sometimes I wonder if I’m not still asleep.

² The tramps’ originally being subjected to physical, objective time has been also stressed by Gilman (248). Being emissaries of the society (consider their master-slave relationship and Pozzo’s arguing that he is a landowner, for instance), they are entirely subjected to the laws of time characteristic of socio-historical situation.

VLADIMIR: And when was that?

POZZO: I don't know.

VLADIMIR: But no later than yesterday—

POZZO: (*violently*). Don't question me! The blind have no notion of time.

The things of time are hidden from them too.

VLADIMIR: Well just fancy that! I could have sworn it was just the opposite. (86)

The above dialogue is worthy of attention for two reasons. Firstly, it is now Vladimir who expresses the idea voiced earlier by Estragon, namely that the blind have a specific gift of foreseeing the future. In addition, Pozzo insists that he does not know when his disability struck him. He thus explicitly states that his blindness is the reason for his having lost contact with the objective, external reality. The second issue becomes the basic point of Pozzo's outburst which follows soon afterwards:

POZZO: (*suddenly furious*). Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we will die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (*Calmer.*) They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. (89)

Surprisingly, while becoming blind Pozzo has started being aware of the meaning of human existence in the context of its subjective quality. According to his opinion, human life, which spans the moment of birth and that of death, is just an instant compared to the limitless existence of the universe. While Pozzo concentrates on the meaninglessness of the relatively short human existence within the context of eternity, the point of reference taken by Vladimir when he paraphrases the speech is completely different: "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. (*He listens.*) But habit is a great deadener" (91).

Both speeches unite, as it were, the moments of birth and death, in Pozzo's speech birth being given astride of the grave, while in Vladimir's it is the gravedigger who uses forceps to help during a difficult birth. The time span is distorted in both utterances. In Pozzo's speech it seems contracted ("an instant"), while in Vladimir's—extended ("we have time to grow old"). This contradiction may be, perhaps, explained by the fact that no matter how long one's life actually is, or is individually perceived, measured by the standards of and compared to the history of mankind or

the universe—and thus to macrocosmic time—it is an affair of a moment. Birth and death seem to be separated by a mere instant, except for those who have to live through that instant as an interminable wait for Godot. For one concrete period of physical time the two characters have substituted two different distortions typical of psychological time.

Pozzo concentrates on man's relationship with eternity. Vladimir puts the stress on the individual suffering, consistent with Beckett's vision of human existence. On the one hand, the playwright's vision of human fate seems to be reminiscent of Martin Heidegger's views and the notions of *Geworfenheit*, *Dasein* and *Sein zum Tode*. On the other, it is an artistic representation of the ideas concerning time expressed by Beckett in his *Proust* essay. Lee writes: "Beckett's *Proust* has the double fascination of throwing light on Proust while revealing Beckett himself. . . . *A la Recherche du temps perdu* serves as a kind of Rorschach test in which the young critic discovers his own fetishes and his own *bêtes noires*" (196). This essay is, in fact, to a greater extent the artist's presentation of his own views concerning time rather than an actual analysis of the French writer's work, the latter being, though, a shrewd critical insight into Proust's novel. In this seminal piece of writing, Beckett introduces the concepts of "the double-headed monster of damnation and salvation—"Time" (11), which he elsewhere calls "cancer," its attributes, "Habit and Memory" (18), as well as life described as a succession of moments of "boredom of living . . . replaced by the suffering of being" (19), the latter being a punishment for "the eternal sin of having been born" (67).

In *Waiting for Godot* the symbolic meaning of blindness is related not only to the gradual deterioration characteristic of most of his "people," as Beckett calls his characters (Shenker 1), but also to the artist's specific treatment of time. Losing his watch in Act I and then, during the interval of the drama, becoming blind, Pozzo has abandoned the objective world characterized, among other elements, by physical time, and entered the subjective world governed by psychological time. Both losses are, as Hayman argues, "symbolical of entering a world in which time and space do not have their normal significance" (Hayman 19). The situation in *Endgame* (1957) and *All That Fall* (a radio play, written in 1956, first produced and published in 1957) is slightly different. Firstly, the two characters, Hamm and Mr Rooney, are already blind when these plays begin and do not become disabled in the span of time covered by the dramatic action. Secondly, unlike the travellers in *Godot*, who enter the existential world of Vladimir and Estragon, they do not cross the threshold of Beckettland, but are already there the moment we get the first glimpse of them.

"The end is in the beginning and yet you go on," Hamm says (44). Beckett himself has commented on this aspect of *Endgame*: "Between the beginning and the end is just that bit of difference there is between

beginning and end” (qtd in Hasselbach 29). Despite the repeated occurrences of the words “finished,” “ended,” “the last” and the phrases “there is/there are no more,” still “Something is taking its course” (26). The basic motif of the play is introduced at its very beginning when Clov says: “Finished, it’s finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. (*Pause.*) Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there’s a heap of time, a little heap, the impossible heap” (12). The characters of this drama keep waiting: not for Godot but, most probably, for their own deaths, as can be deduced from Hamm’s speech towards the end of the drama “Moment upon moment, pattering down, like the millet grains of . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . that old Greek, and all life long you wait for that to mount up to life” (45). The Zenonian heap, consisting of grains of sand, may never be completed, finished, just as a life made up of numerous days characterized by suffering seems everlasting. It seems that the heap of time, which is mentioned in this play and which becomes the theatrical presence of the mound of sand, in which Winnie is buried up to her waist in Act I and up to her neck in Act II of *Happy Days*, will never be finally terminated. The suffering, which is a common lot of people inhabiting Beckettland, appears to be their never-ending fate, or curse.

All four characters in *Endgame* suffer because of some kind of limitation or disability. Hamm’s legless parents, Nagg and Nell, imprisoned in ashbins (a reference to “ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” a phrase from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer burial service), can “hardly” see, as their “sight has failed” (18). While they claim their hearing has not weakened yet, their dialogue seems to indicate the opposite (18). Furthermore, their mobility has been drastically restricted, they are forced to live in the bins and wait patiently for their sawdust to be changed. Hamm’s parents seem to illustrate the opinion verbally expressed by Nell: “Nothing is funnier than unhappiness, I grant you that” (20). In her book, *Beckett and Decay*, Kathryn White comments on this aspect of the play:

The Nagg/Nell partnership is representative of how we are physically reduced by time. From the vigour of youth through the slowing down of middle age and on to the indignity of old age, our physical story is one of decay and degradation. Each stage of life represents a stage of deterioration, and Nagg and Nell perhaps represent the most advanced phase, as the grotesqueness of their appearance forces us to acknowledge the futility of human condition, and the unattractiveness of the aged physical form. Through them Beckett successfully captures the comic/tragic nature of life and drama. (13)

The main couple of the play, Hamm and Clov, resemble Pozzo and Lucky as theirs is also a master-servant relationship. They seem to

adequately represent Hamm's statement: "Every man his speciality" as Clov "cannot sit" and Hamm "can't stand" (16). Furthermore, Hamm is blind, this being indicated by his wearing black glasses, while Clov's eyes being fixed on Hamm, his looking up to and out of window and his fixed gaze are dominant in the initial stage directions of the printed text and the opening moments of the theatrical production. Clov is necessary for Hamm to exist because he is the one who can go to the larder to bring some food for his master. But Hamm is also necessary to Clov's survival—he is the one who knows the combination to the larder so that, without him, Clov would starve. Thus, despite Clov's repeated threats that he will leave his blind partner, it seems that they will continue staying together, being, in a sense, bound by their limitations and thus forced to co-exist. All the same, Hamm seems to hope that sooner or later, Clov's eyes and legs will fail him. Already in the initial moments of the play, he asks his servant how his eyes and legs are. On getting the reply that they are bad, he notices "But you can move," and, having got a positive answer, shouts "*(violently.)* Then move!" (14). A similar exchange takes place slightly later on and is followed by Hamm's ensuing monologue and their dialogue:

HAMM: [. . .] (*Pause. With prophetic relish.*) One day you'll be blind, like me.

You'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever, like me.

(*Pause.*) One day you'll say to yourself, I'm tired, I'll sit down, and you'll go and sit down. Then you'll say, I'm hungry, I'll get up and get something to eat. But you won't get up. You'll say, I shouldn't have sat down, but since I have I'll sit a little longer, then I'll get up and get something to eat. But you won't get up and you won't get anything to eat. (*Pause.*) You'll look at the wall a while, then you'll say, I'll close my eyes, perhaps have a little sleep, after that I'll feel better, and you'll close them. And when you open them again there'll be no wall any more. (*Pause.*) Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of all ages wouldn't fill it, and there you'll be a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe. (*Pause.*) Yes, one day you'll know what it is, you'll be like me except that you won't have anyone with you, because you won't have had pity on anyone and because there won't be anyone to have pity on you.

Pause.

CLOV: It's not certain. (*Pause.*) And there is one thing you forget.

HAMM: Ah?

CLOV: I can't sit down.

HAMM: (*impatiently.*) Well. You'll lie down then, what the hell! Or you'll come to a standstill, simply stop and stand still, the way you are now. One day you'll say, I'm tired, I'll stop. What does the attitude matter? (28–29)

The above dialogue deserves a few remarks. Firstly, Hamm foretells that Clov's future will be the same as his own. If so, this means that Hamm will disappear (die) and his place will be taken by Clov who will be blind and unable to stand up; Clov, in a way, will replace him. This is equivalent to saying that the fate of Hamm, Clov and, by extension, of all people is the same, this being a characteristic of Beckett's whole *œuvre*. Secondly, Clov mentions the possibility that he will not be alone, thus, perhaps, referring to the past, when he joined the solitary Hamm. Such a reading is possible if one accepts the idea that, as is the case with many narratives of Beckett characters, the story told by Hamm may be, in fact, not a mere fiction but an account of his own experiences in the past. And, thirdly, this scene, though tragic, is simultaneously comic, the specific use of the grotesque being a trademark of Beckett's output.

The use of the grotesque also characterizes *All That Fall* which is best exemplified towards its end when Mr Rooney asks his wife whether the preacher has announced his text for the next day and gets the answer: "The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raises all those that be bowed down." What follows in this radio play are the stage directions, which, in the production, are meant to materialize as concrete sounds or their absence: "[*Silence. They join in wild laughter. They move on. Wind and rain. Dragging feet, etc.*]" (38). The childless Mr and Mrs Rooney go on living and suffering, occasionally falling down to rise (actually not being "raised") again. In this context, the title of the play is indicative, a point noticed by Knowlson:

In spite of the apparent comic texture of the play, human misery and suffering emerge as so overwhelming that, when Psalm 145, verse 14 is quoted . . . it is greeted by the lame, seventy-year-old Maddy Rooney and her blind husband, Dan, with wild laughter at its bitter irony. (387)

It should be noticed that in the world of gradual and inescapable deterioration and transience presented in this radio play, its very beginning and end are very telling as a concrete musical piece accompanies them. Beckett chose Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* because it was his favourite, but also, more importantly, because, as he himself argued, he knew of no other "music so heavily imbued with such sorrow."³ Furthermore, the title of the musical piece unites two ideas, namely youth and death, which usually do not go together. The drama combines many contradictory ideas as indicated by the title of my article "In a World Characterized by Transience and Doomed to Extinction Some Old Women Still Need Love—Mrs

³ Samuel Beckett to John Montague, Maurice Sinclair, Marion Leifh and Bettina Jonic (qtd. in Bair 477).

Rooney from Samuel Beckett's *All That Fall*." As argued in this article, Mrs Rooney, at seventy, still longs for love, and the play is saturated with sexual innuendos. Thus it may be argued that this drama deals with a longing for happiness despite the tragic circumstances of general deterioration, decay and inevitable death. Divergent ailments, limitations and disabilities characterizing most of the inhabitants of Boghill are also the tragic lot of Maddy's husband, Dan. Mr Rooney, blind and ill, twice tells Jerry to come for him on Monday, adding, on both occasions, the same sentence: "if I am still alive" (28, 39). On being asked by Maddy whether he is not well, he answers:

132

Well! Did you ever know me well? The day you met me I should have been in bed. The day you proposed to me the doctors gave me up. You knew that, did you not? The night you married me they came for me with an ambulance. You have not forgotten that, I suppose? [*Pause.*] No, I cannot be said to be well. But I am no worse. Indeed I am better than I was. The loss of my sight was a great fillip. If I could go deaf and dumb I think I might pant on to be a hundred. Or have I done so? [*Pause.*] Am I a hundred, Maddy? (31–32)

The blindness of Dan is not dwelt much upon—all we know is that he lost his sight in the past and, surprisingly enough, that it was an incentive, spur and stimulus for him. It may be presumed that he treats this disability as an advantage, because, just like the deafness and dumbness he is hoping for, it is a sign of gradual extinction, of the approaching end. His longing for death, the terminus of "suffering of being," is expressed verbatim by him when he asks Maddy:

Did you ever wish to kill a child? [*Pause.*] Nip some young doom in the bud. [*Pause.*] Many a time, in winter, on the back road home, I nearly attacked the boy. [*Pause.*] Poor Jerry! [*Pause.*] What restrained me then? [*Pause.*] Not fear of man. [*Pause.*] (31)

Steward rightly contends that "the replacement of 'bloom' by 'doom' strongly suggests that it is in blooming that one is doomed, that life itself is the disaster that one should wish to avoid" (84). The thought of killing a child, as Dan himself acknowledges, has haunted him for some time and it seems almost certain that on this very day he has made his dream come true. There are quite a few hints in the play indicating that he is responsible for the death of the boy on the railway track (Uchman, "World of Transience" 111–12). Such an opinion is also voiced by White, when she writes: "Mr Rooney abhors the idea of continuance and would therefore view the death of a child as a welcome alternative to the suffering

of being. Perhaps he terminated the life of his own [sic] child, unable and unwilling to witness her ‘lingering dissolution’” (29). On the one hand, it may be asked why the critic assumes that Dan might be responsible for his daughter’s death, as the issue of when and why their daughter, Minnie, died is not raised in the play. The only information we get about her comes from Maddie, who says: “[*Brokenly.*] In her forties now she’d be, I don’t know, fifty, girding her lovely loins, getting ready for the change. . . .” (16). If, then, Maddie had survived and were alive now she, too, would be past her procreation age, slowly approaching death. On the other, “the lingering dissolution” mentioned by the critic, is a phrase used by Maddie herself: “It is suicide to be abroad. But what is it to be at home, Mr Tyler, what is it to be at home? A lingering dissolution” (15). As she argues slightly later, she is “not half alive nor anything approaching it” (16), heading towards death but not yet reaching it, imprisoned, as it were, in the stasis of her “suffering of being,” expiating “for the eternal sin of having been born.”

The blindness of the three characters described above, though different (Pozzo’s case being unlike the other two as he becomes blind *during* the course of the play’s action and *not before*) is, undoubtedly, highly symbolic. Writing about *Endgame*, White notices: “Hamm’s blindness corresponds to the metaphorical blindness that many Beckett characters endure, as they often appear lost, endeavouring always to find their way in a world devoid of meaning” (14). Fully accepting this opinion, one can only add that blindness, along with the other limitations, restrictions, illnesses and disabilities experienced by Beckett’s characters, are a distinctive feature of Beckettland, a cruel place inhabited by “his people.” Therefore it seems impossible to accept the ideas voiced by Guru Charan Behera in the article significantly entitled “Disabling the Disabled: Samuel Beckett and the Plight of the Handicapped”:

While scholars have explored degradation, degeneration, and decadence in the works of Samuel Beckett, they seem to have overlooked the contemptuous treatment disabled characters experience in his plays. Beckett demonizes the handicapped, thus taking away the empathy the audience has for them. He also weakens these characters’ ability to wrestle with the infirmities he imposes on them. Beckett’s world, especially as seen in *Waiting for Godot* (1954) [sic] and *Endgame* (1958) [sic], is one with no signposts for the disabled, a world where Beckett exposes the helpless to the menacing sternness of other characters. . . .

[H]is horrendous treatment of the disabled characters also seems a consequence of his own blighted life. . . . Since life was not “fair” to Beckett, the vulnerable that constitute part of the jungle, but often enjoy the privileges [sic] must, as Beckett seems to imply, experience the bitterness of an unfair life too. (13, 14–15)

Contrary to this critic's opinions, expressed in a very short and disorderly article which presents his basic assumption concerning "Beckett's bias against characters with disabilities" (14), one should conclude that Beckett is not "disabling the disabled" but presents a specific artistic and, one may argue, philosophical vision of Beckettland, where his lost, bewildered "people" are hopelessly waiting for death which will end the life-long period of expiation for the "eternal sin of having been born." Most, if not all, of Beckett's characters share the same fate, as Vladimir who argues, the word "*sententious*," included in the stage directions being very significant and telling: "To every man his little cross (*He sighs.*) Till he dies. (*Afterthought.*) And is forgotten" (*Godot* 62). Everything they can long for is to be allowed to live where Christ lived, where it was warm and dry "[a]nd they crucified quick" (*Godot* 52). There is a scene in "Dante and the Lobster," one of the stories in the volume *More Pricks than Kicks*, when Belaqua, watching a cook putting a lobster into boiling water, ponders: "It's a quick death. God help us all." These words are followed by a short statement assigned to none of the characters present: "It is not" (22). One may argue that it is Beckett himself speaking, without the formalities of an official introduction. The effect thus achieved is one of disturbing authority.

Many of Beckett's characters long for a "quick" death yet it is always denied to them and it is Mrs Rooney who expresses this wish verbatim while commenting the death of a hen run over by Mr Slocum's car:

Oh, mother, you have squashed her, drive on, drive on! [*The car accelerates. Pause.*] What a death! One minute picking happy at the dung, on the road, in the sun, with now and then a dust bath, and then—bang!—all her troubles over. [*Pause.*] All the laying and hatching. [*Pause.*] Just one great squawk and then . . . peace. [*Pause.*] They would have slit her weasand in any case. (*All That Fall* 19)

The use of the word "bang" may bring to one's mind T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" and the poem's last stanza:

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper. (86)

In Beckettland nearly all the characters, whether actually disabled, according even to a very broad definition of the term, or not, cannot really hope for a "quick death," "a bang"—they must go on living, experiencing "the suffering of being," the punishment for "the eternal sin of having been born." They may either whimper or, at times, laugh bitterly but their cruel predicament always remains the same.

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