



Research Paper

The Plight of Stasis in the Modern Age: An Analytical Study of Samuel Beckett's Happy Days

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Abstract

This paper examines the immobility of characters along with their language and behaviors in Samuel Beckett's Happy Days (1961). It scrutinizes the case of stasis as a modern plight by converting the gestures and situations into understandable concepts and clear images of the content. The purpose of this study is to spot light on the dire consequences for the lack of resoluteness and how the hopes of people will be relatedly thwarted. The stasis of language and meaning along with the lack of will are what this paper will arguably manifest. The importance of the settings of the absurd theatre as well as the portrait of the modern plight of stasis in the 20th century are the essence of this paper to debate and clarify subsequently. The aim of this treatise is to explicate the demeanors of both Winnie and Willie in Happy Days and to investigate their positions and reactions on the stage. It is further to feature the physical and mental static conditions that modern people realistically encompass.

Keywords: stasis, modern age, Samuel Beckett, Winnie, Willie.

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I. Introduction:

Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) is the father of the absurd theatre and no survey of the genre can take place without referring to him. Some of his most famous plays such as *Waiting for Godot* (1954), *Endgame* (1958) and *Happy Days* (1961) address the sombre conditions of humans in the 20th century. Each of these contains some paradoxes such as life and death, hope and despair or success and failure and some have all. Influenced in the existential philosophy of Sartre and Camus, Beckett involves the modern perspectives of human interactions and the interpretation of their entity. Contrary to previous philosophers and to lighten the gloominess of human existence, he offers a new style of diagnosing the bleak conditions of modern times and people, especially in his use of the tragicomic genre. Apparently, his works are natural but in reality they are contextually absurd to the extent of complication and ambiguity. However, they are characterized with referential content as they include many allusions and purposes. The theatre of the absurd is an exceptional literary genre and a sign of contradictory exposition of a certain matter. To know what an absurd title might mean and to what it has pointed to, one should forget all the idealistic measurements of other theatre forms and think of new indications that different of any other known play. Settings, time, events, plots, sometimes characters and even the language itself are extraordinarily presented in an absurd play. Theatre of the absurd is, therefore, a revolution against anything natural and ideal. It is a challenge to create something totally new which never coincide with classics. An absurd play does not tell parts of the play only, nevertheless, the reflection of the time out in which it has written for. After the World Wars and the industrial revolution, the life of humanity interred a course of fast progressive changes after it remained constant for a long time. These changes effect everything belong to the legacy of humanity such as norms, manners, tastes, believes...etc. the theatre of the absurd comes to reflect these changes implicitly. Absurd plays are usually with informal human charterers who are not identified as identical personas and whose motives seem to be personal but in reality they are intentionally included. Such ambiguity would be resolved with an organized dialogue by the

characters of the classical plays but in the absurd plays the dialogue itself seems to be meaningless and has aimless idea to reveal. As a feature of absurdity, there is almost a plot with an ambiguous beginning and a pointless and irresolvable end. It is usually an occult narrative studded with profound plots and sometimes implausible ideas. However, absurd plays have their influence on people's minds and interpretations of literary texts. For example, people who attend Samuel Beckett's plays or read them such as *Waiting for Godot* have got that the theatre of absurd has valuable context that everyone should be acknowledge with. Critics have often situated *Happy Days* within the Theatre of the Absurd, as defined by Martin Esslin, who considered Beckett's work as dramatizing the absurdity of human efforts and existence to find meanness inside a meaningless world. Yet Beckett's engagement with stasis transcends mere absurdity. His depiction of paralysis aligns with existentialist and phenomenological thought, particularly with the writings of Sartre, Camus, and Heidegger, who interrogated the nature of being and time in an era of metaphysical exhaustion. Beckett's aesthetic of stillness, repetition, and silence transforms the stage into an existential space where the temporal flow of life is arrested, leaving only the residue of human persistence.

Finally, this discussion aims at proving the point that the concept of stasis expressed by Beckett in *Happy Days* can serve as a miniature of the contemporary situation, where movement is endless, language is devoid of revelation, life is devoid of transcendence. The bare setting and the cyclical temporality of the play destroy the traditional narrative of the progress, and the world we live in is one in which enduring to be is the only action accessible. Beckett challenges the audience with the terrifying thought that in the contemporary age, survival can be the sole remaining meaning as he uses the paradoxical vitality of Winnie in the face of immobilization.

Winnie and the Status of Stasis

Buried half to her chest, Winnie is supposedly located in a deserted area. Unaware of her condition, she believes that she is having a happy day; "Another heavenly day, World without end Amen" (*Happy Days*, 2013, p. 1). At this moment, Beckett draws an overall portrait of Winnie's life and that is in accordance with what she does. Beckett tells the story of Winnie's journey in the life and demonstrates the inconsequentiality behind her actions and non-actions. Throughout the play, she attempts to ignore this imposed reality through distracting herself. This reality is considered as one of the major symbols of the play because it marks the emergence of the static life in the modern era. New readers of Beckett will be in illusion that they are going to expect happy days once they read how Winnie is cheerful. However, being buried in a mound to her chest will reveal out questions concerning the status of her condition. In a sudden, Winnie picks up random objects from her black bag including a toothbrush, toothpaste, glasses, mirror, and a hand weapon. She starts to use some of them while uttering words that are irrelevant to what she does and to what is happening around her.

Winnie's condition could be taken as a clear example of the modern human life. Choosing a female to act this role does not necessarily mean that the symbolic reference confines for females only. Yet, she is an embodiment of modern character. Throughout the period between life and death, Humans attempt to pursue the reality behind the meaning of their existence and the true essence of life. With the passage of time, they will be taught how to attach themselves to certain ideas and emotions without having the chance to question their existence. Consequently, humans absorb external forces to the extent where they confirm their existence. This can be seen through Winnie's state as she is locked in a hole of sand. The chains inside her mind, however, are stronger than those which are materialistic in nature. She is having certain limitations for her self-realization. The fact that she can't move anything in her body except her hands makes us question her free will and identity. It tells us that she struggles to move forward in life so like many people in modern age; "I cannot move. (Pause) No, something must happen, in the world, take place, some change; I cannot, if I am to move again" (*Happy Days*, 2013, p. 37).

Winnie keeps distracting herself and draws an illusion of constant movement in several scenes. First, she checks the things inside her black bag. Then, she speaks to Willie in undefined language "in my opinion - always said so - wish I had it" (*Happy Days*, 2013, p. 24). She, sometimes, tries to communicate directly with him but there are also times when she loses the sense of communication "Something of this is being heard, I am not merely talking to myself" (31). She also hangs on her memories, trying to escape the mound she is buried inside and to find an outlet from the static environment she is still resisting to eliminate. Despite all these attempts, she still can't move anywhere. The spiritual, mental and physical stasis not only reflects the reality of the human condition, but also to indicate to the slacken act of the humans in the modern age. With the

emergence of technology and modern life, humans gradually become static machines lack of senses and consciousness. Winnie does not seem want to know that she is buried but to accept her motionless status. The submerged half of Winnie symbolizes the half of humans who have been lost in the modern technological life which turns into an essential part in a way that life cannot move without. Concerning Happy Days, Katherine Weiss explains that; "Beckett's narration transforms the body into a machine, regulated into regimented behavior" (2002, P. 67)

When Winnie wakes up on a bell ring instead of waking up after having enough sleep, one can speculate that Winnie is a mere device or instrument that can be switch on and off with a button. Even the name Winnie is suggestive to refer to the stagnation and a slow in the movement. With technological advancement, humans are easily manipulated and controlled. The bag and the gadgets inside they draw a perfect image of the modern human who is controlled and manipulated by the invention of technology and what comes after. The human is trapped inside an ongoing dilemma that has no way out and always hovering around a vicious circle that usually ends to an endless fate and prevents from progression. This is obvious in Winnie's case when she uses the same gadgets every day and does the same things over and over till the day passes, and she wakes up to do the same thing again. When time passes, Winnie finds herself buried to her neck stuck in the same place. Although the image and the idea of repetition could be interpreted into many concepts, it indicates to two things in the play. The first is the static situation and the absurd routine of the modern human activities, while the eternal recurrence represents the second remark. With reference to the image of repetition, Beckett does not focus only on the European modern era, but on the whole human activities as well . The ideology of the eternal recurrence seems to have a fast progressive movement of repetition, but for Beckett, the sequence of repetitive images fused and combined to form a freeze static portrait of the modern human activities. According to Beckett, static activities are not the only obstacle for the existence but may be the major one.

The Stasis of Language in Beckett's Happy Days

Samuel Beckett dramatizes the immobility of the human body as well as the immobility of the language itself in Happy Days. The protagonist, (Winnie) who was buried up to her waist and then with her neck, almost entirely depends on speech as a means of keeping up her existence. Her language is, however, not really a medium of signification but rather a machine that runs automatically and keeps up the pretence of life. Beckett exposes the language as a ritual of survival, devoid of its creativity and communicative possibilities through her chattering on and on. The monologues that are delivered by the character of Winnie are full of clichés, fragments of the cultural allusions, and borrowed phrases- echoes of the linguistic system that lost the originality and authenticity. This is the contemporary state of affairs, which Beckett describes: this is a world where language does not unite but alienates. The speech turns into an action of reflexes, a stammering to fill the gap of silence. Her language, used and meaningless, is a symptom of her linguistic stalemate, which is similar to her physical stalemate. In Samuel Beckett's Happy Days, the use of the language is almost futile. In her article entitled "Strategies of Survival in Samuel Beckett's Happy Days", Dr. Satya Paul maintains the indeclinable and featureless language that Happy Days is characterized with when she states that "The language of the characters is bereft of meaning as there are absurd exchanges, broken and fragmented dialogues, pointless repetitions and futile questions" (2018, p. 31).

Through her speech, Winnie does not use eloquent and pointed phrases, but only words that contradict her condition. She does not cling to the significance of the language itself but to what this language once represents of value. Beckett attempts to show that modern language is separated from its meaning and does not, sometimes, lead to the survival or a happy end. Therefore, it can be noted that Winnie undervalues the current language that formulated by the modern form. Winnie admits in Act One that words are failing "what now? Words fail, there are times when they even fail, is that so Willie?" (Happy Days, 2013, p. 4). She then states that when words start to fail, her language will be not understandable and that forms the greater part of her words. Thus, this attrition of her language leads to create a sort of stasis for which Beckett tried to highlight the focus on as an endeavor to tackle and consequently to suggest a solution. In his "Cambridge introduction to Samuel Beckett" Ronan McDonald offers a comparison to display the condition of Winnie's static language: like Estragon and Vladimir, like Hamm and Clov, she too must pass the time, fill in the day from morning to night, Winnie has two means of keeping going, the same two as Vladimir and Estragon: talking and doing. When talking breaks down, she reaches for her handbag, which, in turn, gives her a pretext for more talk" (2012, p. 67)

When Winnie has nothing to talk about, she picks up things from her bag to make a new dialogue. The language she uses when she checks her stuff in the bag doesn't follow the rules of a dynamic language. She follows this pattern of nonsensical behavior just to fill up the holes of emptiness and escape from silence. Instead of being informative or communicative, Winnie turns into a misled woman who looks forward for a phrase or a sentence to save her from the quagmire she has been in. what Beckett tries to deliver is that the

language of the present day life lacks its essence and starts to be transformed into a static tool instead of progressive. Modern people prefer images and dynamics over speaking especially in their communication and contact. Life is gradually abandoning the linguistic nature and relies on sterile alternatives of communication. Winnie pities Willie for not having anything to do but at the same time, she almost envies him for "sleep forever"(Happy Days, 2013, p. 11). Willie's stasis of his language is aggravated more than his wife who is awake looking for a change unlike the long-lasting sleep that Willie experiences. However, Winnie constantly tries to speak and be busy with her hand back. She acquires her happy days as long as she is busy. Once she stops talking, the happy expressions fade out of her face. This clears out that she is aware of the frightening silence that she is about to confront and that she resists the stasis of the language in the modern age. Thus, she keeps struggling fill her time from the beginning of the day until the end of it.

The Stasis of Meaning in Beckett's Happy Days

The world that Samuel Beckett creates in Happy Days is one where the sense of meaning has been brought to a dead end. The play is not just dramatizing the paralysis of human body or wearing out of speech, but a more ontological, semantic stasis; a state where meaning does not evolve; meaning does not dissolve, but hangs in equilibrium. The characters, and in the foremost place Winnie, live in a world in which life goes on without meaning and language, memory and ritual do not create meaning any more. In the world of Beckett, meaning is a kind of relic, a dead fossil of what once brought some order to human existence.

In all his plays, Samuel Beckett focuses on the meaning of human existence that his characters spend much of their time searching for meaning; "What is one to do? [Head down. Do.] All day long. [Pause. Do.] Day after day" (Happy Days, 2013, p.,43). They fail to realize meaning as their minds are static and confined only to their running time and meaninglessness of their world:

The dramatic world of Samuel Beckett is of a peculiar kind. There is hardly any action or movement, and almost no dénouement in a play. It is a world where nothing happens and whatever little happens appear illogical and meaningless. In his plays, there are no plots in the traditional sense of the term— there are only statements of human situations [like the] futile existence in the harsh world of Happy Days. (Paul, 2018, p. 31)

They can't expand beyond the reality and have not yet learned the policy of modernity. Winnie, for example, finds herself in a circle of meaningless life, but she never stops trying to progress. She tries to convince that the bag and the stuff she has been using are so useful and "cast her mind forward" (33). Throughout Happy Days and the rest of his plays, Beckett alludes to the plight of inactivity that modern man has been currently inflicted with. Winnie is the personification of that man who keeps seeking for an outlet from the stasis of his modern life. People of the 20th century are apparently working to achieve their goals while, in reality, they are striving but in vain. To illustrate, Beckett and through Willie suggests that the endeavors of modern man is not more than a mirage that guide to nothing but to waste of time.

Stasis and the lack of will:

Willie and Winnie condemn their positions as motionless individuals who have not the ability to decide their own destiny. They damn their fates that exclude them out of their determination to proceed forward. Both stuck in their aimless life that Becket describes with his cynical view of absurdness. Their loss in the desert with limited acts or moves turn them into machines stripped of will and control. Yet, they have notable features to adopt as an attempt for salvation, as the eloquent tongue and clear language of Willie as well as his ability to move; "You're not stuck, Willie (Pause. Do.) You're not jammed," (Happy Days, 2013, p. 57). For Winnie, she adopts the classic topics to fill vacuum of their existence and consequently to eliminates her feelings of inability to move forward and in respect of her selfdetermination and having her absolute will. Winnie is the character that exemplifies the Paralysed will and the mental limit of some modern people in their efforts toward advancement. She is conscious of her stasis and circulating days and nights that she cannot change but only counting time. She becomes controlled by the distraction times that she has been living from the beginning. In Act two, Beckett visualizes how she is buried to her neck after she was only to her waist. She was able to use her hands but now she can only aware of her incapability to change her fact of stasis. It is also worthy to mention that losing her will and persistence prevents her from saving herself from obliteration downward. This is metaphorically defined as the plight of retrogression of some humans in the modern age influenced by their disability to progress in the different aspects of life. As a glimpse of hope, Beckett symbolizes the stuff of Winnie as her general principles and private perceptions that she keeps using in spite of her submergence in the ground. This analysis invokes two different visualizations to expose; it probably is the possible adaptation of modern people with their plight of stasis and could be a reference to the frustration that occupies their minds and capture their progress. In his article "Beckett's Optimistic Heroin", Mustafa Ahmad Mohammed reckons that

Winnie "seeks comfort in her rituals which she keeps doing them throughout the play. Perhaps these rituals help her to face her suffering, and to accept her condition with all its agony and struggle. As she feels happy when she can maintain these rituals, she feels that everything is running out with advancement of time" (2017, p. 3). From another point of view, Winnie is the woman who "Performs the routines to fill up the empty hours of the long days ... she acknowledges that the climate around her is always the same and will stay that way. If there are changes, they are so minute as to be virtually static" (Spark Notes Editors, 2005). So, Winnie's feeling of stasis dominates her life and adherents mainly to the thematic aims of the play. She is spinning in a whirl of her thoughts and habits to achieve nothing but "a repetitive motion which grinds Winnie into a static". To Samuel Beckett maintains the symbolic implications that stuff in the bag represent are considered as a mercy and a blessing to deal with in the midst of modern stasis:

There is always remains something. (Pause.) Of everything. (Pause). Of every - thing (Pause.) some remains. (Pause.) If the mind were to go. (Pause.) It won't go of course. (Pause.) Not quite. (Pause.) Not mine. (Smile.) Not now. (Smile broaden.) No. no. (Smile off...Long pause.)... Oh, yes great mercies, great mercies. (Pause.)... The bag of course... a little blurred perhaps...but the bag. The earth of course and shy. The sunshade you gave me."(Happy Days, 2013, p. 146)

However, her gadgets as the toothpaste, medicine and lipstick all are gradually running out in her bag. Here, she wishes that her stuff remain alive and that could present her as an optimistic heroine to continue her life. Mustafa Ahmed Mohammed argues that "Winnie is one of those optimistic characters who shows heroic acceptance of the unbearable" (2017, p. 2). Yet, she does not able to change her condition as if it was possible in the first act. Throughout the sequence of acts in his play of Happy Days, Beckett supposes a notion to be considered in the shade of modern age. He suggests that stasis is the lesion of time. In other words, he always passes into whatever concerns with the static matters as repetition and the decay of stuff as well as vigour and vitality of his characters. This portrait is clearly shown with the passage of time and how everything has been static as it was before and sometimes aggravated to the worse. As the play goes on, Beckett obviously indicates to the significance of the past to the present. He implicitly explains that modern times are useless and more passive than the past. The swamp of absurd environment on the stage of Happy Days is an adequate image for the stasis that extends from the first act to the second. Dr. Satya Paul supposed that "Beckett does not argue about absurdity of human existence in his plays, rather he presents the being in terms of concrete images. His subject-matter integrates form and content excellently in reflecting the experience of the absurd. The human life depicted therein represents a static world where nothing happens" (2018, p. 31). Accordingly, Beckett succeeds in using objects, behaviors and gestures to criticize the modern man as a hopeless product and to demonstrate the plight of stasis in the language that modern people underestimate its importance and value; "Man's predicament in this absurd universe has been highlighted with the help of visuals as well as inconsequential use of language by the characters" (31). He portrays the modern man as a machine that work in terms of time passage and stop at certain point from creating or developing a new active world.

II. Conclusion

The research elucidates the physical and mental conditions of the modern man where the movements, language and behaviors of the characters in Samuel Beckett's Happy Days (1961) are spiritless and static. Throughout Beckett's portrait of the stage, the scenes that illustrate the loss of the modern man have connotatively presented. Beckett criticizes the stagnation of the determination and the will to move forward towards whatever is better and safer. All the activities in the play which have not been accomplished yet are to reflect the nature of evolving of the modern life. By his characters and their reactions, Beckett emulates the rapid growth in technology and the impact of globalization of modern life. This has written by both his absurd prediction and insightful readings to the future depending on manifestations of modern complexities more than on mindset of ideology.

Beckett follows the style of periphrasis in his presentation of concepts and characters. He portrays the modern life by moulding up the characters in unusual positions and sometimes roles. The tangible settings on the stage are also uncommon that reveal possible interpretations beyond. For example, the mound that buries Winnie does not represent her plight by itself but the plight of modern people in their stasis toward actions that other people share too. It also stands for the barriers that modern humans have in their encounter with their endeavors. Therefore, the settings of the play serve as additional characters to interpret the plight of paralysis that modern people has been inflicted with. The issue of stasis that is explored by Beckett, then, is not a mere commentary on despair; however it is a philosophical question about the boundaries of human nature and knowledge. Without advancement or revelation, even life itself is a process of survival. What is ironic is that, in declaring throughout that she was happy, this is a desperate attempt by Winnie to affirm life in the universe devoid of any form of teleology. Her perseverance turns despair into a sort of rebellious energy - the desire to

live on even when continuation has lost its meaning.

In aftermath of the First and Second World Wars as well as the industrial revolution, people live in a total physical and mental destruction that lead them to the great loss of meaning, will, hope, and a static life. With this fact, Beckett predicts the far future of humanity and the extent of their situation that will have. In *Happy Days*, Samuel Beckett used many techniques to serve this theme as the scenario, the script and the characters positions and shapes. In each scene, we see a glimpse of stasis whether in language, characters movement or even their thoughts. In each one, the characters are aware of that stasis and trying to ignore. Thus, acceptance with this reality makes them not to point it out and to move on in an aimless direction regardless of the end and time. What rest, eventually, is the will of life, as in the case of Winnie, and that what Beckett intends to deliver as a message of optimism to realize happy days.

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