

Reading Samuel Beckett's Portrayal of the Self from a Buddhist Perspective

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Abstract— Samuel Beckett's evocation of the self through the discussion of the intertwined themes of language, relativity/dependency, memory, time and change invites diverse perspectives from which the self could be read. Beckett, through the delineation of the self as constantly revising itself in relation to its memories and the larger social exterior, portrays the self as fragmented and impermanent. The delineation of the self in the plays *Waiting for Godot* (1956), *Endgame* (1958) and *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) as disintegrated, dependent and lacking in certitude, resonates with the Buddhist's consideration of the self as a mental formulation.

Keywords— Theatre of the Absurd, Existentialism, the self, Buddhism

I. BECKETT, EXISTENTIALISM AND BUDDHISM

"Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals. Habit then is the generic term for the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects. The periods of transition that separate consecutive adaptations ... represent the perilous zones in life of the individual ... when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being" [1, p. 59]

The above is a quotation from Samuel Beckett's *Proust*. It reflects Beckett's perception of the self as a series of habits. This interpretation of the self in particular, and a search for the self in general, characterize Beckett's plays which belong to the Absurd theatre convention or the Theatre of the Absurd.

In the term 'Theatre of the Absurd,' the word 'absurd' has not been used in the same sense as 'ridiculous.' It has been defined by Albert Camus as that "which is devoid of purpose." Absurd refers to the situation where a human being's "actions become senseless, absurd, useless" when s/he is "cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots" [1, p.23]. In other words, the disconnection between the human and the framework that once explained the world to her/him results in a lack of purpose which is termed Absurdity. Theatrical work which reflects this condition is called Absurd theatre.

Beckett's exploration into the "problem of being" and the "identity of the self" [1, p.29] has led to the association of the playwright with Existentialism, a philosophy which holds that "human beings simply exist in a universe that does not have an overarching moral order or meaning" [2, p. xiii]. The Existentialist philosophy concerns the plight of the

individual in an environment which was made alien to her due to the deconstruction of mechanisms that once explained the world around her. Although Beckett has been associated with Existentialism, connections have been made between Beckett and Buddhism too. Davies [3] goes to the extent of stating that Beckett's "correspondence with the Buddhist account is exact" and that "his constant stress on indices on name, age, gender and station" is ever so often "misappreciated as absurdist aesthetics" [p.119], emphasizing the possibility of reading Beckett's texts from a Buddhist perspective.

Beckett's preoccupation with the self and his deconstruction/fragmentation of the notion of the self is conveyed to the audience through his exploration of the overlapping themes of memory, time, change, language, dependency, and relativity, all of which are factors discussed in relation to the self. This is also reflected in his placing of his characters in a vacuum or a 'nothingness', divorced from the larger social exterior. In his plays, the idea of language being a medium of self-expression, and a meaning-making device, is challenged. Any connection between memory and the construction of the self is subverted. The notion of individuality, or the freedom of the self, is problematized through the portrayal of the self as existing in relation to and dependent on factors, both internal and external to the self. If the self is moulded into shape by the combined machinations of time and change, and has to be defined in relation to the Other, it lacks certitude and independence and therefore cannot be termed a fixed entity that one brings along into the world when one is born. The idea of the self or "I" being a mental creation, in a constant state of flux, and therefore beyond our control, negates the consistency of the self and as a result borders on the concept of the 'non-self' or the Buddhist Doctrine of No-Soul or *Anatta*, which considers the self to be an "imaginary, false belief which has no corresponding reality" and "den[ies] the existence of ...a soul, Self, or *Atman*" [4, p.51].

In this paper, the plays *Waiting for Godot* (1956), *Endgame* (1958) and *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) will be analyzed with regard to how Beckett deconstructs and fragments the self via his treatment of the themes of language, memory, time, change, dependency and relativity. This research will be based on (and limited to) textual analysis of these three plays, which will be henceforth referred to as *WFG*, *E* and *KLT* respectively. Therefore, the evocation of the self through performance would not be looked at. The choice of these plays was influenced by their consistent engagement with the themes mentioned above.

In the first section of the paper, Beckett's devaluation of language as a meaning-making device and the simultaneous creative employment of language are discussed in relation to Beckett's portrayal of the self as fragmented. The delineation of the self as being dependent on both the interiority of the self and the larger social exterior for its definition is focused on in the second section. Lastly, the treatment of the interconnected themes of time, memory and change and the resulting deconstruction and fragmentation of the self is discussed.

II. LANGUAGE, THE 'ACCUSATIVE I' AND THE UNSAYABLE

In Beckett's plays, the idea of language being a form of self-expression and a meaning-making device through which an individual connects to her/his surrounding, is challenged. To have a sense of self, or to be an individual, one must be able to speak for oneself in the "first person: every language offers that possibility, in its own grammar" [5, p.56]. In addition to aiding self-expression, language is considered to be the "appropriate site of political understanding" [6, p.309]. In the Theatre of the Absurd, which is characterized by a "devaluation and disintegration of language" [1, p. 406] and "a turning away from language as an instrument for the expression of the deepest levels of meaning" [p.328], language is neither a medium of self-expression nor a tool of political understanding or action. It ceases to function as the mediator between the self and the environment and is made to assume the position of an object with its meaning-making abilities put to test.

Beckett makes language one of his many theatrical devices as well as one of the subjects/ themes of his plays. His use of language "probes the limitation of language both as a means of communication and as a vehicle for the expression of valid statements, an instrument of thought" [1, p.85]. Through this objectification of language, Beckett equates language and content with one of the realities of his time, the postmodernist notion which states that

if language itself lacked stable referentiality [...] and was fundamentally arbitrary in its relationship to the objects and concepts it described, then all kinds of intellectual theories and processes of cultural enquiry [...] could have no claim to reflect reality or posit objective truths [7, p.179].

The dramatist's focus was on the plight of the human being in a society in which every social system, including that of language, had crumbled. Arguably, through using language creatively, Beckett strives to express the difficulties and consequent inability of the self to express itself using a device which has become dysfunctional.

The act of conversing, from a linguistic perspective, is a "ritualized process which allows the participants to construct and project desirable versions of their identities in a succession of performances targeted at specific audiences" [8, p.415]. Contrary to this view, Beckett's use of dialogue does not reflect the character's identity or sense of self. In *WFG*, the more Vladimir and Estragon talk, the more their selves seem fragmented since their everflowing conversation itself is incoherent and keeps on negating any impression the audience might have created of the

characters at the beginning of the play. Therefore, Vladimir and Estragon never project desirable versions of their identities. Instead, their sense of self is a series of impressions; one emerging after the other in quick succession, with the newer 'self' serving to negate the older one. This portrayal of the self is also similar to the description of the post-structuralist self which is that an individual has many selves which are propagated by the diverse contexts the individual is made to situate her/himself in [8]. Contrary to this poststructuralist view however, although Vladimir, Estragon, Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell, and Krapp are mentally transferred into the past via memories and have many conversations and monologues in the plays, they still remain disintegrated selves deprived of individuality.

From a sociological perspective, mastery of language is crucial in a person's efforts to distinguish herself as a social object. Therefore, the act of "learning one's own name is one of the earliest and most important steps in acquiring a self" [9, p. 82]. Interestingly, never do the protagonists in the three plays dealt with in this paper identify themselves using their names. In the plays, language is deprived of its status as a contributor to identity formation. The dramatis personae of *WFG* include Vladimir and Estragon, but in the course of the drama these characters call each other Didi and Gogo and never Vladimir and Estragon. At the conclusions of both Acts, Vladimir responds when the Boy calls him Mr. Albert-

Vladimir: Approach, my child.

[Enter BOY timidly. He halts]

Boy: Mr. Albert?

Vladimir: Yes... [10, p.42].

Vladimir's response, in turn, makes the audience wonder whether Vladimir's name is Vladimir or Albert, adding to the sense of uncertainty. Similarly, in another instance, Pozzo responds when Vladimir and Estragon call him both Abel and Cain, causing Estragon to exclaim "He's all humanity"-

Vladimir: I tell you his name is Pozzo

Estragon: We'll soon see. [He reflects]. Abel!
Abel!

Pozzo: Help!.....

Estragon: Perhaps the other is called Cain.
Cain! Cain!

Pozzo: Help! (p. 76).

Beckett's use of language could be read in the light of Derridean deconstruction which builds on the principles of poststructuralist theory and suggests that the linguistic system, or the relationship between the signifier/word and the signified/referent, is one of *differance*. The word "differance" is described as "sameness which is not identical" [11, p.278], which, when applied to language and meaning making, would suggest the gap or delay between a word and the object it refers to. In this play, Estragon wonders what day it is and this leaves Vladimir "looking wildly about him, as though the date was inscribed in the landscape" [10, p.7], bringing out the idea that the name of the day of the week is merely a construct and has no corresponding object in the real world. Elsewhere in the play, the stage directions read "Estragon gesture[s] towards

the universe" and "Vladimir uses his intelligence" [10, p.8]. The use of the words 'universe' and 'intelligence' as though they refer to tangible objects, as opposed to abstract concepts, evokes the arbitrary relationship and the gap or slippage that exists between the signifier and the signified.

In a world where change is wrought due to the passage of time, language cannot remain fixed and rigorous. It is this inconsistency of language that Beckett explores in his plays. Dialogue between Hamm and Clov, in *E*, points to how words are rendered meaningless when deprived of a meaningful context, or when the context is wrought with changes according to which language has not been updated. In reply to Hamm's exclamation "Yesterday! What does yesterday mean? Yesterday!", Clov says –

That means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. I use the words you taught me... [12, p.33].

Seemingly, Hamm himself has forgotten the words he taught Clov and, in this particular instance, the word 'yesterday' has no meaning in a context where the concept of time, as Hamm puts it, "[...] was never and [...] is over" [62]. Thus, the signifier remains while the signified no longer exists.

In *KLT*, Krapp's disembodied voice from the past lacks the context in which they were originally spoken and this evokes the contingency of language on a particular context in order to be meaningful. On hearing his own recorded voice use the word 'viduity', Krapp looks it up in the dictionary, having forgotten its meaning. He reads the dictionary definition of the term and concludes that the younger Krapp used the term with reference to "the vidua-bird" as opposed to the "state or condition of being or remaining a widow or widower" [13, p.18] when, in fact, young Krapp uses the word to convey the latter meaning. This too challenges the concept of fixed meaning. The dictionary definition of the term 'viduity' elicits the fact that this word has two meanings. It is only through its placement in a meaningful context that any sense could be given to the word 'viduity', in particular, and to all words, in general.

However, Beckett does engage himself in creative use of language. Katz [14] argues that Beckett 'grammaticalizes' the self, offering it a "middle-space," a location in between the nominative/subjective case and the accusative/ objective case. In other words, Beckett allocates the self a position which is neither 'I' (the subject) nor 'me' (the object). This "middle-space" is named "accusative I" and hints at an "accusative existence." Beckett's "accusative I" is described as "one of the most significant of Beckett's stylistic inventions" [14, p.187]. Therefore, the "accusative I" becomes an example of Beckett's experimental and creative use of language. Katz [14] highlights an accusative existence which pervades much of Beckett's novels, meaning that 'I' in the novels are never given a nominative or accusative position. The 'I,' in one of Beckett's novels titled *Texts for Nothing*, is bestowed a liminal position via the use of language, as is highlighted in the following excerpt –

Where would I go, if I would go, who would I be, if I could be, what would I say, if I had a voice,

who says this, saying it's me? Answer simply, someone answer simply. It's the same old stranger as ever, for whom alone accusative I exist, in the pit of my inexistence, of his, of ours, there's a simple answer [14, p.184].

The 'I' in this passage exists in the accusative/ as the object; it exists for "the same old stranger". Therefore, the stranger, the 'I' and 'him' become one. The "accusative I" functions to blur the distinction between the nominative/subject and accusative/object cases. Therefore, what Beckett portrays as the body or the self occupies a liminal position, in between the two cases, belonging to neither. This particular portrayal of the self highlights the limited possibilities of expression that language offers.

Beckett's use of the "accusative I" is not limited to his novels. In *KLT*, the recorded Krapp himself hints at an accusative existence in the following excerpt –

...With all the darkness around me I feel less alone [...] In a way [...] I love to get up and move about in it, then back here to ... (*hesitates*) ... me. [...] Krapp. [13, p.14-15]

In this passage too, the 'I' and 'me' are the same person, Krapp. Like Pozzo and Lucky in *WFG*, 'me' seems to hold 'I' on a leash. 'I' returns to 'me' similar to how Vladimir and Estragon unite at the beginning of the two Acts in *WFG*. Therefore, Krapp is positioned in this liminal space, in between the 'I' and 'me', the nominative and the accusative.

The in-between space Beckett allocates for the body/self through the use of the "accusative I" is in line with what is called the "unsayable" or the "unheeded neither"[3]. Davies [3] writes that neither self-expression nor its absence is a pre-requisite for being human. This is because language is "error-prone." The truth or the "real refuge" for both Beckett and the Buddhist is the unsayable, the "openness of question," as opposed to the "fabrication of answer," since self-expression is only "a chimerical apparition" [p.120-5] or a fantasy where no self subsists. If so, the accusative I and the unsayable, both of which are middle-spaces, can be considered as being equivalent to the non-self, or the Doctrine of No-Soul.

III. DEPENDENT EXISTENCE AND RELATIVE 'SELVES'

The theme of relativity/dependency is evoked via Beckett's characterization of the dramatis personae in *WFG*, *E* and *KLT* as being dependent on each other or defining themselves in relation to the other. In *WFG*, Vladimir and Estragon are delineated as friends who cannot do without each other. The relationship between Pozzo and Lucky is a master-slave relationship which is reversed to a certain extent in the course of the play. In *E*, Hamm and Clov, and Nagg and Nell are two pairs of characters who depend on each other. In *KLT*, the older Krapp finds his 'other half' in his younger self to whom he listens via his audio archive. Esslin [1] describes these relationships as being characterized by "mutual interdependence" [p.67]. This very interdependence invites into the analysis of Beckett's plays the Buddhist "theory of relativity" according to which "everything is conditioned, relative and interdependent" [4,

p.53], thereby highlighting how Beckett's portrayal of the self resonates with the Buddhist perception of the self.

In *WFG*, Vladimir and Estragon define themselves as friends while for most of the play Pozzo and Lucky are slave driver and slave respectively but the hierarchical relationship which characterizes the latter pair is not allowed to last for the entire length of the play. When Pozzo and Lucky reappear in the second act, not only are they "cruelly deformed by the action of time" [1,p.52] physically, this transformation has also resulted in severing the master-slave relationship with the master depending on his slave's sight. Thus, the action of time has changed circumstances, rendering the blind Pozzo dependent on Lucky for sight, with the latter seemingly having gained a certain degree of superiority despite still being dependent on his master. Conversely, Hamm and Clov are equally interdependent, with Hamm needing Clov to serve him and Clov needing the combination to Hamm's cupboard. But both Hamm and Clov deny their dependence on each other at the beginning of the play –

Hamm: We aren't beginning to... to... mean something?

Clov: Mean something! You and me, mean something!

(Brief laugh)

Ah, that's a good one! [12, p.40]

Nevertheless at the end of the play both acknowledge that they have been of help to each other –

Hamm: I'm obliged to you, Clov. For your services

Clov *(turning sharply)* : Ah pardon, it's I am obliged to you.

Hamm: It's we are obliged to each other. [p. 90]

Therefore, the characters of *WFG* and *E* are portrayed as dependent on other characters for the definition of their selves.

The pairs of characters who find each other indispensable have been referred to as "pseudocouples" [15, p.464]. There is a multitude of interpretations given to this term. For instance, Hamm and Clov are considered "vice-existers" with "the former symbolizing the instinctual and tyrannical side of the mind and the latter the intellect" while other such couples were regarded as representing the relationship between "body and mind". They are also read as "halves of a singular personality", halves that constitute a "single figure" which could be viewed from different perspectives, with the contrasting nature of the "two interlocking profiles" suggesting "the contrasting nature of the self and its other." Most of these pairs remain intact throughout the plays not due to their "harmonious friendships but out of fear, guilt and [...] the need to be witnessed," a reading which emphasizes the dependency of these characters on each other for recognition and acknowledgement.

The theme of relativity/ dependency is arguably best embodied in *KLT* where Krapp's present self is predicated upon and is a reaction to and a revision of one of the previous 'selves' he listens to. In fact, Krapp has been

engaged in this process of definition and redefinition of himself throughout his entire life as is made obvious when Krapp's recorded voice claims that he had "[j]ust been listening to an old year, passages at random" which makes him exclaim that it is "[h]ard to believe I was ever that young whelp" [13, p.15-16]. At the end of the play, the older Krapp denounces the younger self he listened to on the tapes. The two Krapps we simultaneously hear share "an ability to laugh at the aspirations of an even younger Krapp" [16, p. 90]. This ability represents moments where the older Krapp observes his younger self commenting on yet another younger self – the "young whelp". This image is aptly described as being akin to seeing "a face being endlessly reflected between two mirrors", a face which "can hardly recognize its own reflection" [p.90]. Quite unlike a reflection in the mirror however, this series of Krapps is projected onto different time spaces; the older Krapp transports himself into the past while Beckett, via stage directions, projects the old Krapp, along with the audience, into a "late evening in the future" [13, p.9]. Nevertheless, the metaphor of the mirror serves to appropriately describe the image created via this play. The image is that of a self rooted in and growing out of a former self, thereby creating an endless string of selves. These selves interact with former self/selves for their definition and validation.

The dependence of the self on a larger exteriority is evoked in *WFG* via the nameless character of the "Boy". Despite there being only one "Boy" listed in the dramatis personae, both Vladimir and Estragon along with the audience, at the end of the second Act, are under the impression that the Boy who appears in the second Act is not the same as the Boy who appears in the first Act. Even the Boy exists 'in the accusative'; each boy exists in relation to his brother, therefore dependent not on the interiority of the self but on external circumstances. The Boy in the first Act is not the Boy in the second Act because he is the minder of the goats and not the minder of the sheep, for instance. Therefore, although the Boy, like Krapp, appears in isolation and not as a "half" of a pseudocouple, Beckett makes the other characters in the play and the audience define the Boy in the first Act in relation to the Boy in Act Two and vice versa, thereby highlighting relativity and dependency as indispensable to the process of self-formation. This is in keeping with psychoanalytic theory which identifies the inability to recognize difference as a problem of the formation of selfhood [17, p.35]. This suggests that in order to posit a sense of self, one should inevitably recognize the difference between oneself and the other or see oneself in relation to another.

IV. MEMORY, TIME, AND CHANGE

In *WFG*, *E* and *KLT*, the cultural concept of time is problematized while the traditional link between memory and the process of self-formation is disrupted. Jelin [18], in an explanation of the significant role memory plays in the construction of the self, states that it is "the possibility of activating the past in the present that defines personal identity and the continuity of the self over time." When memory is viewed in relation to time, memory cannot be chronologically arranged since "the present contains and constructs past experience and future expectations" [p.4]. In

Beckett's plays however, the flow of time makes one face the fact that the self is in constant flux [1]. Davies [3] presents another argument from the Buddhist perspective, suggesting that Beckett does not engage in the deconstruction of "the values associated with time and the passing of time." Instead, it is suggested that Beckett's portrayal of time is an "effective recognition that in reality there is nothing to deconstruct" since there was "nothing in the first place" [120-1]. In Beckett's plays, the passage of time causes some of his characters to forget and this in turn causes changes in the personalities of these individuals. This severs any connection between the power to recall and self-formation. Therefore, Beckett, once again, thematically fragments the self, depriving it of a sense of fixity.

The concept of time in the plays *WFG*, *KLT* and *E*, is problematized to different degrees. For Vladimir, "time has stopped" [10, p. 29]. For Hamm, "time was never and time is over" [12, p. 92]. Moreover, the 'language of time' is no more – "That means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything anymore, teach me others..." [p. 51] – meaning that no meaningful discourse on time could ever take place again. In a context in which both the frameworks of time and language have crumbled, memory cannot be expressed in relation to time. It is impossible to anchor memory in time, to make "reference to the 'space of experience' in the present" or to read memory in relation to the "'horizon of expectations'" which "introduces a reference to a future temporality" [18, p.4]. Therefore, many of the characters in *WFG* and *E* have deficient memories. Pozzo claims his memory is "defective" [10, p.31] and Estragon either "forget[s] immediately" or "never forgets" [p.52].

Conversely, in *KLT*, Krapp is equipped with the ability to record memories and have them played back to him in different time spaces. In other words, Krapp is able to revisit his past repeatedly, this recollection and repetition assisting him to have a clear memory and also a stronger sense of self. However, in *WFG*, Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo and Boy are all deprived of the capacity to recollect, to remember and therefore have almost no memories. Thereby, an uncertainty is attached to, and in turn results in a fragmentation, of their sense of self. If the "singularity of memories and the possibility of activating the past in the present" is what "defines personal identity and the continuity of the self over time" [18, p.4], it would logically follow that a person's inability to recollect or to remember would deprive her/him of a sense of self. Through depriving his characters of both the power of recollection and a sense of self or identity, Beckett arguably highlights the self's dependence on something as transient as memory, which robs the former of any fixity. This particular reading of the self resonates with the Buddhist negation of the existence of an "abiding, immortal substance in man or outside" [4, p.55].

Interestingly, Krapp seems not to revisit his past randomly. The processes of recollection and repetition he engages in are preceded by careful selection. He does not listen to any tape that he lays his hands on. Instead he selects "box...three...spool...five" [13, p.12]. This process of selection resonates with the statement that the "subject selectively takes certain signposts, certain memories that

place him or her in relation to 'others'" [18, p.14]. These selected memories assist a person to sustain her/his identity and sense of self. Apart from Krapp, Pozzo too selects memories in order to restructure his self. Pozzo, after an emotional outburst says –

Gentlemen, I don't know what came over me. Forgive me. Forget all I said. [*More and more his old self*] I don't remember exactly what it was, but you may be sure there wasn't a word of truth in it..... [10, p.27].

In this instance, Pozzo forgets, or pretends to have forgotten what he just said, and by doing so he returns to being his "old self". There seems to be a manipulation of memory on Pozzo's part; he denies the memory of his repentant self and asks the others to do so too, in order to be his former authoritative self. This is suggestive of two ideas. Firstly, it points to the notion of memory being selective. Secondly, it insinuates that the self is dependent on forgetting as much as it is contingent on recollecting.

Beckett's characters refer to or embody the theme of habit, or habitual memory. Jelin [18] describes daily life as comprising patterns of behaviour that are habitual, non-reflective, learned and repeated. "The past of the learning process and the present of its memory turn into habit and tradition" [p.15]. This perception of existence is clearly reflected in *KLT* where Krapp is addicted to revisiting his past selves and formulating a fresher sense of self. For Vladimir, "hours are long, under these conditions, and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings which... may at first seem reasonable, until they become a habit" [10, p.72]. The void Beckett portrays seems to be full of such 'habits'. *E* elicits this idea of memory-turned-habits, which can be considered to be intrinsic to one's sense of self and identity. Clov constantly questions the part of his consciousness that constitutes habitual memory - "Do this, do that, and I do it. I never refuse. Why?" [p. 50] Later on in the play, Clov, in what seems to be a rather philosophical utterance, brings forth the idea of how habit has shaped his sense of being and, in order to be who he wants to be, or another self, he would have to let go of his habits. But, Clov feels "too old...to form new habits" and therefore his life of servitude will "never end" and Clov would "never go" [p.50], leaving Hamm behind. For Beckett, "habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit... Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals" [1, p.59]. Therefore, life, in Beckett's plays, is portrayed as a habit, a composite of repeated memories, a farce. Nell questions "Why this farce, day after day?" [10, p.40]. Later on in the play, Clov echoes her and Hamm replies "Routine. One never knows" [p.40].

Unlike the characters in *WFG*, those in *E* and *KLT* are bestowed with the ability to recollect or to remember. Krapp's capacity to select, frame and repeat memories until they become part of a routine, however, does not give back the self any validity which Estragon's inability to recall had deprived the self of. Instead, the very fact that memories undergo mental processes of selection, framing and repetition makes the self similar to what in Buddhism is called a "mental projection" [4, p.55]. If the self comprises

memories which are constructions, then the self too becomes a creation.

WFG is described as exploring a “static situation” [1, p.46]. The play is stationary in terms of plot since *WFG* has no story line and the two Acts are almost identical in terms of the incidents that take place. In *E*, “time is the same as usual” [12, p.10] and this refers to either a static situation or the monotony of repetition which makes one think that today’s “time” is the same as yesterday and the day before. Although Clov claims that time is the same as usual and that “Nature has forgotten [them]”, Hamm maintains that this cannot be the case – “But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!” [p. 18]. Hamm recognizes the passage of time and the change it has brought, and continues to bring about. Therefore, via these plays, Beckett explores the minute changes time wreaks on the characters and the environment. For instance, the machinations of time are evident in the drastic changes Pozzo and Lucky have undergone by the time the audience encounters them in Act II [10]. Also, Estragon’s seeming loss of memory makes evident the change wrought in his conscience through the passage of time. Thus, *WFG* does not explore a static situation. Neither is nature portrayed as fixed. Instead, it could be contended that this play, along with *E*, highlights the idea that change takes place even in what seems to be a stagnant state of affairs. As Estragon puts it, “[time] would [pass] in any case” [10, p.41], changing matters as it takes its course.

V. FRAGMENTED SELVES AND THE DOCTRINE OF NO-SOUL

Beckett’s evocation of the self through the discussion of the intertwined themes of language, relativity, dependency, memory, time, and change invites diverse perspectives from which the self could be read. These perspectives include the Buddhist point of view. Beckett goes beyond the mere portrayal of the self and its tribulations in a disintegrated, absurd world. In *WFG*, *KLT* and *E* he proceeds with a process of deconstructing the self. It is this very disintegration of ‘selves’ that invites a Buddhist perspective into the analysis.

In the three plays discussed above, language functions neither as a medium of self expression nor as a means through which the characters in the play could connect with the ever-changing environment. In other words, Beckett deprives language of its status as a naming system and a means through which the speaker can project her/his identity and connect with the surrounding s/he is in. Alongside this disintegration of language, Beckett engages in the creative use of it too. Through the invention of the “accusative I” for instance, Beckett allocates a liminal space for the self, which belongs neither to the nominative nor the accusative. This middle-space allocated to the self can be equated to the concept of the unsayable which refers to that which cannot be expressed. The notion of the unsayable suggests that that there is nothing sayable in a world where no self subsists. Therefore, Beckett’s deconstruction of language results in the fragmentation of the self and, when read in the light of the notion of the unsayable, Beckett’s portrayal of the self as fragmented borders on the Buddhist doctrine of No-Soul.

In Beckett’s plays, the self is portrayed as being dependent on the interiority of the self, other characters and the larger social exterior for its definition and validation. Beckett, through his portrayal of accusative existence through the use of “accusative I” and the pseudocouples, suggests the idea of the self being defined in relation to and dependent on both the interiority of the self and external factors. This aspect of the formation of the self is in keeping with the Buddhist theory of relativity according to which everything is relative and interdependent.

The playwright’s treatment of the themes of memory, time and change within seemingly static situations, serve to portray the self as perpetually subject to change which is brought about by the passage of time. In addition, in the plays, the traditional link between memory and self-formulation is subverted. The disintegration of the ‘language of time’ or the concept of time in the plays makes it impossible for the characters to anchor their memories in time or to express their recollections in relation to time. Also, the inability to recollect, which is displayed by most characters in the plays, highlights the degree to which the self is dependent on something as short-lived as memory for its existence. Thereby, a transient quality is attributed to the self, robbing the latter of any sense of permanence. This portrayal of the self resonates with the Buddhist perception of the self. The evocation of the ‘impermanent self’ is similar to the Buddhist perception of the sense of self which is that, in an individual, there is no everlasting and absolute entity, named the self. Where the characters do have the power to recollect, select, frame and repeat memories, the self becomes, what is from a Buddhist lens, a mental projection. For instance, in *KLT*, where the self is delineated as always predicated upon the memory of a previous self, the self is reduced to a momentary, mental formulation.

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