Emerging from the Margin – Absurd, Grotesque, and Meaningless Meanings in *Waiting for Godot*

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Tutkielmassa tarkastellaan Samuel Beckettin läpimurtonäytelmää *Waiting for Godot* (suom.
Huomenna hän tulee), ja pyritään osoittamaan näytelmän sisältävän merkittävästi hienovaraisia
groteskeja piirteitä, joita ei aiemmassa tutkimuksessa ole huomioitu juurikaan. Näytelmän groteskit
piirteet nousevat siis ikään kuin sekä tekstin itsensä että aiemman tutkimuksen marginaaleista.
Näihin tutkielma pyrkii pureutumaan ja joita se aikoo aukoa ja paljastaa.

Tutkielmaan on valittu groteskin teorian lisäksi kaksi muuta aiempaa teoreettista kehystä,
joiden puitteissa näytelmää on usein tutkittu ja analysoitu: absurdius sekä merkityksettömyys.
Jokaista kolmea viitekehystä tutkitaan kolmelta näkökannalta: niiden konstruoimasta paikasta,
ajasta, ja itsestä (tai identiteetistä) käsin. Tutkielma lähtee liikkeelle ensimmäisessä osassa absurdin
teatterista ja absurdin (eritoten Albert Camus'n) teoriasta laajemmin osoittamaan, millaisia
absurdeja piirteitä ja merkityksiä näytelmään on luettu, näitä samalla kyseenalaistaen ja kritisoiden.

Toisessa osassa siirrytään merkityksettömyyden teoriaan, Maurice Blanchot keskeisimpänä
kriitikkona, ja tarkastellaan, millaisia merkityksettömiä merkityksiä ensimmäisessä osassa havaitut
keskeiset piirteet saavat.

Kolmannessa osassa tarkastellaan, hyödyntäen erityisesti Mihail Bahtinin ja Wolfgang
Kayserin kirjoituksia, groteskin kautta kahdessa aiemmassa osassa tutkittuja ja ongelmallisiksi
havaittuja ilmiöitä, ja pyritään osoittamaan, miten ne eivät pelkästään koodaudu auki groteskin
linssin läpi luettuna, vaan suorastaan kutsuvat groteskeja tulkintoja itsestään.

Tutkielman kolmiportaisuudesta muotoutuu eräänlainen oma metodinsa: eri viitekehyksiä
teokseen sovittamalla voidaan teoksesta ikään kuin suodattaa esiin tekstimassan seasta keskeiset
ilmiöt ja merkitykset tutkimuksen kohteeksi.

Lopputuloksena nähdään, kuinka Beckettin tyylille ominainen groteskin muoto sijaitsee
toisaalta näytelmän itsensä, toisaalta aiemman tutkimuksen marginaalissa, ja kuinka nämä kaksi
tasoa ovat analogisessa suhteessa.

Avainsanat: absurdi, merkityksettömyys, groteski, samuel beckett, waiting for godot,
kirjallisuustiede

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1. Introduction

Whatever could be said of such a seminal work of twentieth century literature as Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* that has not already been said? Surely this is a piece that is analysed to the death it so ambivalently seeks and fears. Yet meaning changes with time and readers, and the statement, so often made of Beckett's works, that a text construes meaninglessness, is especially compelling for a student of literature. Bearing this in mind, we begin.

Firstly, looking at the table of contents, the focus of this thesis may not be immediately apparent. The reason there are three seemingly distinct sections on three seemingly distinct topics is that we are to demonstrate their interconnectedness, and furthermore, that the frameworks of the absurd and the meaningless—which are among the most discussed topics in conjunction with both Beckett's work in general and *Waiting for Godot* in particular—are in a mutually supportive relationship with the framework of the grotesque, which has so far been rather contingent in criticism (though not completely neglected, and this is an interesting discussion to take part in).

The aim of this thesis is to show how the grotesque grows out of the absurd and the meaningless, or emerges from the margins of silence, the gaps, that remain in the discussions, relating specifically to *Godot*, as the influential critic Martin Esslin argues that while the play is analysable, "any endeavour to arrive at a clear and certain interpretation" of the play would be foolish (1985, 45). We will, therefore, endeavour to seek an analytical framework that refuses clear and certain meanings, and for this purpose, the theory of the grotesque is not only appropriate, but very insightful.

To tease out the grotesque from the margins of earlier criticism and from the margins of the play itself, a kind of filtration method has been devised, if such a loan from the natural sciences may be permitted: by imposing several theories onto the text, we filter out what is irrelevant to us. This gives us a number of critical strata, layers of the text which take on different meanings and significances in different theoretical contexts. It is presumed that, after such a process, we are left with something new. A meaning that emerges from meaninglessness. For this reason, this thesis is as much about the theories as it is about the play, and this is reflected in the way the theories are

discussed quite deeply and comprehensively.

In the context of all three theories, on each strata, as it were, there are a number of concepts or themes that suggest themselves over and over again. These run through the thesis as the red thread of the analysis: those of world, time, and self are picked out as the main ones, and they serve the function of nodes or interstices for the rest. This division is kept as absolute as possible, but during the writing process it became clear their interconnectedness renders such an endeavour nearly futile. The division is held to a reasonable extent nonetheless. The minor concepts or themes, which may not all be present in all three frameworks, are: language, void, tragicomedy, realism, the aura, consciousness, paradox, contradiction, and night. Granted, most of these are such sweeping, general terms as to encompass whole areas of life, and have in themselves limited expressive, let alone analytic, capacity. However, the individual contexts in which they are discussed demarcate and shape them. The breadth of their scope makes them adaptable, plastic, and the contours of each theory are marked on their adaptive surfaces.

The individual critical discussion for which this thesis has the most to offer, and towards which it builds, is the grotesque. It is strangely underrepresented especially in the criticism on *Waiting for Godot,* considering how relatively often the grotesque is identified and discussed for example in Beckett's prose work. Yet it is not somehow outside or alien to the play: a notable theorist of the grotesque, Geoffrey Galt Harpham argues that the grotesque reveals the presence of meaning within apparent meaninglessness; it does not stay in the margin—these directionalities, Harpham argues, are unravelled in and by the grotesque, for on one hand, the grotesque compresses forms into meaningful ambivalence, and on the other, it proliferates them into meaningless ambivalence (1982; 31, 44-45, 65-68, 184). It appears as a glimpse throughout both the play and, as importantly, the criticism. For example, Esslin already states that the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd are grotesque, and Neil Cornwell notes the parallels between the grotesque and the absurd, but neither elaborates on this—it is argued that the absurd and the grotesque both are "quickly cheapened" that is, especially susceptible to dismissive and approximate use (Blau 1961, 137-139; Kayser 1981, 17; Thomson 1971, 10-13). On the other hand, theorists of grotesque such as

Wolfgang Kayser, Philip Thomson, and Arthur Clayborough mention Beckett in passing, but never really focus on the kind of grotesque that is found in his works. The connection that is made between the grotesque and Beckett is in its contingency a perfect example of just such cheapening use. It is mentioned in passing, treated like an off-handed remark, and David Musgrave, one of the few who actually do consider the connection worth closer inspection, notes that most of Beckett study has "tended to dwell on established theories of the grotesque and has not attempted to determine how the grotesque in Beckett's works differs from other representatives of the mode" (2003).

Furthermore, our chosen play, *Waiting for Godot*, gets minimal attention in this respect as was noted. This may be due to its nature as a relatively straightforward theatrical piece. We view this not as a hindrance but a strength: the play does not self-evidently invite grotesque readings, but, as will be apparent, the grotesque permeates it, making the findings more revealing. The grotesque exists in the play like a palimpsest text: it hides behind the lines of dialogue, and given the opportunity, bursts forth with force and effortlessness. The tradition of the grotesque has a similar relationship to Beckett studies generally as well, as it "hides" behind the lines of query. We wish to study the kind of grotesque that specifically emerges from the play, for it is certainly not a very typical one. Musgrave argues it represents a new era or generation of the grotesque, but the problematics brought forth by the absurd and the meaningless help us understand that his formulation, while evincing great insight, partly focuses on aspects which may not be central to Beckett's work.

Before we begin, let us first introduce the object of this thesis and the structure of its argument briefly. In his very influential book, Esslin posits Beckett into a group of playwrights loosely collected under a common rubric which he calls the Theatre of the Absurd. The group does not form an actual movement as they lack solid connections between them; the denomination has been assigned to their type of drama *ex post facto*. *Waiting for Godot* is one of Beckett's earliest and most recognised plays, originally in French, and first performed in Paris in 1953. The English translation is by Beckett himself, and it was first staged in the English language in London in 1955.

The play is divided into two acts, and features two main characters, Vladimir and Estragon, who await a third character, Mr. Godot, never to be seen in the play, on a country road near a single tree. The stage-setting is very bare, only the tree and a stone or a mound are explicitly mentioned. There are three other recurring characters: a master and his servant, Pozzo and Lucky, and the messenger boy from Mr. Godot. Pozzo and Lucky are passing by, and the messenger boy appears only at the end of each act. While waiting, Vladimir and Estragon pass the time by talking, participating in what can only be described as a variety of physical and linguistic games. Though we shall discuss it not in terms of a theatrical production but as a text (experienced as a textual rather than a multimodal entity), it is fruitful to consider on a general level what is said about the characteristics of the Theatre of the Absurd.

About the structure of this thesis, we will begin our analysis with the absurd: It is the first and foundational theory to be applied to Beckett's works, and thus appears in a variety of forms, since most critics have of it a version of their own, though all versions have in common the sense of loss of meaning and value. We will be using as our starting point Albert Camus's formulation. However, we will notice that the absurd as a theoretical framework is unable to really grasp the play in terms of meaninglessness and what it entails. Its discussion is also centred on the play as a theatrical, physical and visual work. This gives rise to the need to look at meaninglessness as a subject and a tradition of Beckett criticism independent of the absurd.

In the second section we move on to the meaningless: The theory is more textually-oriented in its approach, it discusses the play from a completely different viewpoint, and thus addresses some problematic, seemingly unsolvable, issues that arise from absurdist criticism. Yet the framework of the meaningless is not enough in itself, as it leads to an untenable paradox. This leads to a need for a still new framework, one that encompasses both traditions, and, more importantly, which legitimises paradoxical meanings. This leads us to the grotesque.

In the third and last section we move onto the grotesque: The palimpsest nature of the grotesque in *Waiting for Godot*, the vague assertion that some grotesque elements can indeed be found in Beckett's works, on both Beckett studies and grotesque theories, was mentioned. But the

ties are even deeper: the history of the Theatre of the Absurd is closely if obliquely linked to the history of the tradition of the grotesque, as the two manifest similarly in relation to different phases of the history of Western culture. The superficial and incidental role of the grotesque in the Theatre is therefore an unfortunate oversight.

Our analysis does not focus on the history of the grotesque and the Theatre, and therefore this subject, which would certainly warrant a study of its own, is but a minor point. More importantly the grotesque helps us overcome many problems with the interpretation of our main object, *Waiting for Godot*: On one hand, the critical tradition of the absurd tries too hard to fix a definite meaning for the play, and the physicality of the play as a play invites readings that may be objectionable—and in direct contradiction to the explicitly stated general consensus that there can be no meaning fixed to the play (for example, Esslin himself argues that the identity of Godot is unimportant yet cannot resist speculating on it anyway). On the other hand, the critical tradition of the meaningless is better suited for understanding the textuality of the play but cannot fully grasp the relationship between meaning and meaninglessness, silence and materiality, in the play. The grotesque that emerges from the text combines these as the strange, clashing existence of both nothingness and embodiment. The combination of traditions is also reflected back to the grotesque in the way the play combines the two main traditions of the grotesque, here called the carnival-grotesque and the subjective grotesque.

As a final note, this thesis in itself is something of a hybrid, its ingredients sought and fumbled upon in many different places and thinkers' works. It may seem (hopefully merely initially) to the reader even a grotesque one, as Harpham argues that grotesque analysis is the application of a method and expression to an unsuitable object (1982, 12). Hopefully at the end of this thesis the method has proven itself worthwhile.

2. Reading the Absurd

Let us begin by considering the foundation and inspiration of the Theatre of the Absurd and the putative inspiration for *Waiting for Godot*, the concept of the absurd. Though there is a number of

works dedicated to the analysis of the absurd, we will rely mainly on the definition presented by the essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* by Albert Camus (originally published in 1942), as this "fundamental treatise" (Cornwell 2006; 3, 114) is treated as the main authority of the absurd by Esslin, and is surely, if not the most, at least among the most influential texts on the absurd. The essay centres on the figure of Sisyphus from ancient Greek mythology: he displeased the gods, and as punishment in the afterlife must roll a large boulder up a hill, only for the boulder to roll back down, thus renewing his labour indefinitely. Camus argues that instead of being tortured by his punishment, Sisyphus is the happiest of all men: "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy." (Camus 1991, 123) Sisyphus lives his (after)life freed of disappointments and uncertainty, and Beckett's works have been read as just such an infinite ceaseless task—indeed, Beckett is recorded to view writing as such a task (Brater 1975, 197; Cornwell 2006; 20, 241; Krieger 1977, 988-991). We will see how these ideas have been interpreted in the works of the Theatre of the Absurd, for like Manuel Grossman argues, the meaning is specialised (1967, 473-474).

2.1 What is the Absurd?

The word *absurd*, according to Camus, denotes something impossible, and more importantly, something that is contradictory. The absurd is not a single entity, but a relation between two extremes; it, as Camus lyrically puts it, "bursts from the comparison between a bare fact and a certain reality, between an action and the world that transcends it." (1991, 30) The absurd is a clash, an unceasing struggle, in the experience of an individual when faced with the familiar world made strange, a world void of reason and explanation, in short, world without meaning. (1991; 6, 14, 29.) The absurd, therefore, is an experience rather than a physical phenomenon. Camus argues that the absurd is felt when the human need for coherence and unity is encountered by the incoherence and strangeness of the world. As the only bond between the mind and the world the absurd it is a "divine equivalence which springs from anarchy" (Camus 1991, 51), it is restless and oppositional. (1991; 28-31, 35, 51.) The absurd can only be denied or accepted completely, as the clash that creates the

absurd cannot be reconciled (1991, 48). A relationship can only exist between two distinct components, not their indistinct fusion.

Camus describes the denial of the absurd as being asleep, the similarities between being wilfully ignorant and unconscious being somewhat obvious and as the denial of the absurd is, necessarily, the denial of a part of the human mind as well. The acceptance of the absurd situation is, conversely, described as awakening, consciousness, and lucidity, and the encounter with the absurd is a moment of lucidity. (1991; 6, 13, 44, 15.) Owing to its nature as consciousness (also literally understood), and since the absurd is delimited on both sides by the extremes by whose clash it is created, it is "lucid *reason* noting its limits" [Italics added.] (1991, 49). In terms of the night/day duality which is derivative of asleep/awake, Camus describes the absurd as "light without effulgence" (Camus 1991, 5), and committing suicide because one cannot bear the absurd is the flight from light (1991, 5).

In a world of perpetual struggle, devoid of meaning and explanation, Camus asks: "Does the Absurd dictate death?" We are strangers in a hostile world, exiles without memory or hope of a homeland, divorced from our very lives. Should we commit suicide as nothing has meaning any more? (1991; 6, 9.) As the metaphors of light and awakening imply, the experience of the absurd is by no means negative in nature for Camus, as Neil Cornwell and Clyde Manschreck note (Cornwell 2006, 115; Manschreck 1976, 92). Accepting the absurd, or living in reconciliation to it, is empowering. The world is suddenly given a "poetry of forms and colours" (Camus 1991, 52). The void where meaning disappears becomes suddenly eloquent, and indeed the absurd is a progression towards this void. (Camus 1991, 12; Cornwell 2006; 12, 115.) Furthermore, even though the absurd teaches that all experience is meaningless, it also dictates that life should be lived to the fullest and the longest, as human life is the only necessary good in the meaningless world (Camus 1991, 62-63; Cornwell 2006, 117). The will to live in the present moment, the will to experience the world, is the consequence of accepting the absurd for nothing matters more than being conscious, "the purest of joys" (Camus 1991, 63). "By the mere activity of consciousness I transform into a rule of life what was invitation to death—and I refuse suicide." (Camus 1991, 64) The acceptance of the absurd has

other consequences, deeply personal, which we shall discuss more in depth later: revolt, freedom, and passion (Camus 1991, 60).

The two facets of the absurd, or the two clashing elements, the absurdity of the world and the human mind, will be discussed in the following section.

2.1.1 The Absurd World

What is the absurd world, the world deprived of meaning, reason, and familiarity for Camus? It is the world the human mind cannot grasp, knowledge of it is impossible, everything seems to have sunk into nothingness, and all explanations turn to images covering up the emptiness of uncertainty. It is the world of "the anonymous impersonal pronoun 'one'" (Camus 1991, 52), the natural world having suddenly turned strange. It reveals the inhumanity of the world which has been made comprehensible by imposing the human system of thought upon it—the absurd takes this imposed meaning away from us. It is once more unexplainable, inhuman–divested of illusions of meaning and false illumination. (Camus 1991; 6, 14, 19-25) The absurd world is experienced as a stranger to it, it seems nonsensical and irrational as it cannot be grasped (1991, 27). Yet it is, by necessity, none other than our own world and has never been anything else. The human need for coherence, or human nostalgia (to use Camus's term), has wanted to grasp it, to bring it closer for inspection and understanding (Camus 1991, 31, 35). Camus writes: "The world evades us because it becomes itself again . . . It withdraws at a distance from us." (Camus 1991, 14) Walter Benjamin speaks of a phenomenon he names the aura which exhibits such similarities that we shall discuss it here briefly.

With references notably similar to Camus's (who talks of "the soft lines of these hills, and the hand of evening on this troubled heart" [1991, 20].) Benjamin writes: "If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch." (1936, section III) The aura is a perceived distance that does not rely on the spatial proximity of the object, it is an effect on the human mind of distance, reverence and sublimity. As Benjamin notes in another essay, it is the experience of the object as opaque (2014, 137). For Benjamin, human nostalgia is

greedy: he talks of the poverty of the human experience which turns the masses into barbarians who hungrily consume everything in their way, only soon to be tired and bored by it (2014, 138). This nostalgia, hunger, for bringing objects close for scrutiny strips them of substance and the aura.

As the aura is a phenomenon of the mind of the subject rather than an inherent quality of the object, so too is the absurd a phenomenon of the mind: the birthplace of the absurd is the contradiction in the human mind that observes the absurd world, it is born in the realisation that the ordinary is wholly strange. The origin of the absurd is the meet of the strange world and human nostalgia, the need for coherence and unity, and it persists in their continuous conflict. (Camus 1991; 12, 17, 21, 28, 31.) As this conflict, the absurd is the only bond that unites the man with the world, as already mentioned (Camus 1991, 30-31). It is what makes the strange, inhuman world ours nevertheless. As the absurd world resist unification, in its denial of human nostalgia, it is endlessly diverse and splendid (1991; 9, 65). The feeling of the absurd is the feeling of awe and fear inspired by the strange world, understanding that the world cannot be understood from a human perspective. This sounds like the sublime, and indeed, perhaps the absurdity of the natural world is an auratic, sublime experience for Camus.

To experience life fully, man cannot expect to integrate the world into his own frame of reference, to receive the world in one's studio, as Benjamin writes (1936, section II). One must, with humility, go out into its splendid diversity. This leads us to the absurd self that wishes to live in reconciliation to the absurd.

2.1.2 The Absurd Self

The human mind unconscious of the absurd wishes to grasp the world, that is, to impose the unifying human structure of signification onto it. It is in a state of obscurity and ignorance (Camus 1991; 41, 54). But the conscious (or absurd) man[1] (modelled on but not limited to the character of Sisyphus) who lives in reconciliation to the absurd is different. Again in terms of the dualities of awake/asleep and light/dark, the absurd man has seen the light without effulgence, the absurd, cast

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1 4 For Camus, the subject is always a man. The same holds for Maurice Blanchot, who we shall discuss in section 3. What remains unclear is whether or not man is intended as a universal subject.

away the inner darkness that is the love for unity (1991, 54). He is conscious of the absurdity of life and its three consequences: revolt, freedom, passion.

Consciousness is not a state which one can choose to leave, for the conscious man is forever bound to the absurd, however he may wish to recover the feeling of meaningfulness. He feels estranged from his life and self, as the absurd world he inhabits his identity has become absurd as well, and will be unknowable to him: "If I try to seize this self of which I feel sure, if I try to define and to summarize it, it is nothing but water slipping through my fingers." (Camus 1991, 19-20) His consciousness is achieved through what Camus calls a revolt; a revolt that extends his awareness to the whole of experience and gives value to the absurd life. (Camus 1991; 6, 15, 25, 31, 54-55.)

The revolt is against future and hope (Camus 1991; 14, 32-35, 54). These two are so intricately linked they are nearly identical, as Camus writes that "we live on future" (1991, 13). We turn our hungry gaze towards tomorrow in the hope for something better than today. For the absurd man, there is only the absence of meaning and hope. Yet without hope, the absurd man is without death, as the absurd revolt is ultimately against death: the future brings with it our eventual death, and in looking forward to it, one is slave to it (Camus 1991; 13, 58; Cornwell 2006, 117). The absurd man simultaneously recognizes and rejects his death, and this will give him the freedom of action in this life (Camus 1991, 54-57). Instead of rejecting time, in the hope for eternity after life, the absurd man embraces the temporal limitedness of his life. In this way death grants the absurd man strength and justification in his actions. (Camus 1991; 66, 86-90.) However, this does not mean the absurd man is liberated (1991, 67). He is bound forever to the absurd itself (as already noted), to this earth, and to the consequences of his own deeds—the absurd does not license crime, unlike Manschreck argues. It enables the impartial calculation of the worth of all actions. As Oliver says, it is ironic that absurdity is the only solid foundation for reason to rest securely on. (Manschreck 1976; 86, 96; Oliver 1963, 234.) But that, too, is only in the nature of the absurd.

Consequently, the absurd man is characterized by calmness and logicality, without favouring neither logic nor absurdity over the other (Camus 1991; 37, 66). He believes in rationality without reservations or limits, that is, whatever the conclusion, it is to be accepted—this is what Camus

calls absurd reasoning (1991, 9). It is for the absurd man alone to carry the implications of his actions (Camus 1991, 55). When confronted with an illogical world, the rationality of the absurd man freely admits to knowing nothing, not even himself, except for one thing: his own rationality, or lucidity. The absurd man wishes to live with only what is certain, and in an uncertain world, that is nothing. (Camus 1991; 53, 68, 90.) Therefore he settles for living with nothing. In addition to knowing nothing, the absurd man wishes to mask nothing, for the mask hides the inhumanity of the absurd world: Camus mentions priests holding painted masks before the faces of prisoners to be executed, to hide the scaffold that is their demise (1991, 90-91). The absurd man is this condemned man, yet he chooses to view his inevitable end.

The absurd man recognizes the mechanism of his mind for what is truly is: contradiction and multiplicity. In the very act of the asserting a unifying proposition, the mind proves its own inconsistency— his is insufferable for the unconscious man, and he creates a simulated ignorance to ameliorate the dissonance (Camus 1991; 18, 87-88). When the simulated ignorance is rejected, it shatters, and "an infinite number of shimmering fragments is offered to the understanding." (1991, 18) So the absurd man multiplies what he cannot unify, he rejoices in the unrest of the heart, embraces the passions that burn the heart while exalting it. Thus the absurd man feels passion by living in a constant state of clash. This is the state of harmony with the absurd world as the absurd world, too, is characterised by clash. (Camus 1991; 18, 22, 74, 90.)

Camus argues that the most absurd character is the creator (1991, 92). We shall look at the character of the creator in more detail in conjunction with our discussion of Maurice Blanchot and the nature of the literary author in section 3.1.3. Next we will, however, focus on the "leading exponents of the absurd" (Cornwell 2006, 3), the Theatre of the Absurd in general and Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* in particular.

2.1.3 The Theatre of the Absurd

Let us now consider the way in which Camus's conception of the absurd has been applied to the

practice of art by the writers of the Theatre of the Absurd—it is naturally a nearly impossible task to ascertain that Camus's work has been a conscious source and inspiration, but Schevill argues that the absurdity of *Godot* bears a specifically Camusian aspect (Schevill 1977, 236). As already mentioned, the authors involved do not constitute a literary movement per se; they are loosely collected under a common title as their plays seem to reflect the same attitude, an attitude that was central, fundamental even, to the twentieth century (Esslin 1985, 23). The similarities that constitute the movement are mainly accidental, and mostly due to the Zeitgeist they capture acutely, since each of the writers of the Theatre is "an individual who regards himself as a lone outsider, cut off and isolated in his private world" (Esslin 1985, 22). Alongside Beckett, according to Esslin, such authors as Arthur Adamov, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Harold Pinter belong to the Theatre.

Esslin defines the absurd of the Theatre of the Absurd as something which is devoid of purpose, senseless and useless. The absurd is the world become devoid of meaning, and the reaction to this, which the Theatre aspires to depict, is, to borrow Esslin's words, a "sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition". (Esslin 1985; 23-24, 409.) This, as Grossman argues, is a specialised version of the absurd Camus proposed in his essay (1967, 473-474); it is still important and useful to compare this with Camus's concept, especially as it is wider in scope, foundational for all thought on the absurd in general, and, as already noted, explicitly connected to *Waiting for Godot*.

The Theatre presents its audience with an absurd universe, one which has lost its centre of unity, its purpose, and most importantly, its meaning (Esslin 1985, 411). Senselessness and uselessness, the devaluation of ideals and purpose, and, foremost of all, the meaninglessness of the human condition that result from the experience of the absurd are somewhat removed from Camus's own conception of the consequences of the absurd, as we have seen: for him, the absurd man is a rational creature in an irrational world, and the consequences of accepting the absurd as one's own reality are the personally engaging revolt, freedom, and passion (Camus 1991; 64, 85). The helplessness and dejection Esslin sees following the acceptance of the absurd stand in conspicuous contrast to Camus's attitude, who calls the absurd sweet wine (1991, 52). Though all things are

equally indifferent in the absurd world, the absurd man feels privileged in knowing his own limitations (Camus 1991, 91).

Perhaps owing in part to the absurd nature of the Theatre of the Absurd, the absurd is, after all, impossible and contradictory, it features characteristics which oppose those of traditional theatre (Camus 1991, 29; Esslin 1985, 28; Knight 1971,184-185). These characteristics are easy to see as neither harmonious nor acceptable for a proper theatrical piece to have: it features no linear or sensible plot instead relying on disconnected farcical situations, no relatable or rational characterisation, radical undermining of language usually in the form of nonsense dialogue and unusual or incoherent symbolism (Esslin 1985, 398; Hurley 1965, 634-637). However, there is no argument that these features are unique; indeed, it is only the combination of pre-existing attitudes and literary modes which is unique to the Theatre, and that it is their subject, the philosophy of the absurd, and not the works of art themselves which distinguishes them (Esslin 1985, 398; Oliver 1963, 224). We will discuss the history of the Theatre of the Absurd in more detail later.

The rejection of a sensible plot, narrativity even, is compared to Cubism and abstract painting (Cavell 2002, 131; Esslin 1985; 26, 392). It is connected to what Esslin calls "the open abandonment of rational devices and coherent discourse" (1985, 24). The comparison of the Theatre of the Absurd and abstract painting seems appropriate: both search for means to show concretely the sense that the epistemology of the subject breaks down, that is, how the deforming of temporal and logical structures are experienced. The message and the form approach a unified whole in the Theatre as the experience of the destruction of logic is represented in a way that destroys textual logic. Instead of presenting a linear sequence of events, the Theatre is interested more in presenting basic life situations which are static—and especially situations that arise from the author's personal subjective consciousness. (Esslin 1985; 403.) Therefore the Theatre does not discuss the absurdity of the world and the human condition, but simply presents them, and asking how the problem of absurdity should be solved seems naïve and superfluous to the absurdist creator (Esslin 1985, 25; Hurley 1965, 636-640). For Esslin this is a truer, more accurate, formulation of the absurd than Camus's, as Camus states the irrationality of the absurd in a neatly structured manner (Esslin 1985,

24). However, it could be argued that Camus uses concrete Beckettian language to illustrate his theory, and that even the absurdists' abandonment of rationality is not as pervasive or open as Esslin wants to see it (Brater 1975, 198; Cornwell 2006, 7-8).

Keeping this in mind, and that the relationship between irrationality and the absurd is rather more complex for Camus than Esslin makes it out to be, we may well question the acuity of Esslin's arguments. Camus himself argues that existentialist philosophers, such as Sartre, prefer escaping to accepting the absurd, in this way distancing himself from the tradition of well-structured argumentation (1991, 32). The absurd is something that appears amenable to reason but is ultimately beyond its reach, and so we may question the importance of the *open* abandonment of rationality, as even for Camus, the absurd is at the limit of rational thought (Camus 1991, 49; Cornwell 2006, 2). The tendency of the Theatre to make use of grotesque imagery and dream-like images and thought patterns in rejecting coherent discourse may seem a vehicle for rather escaping the absurd than confronting it, as we have noted Camus calling being unaware of the absurd *sleeping* (Esslin 1985; 22, 25, 349-350; Cornwell 2006, 15; Knight 1971, 184-185). However, we will soon see that the absurd is not incompatible with sleep or dreaming.

The inconsistency, if not irrationality, of characters and characterisation reflects the sense that the modern human condition is senseless and irrational, and that human nature is not coherent. The characters of the Theatre thus resemble mechanical puppets, and even the actors may be turned into puppets by the playwright's rigorous stage directions. (Esslin 1985; 21-22, 24, 377; Hurley 1965, 634-635; Oliver 1963, 228.) This is analogous to the series of static events arising from the author's experience, as Esslin argues that the Theatre is not interested in characters who are independently motivated and "objectively valid" outside of the author's inner world (1985, 403). The characters of the Theatre are designed to not resemble actual human beings. Furthermore, the puppetry of the Theatre of the Absurd, the apparent incomprehensibility of the character's actions and motivations, serve to alienate the observer. The consequence of this negation of identification with the characters is twofold.

On one hand, humour arises from comical predicaments we cannot empathise with, as

William Oliver talks of the "comedy-coated pill of absurdity" (Oliver 1963, 229), meaning that the pessimistic message of the absurd is easier for the audience to accept when it is presented in a humorous guise (Esslin 1985; 411-412, 415). This leads to the aforementioned grotesque, as the Theatre combines horror with laughter, that is, the laughter of humour with the horror of the lack of meaning. Furthermore, Cornwell argues that there is something comic about the experience of the absurd itself. It is, indeed, laughter which links the grotesque to the absurd, since the comic is experienced as incongruity, exactly like the absurd and the grotesque. (Cornwell 2006, 15-18; Esslin 1985, 411.) Therefore the grotesque dream realities and the absurd are not mutually exclusive but may even be co-articulated.

On the other hand, the senselessness of the characters presents a concrete image, an instantiation rather than a theory, of the senseless and disintegrating absurd world, which is a form of social criticism, albeit mostly unintended, as William Haney argues that the Theatre of the Absurd is part of a tradition that focuses on basic individual circumstances, the inner world of the mind in contact with the material world, rather than social realities (Brater 1975, 198; Esslin 1985, 410-411; Haney 2001, 39-40). We may compare this to what Camus says of the birthplace of the absurd—the human mind. However, Paul Hurley argues that the American side of the Theatre does have an overt political agenda, whereas the French (Beckett's side) is more focused on the inner experience of the characters (1965, 636-638).

The use of the concrete image is part of the devaluation of language in the Theatre of the Absurd. This may sound strange, especially considering our explicit task of studying *Waiting for Godot* as a text. However, it is argued that the absurdity of the human condition unravels meaningful language into contradictions and nonsense, as the impassable rift between the absurd world and the human mind can only be explored by "forcing" language into nonsense. A meaningless world is seen to produce meaningless, unrecognisable language. (Cornwell 2006, 13; Esslin 1985, 84-5; Oliver 1963, 228.) In keeping with this, Esslin states: "Theatre is always more than *mere* language. Language alone can be read, but *true theatre* can become manifest only in performance." (Italics added) (1985, 329) The implication is clear: language is deficient or

inadequate. The Theatre of the Absurd tends towards poetics which emerges from the action set as image on the stage, and what happens is a clash between words and images when the image exceeds or contradicts the words of the characters (Esslin 1985, 26). Indeed, the absurd playwrights endeavour to awaken the audience to the absurd only by indirect means, using complex images and unusual symbolism to convey their ideas (Oliver 1963; 227, 229, 234).

The Theatre is, according to Esslin, anti-literary, as words are eschewed as banal. This is especially seen in the dialogue of the characters, which often consists of "incoherent babblings" (Esslin 1985, 22), which fit the meaninglessness of the world. The Theatre aspires to relegate the function of communication from speech to gesture. (Esslin 1985; 26, 384.) The Theatre is concerned with expressing supraindividual psychological states by objectifying them into concrete and complex stage or poetic images, whose gradual completion or unfolding is the main source of suspense and drama in the play. The images are complex so as not to scare the audience away from the heavy themes of the play, and the only reason they appear sequential: it makes it impossible to represent them instantaneously, they must be broken down into separate elements which then build up the unified images as temporal progression. (Esslin 1985; 361, 405, 416; Haney 2001, 39-40; Oliver 1963, 229.)

Why is the devaluation of speech of such importance to the Theatre, and how can we in our present study benefit from looking at it? For the authors of the Theatre the problem of language is central—how to put into words the lack of words? How to speak the silence? Esslin notes Beckett's statement, "the attempt to communicate where no communication is possible is . . . horribly comic". (Esslin 1985; 32, 381) We may note again the conjunction of the horrible and the comic. Here lies the question of the meaninglessness, for the limitations of language that result from the absurd can be subverted by silence (or by madness), but art such as literature, and, to some extent, theatre, can only be realised through language, in the "authentic spirit of gratuitousness" (Cornwell 2006, 8). The concrete poetic images Esslin discusses are instantiations of experience, of the experience of simply being, existing, which are essentially non-linguistic entities presented in language: conceptual thought robs them of their "pristine complexity and poetic truth" (Esslin 1985, 406-407).

To put such entities into words, to try to speak the silence of experience, is a horribly comic act of violence. This does not, of course, imply that experience in and of itself is meaningless; in the Theatre of the Absurd, the meaningless is found in the world and in the human condition that serve as the foundation of the concrete poetic image *qua* the experience. There is silence in the experience, and not only because it is by nature extra- or pre-linguistic, but also, and more importantly, because it is the reflection of a silent, meaningless, absurd world. However, at the end, Esslin argues that this is the Theatre's dedication: to show the audience the meaninglessness of the world, to face it without fear or illusion, and to laugh at it (1985, 429).

Perhaps this endeavour to show the absurdity of the world, and seeing the Theatre as anti-literary, is what has prompted Esslin to posit that the Theatre of Absurd is fundamentally realistic. Esslin argues that the Theatre presents to us a world that is more real than real: it is the world, the absurd world, reflected into the consciousness of an individual as an inner reality, and Oliver agrees that absurd dramatists tend to create the drama of physical and sensory experience, that is, not naïve imitation but a deeper kind of realism (Esslin 1985, 353; Oliver 1963, 227-228). Esslin follows the professional growth of James Joyce from the depiction of the surface of things, what could be called classical realism, to how the world appears in the individual experience, which Esslin calls "an even more total reality". The Theatre does, in its own way, present an attempt to give a truer picture of reality. (Esslin 1985; 353, 404.)

On the other hand, the realism of the Theatre, and Esslin's insistence on the creation of concrete stage images whence realism is derived, is perhaps placed under suspicion if we return to what Camus says of images: the image is a cover over the inexplicability of the world, a fiction of understandability offered when the world cannot be grasped by the intellect: "the intelligence that covers with images what has no reason." (Camus 1991; 98, 20.) The image is the antithesis of consciousness and therefore the antithesis of reality—or realism. Whichever the case, the question inarguably still remains: are realism and meaninglessness incommensurable?

2.2 Reading the Absurd in Beckett: A Beginning

It has been established that the authors of the Theatre of the Absurd depict the absurdity of life and the human condition—that Samuel Beckett, and his play *Waiting for Godot*, is a leading advocate of the absurd, and that he presents a view on modernity that is unquestionably absurd (Cornwell 2006, 3; Dubois 2011, 113). We will now study what kinds of forms the absurd features discussed in the previous section take in the play *Waiting for Godot* (or simply *Godot*). Esslin calls it a "strange, tragic farce" (1985, 39), and which, in the spirit of the Camusian absurd, may be seen to be seeking the answer to the question of suicide in the absurd world posited by Camus (McLuckie 1993, 423-430). (Let us here note again the emerging conjunction of comedy and tragedy.)

Esslin sees that trying to fix the play with any one certain interpretation is foolish, though it still is analysable owing to its use of polyphonic images that can be grasped. Alain Robbe-Grillet goes as far as to argue that trying to explain the play is entirely pointless. (Esslin 1985, 45; Robbe-Grillet 1965, 110.) Yet, as Craig McLuckie points out, the play is still an act of communication, "a dramatic utterance" (1993, 423-430), and therefore it is certainly not pointless to try to understand it. On the contrary, it may even be useful to try understand something that eludes rational explanation—we may ask if there can ever be an act of communication that has no meaning. Moreover, for Camus, the absurd is the opposite of irrationality.

In making an interpretation of the play, it is generally considered best to avoid biographical readings, as that is seen to trivialize the play. This is so even though Esslin argues that the concrete poetic images are born in the author's personal experience, and furthermore, that personal experience cannot be recognized as a "universal truth" as it stems from the constant change of the author's unstable identity. There is no universal meaning that can be retrieved from his works. (Esslin 1965, 2; Esslin 1985, 68-69; McLuckie 1993, 423-430.) The demands for personality (or particularity) on one hand and universality on the other exist simultaneously.

Interestingly, Esslin's image of Beckett as a person and author is startlingly similar to the absurd man Camus presents to us. Esslin writes: "[Beckett has an] uncompromising determination to face the stark reality of the human situation, [he will not yield] to superficial consolations that

have 'clouded man's self-awareness', [he is] a lone figure without hope or comfort, in dignity, resolved to fulfil its obligation to express its own predicament" (Esslin 1965, 14). In Esslin's vision, Beckett heroically struggles to create in a world void of meaning, to express when there is nothing to express but the obligation to, and there is "the ultimate void in its grotesque derision" (Esslin 1965; 2) in his work. For Camus as well, the position of the absurd man is a heroic one (Cornwell 2006, 3). However, let us now move to consider the individual features of the Theatre, and how they manifest in *Godot.* The features are the lack of linear or sensible plot, rational or relatable characters, and the devaluation of language.

The subheading of the play, "a tragicomedy in two acts", affords us with a clue to the ambiguity of the play: The "tragi-" part makes clear that the loss of meaningfulness that is absurd constitutes a tragedy of some kind. However, as indicated by the "-comedy" part, the play is also humorous, which was demonstrated to be an integral element of absurdity as well. The humorous elements in the play emerge often in surprising, even improper, contexts. For exampe, the main characters Vladimir and Estragon contemplate the name of another character, Pozzo: "VLADIMIR: [*Conciliating.*] I once knew a family called Gozzo. The mother had the clap." (Beckett 2006, 15) Humour arises from the completely unrelated, and unexpected, mention of the venereal disease, an interjection supposed to reconcile Pozzo to their ignorance.

Critics agree that *Godot* is a difficult play. Esslin notes that the more Beckett refused to explain his play, the more urgently the critics wanted to (Esslin 1985; 1). Yet it is in the nature of the absurd that the more we strive for a fixed explanation, the more absurd we become, and therefore there is reason to argue that there exists no single "key" to unlock the meaning of the play (Esslin 1985, 44; Oliver 1963, 225). It may even be the case that the play should not be analysed in the critical tradition of conventional drama, as that reduces it to old conventions which Esslin thinks it clearly transcends. It also invites a great number of analytical contexts. (Esslin 1985; 44-45; 62; McLuckie 1993, 423-430.) Surely contributing to this is the lack of spatial or temporal markers to fix its time, location, and thus eventual meaning. However, there does exist a number of deictic markers, such as 'now' and 'here', but these have ultimately no definite meaning as they lack stable

points of comparison. (Ionescu 2013, 73; Suciu, 16.) Place and time are deeply intertwined in the play in their absence, as Vladimir and Estragon try to ascertain the date: "ESTRAGON: [*Looking wildly about him, as though the date was inscribed in the landscape.*][2] It's not possible!" (Beckett 2006, 7) Estragon relies on the spatial to reveal the temporal, but both elude fixed points of reference and thus secure meaning.

There is a general consensus among critics that *Godot* is a play in which nothing happens, that is, it has no traditional linear plot (see eg. Esslin 1985; 22, 45-46; Kern 1954, 41; Cornwell 1973, 41). In the play, Estragon complains: "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!" (Beckett 2006, 34) This can be read as a meta-fictional comment on the play itself, and certainly has been read as such. The lack of action is viewed as a symptom of the absurd world depicted in the play: it is a half-lived life, in a "twilight world" (to use Metman's words), pared down to the barest essential, which the strangeness of the characters and the bleakness of the stage-setting make concrete (Manschreck 1976, 93; Metman 1965, 122).

The stripping away of meaning takes the concrete form of the stripping away of the material world, and with it, the desire that guides our actions in the world appears only as a demonic absence; therefore the play is "below" realism in the spareness of its stage-setting, and it seeks to find reality, but instead only finds the void of death. (Esslin 1965, 7; Dubois 2011; 25, 118; Manschreck 1976, 93.)

This polarises the opposition between the world and the human, and in such a world, time will never cease, Esslin argues (1965, 7). However, as Vladimir complains, time in the play has, in fact, stopped (Beckett 2006, 29). The cessation of time takes the form of circularity or circular time in the play, as nothing can begin or end in the absence of linear time, including a linear plot. Interestingly enough, Esslin fails to discuss the circular form of the play. The lack of time's linear progression is apparent when we look at the beginnings of acts I and II: Both begin with only Estragon on stage, fiddling with boots (though in act I Estragon wears them, and in II they are on the ground), Vladimir entering, and the characters talking about staying together (Beckett 2006; 1-2,

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2 All stage directions are in Italics, and will be cited accordingly.

48). The endings, however, are even more revealing: both show Estragon and Vladimir discussing parting ways (without actually doing it), and end with exactly same three lines: "Well, shall we go?" "Yes, let's go." and the stage directions indicating, "[*They do not move.*]" (Beckett 2006; 47, 87)

As critics note, we could well imagine more acts, as the end of act II does not conclude the events. Esslin notes that minor changes across the acts, such as the tree having grown leaves, or Estragon being rid of his boots, only serve to emphasize the essential identity of the situation. Suciu argues that almost perfectly repetitious structures are used to create the impression of the circularity of time. (Esslin 1985, 46, Ionescu 2013; 82, 1; Suciu, 5-6.) Even though the most striking difference between the beginnings of the acts, the boots being stuck in Estragon's feet in I and in II, "*front centre, heels together, toes splayed*" (Beckett 2006, 48), suggests a development in the plot, as Estragon has finally manage to strip off the boots, but the similarity and complementary nature of the topics discussed by Estragon and Vladimir emphasise the negation of any progress, as they during beginnings discuss staying together and being perhaps glad over it, and during the endings separating and committing suicide (Beckett 2006; 1-3, 46-51, 86-87). The reversibility of the themes and situations create an atmosphere of aimlessness, as the beginning sets a mood of solidarity which the ending negates, and which the break between the acts negates again, re-establishing the earlier situation.

In addition to this, the non-movement of time can also be seen in Vladimir and Estragon's waiting. Vladimir and Estragon are sure that their wait is not without object: "We're waiting for Godot" recurs throughout the play as if they need to re-establish the reason for their existence. But to establish the meaning of Godot finally arriving, they need to establish temporality in a world where there is none. They are "in a state of twilight" (Metman 1965; 124, 128) that is, half-unconscious of the horror of their situation. Suciu argues that the characters wait for Godot to wake them up to living, and they do talk about finding something to "give [them] the impression" (Beckett 2006, 61) they exist (Ionescu 2013, 72; Suciu, 15-16).

Stanley Cavell and Manschreck argue that Vladimir and Estragon wait for, in fact, nothing. The goal of their waiting becomes total meaninglessness in the form of the waiting itself (Cavell

2002, 150-151; Haney 2001, 43; Manschreck 1976, 93). That is, to make it cancel itself, to "wear waiting out" (Cavell 2002, 151). And indeed, Vladimir notes they are waiting for the night, Godot, but ultimately, only waiting itself (Beckett 2006, 69). The character of Godot is often interpreted as death, and total meaninglessness would be just that, but death is absent, both in the form of Godot, and a real ending (Cornwell 2006, 230; Cronkhite 1969, 48; Haney 2001, 44; Ionescu 2013, 75-76; Manschreck 1976, 93). The resulting deathlessness, the eternal life in the now, is a curse for the characters. It is an absurd cycle from nothingness to nothingness. (Cornwell 1973, 41; Dubois 2011, 118; Metman 1965, 120.)

The temporality from where the characters are excluded would wake them to their objective presence, their concrete existence in the world. However, the only temporal landmark in their situation is the perpetual now, and Haney argues that waiting is a beginningless moment "beyond the flux of time". (Haney 2001, 44; Ionescu 2013, 72.) There are no temporal markers, as they exist outside of time. (Here we may note the almost Camusian use of expressions such as "unconsciousness" and "waking up".)

Esslin argues that in the absence of time, language has no meaning, and Günther Anders argues that in the absence of time, there can be no memory, as memory is both language and time as history: verbalisations of lived experience and feelings makes it language, and the experience of something that has been but is not any more makes it time as history. The absence of time, therefore, leads to the previously mentioned perpetual now, ever-recurring present moment, a succession of nows. Cavell argues that for Beckett, the isolated present moment, the eternal now, is a way of escaping the logic of language. (Anders 1965, 150; Esslin 1985, 87; Cavell 2002, 120; Suciu, 6.) The stage directions destroy the memory of the play as they implicitly deny the possibility of assigning the events some definite date (Ionescu 2013, 78). Instead they show the characters as pastless and futureless, that is "in a dilated present moment" (Suciu, 12). The location and time of the play are left vague, only that act II begins with the words "*Next day. Same time. Same place*" (Beckett 2006, 48) which in itself is already something of a paradox: the next day is fundamentally a different time. The temporal and spatial location of the play is truly a "here and

now". But even the eternal now, in the absence of death and the reference points of past and future, cannot hold (Miskinis 1996, 1050).

As the past is driven by memories, the present by will, and the future by desire, each of which denied from the characters, they live a time which is not measured by clock, but by their endurance (Dubois 2011, 116; Suciu, 15). The lack of will is obvious in the puppet-likeness of the characters, and the lack of their memory can be seen when Vladimir tries to recall their past experiences in Macon country, in a place he cannot remember, picking grapes for a man whose name he cannot remember. Estragon denies having been there at all. (Beckett 2006, 53) Diane Dubois argues that desire can give the meaninglessness world meaning and purpose, transform it into human forms—that is, unmake its absurdity (2011, 118-119). But the inhuman, absurd world cannot be given human forms or meanings, and thus the characters live without desire, there is no way out of their predicament. The tension between the human and the world breaks down the only connection, the absurd, between human and world, resulting in what Cornwell calls "primeval wasteland" (2006, 227): a world habitable to no human being. Anders argues that the world of the play is an empty world, save only for the tree. Suciu argues that the destruction of place is actually only experienced by the characters, but fundamentally there is no difference. (Anders 1965, 141-142; Suciu, 13.)

Let us have a brief look at the tree as the only concrete object of the material world in the play: the tree. As noted, it is in act I completely bare: "ESTRAGON: Where are the leaves? VLADIMIR: It must be dead." (Beckett 2006; 6) But it has grown "*four or five leaves*" (Beckett 2006; 48) during the break between the acts, literally overnight as the stage directions specify the time to be the next day, and Vladimir even makes note of it (Beckett 2006; 57). This may encourage us, and it certainly has, to think that the tree is an optimistic symbol for movement—passing of time, change, hope, even the change from tragedy to comedy (Dubois 2011, 121; Metman 1965, 132; Cronkhite 1969, 53)... that is, a symbol for the subtle subversion of nearly all the features Esslin argues that are integral to the Theatre of the Absurd. However, the tree is also a gallows-tree as Vladimir and Estragon on several occasions contemplate hanging themselves from it (Beckett

2006; 9-10, 46, 86-87). This gives it also a negative, even menacing, significance which is more in line with the general tendencies of the Theatre.

The two meanings of the tree, one directed towards the creation of life and the other towards ending it, are mutually exclusive, as Suciu notes: they annul each other while existing simultaneously, leading to the tree being devoid of meaning (13-15). While this may not completely void the tree of all meaning, it certainly leaves it in a state of undermined existence, as even the identity of the tree *as* a tree is questioned: Estragon says "Looks to me more like a bush" (Beckett 2006, 6), and the characters discuss the matter briefly, but eventually the identity of the tree is dropped without conclusion, leaving it, the only thing of the world with clear contours, in the tension between meaning and meaninglessness, of uncertain identity.

This argumentation rests on the presumption that the tree is symptomatic of the world more largely: as an index of the world, both are meaningless to the point of non-existence. Certainly it could be argued that the characters of the play inhabit a no-place, as Anders does, and therefore the absurd clash with the world cannot and does not take place (1965, 142). This, we have seen, undermines the basis of the absurd, as the clash of human nostalgia with inhuman world is at its very root. What then is the relation between the characters and their stripped-down world? There must be something happening, as it produces what Esslin calls a movement from action to static pattern, and which Haney calls movement from activity to non-activity that dislocates personal identity (Esslin 1965, 12; Haney 2001, 43-44).

This leads us to the non-rational or unrelatable characterisation of the play. The expectation of characterisation is denied in *Godot:* characters have no clearly defined individuality or essence, they may change their condition suddenly, which happens to Pozzo between the acts: In act I he is strong and proud, in act II inexplicably blinded and helpless (Beckett 2006, 69). The characters are moved by the search for their ever-changing self, their dislocated personal identity, but one thing is constant, alienation from themselves and the world. Thus Cavell's observation that they are like Cubist paintings that follow the abstract logic of dreams, is interesting (Esslin 1985, 21-24; Cavell 2002, 131; Suciu 11).

The references to Cubism and dreams, and the implied fragmentation of causality and temporal progression imply that the play constructs its characters in a way that undermines the stability of the narrative. Padhy, like Esslin, argues that *Godot* is not the story of the characters but a complex poetic image derivative of Beckett's personal experiences, and Leventhal agrees that the workings of Beckett's psyche can be read in his characters (Leventhal 1965, 48; Padhy 2006, 47). Indeed, it is argued that *Godot* lacks proper characters because it discusses its subject at a deeper level, where internally consistent characters do not exist—that is, in the realm of paradigm and archetype, which makes the play a metaphor for the absurdity of existence both physically and metaphysically (Esslin 1985, 76; McLuckie 1993, 423-430; Wolosky 1991, 221). This views the characters as archetypes or symbols of something rather than as approximations of "real" people, and they have been seen as, for example, embodiments of human attitudes, the mind/body dichotomy and universal, non-specified humanity (see Anders 1965, 143-149; Esslin 1985; 48, 76; Kern 1954, 44; Yuan 1997, 132). This lack of what Esslin calls objective validity outside of the author's psyche leads to the alienation of the viewer with twofold consequences, as we have noted: making the characters firstly puppet-like and secondly humorous. We will see that in the case of *Godot*, these two effects are opposite and simultaneous.

Beckett's characters are puppet-like in the way they are generally physically static, incapacitated in some way, and suffering, but they compensate this with incessant, even delirious, chatter expressed in the language of cold and hunger (Kern 1954, 42; Leventhal 1965, 43-46). The play abounds with static situations where the characters sit, lay on the ground or pace around helplessly all the while talking incessantly, and sometimes the directions make their likeness to puppets almost explicit: "[*They listen, grotesquely rigid.*]" (Beckett 2006, 12) Contrasting these restrictions on movement, talk appears as the characters' only activity. However, its effect is making concrete the characters' inability for independent action. Even though the activity is minimal, the characters still persist, as only death has the power to silence them, but the gradual reduction of all recognizable life accompanies this physical incapacitation, and Cornwell calls Beckett's work "skeletal fiction". (Anders 1965, 143; Cornwell 2006; 222, 227; Leventhal 1965, 50; Suciu, 11.)

In their reduced activity and physicality, the characters are exactly like puppets. The explicit presence of the stage directions that directly contradict what they say, both equally apparent on the page, emphasises this: "VLADIMIR: [*Admiringly*.] A ditch! Where? ESTRAGON: [*Without gesture*.] Over there." (Beckett 2006, 1) The stage directions manipulate the characters like marionettes against their expressed wishes and intentions. They are also like performing artists, controlled by the stage-directions, especially Lucky, who is forced to play the buffoon, to be a spectacle both for the audience and for the other characters (Cohn 1962, 43-44). This is made clear when he is forced to dance, where he "*executes the same movements*" (Beckett 2006, 33) upon twice being ordered to dance. Yet especially clear it is when he is ordered to "think", to deliver a nonsense speech, which has been called "word-salad" by some critics, owing to a confusion of elements from various discourses without a single coherent sentence (Brater 1975, 203; Metman 1965, 122). It is obvious Lucky is unwilling to perform the tasks: he must be rudely ordered many times before he complies, and even then it seems as if the action is automatic and non-voluntary, like that of a puppet.

Mirroring this, even the concrete actors are turned into the author's puppets, as Beckett is said to be especially demanding both in his stage directions (which is apparent in *Godot* in the long sequences of hat-changings and boot-wearings, where stage directions may take the entire page) and in his directing. It is unconventional for actors to act with little more than their voices and small gestures, and with the meticulous directions which at times dictate even the order of items to be picked up and put away, for example, when Pozzo readies himself for his first speech in act I (Beckett 2006, 23). This is echoed in the textual form of the play as well: reading the highly specific stage-directions for these scenes one, again, wonders whether the characters are meant to move outside of indicated action at all, or if they are supposed to stand still, like a still marionette.

The role and performance of the Beckett actor is physically uncomfortable, it is the presentation of "peculiar 'bodily' functions" which create an experience of the absurd that is designed to create a new dimension of absurdity, which Brater calls the *physical absurd* (Brater 1975; 199, 206). The physical absurd is not only created by the concrete conditions of the actors, as

Brater seems to argue, but also by the physical condition of the characters and their surroundings witnessed by the readers of the text as well; this is part of Beckett's concreteness: the absurdity of the human condition is not merely verbalised by the characters but also witnessed in their physical appearance—both on-stage and on-page. We may note how this is in an interesting contrast to the reduction of materiality which we discussed previously.

Let us now bring up realism, as both Oliver and Brater see Beckett's theatrical representation freed of imitation of life or the usual constrictions of theatrical realism (Brater 1975, 199; Oliver 1963, 228). Like the absurd man in the absurd world, the Beckettian actor cannot feel at home on the stage, only the spectators can force the play to continue. This recalls the Benjaminian barbarian mass hungry for consumable entertainment. Despite this, the actor is pivotal to Beckett, as the clash of the actor with the script is what gives birth to the play, parallel to the experience of the absurd that is born of the clash between the man and the world, the actor and his setting (Brater 1975, 206; Cohn 1962, 48). Brater argues that Beckett subverts the actor's expectation of the play and his role in it like Camus's absurd man subverts reality into a stage set, and both fashion themselves for display. Indeed, theatre was for Beckett a metaphor for the world. (Brater 1975, 198-199; Grossman 1967, 477) It could also be argued that analogously to this, the play (as a text) subverts the reader's expectation of how a play reads—that is, appears on the page.

The second result of the inability of identification is humour, and there certainly is a great amount of humour beneath the grim surface of the play, as Beckett evokes comedic atmosphere using the comic techniques of the popular theatre, especially those of circus or clowning and music-hall (Brater 1975, 204; Esslin 1985, 47; Grossman 1967, 477; Knight 1971, 184). Vladimir and Estragon actually discuss the circus and music-hall in one of their cross-talks:

> VLADIMIR: Charming evening we're having.
> ESTRAGON: Unforgettable.
> VLADIMIR: And it's not over.
> ESTRAGON: Apparently not.
> VLADIMIR: It's only beginning.
> ESTRAGON: It's awful.
> VLADIMIR: Worse than the pantomime.
> ESTRAGON: The circus.
> VLADIMIR: The music-hall.

> ESTRAGON. The circus. (Beckett 2006, 27-28)

The discussion is almost like a meta-fictional comment on the play itself, as the technique of cross-talk is borrowed from the circus, and the play may well be deemed "worse than the pantomime" owing to its difficult style and themes. Cavell argues that in *Godot*, Beckett has discovered how clowns would speak if they were able to, and the humour in the play does stem from both the verbal and the physical elements of clowning: from the dialogue in the form of nonsense, repetition, parodying and cross-talk, and from the cruder physical humour, such as miming and slapstick (Cavell 2002, 158; Esslin 1985, 47; Knight 1971, 184; Suciu, 9). As an example on the comic cross-talk, relying on repetition and subtle change we have this exchange, where Vladimir and Estragon discuss whether the single tree is a tree or a bush:

> ESTRAGON: Looks to me more like a bush.
> VLADIMIR: A shrub.
> ESTRAGON: A bush.
> VLADIMIR: A -. What are you insinuating?
> That we've come to the wrong place? (Beckett 2006, 6)

In the discussion, Vladimir almost gets carried along by the spirit of the cross-talk, oblivious to how Estragon uses the game to undermine his certainty that they are waiting at the right spot. The humour in the sudden realisation of "what are you insinuating?" is what breaks the game. Another perhaps meta-fictionally oriented cross-talk sequence appears when Vladimir and Estragon insult each other to pass the time, and Estragon wins the game: "ESTRAGON: [*With finality.*] Crritic! [sic] VLADIMIR: Oh! [*He wilts, vanquished, and turns away.*]" (Beckett 2006, 67) Obviously the greatest insult within theatre is being called a critic (the doubling of the r's may indicate a pretentious accent). But the logic of the cross-talk can also be used for a melancholic effect:

> ESTRAGON: All the dead voices.
> VLADIMIR: They make a noise like wings.
> ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
> VLADIMIR: Like sand.
> ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
> . . .
> VLADIMIR: What do they say?
> ESTRAGON: They talk about their lives.
> VLADIMIR: To have lived is not enough for them.
> ESTRAGON: They have to talk about it.
> VLADIMIR: To be dead is not enough for them.

. . .
 VLADIMIR: They make a noise like feathers.
 ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
 VLADIMIR: Like ashes.
 ESTRAGON: Like leaves. (Beckett 2006, 54)

It is unclear what noises Vladimir and Estragon thus discuss, but as the section is preceded by Estragon noting that they cannot keep quiet, so it could be argued that they actually describe themselves (2006, 53). Especially revealing is the talk on being dead and alive, since as puppets they are neither dead nor alive. They themselves through assertion reduce their talk into a "noise like wings", that is, indistinct, repetitive and non-human. This example is especially striking as the technique of cross-talk is usually used for comedic effect, and here this subversion of pre-established expectations makes it even sadder. This demonstrates how the play is saturated with self-defeating mechanisms—how one vehicle is used for creating both a certain effect and its opposite, but the critics sometimes fail to discuss both aspects (though this has been pointed out about the dialogue, as we shall see).

The forms of physical humour and slapstick that the play features appear in, for example, act II, when Vladimir and Estragon go through an elaborate hat-exchanging routine for the purpose of Vladimir changing his hat: "*ESTRAGON hands VLADIMIR's hat back to VLADIMIR who takes it and hands it back to ESTRAGON who takes it and hands it back to VLADIMIR who takes it and throws it down.*" (Beckett 2006, 63-64) The repetition of the words "who takes it" and the unceremonious "throws it down" at the end make the scene strange and therefore funny both visually on-stage, and textually where the stage directions stack on top of each other in similar-looking lines, the abruptness of the end especially standing out. There is also a number of scenes where, for example, the characters themselves, or their trousers, fall down. Various allusions to various body parts and bodily functions (mentions of urinating, defecating, ejaculating, farting and vomiting are made) may also be counted into the forms of physical humour.

The physical humour in the play is viewed by some critics as a substitute for the missing real action. Slapstick, for example, is seen as infinite placeholder action that can never accomplish anything, and is used as a strategy to avoid facing the predicament of the characters (Cornwell

2006, 20; Dubois 2011, 124). Indeed, the aforementioned hat-changing sequence, which is an example of the type of slapstick found in the play, is preceded by Estragon announcing his intention of leaving, which would certainly be a real action and accomplishment in the play. The intention is, however, forgotten when Vladimir shoves his hat into Estragon's hands telling him to hold onto it. Shortly enough Estragon apologises for his intention to leave: "[*Calmer.*] I lost my head. Forgive me. It won't happen again. Tell me what to do." (Beckett 2006, 63-66) Physical humour connects the grotesque to the play, as circus and clowning imagery are staples of the carnivalesque grotesque (Cornwell 2006, 15; Haney 2001, 39; Knight 1971, 184). Furthermore, Cornwell argues that the extreme form of the comic is the logic of the absurd, and Suciu notes that the characters' "rigidity of logic" (Suciu, 11) leads to absurd conclusions, and for Camus, absurd logic is logic to the point of death (Camus 1991, 9; Cornwell 2006, 19). One question still remains, how is the physical absurd, which is bodily in nature, related to the reduction of materiality or physical capacity? How can those two co-exist, as they apparently do?

Turning lastly to the radical devaluation of language, which appears as nonsense dialogue, incoherent symbolism, and in the form of the concrete stage image. The nonsensicality of the dialogue is achieved by the conjunction of unexpected words and odd positions, as Robbe-Grillet puts it, "thought and eloquence are conspicuous in their absence, present is only their corpse" (Brater 1975, 205; Robbe-Grillet 1965, 112). Thus we may compare this with how Beckett's works being called "skeletal fiction": the reduction of materiality is located into the same field as the devaluation of language, making language and body analogous.

Edith Kern argues that the play depicts "stark suffering" in language that is coarse and lowly, without mitigating ornamental rhetoric or lofty ideals (1954, 42). The collision of the logic of the language and higher ideals can be detected in the scene where Vladimir is upset over how Pozzo treats Lucky: "[*Stutteringly resolute.*] To treat a man... [*Gesture towards* LUCKY]... like that... I think that... no... a human being... no... it's a scandal!" (Beckett 2006, 20) Estragon, who has received food because of Pozzo's arrogant behaviour, suddenly joins in: "[*Not to be outdone.*] A disgrace! [*He resumes his gnawing.*]"(Beckett 2006, 20) Moral outrage is reduced to a game of

language and outdoing the other. Later Estragon tells Pozzo Vladimir is eleven years old, implying his moral principles are childish. (Beckett 2006, 20) The play employs instant negation or withdrawing as a means of emptying all positive statements of their meaning. This leads to the play using language in a way that Cronkhite describes as "almost totally unproductive" (1969, 51). Furthermore, Esslin argues that dialogue breaks down in the play because it is not dialectical, it is a game to pass the time in a meaningless world (Esslin 1965, 4; Esslin 1985, 85-87). We can see this in the following dialogue:

> VLADIMIR: That prevents you from thinking.
> ESTRAGON: You think all the same.
> VLADIMIR: No, no, impossible.
> ESTRAGON: That's the idea, let's contradict each other.
> VLADIMIR: Impossible.
> ESTRAGON: You think so?
> VLADIMIR: We're in no danger of ever thinking any more.
> ESTRAGON: Then what are we complaining about?
> VLADIMIR: Thinking is not the worst.
> . . .
> VLADIMIR: What is terrible is to *have* thought.
> ESTRAGON: But did that ever happen to us?
> VLADIMIR: Where are all these corpses from?
> ESTRAGON: These skeletons.
> VLADIMIR: Tell me that.
> ESTRAGON: True.
> VLADIMIR: We must have thought a little. (Beckett 2006, 55)

In the above quotation thought and speech are corpses; "Where are all these corpses from?" "We must have thought a little". Speech is corporealised and killed, indeed, it is stillborn. Yet the massacre is over, since the characters are certain that they do not think any more. And the discussion does not follow the logic of dialectic as they do not arrive at a conclusion, nor does the situation even really change. Rather it follows the logic of assertion and negation as the characters switch to opposite opinions and positions suddenly, and in the end, communication breaks down completely into silence:

> ESTRAGON: Que voulez-vous?
> VLADIMIR: I beg your pardon?
> ESTRAGON: Que voulez-vous?
> VLADIMIR: Ah! Que voulez-vous. Exactly.
> [*Silence*.] (Beckett 2006, 56)

Furthermore, Kern argues that the language of suffering is offset by what she calls "human

tenderness", and Schevill that there is compassion in the play, and the urge to "struggle and continue, to seek the necessity of companionship absurd though it may be in the face of vacancy" (Kern 1954 42; Schevill 1977 236). It should be noted that for Camus, the absurd in itself is consolation enough, and it may seem that the characters, Vladimir and Estragon especially, seek solace in each other's company, but it is always counteracted by such statements as "If we parted? That might be better for us." (Beckett 2006, 87) The joy of the absurd seems quite absent, and the characters, though "Sisyphean" in the ceaseless recurrence of their life, appear the opposite of the absurd man, who is heroic and decisive.

The breakdown of human connection and thus symbolism in the play is well demonstrated by the critics' reaction to the character of Godot: who is he? The variety of readings, some contradictory if not mutually exclusive, offer no satisfactory outcome, and this problem goes back to Esslin's foundational work where he firstly argues that Godot's identity is irrelevant, but speculates on it anyway (1985, 55). A number of explanations have been offered, ranging from abstract concepts like death, God and salvation (eg. Cornwell 2006, 229; Cronkhite 1969, 48; Dubois 2011, 117; Esslin 1985; 49-53, 75; Metman 1965, 120-125); names of actual people and places (Cronkhite 1969, 47-48); phonetically similar words in other languages such as Gaelic, German, and French (Cornwell 2006, 229; Cronkhite 1969, 47; Haney 2001, 44; Suciu 15-16). In fact, the number of interpretations of Godot is so considerable that drawing attention to it has become a rhetorical trick. Hurley sums up the question of Godot's identity very neatly by saying that the urge to explain Godot is created by ignoring the fact that the play simply presents the absurdity of life, and Suciu writes that Godot has a function rather than a role (Hurley 1965, 637; Suciu, 15-16). Perhaps the function of Godot is to be the confounding, elusive and unexplainable absent heart of the play. An incoherent, illegible symbol.

The break down of dialogue in the form of the incongruity of speech and action creates the concrete stage image, which is a clash between words and images (Brater 1975, 205; Esslin 1985, 26). The most notable instance of this is at the end of both acts when Vladimir and Estragon say "Yes, let's go." and the stage-direction says "[*They do not move.*]" (Beckett 2006; 47, 87) Esslin

argues that the clash between words and action is a way of communicating beyond language, and that the play moves from verbal to visual communication. Beckett's work is designed to devalue language as a vehicle for conceptual thought, as an instrument of communication, and as means to approach the reality beyond language. (Esslin 1985; 43, 85-88.) Brater argues of the realism of the play that its physicality gives rise to a new kind of experience of absurd, the physical absurd, as the actors are used as a vehicle for confronting a "level of absurdity never felt by the reader within the lucid pages of Camus' argument—a level of absurdity apprehended not so much metaphysically as it is experienced literally and . . . physically" (Brater 1975, 198-206). This also is related to the grotesque, as we have discussed in the previous part, the uncomfortable physical situations the actors are placed in make them grotesque, as they are concretely "*grotesquely rigid*" (Beckett 2006, 12) on-stage.

Beckett's work can be seen as avoidance of the evocation and allusion of language, to resist the logic of the narrative, as we have seen with the readings of Godot and the tree. It endeavours to use words to express what they are designed to cover up: the inexpressible (Esslin 1985, 38-39). That is, the inexpressibility of the material world and the silence of experience. The play, as a sequence of concrete poetic images, is rather "portrayable" than "actable" (Brater 1975, 207). The images are incoherent and inconclusive in themselves, creating a complex whole, and they take the mind from the "coherence and rationality of a narrative" to the "intuitive realm beyond" (Haney 2001, 40-41). Returning to Camus and image, image is a cover over the inexpressible, and we can see that in Beckett's work, and in *Godot*, the image is not a cover, but in fact it takes the form of experience itself: it is concrete, material, in contradistinction to all (verbal) explanation, and most importantly, it in itself is inexplicable in its complexity.

However, we have yet to answer the question of realism and meaninglessness coexisting. The image, while concrete, still does not have much meaning in the usual sense, especially when we look at the play as a text the emergence of the image may be even less clear.

As we analysed *Waiting for Godot* in the three central aspects of the Theatre of the Absurd, we encountered paradoxical problems in all: in the lack of plot we arrived at a conclusion that the

plot is missing because the absurd world is missing, but without the world, there can be no absurd. On discussing the characters we ran into the problem of the reduction of the physical meeting the emergence of the physical absurd. In conjunction with the devaluation of language we noted a problem with the concrete image in the context of the play as a text, and the contradiction between the play being "more realistic than realism" as Esslin argued, but similarly having characters that have no objective validity outside the author's personal experience.

We also noted the multitude of mutually exclusive and incompatible readings of the play and its elements, notably those of the phenomenon named Godot. Furthermore, though it was explicitly stated that reading the play biographically is reductive, many critics, including Esslin, Padhy and Cronkhite, proceeded to do it regardless. On a larger scale, the play was analysed very clearly within the framework of traditional criticism, though Esslin discouraged that. Anders offers us perhaps the least reductive reading of the play when he calls *Godot* a parable or negative fable that works through inversion, unclear of exactly what but a "kind of existence" that has lost form, principle and the ability to move forward (1965, 140-141). Though the point of the parable is formlessness, and part of the charm of the play is the inexhaustible amount of possibilities it offers as Suciu notes (4), such a weak conclusion to otherwise solid analysis is fundamentally disappointing.

The situation then seems to be as Oliver says that "lucid" criticism on absurdist drama is rare, and even then it is coloured by "excessive sympathy or partisanship" (1963, 224), referring especially to Esslin. But perhaps the fault does not lie with the critics—perhaps it is the concept of the absurd which has reduced analytical capacity: Herbert Blau argues that the critical concept of the absurd has lost its capacity of expression and differentiation due to overuse or exploitation (1961, 137). Furthermore, the physicality of the play *qua* play, being "more than mere language" as Esslin says, invites the problematic need to impose a system of allegories onto it, as Reuven Tsur argues that critics try to bring the distant images of the play nearer as they simply cannot *not* mean something (1975, 780). We may here note, in passing, Benjamin's argument of the mass wishing to grasp and bring the object close for scrutiny and consumption through understanding.

A more textually-oriented theoretical framework and methodology may help us analyse the play in a way that is not as reductive, and which enables us to tease out something perhaps new in it. Our next section will deal with meaninglessness in greater detail, and uses more textually-oriented theoretical devices in its analysis. If the question of the coexistence of realism and meaninglessness was here addressed with little satisfactory result from the perspective of realism, we will next look at it from the viewpoint of privatisation, which means the destruction of meaning.

3. Reading the Meaningless

We discussed the concept of absurd and the Theatre of the Absurd, both of which are founded on a form of meaninglessness, the sense of a loss of meaning of life. We saw that it is argued that the feeling of absurdity has inspired Beckett in his work. The concept of the absurd as a critical framework seems insufficient in itself to grasp the complexity of the forms of meaninglessness of *Waiting for Godot*. Indeed, we may have noted how the absence of meaning in the work was if not completely ignored in the criticism, at least treated as an embarrassing lapse to be explained away. In this section we will turn our attention to how exactly meaning can emerge from meaninglessness. Next we will look at the theory of literature suggested[3] by the French philosopher Maurice Blanchot.

It seems necessary to begin with an explanation: One may ask, and not without reason, why the notoriously obscure theory of Blanchot has been chosen for this section as the main theoretical framework. Let us return to the character of Sisyphus: in his recurrent task, Blanchot writes, he is "turned toward the region of infinite rebeginning" (178), he exists in a place and a time of the absence of time and place, where nothing ends or begins, not even his existence (1993, 178-179). In other words, the reason for our decision is twofold: firstly, Blanchot's theory has seemingly absurdist qualities—it has many surprising parallels to Camus, even though it does not discuss absurdity explicitly. This makes it well suited for the study of the absurd in its literary form.

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3 "Suggested" is the pivotal word here; Blanchot's text is a hybrid form of philosophy and fiction, and writing theory based on his philosophy is necessarily a conglomeration, a hybrid.

Another reason has to do with the ways of negating meaning: following Päivi Mehtonen's description of the poetics of privation, we shall notice that not only does the theory discuss and describe these, but they are also in its core: Blanchot's style of writing, the very structure of his argumentation, utilises privative tactics (this will be demonstrated by ample citations from the work *Space of Literature* [1982, orig. 1955]). The theory of literature that Blanchot outlines is therefore engaged in the act of privation on two concentric levels, one describing the nature of privative, absurd, literature, and the other where the text itself simultaneously writes itself in and out of existence. We shall see in 3.2 how *Waiting for Godot* has similar self-annihilatory structures.

3.1 What is the Meaningless?

Literature does not exist; to be specific, literature exists as non-existence.

This is a persuasive, and only a little dramatic, way of capturing the essence of Blanchot's theory of literary language. Literature constitutes a space, a whole realm, of its own which is radically different from and independent of the real world, and perhaps because of this, glorious. It is withdrawn, turned inward, and independent unto itself. Let us note that this recalls Mehtonen's argument that Beckett's universe is turned inward and closed off (2007, 21). Furthermore the word *realm*, which, by avoiding the use of the word "world" indicates separation and radical dissimilarity on the conceptual level to the real world, either as the *physis* or any original on which realist writing is modelled. In the literary realm only literary language has reality, reality that is material in nature, and lends its materiality to the realm as well. But it is also meaningless, annulled, and therefore subjectivity and identity, which are only possible if constituted by language, are not stable or continual. (Alanko 2000, 233; Blanchot 1982, 45; Holland 1995; 12, 19.) The meaninglessness of literature comes from its severed connection with everything human and the real world, and from the way language is structured that detaches itself from the world.

3.1.1 The Negation of the World

Why are we tempted to say that literature appears as non-existence? While Blanchot makes it

clear that literature is *not nothing*, the very nature of literary language is radically different from everyday language, or the everyday use of language that composes the real world for us (the *coarse* word) (Kauppinen, 2007, 170-171). Literature is composed of literary language, the essential word. Let us note how the language of Beckett's works was argued to be coarse and lowly, and his writing to be anti-literary.

Before discussing the difference between the coarse and the essential word, let us first make a brief recourse to the general level of the poetics of privation, which we will observe in Blanchot's writing. Mehtonen lists the five main tactics of privation or negation of meaning that involve the strategies of understatement and exaggeration—rhetorical devices or statements are exaggerated to a point they no longer denote anything but a language game, things are understated by giving them names that deny their identity (such as 'Mr. Nobody'). These rhetorical structures are consistent and universal across languages and can be compounded, for example, an understatement being exaggerated to an unusual extent leading to a paradox of meaning. The specific list is as follows: Either implicit or explicit negative names of people, places and times; Atypically repetitive and oxymoronic exaggeration of language; Obscure speech or frequent use of ellipses and ungrammatical sentences; The use of the 'modesty topos', that is, exaggeration of epistemological or narrative failure to an absurd extent; Impotence of narration and the narrator, that is, saying that something is unsayable. These tactics are anti-realist in nature, and unsurprisingly so, as they aim to efface the real world. (Mehtonen 2007; 10, 13-21.) We may also note how the Beckett critics referred to these when considering the devaluation of language without explicitly stating it. In section 3.2 we will discuss them in more detail.

Let us now return to Blanchot and literary language. The crude word aims at unambiguous communication and the creation of meaning. It is tied to the real world, it gives us the illusory presence of material things, Blanchot argues. (We argued that for Camus, the real world in its silence and materiality is unknowable to humans, who are tied to their language, and therefore severed from the world.) The essential word on the other hand aims for the annihilation of meaning: it is characterised by paradoxical meanings and the exaggeration of understatement, as it evokes the

world by distancing it. It opens up a void between itself and the world. The essential word effaces the real world by reducing it to references; by substituting the real world with itself. Therefore the literary realm is the space language has created for itself. (Alanko 2000; 215-216, 219, 223; Blanchot 1982, 39-40.) Thus the essential word does not take the real world as its referent at all—it references the world it creates by referring to it. Literary language escapes the real world into a void of silence, which Blanchot calls "dehors"—the outside.

The essential word is essentially non-worldly, but literature seeks to encounter the pre-linguistic silence of the world, to reach the worldliness of material objects (Alanko 2000, 224). However, it cannot do that, as "[the essential word] alone frees us from the weight of things, [from] the enormous natural plenitude" (Blanchot 1982, 39). It annihilates itself in this endeavour: literary language turns existence into non-existence by its capability of calling forth things as their absences, and in literature this power is turned upon itself. As the nature of literary language is absence, it follows that its complete presence is its complete absence. In its attempt to grasp the world, literary language realises and destroys itself simultaneously, as Blanchot writes that words proclaim a totality wherein they simultaneously annihilate themselves (1982, 43-45). Here we detect a strategy of privation, that of negative naming: the literary realm is called "the outside" which can be seen as implicit negative naming, and Blanchot says that not only can words be used to give explicit negative names (such as 'Mr. Nobody') but they are also used *as* negative names. They create an absurd space where to call a cat 'cat' is equal to calling it 'not-cat'.

All language, coarse and essential word alike, is unable to call forth the silence of the real world. But to write is "to withdraw language from the world, to detach it from what makes it a power according to which, when I speak, it is the *world* that declares itself, the clear light of day that develops through tasks undertaken, through action and time." [Italics added] (Blanchot 1982; 26) Literary language obliterates the real world in the act of its self-creation and substitutes it with its strange shadow that is "the other of all possible worlds" (Blanchot 1982, 75). The force of the writing impulse, Blanchot argues, makes the world disappear (Blanchot 1982, 52), and this effaces what is characteristic of the real world, "the clarity of the impartial light of day" (Blanchot 1982,

28), that is, ordered structure and distinctive details. The literary realm is chaotic and perpetually clashing, not universal, "finer or better justified" (Blanchot 1982, 28) also because it is not dialectical: It does not move forward in harmonious alternation of a thesis and its antithesis, inevitably reaching the final apex. It is not a teleological movement towards perfection. (Blanchot 1982; 30, 226; Gregg 1994, 8-9.) Instead the contradictions create a restless union that transgresses its own limits, where neither gains supremacy, they "do not exclude each other . . . nor are they reconciled" (Blanchot 1982, 30). Contraries exist as "the intimacy and the violence of contrary movements which are never reconciled and never appeased" (Blanchot 1982, 226). (The clash of contraries was a central aspect of the absurd world, too.) This means that the literary realm is characterised by the suspension of negation: negation is needed to make a decision, to exclude one of the conflicting choices. This is a point we will look at closer further on, and discuss its problematic relationship with privation which is, by definition, negation.

What appears amidst the clash and chaos of the literary realm, the eternal cycle of self-annihilation and self-assertion, is the materiality of language in a form that is neither pure language nor of the real world: the single work of art. As we noted, literature does not pursue pure ideas but the materiality of being—it devotes itself to the concrete that precedes language and concepts, that is, what cannot be grasped by rational thought. Because of this, the essence of literary language is impossibility, and its task is endeavouring to refuse saying anything, that is, to retain the pre-linguistic, silent, materiality of the world. Therefore the work of art is situated between language and reality, and it guides us in the attempt to see the world and overcome the limitations of language. (Alanko 2000; 231-234, 236; Blanchot 1982, 87.)

3.1.2 The Negation of Time

The time of literature is the negation or absence of time, and it is marked by repetition, one of the aforementioned tactics of privation (and a central element in *Waiting for Godot* as well). Strange chronology in itself is a staple of privative tactics. (Blanchot 1982, 30; Mehtonen 2007, 19.) Literature is circular, it begins where it ends, and endlessly returns to its point of origin, and even

Camus writes: "the last pages of a book are already contained in the first pages. Such a link is inevitable" (Blanchot 1982; 52, 88, 94; Camus 1991, 11-12). As literature represents only itself, it is doomed forever to repeat itself, and because literature exists as repetition and circularity, it cannot have historical time, that is, history or future: "The irremediable character of what has no present, of what is not even there as having once been there, says: it never happened, never for a first time, and yet it starts over, again, again, infinitely. It is without end, without beginning. It is without a future." (Blanchot 1982, 30)

The time of the work of art is outside of everyday time. As an ahistorical entity, it has no present, no past nor future—it is their *absence*: artworks inhabit a temporality of their own which has ceased being dialectical like historical time, as the conflict of the contraries cannot be solved in the time of time's absence, but turns into an eternally self-renewing cycle (Blanchot 1982, 30; Bruns 2004; 129, 134). As Blanchot argues, "the time of time's absence is not dialectical . . . Contradictions do not exclude each other in it; nor are they reconciled" (1982, 30). (Much like the language of literature is non-dialectical and outside everyday language; perhaps a correlation exists.) The time that the art work creates is similar to its materiality that is not of the real world.

We will now turn to look at the absence of negation in negation, as mentioned earlier. Let us begin with a question posited by Gabriel Marcel: is not absurdity, such that is found in paradoxical and self-defeating propositions, the pure presence of negation? (1978, 201) It seems we are in the presence of another paradox, but literature is not the pure presence of negation, it is *not nothing*, but rather, in Blanchotian style, could be called *negation without negation:* literature exists as negation, yet the very nature of that negation is the denial of any conclusive denial which would lead to an ending of some nature. This works as the deferral of definite meaning through repetition, and to the annihilation of dialectical or historical time whose vehicle the continual movement of a series of conclusive negations is. Any accomplishment the language of negation may achieve, the language of passivity returns to undo (Gregg 1994, 8-9).

Furthermore, the time of the literary realm is dying, as that which appears in this heart of (time's) absence is death. Death, "the being deep within being's absence" (Blanchot 1982; 30-31), is

the shadow of presence that occupies the place of real presence, rendering it impossible. Blanchot says that literature is deterred death, "the eternal torments of Dying" (Blanchot 1982, 66). Literature is the moment of dying, existing in the liminal space between life and death, incessantly vacillating between the two extremes, never quite reaching either (Alanko 2000, 211). We note a resemblance in this respect to the absurd: the mark of the absurd man is the simultaneous rejection and acknowledgement of death. Though they are not entirely similar: in the absurd world death is to be rejected, its gradual victory is nevertheless inevitable. The death of the absurd man is an active, decisive one, as the absurd man is active and decisive in whatever he does, whereas for Blanchot death is indecision and passivity that cannot be rendered present or personal (Camus 1991, 90; Gregg 1994; 17, 35).

We noted earlier that the absurd world and the literary realm are markedly similar, but time, in terms of light, seems to pose a considerable dissimilarity: the absurd is light without effulgence, and the time of literary realm is conceptualised as the time of the night. It is not "the restful dialectical opposite of the day" (Gregg 1994, 43), but a realm which is characterised by the loss of the self, the abyss of the present moment of dying, and passivity. The night of literature is one which denies us the forgetfulness of sleep or dying, and instead affixes us, permanently, to the fact of existence. The act of writing involves a pact made with the night, and cannot be equated with any diurnal task (Camus 1991, 11; Critchlety 1997, 32; Gregg 1994; 36.) However, the absurd world is not ordered and structured like the day either, as Camus writes that the absurd man knows the world of night, of unceasing existence: "There is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night. The absurd man says yes and his effort will henceforth be unceasing." (Camus 1991, 123) For Blanchot, literature is the presence of night and the absence of light, as the *dehors* of literature is a nocturnal phenomenon which the light of structured thought and knowledge cannot apprehend: when familiarity disappears into obscurity, emptiness appears in the place of objects. That is when the materiality of literature, which is the presence of absence felt as the thickening of being, emerges (Alanko 2000, 226-227; Blanchot 1982; 87, 163). Furthermore, Blanchot's conception of literature has been read as a kind of black light: objects are lighted up by a black light which shows them

strange, distorted, and nocturnal (Hart & Hartman 2004, 5).

Moreover, there is one very unique moment of the night: the midnight. Let us begin by contrasting it with the midday: The midday is a moment of the experience of utmost meaningfulness, full of joy, revelations, divine encounters, and yearning for the ideal, with the sun as its symbol. Furthermore, the midday sun illuminates and unifies all objects, and closes the distances between them, it is as if a concrete substance on every "hard detail", every distinct boundary, when nothing can move or hide. (Kivistö 2007, 101-115.) As the polar opposite of the midday, the midnight is the moment of vanishing meaning, of the black light cast upon objects of the world that obscures their boundaries, and the distinctions between details and thoughts. It is the eternal struggle of the conflicted contraries. The midday is an hour of pure presence, the presence of universal sleeping, whereas the midnight is an hour of pure presence of restless nothingness and absence, of being unable to lose consciousness and rest. (Alanko 2000, 227; Kivistö 2007, 107.)

The midnight is the essence of literature: "The work draws whoever devotes himself to it toward the point where it withstands its impossibility" (Blanchot 1982, 87), and "this experience [of withstanding the impossibility of existence] is purely nocturnal, it is the very experience of night" (Blanchot 1982, 163), that is, the fragile moment when the cycle of assertion and annihilation is in a perfect balance, vacillating between the opposites, reaching neither—wholly comparable to the moment of dying. It is the moment when the materiality of language emerges. (Alanko 2000, 227; Blanchot 1982, 44.) As the central point of the cycle, the midnight does not transition into the future or the past, it is an eternal now, which is nothing in itself: always bounded on one side by the past and the future on the other, each instance of now is different, yet always the same. It has no inherent content. (Bruns 2004, 127-128.)

As the opposite of the unifying sun of midday, the midnight is a moment when being in the world and writing are two incommensurable states of existence, and this division is the root of the unhappiness or division of consciousness: in writing, the writing subject or author experiences the division of the self: "I am myself and also another". It is when the subject exists not as a unified subject but as a question, without identity, as gratuitous, and consciousness is inescapable, it is like

a constant murmur (Alanko 2000, 27; Bruns 2004, 122-124). "One can imagine the 'now' is the time of unhappy consciousness" as Bruns says (2004, 128). Camus talks of the hour of consciousness which could be described as unhappy, as it is the hour of returning to your inevitable suffering; it is when you are superior to your fate (1991, 121). Suffering has an element of superiority for Blanchot as well: writing is surrendering to the passivity of death, and therefore mastery over writing, while being suffering, is being superior to death.

We may notice that the absurd man lives in the eternal now: he has no future, not even past of any note, yet he is a staunch ally of time (Camus 1991, 111). The time of literature, absurd time, is self-annihilation and ceaseless consciousness. Perhaps, then, the difference between the time of the absurd world and the time of the literary realm is not so considerable after all? It could be argued that the black light is light without effulgence, the light that illuminates the life of the absurd man and the literary realm. Both literature and the absurd world draw whoever devotes himself to them toward the point where they withstand their own respective impossibilities, that is, towards their respective centres where both are simultaneously annihilated and affirmed, glorious and unbearable. The night of literature is the inability to lose consciousness, but being conscious is, as we have demonstrated, at the centre of Camus's absurdity, the absurd being lucid reason noting its limits.

We have established that the literary realm bears striking resemblance to the absurd world: both are characterised by an unmitigable clash of contraries, alienation or moving away from the everyday real world, hostility to human inhabitants, and nocturnality; moreover, both create a feeling of awe and fear in the inhabitant—a feeling that could well be called the sublime.

3.1.3 The Negation of the Self

Let us now turn our interest to the one who is most intimately associated with literature: the writer. We may also compare this with what Camus says of the creator who is "the most absurd character" (1991, 92). This section does not have as solid a connection to the tactics of privation as the two previous ones as the discussion focuses less on literary phenomena, but it does recall many aspects of the absurd. The reason we are interested in the writer is threefold: firstly, he is in the liminal

space between literature and world and therefore absolutely necessary for understanding Blanchot's conception of literature; secondly the writer is a semi-literary being, and the theory therefore can, with certain reservations, be applied to the characters of *Waiting for Godot;* and thirdly, because the absurdist criticism placed explanatory expectations on the person, life experiences, and putative psyche of Samuel Beckett himself, which we wish to show to be not only irrelevant, but more importantly, against the spirit of meaninglessness of the work, which is also implied in the absurd.

Being between the world and literature, the writer is deprived of both. He, by participating in the construction of the literary realm and therefore the annihilation of the real world, "does not feel free of the world, but rather, deprived of it; he does not feel that he is master of himself, but rather that he is absent from himself and exposed to demands which, casting him out of life and of living, open him to that moment at which he cannot do anything and is no longer himself" (Blanchot 1982, 53). (This recalls Esslin's words: writers of the Theatre of the Absurd felt "cut off and isolated in [their] private world[s]" [1985, 22].) He is outside the time of possibility, subject to the perpetual now, the moment when writing and living in the world are two distinct modes of existence, and cannot live in the real world any longer. This is experienced as a lack, he is deprived rather than freed. His ties to the real world are irreversibly severed, he is forever bound to the literary realm like the absurd man is forever bound to the absurd. But, surely, the writer can hope that his work will bear witness to what he is, as Camus says? (Blanchot 1982, 92; Bruns 2004, 124; Camus 1991; 30, 67, 78.)

Unfortunately not. The language of fiction does not act as a witness, that is, the writer does not live on in his own works. He is removed from his own work, he is not welcomed to the literary realm where language itself takes the primary position—the text is indifferent to its creation, like the absurd world is a "passionate world of indifference" (Alanko 2000, 216; Camus 1991, 110; Gregg 1994, 44; Holland 2004, 44-45). After all, the writer is human and not art, and cannot be part of a work of art. Neither does the work allow its writer to read it: "[The text] still withholds itself – the rude and biting void of refusal – or excludes, with the authority of indifference, him who, having written it, yet wants to grasp it afresh by reading it" (Blanchot 1982, 23-24). It turns

suddenly away from the author like the absurd world turns away from the absurd man (Camus 1991; 14, 45). The writer "is he for whom there exists not even one world. For there exists for him only the outside, the glistening flow of the eternal outside." (Blanchot 1982; 23-24, 83)

The writer's identity is uncertain and in a state of constant flux: for there to be a text, the writer needs to exist, yet "the poet exists after the poem [because] he receives his 'reality' from the poem, but . . . he does not dispose of this reality except in order to make the poem possible . . . The finished poem regards the writer with indifference, it does not refer to him" (Blanchot 1982, 227). This is what makes the writer deprived, not freed, of the world: he is unsure of his own status as a writer, but also unsure of the status of literature, because the nature and existence of literature depends on the writer: art has to exist, as a concept, as a separate realm, a separate temporality even, for someone to be an artist. His work defines him at least as much as he defines it. He cannot escape this predicament—otherwise he would cease to be a writer (Camus 1991, 117). "Creating is living doubly" Camus writes (1991, 94), and the writer occupies the position of the double-bind of uncertainty. This double-life makes the writer uncertain of himself, "as if nonexistent" (Blanchot 1982, 87).

To write is to surrender the writer's own identity, of what constitutes his very nature (Blanchot 1982, 55). He becomes a neutral, empty entity: "When I am alone, I am not alone, but . . . I am already returning to myself in the form of Someone . . . Where I am alone, I am not there; no one is there, but the impersonal is: the outside, that which prevents, precedes, and dissolves the possibility of any personal relation." (Blanchot 1982, 31) Here we detect two of the tactics of privation: negative naming (the self becoming only Somebody) and the impotence of the identity of the narrator or author (or even characters): the author knows not what he is writing, for the work of art pushes him away even at the moment of its inception, only that he *writes* and that sustains him (Gregg 1994, 6). Though author and narrator are separate concepts, they are treated here synonymously, as Esslin argues that the power of the Theatre of the Absurd is derived from the author's experiences and inner life. Whether a theatrical piece has a narrator or not is an interesting question, and we are to take whatever it is that is derived from Beckett's experiences to be the object

of our study: presumably the characters, the situations, the mood of the play.

Here there is an interesting parallel to the absurd world: it is, as mentioned, the world of the "anonymous impersonal pronoun 'one'" (Camus 1991, 52). Perhaps the absurd identity is the identity of Someone, the neutral subject. This empty, absurd identity is a vessel for the emergence of literature: the writer reduces himself so that literature can appear, irreducible and eternal—people die but books survive (Blanchot 1982, 48; Gregg 1994, 45). To speak is to bring objects under the "rule of identity" (Bruns 2004, 130) which destroys their singularity. Being outside the dialectical logic of differentiation that creates identity literature opposes the tyranny of identity: literary language cannot be used to speak, to say "I", to refer to the self of the writer; because literature does not bear witness to the life of its writer, the "I" of the writer turns into a multitude of "Who?" (Blanchot 1982, 51; Holland 2004, 45). The language ceases to be the language of the self, and becomes of the eternal literature. Thus we shall omit from our analysis authorial derivation, the presumption that something could be derived from Beckett's experiences, and focus on the ways the characters of the play embody the negation of the self presented here.

This means that the writer cannot survive the creation of the text, "he lives by dying in it" (Blanchot 1982, 227). The writer writes in order to be able to die and dies in order to be able to write—he must "kill" himself to create an independent work of art; he is like the actor who dies every night, having given his all to his role. Every text is, then, began *ex nihilo*, as if from the dead. (Alanko 2000, 209; Blanchot 1982; 66, 95; Gregg 1994, 37; Hartman 2004, 50.) (The actor also belongs to the group of examples that Camus gives of inherently absurd characters.) This is one connection with the absurd, as the restless relationship between the absurd man and his own death is a central concept to Camus. Death for the absurd man is simultaneously to be both accepted and refused, he sees at the gallows in front of him and draws strength from the sight (Camus 1991, 91). For Blanchot, we must see the death that lurks behind us if we are to speak, as literature supports itself on the grave (Alanko 2000; 211, 230, 234).

The directionality here is rather fascinating: for Camus, death and meaning are in front of the absurd man, and for Blanchot's writer, they are behind him. Perhaps this is so because to die in

order to be able to write indicates that death is a prerequisite of writing, therefore "behind" the writer. It is the origin of meaning and language, as only through death can things be grasped: "Without death everything [sinks] into absurdity and nothingness" (Bruns 2004, 130). The possibility of meaning and life is tied to the possibility of dying, as the signifier kills the material object it calls forth as its absence creating its meaning for us—we cannot grasp the object which is voiceless materiality since we can only understand it through language. Therefore, in terms which seem again rather paradoxical, death is the only hope for meaning. The negation within language cannot suspend meaning, because literature, the moment of Dying, is passive in nature, negation negates itself. Literature and death are therefore intimately linked: both are liminal experiences and impossible to objectify. (Alanko 2000; 206-208, 222, 226.)

If literature is death, writing then is suicide: "[the artist] is linked to the work in the same strange way in which the man who takes death for a goal is linked to death" (Blanchot 1982, 105). The writer is under the same illusion of power as the perpetrator of suicide: he is in control of the impossible. The writer sets out to conquer and appropriate language with the same determination the perpetrator of suicide sets out to own death, but the endeavour fails and the opposite happens: the act of the individual will is transformed into passive indecision—the moment when the suicider wishes to escape life, he is bound tighter than ever to it. As literature is passive dying, the writer too is resigned to a passive suicide through his words, he is tormented by the thought of a suicide he cannot commit. (Alanko 2000; 211, 221-223; Critchley 1997, 32; Gregg 1994; 36, 44.)

Walter Benjamin calls suicide the foundation of modernism: living modernity takes a heroic constitution, for it requires resignation to a life of unbearable burden. Suicide, then, is not a resignation but a heroic act of passion (Benjamin 1973; 74-76, 81; Hartman 2004, 50). We may compare this with the absurd man: Sisyphus is resigned to an afterlife of burden, and Camus's absurdity was called heroic by Cornwell, and it is a quintessentially modern condition, and though both are resigned to their fate, the absurd man receives his courage from what drives Benjamin's modern subject to suicide. Both rejoice in suicide, as it is an act of passion, but one rejoices in affirmation and the other in refusal. Perhaps, indeed the power or vigour of the absurd man's

identity lies in his refusal, since to refuse suicide is to refuse the power of negation (Alanko 2000, 212).

Compared to the absurd man, the writer seems passive and weak, but this is not so: "you cannot write unless you remain your own master before death; you must have established with death a relation of sovereign equals" (Blanchot 1982, 91). The writer cannot be the master of his own work, but he must be superior to his fate as Camus says, the master of death (Camus 1991; 115, 211). Death is controlled through the refusal of writing, even the refusal of language itself: "The writer's mastery is not in the hand that writes, the 'sick' hand that never lets the pencil go . . . [it] always characterizes the other hand, the one that doesn't write and is capable of intervening at the right moment to seize the pencil and put it aside" (Blanchot 1982, 25-27). Refusal provides the writer the power and will to write, as he cannot know that the work has already withdrawn from his grasp (Gregg 1994, 6).

However, the writer may not be as clueless as Blanchot suggests, for Camus writes that the awareness of absurdity authorizes the writer to plunge into his creative work "with every excess" (Camus 1991, 11). Indeed, it is the very sense of absurdity that keeps the writer at his task (Hartman 2004, 57). The absurd creator makes his art while knowing it will be for nothing and still persisting, for like him, his creations have no future. He simultaneously negates and magnifies his meanings—his work will lead to no definite conclusion, it will be gratuitous. The absurd creator must work with the knowledge of himself being deprived of all meaning, he must as Camus writes "give the void [where meaning disappears] its colours" (Camus 1991, 113-114; Gregg 1994, 16-17).

The power of refusal that controls writing also controls what Blanchot terms *fascination*, as "to write is to let fascination rule language." (1982, 33) Writing and fascination are, then, to some extent analogous phenomena. However, let us approach the concept of fascination through another theory, revisiting Walter Benjamin's concept of the aura; as fascination is the surrender to art, then the aura is a product of the mindset of fascination.

As we saw, the aura is the "unique phenomenon of a distance, however close [the object] may be" (Benjamin 1936, section III). As it is a function of the mind, it can found in most anything,

natural as well as artistic objects. (Benjamin discusses paintings, Blanchot talks of works of pure language comparable to paintings [1982, 42]. Furthermore, Beckett's works were often compared to paintings.) Benjamin focuses on the optical aspect in the act of receiving and perceiving art—the aura is in fact created in and by the eye, by the distancing attitude of the gaze, in the contemplation of and concentration on the work. Furthermore, it is a lingering gaze, and the aura of a work of art, in contrast to natural formations, is only experienced in the temporality unique to art. (Benjamin 1936, sections XIV-XV, XII, XV; Bruns 2004, 134.)

The "distance" is purely a function of the relationship between the gaze and the work of art. It is the lone viewer's gaze, elation of the work onto a higher plane, which gives the work the aura of uniqueness, unapproachability and authenticity. Blanchot would perhaps call Benjamin's unapproachability the indifference of the work. The mediated or indirect nature of the work of art prompts this gaze: the use of the equipment of mechanical reproduction creates a representation of reality which paradoxically seems to be free of mediation. (Benjamin 1936; XV, XI-XII.) It creates the illusion of there being nothing to prevent the grasping and consuming of the work of art. The opposite of the aura is the greedy gaze of the masses: it absorbs the work of art and brings objects closer for careful scrutiny. It wishes to grasp the object in its finest details as if it was clear like glass. The greedy gaze will not stop for contemplation, it consumes absent-mindedly, devours quickly whatever it captures and then grows bored of it. (Benjamin 1936, XV; Benjamin 2014, 138.)

Fascination, then, is neither distancing nor devouring gaze, but their composite form, the distancing gaze turned upon itself: it is "the power that neutralizes [the distance] . . . making of it a neutral, directionless gleam which will not go out, yet does not clarify . . . the gaze turned back upon itself and closed in a circle" (Blanchot 1982, 32). It is becoming engulfed by the work, the surface of the work thick, opaque, material (Alanko 2000, 232). Therefore what the writer does not see is the surface of the work, but a mirror within its deep, their own gaze reflected back to them in the form of the Neutral. Yet he must resist the urge to lose his self completely in the work as the work pushes him away, he must retain his power of refusal, as he has to be able to move between

the work and the distance, attach to and detach from the work, as Camus writes that art is the play of detachment and passion (Camus 1991, 102). The writer can never give in to the human nostalgia, the need to grasp the work, otherwise he can no longer detach himself from it.

Blanchot's theory is about coping in a strange world, the literary realm. We may draw parallels between Camus's "living without appeal" and Blanchot's "demand of literature": both require living without meaning or perishing, yet both reward those who choose life among death. The main difference is, as Blanchot himself writes of Camus, the absurd man says "I", Camus believes in individuality, whereas for Blanchot, it is untenable (1993, 173). Thus we may read Blanchot's theory as indicative of how closely linked the absurd and the meaningless are in literary objects. This is supported by the fact that Beckett is often discussed with Blanchot, and Blanchot has edited Beckett's prose works. Indeed, their connection seems intimate to the extent that Blanchot's theory seems a theory of absurd literature specifically. We may also note, with interest, how not only parallel and complementary Blanchot and Camus seem in their thinking, but how scarcely the two thinkers are discussed in either conjunction or in comparison—not a single such text was, in fact, to be found.

3.2 Reading the Absurd and the Meaningless in Beckett: A Development

The absurd is, or entails, the loss of meaning, but this was inadequately dealt with, thus next we shall see how exactly *Waiting for Godot* has no meaning, and how this relates to our previous discussion of its absurdist characteristics. While most likely derived from the absurdist tradition of criticism, the idea that meaning is destroyed in *Waiting for Godot* goes beyond the absurdist critics: the analysis of the loss of meaning (conceptualised variably as absence, void, negation, privation, etc.) in itself is a current of thought in Beckett criticism. It should be noted that Blanchot, and many other theorists we shall discuss shortly, tends toward Beckett's prose rather than his theatre, as the image on the stage is in a natural position of domination over voice and silence, even though silence alone is not the goal of Beckett's work (Critchley 1997, 152-153; Sheehan 2008, 121). This is a problem in terms of reading meaninglessness, but as stated, we are reading *Waiting for Godot* as a

text, and it is argued that Beckett's techniques and themes are not always perfectly suited to the theatrical form as they deal with things that lend themselves to a presentation in concrete form only with difficulty (Postlewait 1978, 476-479).

According to this type of argumentation, the play is structured and dominated by absence, which we discuss in terms of meaninglessness, and to less extent, the void. It is argued that the play features the absence of both definitive meaning and the literary tradition, making it "echo in a void" (Postlewait 1978, 483; Yuan 1997; 125, 129). Inadequacy, therefore, is a part of the imagery of the meaningless and also of its rhetoric, albeit on different levels: as part of the meaningless, it is the inadequacy of making sense; in the rhetoric of the meaningless, and especially in a theoretical framework, it is as the inadequacy of method, for the question of how to delineate absence when there is, in the first place, *nothing* to be analysed, is deeply problematic, if not unsolvable. The discourse must rely on figures, that is, images, which work to conceal the very structure of self-annihilation of the language under discussion; let us remind ourselves that Camus argued that the image is a cover over the inexplicable silence of the world, and for absurdist criticism the image in Beckett is concrete and inexplicable or difficult to explain. The act of concealment is foregrounded in Beckett, as we saw that the concrete image is a prominent, if problematic, feature of the play. (Wolosky 1991, 215; Yuan 1997, 124-125.)

It could be argued that the self-annihilation in *Godot* represents the problems inherent in story-telling, and the modernist mistrust of communication and representation which is supported by Esslin's argument that all the Theatre of the Absurd playwrights were shut off in their private worlds and reflect their own era (Bruck 1982; 159, 163; Culik 2008, 130; Esslin 1985, 22; Kern 1954, 54). This reminds us of the absurd reduction of the world, and Blanchot's argument that the author is deprived of the real world and the literary realm: when the real world and its modes of communication appear defunct and incomprehensible, the very concept of making sense begins to look questionable, and literary representations of this distrust begin to take form.

Indeed, it is argued that self-annihilation in the form of presence as absence constitutes the very centre of *Godot*, in terms of absence of desire, affects and emotions, the character of

Godot, and, as we have argued, the world it presents (Moody 2011, 57; Wolosky 1991, 213; Yuan 1997, 129). Cavell argues that the play features the alternatives of nihilism or purposeful undoing of all purpose, and testament to the ambivalence of this choice and the play itself, is the fact that Beckett has been described as a nihilist (eg. Manschreck 1976, 93; Miskinis 1996, 1047-1050; Ionescu, 2013, 72) *and* incapable of nihilism (eg. Anders 1965, 150; Esslin 1965, 8; Haney 2001, 42; Cronkhite 1969, 49). However, we have seen that nihilism is absent even from Camus's theory of the absurd, and the same holds for Blanchot. Furthermore, as Beckett is said to have both inspired Blanchot's theories and affirmed his ideas about language, voice, silence and death, we are inclined to consider Beckett's work as something other than nihilist (Sheehan 2008, 114-115).

So, if not nihilism, what then does Beckett's textual *nothing* signify? Wolosky identifies several answers to this, but notes that all take as their foundation the assumption that Beckett attempts to transcend temporal reality and language in search of an essence beyond it, and that language is a mask which hides true reality (Wolosky 1991, 225). This is of course quite well in line with what was said in our section on the absurd. Yet nothingness is not to be defeated, and some absurdist critics' urge to reach an interpretation that reconciles the ambivalences within the play, to reduce it to some allegory that makes negative entities into positive traits, is ultimately a futile attempt to bring hope to the play (Price & Johnson 2012, 3; Tsur 1975, 779-780; Yuan 1997, 128). The allegorical readings, which we noted in 2.2, are the critics' attempt to bring the distant images of the play nearer and decipher what they "actually" are, as the idea of something lacking meaning seems unthinkable (Tsur 1975, 780). The parallel to Benjamin's consuming mass that always searches for a new object for its hunger is quite obvious, and in notable contrast to Esslin's image of Beckett as the severe, lonely and proud absurd man. However, Beckett's work is rather characterised by hunger *without* object, conceptualised as a lack of desire (Moody 2011, 62). We discussed the lack of desire in Godot in 2.2, and came to the conclusion that it indeed is absent. With this, let us begin our analysis of the three aspects of meaninglessness, the negation of the world, time, and ultimately the self in the play. Even Esslin draws attention to the last one: the subtitle of the Beckett section in *The Theatre of the Absurd* is "The Search for Self".

To discuss the negation of the world, we begin with the tool used: language. It is argued that Beckett's language is coarse and lowly without sublimation by rhetoric or idealism, and it depicts suffering, the void of despair, isolation, and lack of physical necessities (Kern 1954, 42; Krieger 1977, 987). It is similar to Blanchot's essential word: it paradoxically annihilates itself while it creates itself, final meaning being forever deferred, but it also annihilates the world it creates; it could be argued that it resists the act of creation while creating a fictional world and a fictional self to inhabit it, but this does not make it a hermetically sealed system that is "better justified", to use Blanchot's words (Bruck 1982, 163; Culik 2008, 133; Miskinis 1996, 1063; Wolosky 1991; 213, 221, 228; Yuan 1997, 131). Furthermore, the goal of Beckett's language is to undermine itself as communication, that is, to communicate paradoxical meanings (Bruck 1982, 163; Esslin 1968, 86). In Blanchotian terms, it endeavours to stretch and break the limits of the world-building coarse word. We may think these claims outlandish, but as we consider them more carefully, are they not what the absurdist critics were saying, only phrased somewhat differently, with more honesty and commitment to the repercussions of the absence of meaning?

Godot creates meaning by deferring meaning. It was already argued by the absurdist critics that each line negates or denies the preceding line, though it could be argued now that there is a multitude of methods the play uses to unmake meaning. It resists creating a fictional world by making it appear simultaneously below and above real—it could also be argued that being below and above the real world, that is, created by the coarse word, the play pursues the reality beyond it, the silence of experience. For the absurdists the strange realm thus created is not hermetically sealed because it is born in Beckett's consciousness and from his experiences, but for us, the system of language is permeable and therefore not sealed off from the real world.

We may wonder why the theoretical framework and terms used to describe the same phenomena are so different. Perhaps one reason is the tendency of the absurdist criticism to take Beckett's life and putative psyche as its starting point, whereas Blanchot's theory of the meaningless explicitly states that the writer's life and personality are, by necessity, always irrelevant to the work. Simon Crtichley writes that "to ascribe the voice that speaks in the work with the author Samuel

Beckett . . . is to fail to acknowledge the strangeness of the work under consideration and to read the work as an oblique confession or, worse still, a series of case studies in a reductive psychobiography." (1997, 172) This way we must abandon all enticing but ultimately cowardly means of facing the meaninglessness within the language of *Godot* without the promise of an escape to meaning through allegory.

Godot is an example of the problem of creating through language the reality beyond the real world, that is, the silence as the limit of representability, as it appears as meaningless. Textually oriented theories thus offer us insight into this feature which permeates the play but which the absurdist framework was seen to be unable to grasp. Beckett sought the liminal space of silence within language with a very Blanchotian method: by making his language simultaneously debased or atrophied and excessive or gratuitous (Rabaté 2012, 56). This creates paradoxical works of "misspeaking, unfulfilled expectation, unrealized meaning, unresolved definition, deceptive reason, antithetical style, misjudgement, and incongruity" (Postlewait 1978, 483). This can be best seen in the exchanges between Vladimir and Estragon: their language comprises of short, often discontinuous sentences and lines, offset by occasional outbursts of longer and more complex sentences or monologues. Especially notable is this when a dialogue is on the verge of reaching a solution or termination the subject abruptly changes, expanding and sprouting ever new branches in wildly different directions. In the following excerpt, Estragon has complained that his boots hurt his feet:

> VLADIMIR: Try and put it on again.
> ESTRAGON: [*Examining his foot*.] I'll air it for a bit.
> VLADIMIR: There's man all over for you, blaming on his boots the faults of his feet. [*He takes off his hat again, peers inside it, feels about inside it, knocks on the crown, blows into it, puts it on again*.] This is getting alarming. [*Silence. VLADIMIR deep in thought, ESTRAGON pulling at his toes*.] One of the thieves was saved. [*Pause*.] It's a reasonable percentage. [*Pause*.] Gogo.
> ESTRAGON: What?
> VLADIMIR: Suppose we repented.
> ESTRAGON: Repented what?
> VLADIMIR: Oh... [*He reflects*.] We wouldn't have to go into the details.
> ESTRAGON: Our being born?
> [*VLADIMIR breaks into a hearty laugh which he immediately stifles, his hand pressed to his pubis, his face contorted*.]

> VLADIMIR: One daren't even laugh anymore.
> ESTRAGON: Dreadful privation. (Beckett 2006, 3)

The changes in subject intrude in the discussion and disrupt it, changing its direction and tone. The tone of the discussion is first annoyed and rather banal ("I'll air it for a bit"), then suddenly aphoristic ("blaming on his boots the faults of his feet"), then turning solemn and ponderous ("suppose we repented"), and amused ("our being born"), and finally serious, but perhaps experienced as funny by the reader owing to the meta-fictional mention of privation ("Dreadful privation"). The short excerpt contains components of perhaps five or six different discussions, none of which is either begun nor finished properly, making this not a dialectic discussion with a goal, a beginning and a termination, but a repeatedly disrupted exchange of words which only masquerade as meaningful. The gaps in the discussion, the silences between the lines that are the stage-directions, may in fact be the only meaningful parts of the exchange. The words are truly atrophied and gratuitous simultaneously. As a result of the non-dialectical nature of the exchange, the elements of the "discussion" become clashing both in style and in content.

Another type of exchange of words which seems pure verbal movement, contraction and expansion, like batting a ball between the interlocutors with little semantic content is what was in 2.2 called music-hall dialogue:

> VLADIMIR: We could do our exercises.
> ESTRAGON: Our movements.
> VLADIMIR: Our elevations.
> ESTRAGON: Our relaxations.
> VLADIMIR: Our elongations.
> ESTRAGON: Our relaxations. (Beckett 2006, 68)

It may seem that the discussion aims to refine the specific nature of their activity, exercising while waiting, but the accumulating, variably synonymous expressions hardly succeed in this—in fact, what Estragon ends up repeating, "relaxation", is the very opposite of exercise. Thus a term and its opposite are asserted simultaneously, presented as parallel rather than opposite. It is a recurrent pattern that Estragon starts repeating the same word while Vladimir varies his vocabulary. This especially contributes to the sense that the dialogue never reaches, and may even be completely unable to reach, any termination point, synthesis or compromise; the back-and-forths seem to serve

a function opposite of the narrowing focus of reaching the final word, that of the proliferation of meanings. And if the previous two excerpts do provoke mirth, as the music-hall dialogue and the meta-fictional commentary were argued to do, it is according to Critchley because laughter is "the sound of language trying to commit suicide but being unable to do so, which is what is so tragically comic" (1997, 157). Laughter returns us to the limitations of our language and bodies (Critchley 1997, 159).

Another way of portraying the coexistence of silence and image is by subverting the implications of conventional uses of language by using language as literally as possible (Yuan 1997, 130):

> VLADIMIR: You must be happy, too, deep down, if you only knew it.
> ESTRAGON: Happy about what?
> VLADIMIR: To be back with me again.
> ESTRAGON: Would you say so?
> VLADIMIR: Say you are, even if it's not true.
> ESTRAGON: What am I to say?
> VLADIMIR: Say, I am happy.
> ESTRAGON: I am happy.
> VLADIMIR: So am I.
> ESTRAGON: So am I.
> VLADIMIR: We are happy.
> ESTRAGON: We are happy. [*Silence*.] What do we do now, now that we are happy?
> VLADIMIR: Wait for Godot [. . .] (Beckett 2006, 51)

Here Estragon takes Vladimir's insistence on him being happy literally as an order to be happy, and continues in this vein, as if under obligation, to say what Vladimir (whose words, "say you are, even if it's not true" sound conventionally understood more pleading than demanding) asks or instructs him to say. In the end, as if having by the act of speech established their shared happiness, the discussion reverts back to beginning, back to waiting for Godot, bringing no development.

Another, perhaps more light-hearted in tone but equally grim in content, example (specific to the text of the play.) of the literality of Beckett's language occurs when Vladimir and Estragon consider hanging themselves Vladimir does not understand why the issue of hanging is problematic: "ESTRAGON: Use your intelligence, can't you? [VLADIMIR *uses his intelligence*.] VLADIMIR: [*Finally*.] I remain in the dark." (Beckett 2006, 10.) It is not Vladimir who takes Estragon's words

literally, but the text itself in the form of the stage-direction: the act of using one's intellect is presented to readers as if it could be portrayed or even visualised literally as an unambiguous external action. The ambiguity of the statement, however, again leads to a multitude of possible interpretations for the words "uses his intelligence". It seems, therefore, that the meaninglessness that is silence as the limit of representation cannot be presented in language: it leads to the paradoxical play of infinitely proliferating but disrupted meanings.

As any final, fixed meaning of *Godot* cannot, or will not, be reached, the piece is subject to the infinite play of a multitude of meanings—and perhaps this is inescapable, as the logic of language overtakes every text and always succeeds in bringing some meaning to it (Cavell 2002, 117-126). This inescapability of meaning in Beckett's texts, which are characterised by lack (of desire and meaning), is experienced as disgusting "force-feeding": language and narrativity disrupt what Moody calls Beckett's art of hunger, the aim of which is to embrace the rejection of expression, the failure to express, and the conscious annihilation of objects; in the art of hunger, hunger is the lack, not craving, of something, and in Beckett's writing it is the process of divesting itself of all objects and failing in it, resulting in an oscillation between being with and without an object, rather than the static situation of being completely without them. The state of lack is repeatedly disrupted by language and the obligation to express, creating a pattern contrary to earlier claims: not shift from movement to static image but alternation between the two. (Esslin 1965, 12; Moody 2011; 56, 59-63, 67, 71.) We may compare this with Blanchot's essential word, which ceaselessly oscillates between being with and without its object, meaning. We may also compare it with Benjamin: Moody argues that beauty, the goal of art, is born of the erasure of the distance that separates nature and art, and the art of hunger subverts this erasure by lacking object and expression (2011, 70). The eye, by beholding the work of art and recognising its natural counterpart, recognises the work as beautiful and begins the creation of the aura (the connection to nature or the natural is made very clear by Benjamin's examples). But the art of hunger is not beautiful, it is disgusting, because it separates nature and art—it endeavours to depict things which are unnatural in a way that subverts the expressive power of language, and thus, meaning. But meaning is inescapable: the

work of art cannot remain hungry and objectless, and therefore the art of hunger is "force-fed" meaning.

When meaning is force-feeding, speaking is vomiting: "word-vomit assumes expression's form, while recasting it as literally and figuratively tasteless, and divorcing it from the authentic connection to the speaking subject that is integral to the proper operation of expression" (Moody 2011, 69-70). The best example of the word-vomit in *Godot* is Lucky's speech—we noted in 2.2 it being called "word-salad", but word-vomit perhaps better describes the way language and bits of discourse are ejected out of Lucky's mouth, like chewed and half digested texts:

> Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattman of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment . . . it is established as hereinafter but not so fast for reasons unknown that as a result of the public works of Puncher and Wattman it is established beyond all doubt . . . concurrently simultaneously what is more for reasons unknown in spite of the strides of physical culture the practice of sports . . . in a word for reasons unknown . . . namely concurrently simultaneously what is more for reasons unknown but time will tell (2006, 36-37)

The speech seems to parody formal discourses of knowledge and argumentation. The same semi-academic phrases and conventional argumentative markers such as "for reasons unknown" and "what is more", keep repeating themselves in varied environments, following a very associative logic. The speech reads like a parody of a learned monologue—in perhaps contrast to this, it also sounds like a puppet's broken speech-synthesizer in its automaton-like quality, with spontaneous lists and repeated words (Kern 1954, 44; Reid 1993):

> such as tennis football running cycling swimming flying floating riding gliding conating camogie skating tennis of all kinds dying flying sports of all sorts autumn summer winter winter tennis of all kinds hockey of all sorts . . . in Feckman Peckham Fulham Clapham . . . in spite of the tennis on on the beard the flames the tears the stones so blue so calm alas alas on on the skull the skull the skull the skull . . . tennis... the stones... so calm... Cunard... unfinished...[4] (Beckett 2006, 37-38)

Perhaps significantly the speech ends, almost exhausted, with the word 'unfinished' and the typographical sign of the utterance being unfinished, three full stops. The torrent of association

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4 ". . ." marks an omission from the original text, and "..." is quoted directly from the play.

which characterises the beginning of the monologue dies down to a laboured trickle, as if the verbal stomach is being emptied. It should be noted that there is something shocking or outrageous in the speech, as the stage-directions read:

> [*During* LUCKY's *tirade the others react as follows:* [1] VLADIMIR *and* ESTRAGON *all attention*, POZZO *dejected and disgusted.* [2] VLADIMIR *and* ESTRAGON *begin to protest*, POZZO's *sufferings increase.* [3] VLADIMIR *and* ESTRAGON *attentive again*, POZZO *more and more agitated and groaning.* [4] VLADIMIR *and* ESTRAGON *protest violently.* POZZO *jumps up, pulls on the rope. General outcry.* LUCKY *pulls on the rope, staggers, shouts his text. All three throw themselves on* LUCKY *who struggles and shouts his text.*] (Beckett 2006, 35-36)

The speech, while making absolutely no sense, provokes a fierce reaction from the hearers. The speech seems almost like a script for reader reactions, Pozzo as the owner (perhaps akin to the author or the narrator) of the text pulling the rope to stop the violent cascade of nonsense, and Lucky as the text pulling against it and persisting through struggle, not yielding to the wishes of the owner. Yet the process of signification begins automatically: The names sound like dirty words, they are there to contrast the seemingly learned text; the logic behind the association is not one of content but one of phonetic similarity. The interpretation process excavates meanings from under the surface of the monologue. The language cannot *not* mean anything, despite the effort, and perhaps this is what makes it absurd: not only is "the attempt to communicate when it is impossible" (1985, 32) horribly comic, as Esslin quotes Beckett, but also the attempt *not* to when it is, in fact, unavoidable. We cannot uncover the void underlying the image, as the very effort to efface meaning gives birth to a new meaning in a vicious cycle of signification. The two aspects, void and image, can only exist together, not harmoniously but in a restless union.

Moving on to the world created by this strange language, as already argued, the structure of self-annihilation is related to the way literary language destroys the real world in search of the silence of experience beyond it, creating a strange, literary realm that is the other (or shadow) of the real world. We have made the conscious choice of situating ourselves in the context of the modern of the twentieth century. However, Beckett is a liminal character in terms of his artistic career: he wrote his main works around the time it is generally agreed that modernism was turning into post-

modernism (1940-1970) and so is analysed in both traditions—we have chosen the earlier, modern one, as the absurd as a condition essentially predates the post-modern. Therefore it is worthwhile to have a brief look at what is (or was) modernity's vision of the world.

According to Anthony Cascardi, the quintessentially modern view of the world tends towards abstraction, it subordinates nature to reason, that is, it seeks to make the material world into an abstract representation for the rational subject to grasp and control with his intellect and avoid a concrete, experiential approach; it seeks to reject auratic presences and turn natural objects into "objective" representations, in other words, abstractions (1992; 37-38, 127, 152, 171). We can detect some themes in common with Camus's theory of the absurd, but they are valued differently, most notable being the controlling of the natural world, turning it into a representation: this is sought in Cascardi's argumentation, and refused in Camus's. Moreover, Camus's argument that the absurd is "reason noting its limits" becomes clearer now, as reason is the tendency to see the world and human actions as representations or abstractions, and the absurd is the refusal to control the world (Cascardi 1992, 37). Absurd reason is, then, reason noting the limits of its capability to make the world controllable. Furthermore, Benjamin argued that the aura of objects started decaying during the modern period: it was a time when the world was increasingly viewed only as something to be grasped, thus it is no wonder the work of art started losing its integrity as well. The auratic presences rejected by the modern subject are found by the absurd man in specifically what the modern subject wishes to escape: the absurdity and inhumanity of the world.

We can observe the echoes of these sentiments in Beckett as well. The world of *Godot* is ungraspable by human language, it refuses abstraction: "VLADIMIR: [*Looking around.*] It's indescribable. It's like nothing. There's nothing. There's a tree." (Beckett 2006, 79) This is also a way of negating the existence of the world, through the explicit statement that "there is nothing". Moreover, when the artist is without the power or desire to express, he is denied both himself and the world. The annihilation of language is analogous to the annihilation of the world, for if we cannot associate plot and characters onto what we are writing or reading, the text loses its specificity, and the negative valuation of the creative powers of language is spilled over to the world

that is created and represented by that language, binding the artist to failure and paradox (Moody 2011, 59; Krieger 1977, 991; Wolosky 1991, 226). But like the language of absence cannot not be made to mean nothing, so is the abstraction and destruction of the world is interrupted by the materialisation of language: language is not prior or outside to the material world, and through self-negation, it may reach the world beyond material embodiment. Indeed, reaching (at least in the imagination) the silent and material world is a prerequisite of shared experience, and thus art. (Price & Johnson 2002, 3; Spanos 1971, 360; Wolosky 1991, 219-226.)

Language and the material world are inextricably linked, especially so in the ambivalent language of the absence of meaning. Similarly to the creation of meaningless statements, the endeavour to create a world that does not exist is a self-defeating paradox: the literary world, in strict terms, does not exist as such—it is a product of the imagination, but the process of writing it brings it into existence, as it becomes a literary object. Blanchot's point is that it simultaneously exists and does not exist, the two poles cannot be rent apart. To "unmake" this world is as difficult as making a meaningless statement, yet this is exactly what has been argued: the world of *Waiting for Godot* is a "no-place" (Anders 1965, 142). The argument is that it is by its assertion unmade, erased from existence, it is not just a "twilight world" but a place which does not exist. It cannot be a no-place, for there is something, though, granted, not a lot: a tree, a stone; surely the embodiedness of Pozzo, Lucky and the messenger boy is proof that they do not emerge from ontological nothingness?

The play resists abstraction by turning temporal paradigms into spatial ones using repeated and "petrified" words (containing as little metaphorical meaning as possible), and automaton-like actions—that is, time does not progress but the material world and the characters as bodies do. This can be seen in the way the setting never changes, but the characters wander around aimlessly and anxiously. This imprisons the characters, actors and spectators within the concrete space of the stage and into the concrete images that Esslin speaks of. Furthermore, by this imprisonment, physical restriction, or incapacitation of the characters the play creates the feeling of the world being beyond human control. (Harvey 2001; 109, 114; Postlewait 1978, 477; Reid 1993.)

It can be argued that *Godot* has elements of a play within a play (Kern 1962, 49; Postlewait 1978, 476-479). One such mise-en-abyme can be identified, which expands through the action of speech: the dog song in the beginning of act II. Estragon sings to himself a song about a dog who was killed by a baker as he stole a crust of bread. The song continues in infinitely recurring loops as the other dogs write the story on the dead dog's tombstone, thus renewing the cycle potentially indefinitely (Beckett 2006, 48-49). While the song can loop indefinitely, it can also quite concretely multiply indefinitely: the more it is sung, the more space it concretely takes on the page (or time on the stage) exactly like the play which simply loops back to start at the end of the act.

However, the dog song also seems to constrict with each new verse: it seems to go faster with every iteration, giving an impression of an ever narrowing spiral. The second act of the play itself, too, seems faster, as the basic structure is already familiar to the reader. Therefore it could be argued that Beckett's art is constricting and expanding at the same time: he constricts existence in the physical world, but expands it through speech (Postlewait 1978, 489; Sheehan 2008, 118).

Thus the reduction of the physical world discussed in 2.2, unlike argued earlier, does *not* constitute an irrevocable loss, but a potent, textual and material space which enables textual creation: the stage as a space of designification is interrupted by the comic elements of the music-hall (Yuan 1997; 127, 130; Reid 1993). From there, textual creation abounds almost uncontrollably, since Kern and Postlewait argue that *Godot* transposes onto stage, onto concrete terms, the bodilessness of Beckett's novelistic characters and shows the internal world reflected in the external world in the form of the mind seeking itself in the concrete world (Kern 1962, 49; Postlewait 1978, 476-479): for Beckett the physical landscape is a reflection of the characters' inner world, which expands through their speech. To conclude, absurdist criticism argues that the image is a way to try to overcome the limitations of language and reach a materiality beyond it, but the theory of the meaningless applied to the play makes it clear that silence is better at this (since images are like covers over silence, as Camus argues); the world of *Godot* is not an abstract no-place but the material, concrete projection of the materiality beyond the world which is the characters'

consciousness.

This brings us to the temporal aspects of the play, as it was argued that consciousness and identity are dislocated in the non-dialectical, repetitive and cyclical temporality specific to art—the time in the absence of time. It could be argued that the play features two kinds of temporality, the time of the work of art, and the time of Dying.

Beginning with the temporality of the artwork, the contradistinction between ordered, teleological historical time and the time of the work of art, which is random, absurd, without an end, and therefore superfluous and absent, is a characteristic of the modern literary sensibility according to William Spanos (1971; 345-347, 352). In *Godot*, the temporal structure, the cyclicality of the two nearly identical acts and the repetition of elements such as scenes and individual lines, is the main method of rejecting the teleological, linear movement of historical time, and laying open the structure of the absurd time. In contrast to the absurd play, traditional well-made drama objectifies the individual to make them feel at home in the strange world. (Cascardi 1992, 22; Postlewait 1978, 484; Reid 1993; Spanos 1971; 345-347, 349, 371.)

Spanos argues that the spatialisation of time is a function of scientific time, being measurable and independent of human experience, it becomes a means of escaping absurdity, resulting in the solidification of consciousness that leads to negation of individuality (1971; 347-348, 358-360). However, we have seen that *Godot* features the solidification of consciousness and the negation of individuality specifically in the absence of scientific time, and that they certainly are used as tools, not of communication, but exactly of confronting absurdity, as Ionescu argues that the play refuses measurable time (2013; 8, 73). The randomly flowing absurd time that negates any progress by turning into a cyclical, non-dialectic movement solidifies identity and negates individuality as the literary realm is wholly directed toward materiality. Waiting, which was in the absurdist criticism seen as a placeholder action, is arguably the most concrete example of the circularity and the spatialisation of time, as waiting is like space, equal in all points, and Ionescu argues that the characters are unable to "objectify their waiting temporally" (Blanchot 1995, 272-274; Ionescu 2013, 74). Waiting presents to us the time of the artwork: logic of the negation without negation of

time.

According to Blanchot, waiting is essentially waiting for nothing (which was argued to be the case in 2.2), for it surpasses its object, and becomes a circular and self-contained movement (Blanchot 1995, 274); in the play, Vladimir notes that they are "waiting for the night, waiting for Godot, waiting for... waiting" (Beckett 2006, 69). Finally waiting surpasses its object—Godot, the night, anything—and serves not the function of self-destruction but that of self-perpetuation. Waiting signifies the anticipation and the deferral of meaning, the indecision between the mutually exclusive opposites of going and staying, living and dying: the characters end up living a half-life, perpetuating empty hope which is ultimately indistinguishable from despair. The time of time's absence is experienced as heavy like some concrete material, through which the body and mind of Vladimir and Estragon laboriously move. This is concretely manifested in the bare stage-setting. (Metman 1965, 124; Miskinis 1996, 1061; Postlewait 1978, 475; Yuan 1997, 130.) The nature of waiting as circular and equal in all points is attested to by the continual recurrence of the lines, "Let's go." "We can't." "Why not?" "We're waiting for Godot.", whatever preceding discussion always leading to Estragon questioning and Vladimir affirming their task of waiting. These lines appear in the play six times, each one exactly the same. In waiting, the characters experience the absence of time, time that surely progresses with games and other distractions, but never reaches anything, always looping back to beginning.

Not even death can put an end to their existence, as it is dissolved in the uniformity of waiting, the negation that is death is itself negated. Oblivion could be the only remedy, yet for Beckett's characters forgetting is cyclical as well, both impossible and inevitable, as Estragon says, "Either I forget immediately or I never forget" (Beckett 2006, 52). (Blanchot 1995, 276; Ionescu 2013, 81; Postlewait 1978, 476.) As noted, the end of the play does not conclude the waiting, it will go on indefinitely, negation of the ending again negated, and the characters of the play, Vladimir and Estragon especially, are turned into subjects of lack, without identities, memory or purpose— without past of future (Haney 2001, 43; Ionescu 2013, 82; Postlewait 1978; 475-476, 480; Yuan 1997, 131-132). Vladimir notes, "Hope deferred maketh the something sick, who said that?"

(Beckett 2006, 2) This is a reference to the Proverbs in the Bible, where the "something" is the heart, perhaps reminding us of the aspect of unhappy consciousness of the now, when hope turns into despair.

It was argued in 2.2 that waiting was the image of the time which is not measured by clock but by the endurance of the characters. The time of the artwork is characterised by enduring as well, yet in Beckett's works, enduring is not a continuum but an eternal returning, that is, the eternal now. The now is the absent centre of waiting: bounded by the past and the future, it does not have independent substance; rather it is a state of discontinuity and returning–each present moment is different yet same, as Bruns argued, and never really there. This movement of returning takes away the certainty of identity and meaning in the literary realm. (Ionescu 2013, 72; Miskinis 1996; 1050-1051, 1060; Postlewait 1978, 474-475; Price & Johnson 2002, 5; Spanos 1971, 347.) The now, in the form of eternal returning, permeates the play on both thematic and structural levels: on the thematic level, waiting is constant but uncertain as the present moment—the past is recalled like a dream ("Do you not remember?" "You dreamt it." [Beckett 2006, 52]) and the future only half-heartedly dreamed of. On the level of structure, the characters' lines that are repeated with only minor variations, and the essential identity of the acts contribute to the atmosphere that nothing continues uninterrupted or grows in the play, but instead returns to its beginning. As a side note, dialectics as the opposite of recurrence could be seen as a form of duration: the principle of goal-oriented movement illustrates how superficial changes obscure the way the system itself essentially moves forward and endures. This connection is supported by how duration and dialectics are missing from *Godot*, and directly contraposed in Blanchot's theory.

Turning next to the time of Dying, the now is its central figure: Critchley argues the time of Dying is created by a voice ceaselessly telling unfinished and unfinishable stories (1997; 161, 164-65). The telling of the stories takes place always in the present moment, always in the now, especially since the stories are most often of either the poorly-remembered past or the almost-imagined future. The voice that tells these stories is like a "vast, continuous buzzing . . . an unqualifiable murmur at the back of our words" (Critchley 1997, 174-175). This reminds us of the

discussion we quoted in 2.2, this:

> ESTRAGON: All the dead voices.
> VLADIMIR: They make a noise like wings.
> ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
> VLADIMIR: Like sand.
> ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
> . . .
> VLADIMIR: Rather they whisper.
> ESTRAGON: They rustle.
> VLADIMIR: They murmur.
> ESTRAGON: They rustle.
> . . .
> VLADIMIR: They make a noise like feathers.
> ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
> VLADIMIR: Like ashes.
> ESTRAGON: Like leaves. (Beckett 2006, 54)

It was argued that the excerpt illuminates how the identities of the characters become annulled. It indeed is an example of the loss of identity, but that of the Blanchotian Neutral, for the time Dying is the time of the impersonal voice of the "Not I" (Critchley 1997, 172-175). The "dead voices" are the voices of stories—it was noted in 2.2 how speaking is present only as its corpse. Vladimir and Estragon hear their murmur behind their own words, behind the sound of their own voices, making a noise like ashes. The unfinished, dead stories arrest the movement of time and the movement of death into an eternal disrupted moment which exists along and within the time of the artwork.

Furthermore, the time of Dying is the night: Literature is nocturnal in nature as we noted in 3.1.2, and Beckett "writes for the dark" (Blau 1961, 147; Critchley 1997, 174). The night of literature is the time of unceasing consciousness, clash, vanishing meaning and division between world and writing. Furthermore, it is the time of diversity of identities, uncertainty, release from reality, and lack of desire (Cornwell 1973, 43; Krieger 1977, 991; Postlewait 1978, 478).

The night is ambivalently absent from *Godot*. The play seems to take place in a temporally uncertain eternal twilight, as Metman argues (1965, 122): Vladimir judges it to be evening, Estragon morning: the sun sits low on the horizon, is it setting or rising? Vladimir finally wins the argument, and it is settled to be evening. The characters are waiting specifically for nightfall, as Godot is to come only then. (Beckett 2006; 63, 78.) However, the nightfall, unlike night itself, never comes, as Pozzo describes how the night works in the world of the play: "behind this veil of

gentleness and peace night is charging [*Vibrantly*] and will burst upon us [*Snaps his fingers*] pop! like that! [*His inspiration leaves him*] just when we least expect it. [*Silence. Gloomily.*] That's how it is on this bitch of an earth." (Beckett 2006, 31) At first it seems to approach gently and lingerigly, hidden from those who wait, until it unexpectedly arrives with almost violent suddenness but not violently (for the sound it makes is only a harmless "pop"), alternately lyrical and prosaic, and finally listless—Pozzo notes that he "weakened a little towards the end", which Estragon assures he thought was intentional (2006, 31). The nightfall so awaited by Vladimir and Estragon is however deferred by the suddenness of the night: "*The light suddenly fails. In a moment it is night. The moon rises at back, mounts into the sky, stands still, shedding a pale light on the scene*." (Beckett 2006, 45.) The arrival of night signals the renewal of the cycle of waiting: after night there will be day once more, and after that, evening, and the promise of the arrival of Godot, who will not arrive. Indeed, the night falls right after it is announced that Godot will surely come tomorrow, but not today.

It becomes apparent that in the play, the midnight—the time of self-annihilation, unceasing consciousness and finally the materiality of language as the clash of contraries finds a momentary, careful balance—is the nightfall. Only then will waiting and the clash of contraries cease. Waiting as a self-perpetuating action and time, does it require the subjects to be conscious? Metman argues that waiting keeps the characters, Vladimir and Estragon especially, unconscious and unwitnessed (1965; 128, 134). They may not be totally unconscious, but neither are they fully conscious: they do not realise the futility of their existence and actions but neither are they completely oblivious of it. The characters of the play exist in a twilight state where nightfall will never come, as they are always "waiting for the night" (Beckett 2006, 69). It never comes, for it might bring change in the form of Godot, and the awaiting turns into a listless twilight. Neither full unconsciousness nor full consciousness prevails, no joy nor misery, no activity nor rest; the nocturnal time of the play is the eternal time of Dying which the force of waiting, circular and always returning to start, prevents from ever finishing. The time of the artwork in the form of waiting coils around its absent centre, the time of Dying. Godot will never come because Vladimir and Estragon await him.

Lastly we shall move onto the final section, the annihilated self. The characters construct and reconstruct fleeting identities within their material and mental space, damning life as a body, oscillating between desire for and fear of death (death being seen as something of a new or reversed birth). The central problem in Beckett's works is that of living with dying (comparable to the experience of the Blanchotian writer), the burdensome and frightening project of simultaneous self-creation and self-destruction (Bruck 1982, 161; Cornwell 1973, 41-47; Kern 1962, 49). This is not as easily observable in his theatrical pieces as in his prose works, for the physical presence of the actors on stage creates the illusion of personal, individual presence—though Esslin already stresses the uncertainty of the self. As Estragon observes: "We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?" to which Vladimir answers: "[*Impatiently.*] Yes yes, we're magicians" (Beckett 2006, 61). The characters convince themselves of their own existence through their speech (which has the power to conjure anything into existence, like a magician), and the reader and viewer are convinced, too.

Let us take the modern subject as a point of comparison for our closer analysis of these characteristics. The modern subject is at the intersection of different discourses, empty, contradicted and divided into irreconcilable oppositions. He is turned towards an inward subjective reality, his relationship to the real world reduced to arbitrariness. This makes living in the real world a heroic feat. However, the inconsistencies of his personality are glossed over by a unifying narrative. (Cascardi 1992; 2-7, 56-58, 61, 67, 99, 176.) (Let us note the similarity to Benjamin's argument, and that Camus's absurd is heroic.) It appears that there is something very modern in Beckett's heroes, since turning away from the world, mask-like identity over the emptiness of their person, and contradictions are their defining characteristics as well. They are also internally inconsistent and unstable (Cavell 2002, 156; Critchley 1997, 148; Figlerowicz 2011, 77-78). Like the Blanchotian writer, the Beckett hero cuts his ties to the real world and recedes into his solitary, private subjective reality. This leads to the atrophying of the experience of the self, and, eventually, the destruction of the speaking "I" (Bruck 1982, 165; Cornwell 1973; 42, 47-48; Figlerowicz 2011, 90; Krieger 1977, 987). (In the discussion on temporality, we saw that the speaking "I" has been

destroyed and turned into the neutral "Not I".) It is not surprising that the characters of *Godot* have many features in common with the modern subject (as they did with the absured man), as the absurd which they embody is a quintessentially modern condition—however, the heroism of the characters seems dubious at best: they are weak and indecisive, and as the midnight, the moment of being superior to one's fate, is missing, how could they be otherwise? This raises an interesting question as to the exact nature of the absurdity they embody.

The inconsistency and instability of the characters reminds us of the Blanchotian writer: his self is in a constant flux, and always on the verge of being completely changed or erased. His identity is dependent on and depended by literature similarly to the way the characters mutually define and are defined by their surrounding: they are at once cut away from and indifferent to the material world and to their own bodies, yet also inextricably linked to them; indeed, they have no fixed self beyond the name-body-association, and in a world where names never fit the characters, they are in constant flux and on the verge of becoming someone else (Figlerowicz 2011; 77, 91; Kern 1962, 43-46; Wolosky 1991; 223, 227). The characters have so little consistency and individuality so as to be interchangeable, and thus names are a constant topic for discussion, especially searching and forgetting them:

> ESTRAGON: [*Pretending to search.*] Bozzo... Bozzo....
> VLADIMIR: [*Ditto.*] Pozzo... Pozzo...
> . . .
> ESTRAGON: Pozzo... no... I'm afraid I... no... I don't seem to...
> (Beckett 2006, 15)

And "what happens in that case to your appointment with this... Godet... Godot... Godin... anyhow you see who I mean" (Beckett 2006, 22). The contours of the characters are thus erased and renegotiated each time; each time he could be anything, anyone, in the atmosphere of uncertain amnesia. Interestingly, the search always falls into upholding the established identities—no one changes conditions completely, the name-body-association finally resists unravelling.

However, the uncertainty of names exists on the structural level as well, as the two main characters have two names: Vladimir/Didi and Estragon/Gogo. One pair, 'Vladimir' and 'Estragon', is prevalent in the text version, appearing always as indication of speaker, and the nicknames

disappear into the confusion of ceaseless talk. However, if the play was to be viewed instead of read, it is likely only the shortened nicknames, Didi and Gogo, would be learned, as the proper names are both mentioned only once by the characters during the whole play. It could be argued, then, that in different versions the characters actually have different names, or that they exist between names, as the struggling contrary of two identities. Furthermore, a more stable identity is searched for by trying on different identities through talk and games, Vladimir and Estragon even play at being Pozzo and Lucky (Beckett 2006, 64). It could be argued that they are empty or conflicted subjects, like the modern subject, but they lack the mitigating inner narrative that unifies them and reconciles them to the outside world.

The irreconcilability to the world leads to turning away from it; the characters are deprived (or freed) of the real world. This was anticipated earlier, when it was argued that Beckett explores the subjective mind's reality and its experience of the real world through concrete projections: the turn away from the world is seen in the way the real world turns into a representation (or reflection) of the inner world. This gives rise to a tension in the name-body-association, that is, in the relationship between the material and the mental, and in *Godot*, it is the contradistinction between the disintegrating body and the babbling mind. This is most apparent in the long, meandering and sometimes almost manic monologues or the pseudo-dialogue which contrast the characters' inability or hesitancy to move physically. Especially striking it is at the end of each act (Beckett 2006; 48, 87), when Vladimir and Estragon sit alone on the stage, and one asks the other, "Well, shall we go?", the other answering "Yes, let's go", not to even stir afterwards. The roles-reversal that takes place between the acts emphasises this inability to move, as in I it is Estragon who asks Vladimir, and in II it is Vladimir who asks, and Estragon who affirms. Sometimes they even try to leave, only to realise they cannot.

In *Godot*, human nostalgia is undermined by the malfunctioning corporeality of the body that is isolated from the progress of historical time. The characters are depersonalised, denied even purposeful language, and their selves are materialised into concrete projections (reminiscent perhaps of the puppets in 2.2) but their bodies are not in a prosthetic relation to their minds; they are

rather ambiguously and mutably contoured, and therefore their boundaries are extended and contracted by their speech rather than their body or physical actions. (Postlewait 1978, 482; Figlerowicz 2011; 78-86-88; Ionescu 2013, 72.) The mind is concretely projected onto the surrounding world, and the focus on structures of language is a paradoxical way of representing the reality of the mind more concretely (Figlerowicz, 2011, 90). But what a dreary, grim sight it is: a stone, a tree, a country road, everything else covered in an ontological fog. Surely a self that finds such a manifestation is quite empty, filled only with the continuous buzzing of the Neutral "Not I".

Vladimir and Estragon are stripped of nearly everything that identifies the modern individual as the subject and master of world, such as unified identity, property, conventional rationality (it was argued in 2.2 that they have a rationality of their own: the absurd logic), and desire which directs them toward the world and toward changing it from within a social framework (Bruck 1982, 1609; Cascardi 1992; 231-240, 260-261). Desire is part of what makes up the individuality of the individual, and lacking it, the characters are turned inwards, away from the world and sociality. Vladimir and Estragon are "subjects of lack", in their waiting they lack stable identity, stable body, stable meaning, and desire. According to Moody, the lack of desire, specifically for food in the form of hunger and starvation, permeates Beckett's works (Moody 2011, 55; Yuan 1997, 132). The eating that takes place in the play is minimal: a carrot, a radish, some chicken bones, but it still seems to be more than enough, as Estragon is first very hungry, but then will not even finish one carrot, noting: "Funny, the more you eat the worse it gets" (Beckett 2006, 12), to which Vladimir says: "With me it's just the opposite . . . I get used to the muck as I go along" (Beckett 2006, 14). It is apparent, from the way Estragon begs for the chicken bones that Pozzo has already picked clean, that hunger is ever present, but food inexplicably seems not to satisfy the characters—except for Pozzo.

Hunger as the image of the absence of desire is cognate with the annihilation of meaning, as both are characterised by absence, and like Critchley argues that Beckett's self-annulling language is "physically articulated by feebleness, a dwindling, stiffening corporeality" (1997, 168-169). Indeed, hunger is a fully bodily experience (and function), and lends the work an atmosphere of banality and immanence, making it stylistically lowly—as evidenced by Beckett's frequent if

sometimes oblique references to excrement (Moody 2011, 56-57; Figlerowicz 2011, 90). Thus the corporeality of hunger is in an ambivalent relation to the argument that Beckett's characters are disembodied voices that damn the life of the body. However, the one thing in common with the modern subject that the characters *do* have is the body, and as has been argued, its life is transposed rather than completely denied. If taste offers a way from abstraction into "robust sensibility" (Moody 2011, 60), then surely *tastelessness* and hunger offer an *emaciated* sensibility—one that is fitting for Beckett's "skeletal fiction" (Cornwell 2006, 222), and not so incompatible with the damning of the life of the body that nevertheless resiliently persists. As a side note, Moody argues that the aesthetic of hunger is where theatrical Beckett and Blanchot meet (2011, 58-60).

The art of hunger offers a reduced and deteriorating version of corporeality, and the classical, modern individual with clear and robust boundaries is missing. In its stead, the characters' selves are materialisations, the combinations of bodies and externalised objects (Figlerowicz 2011; 90, 93; Moody 2011, 60). Pozzo seems to be an exception to this as well: he is far from emaciated and lacking in earthly goods (for the standards of the play). However, he is not outside the bodily ambivalence that is tied to eating and hunger, health and sickness, either. In fact, in the character of Pozzo the dynamic of corporeality and lack find their most tangible manifestation: He is proud and healthy, a conqueror of the world, strong in his selfhood, in act I: "I am Pozzo! [*Silence*.] Pozzo! [*Silence*.] Does that name mean nothing to you?" (Beckett 2006, 15) But in act II he has inexplicably become blind and helpless, offering two hundred francs just to be helped up from the ground. Furthermore, Estragon notes: "He's all humanity" (Beckett 2006, 76), that is, he has lost his individual name, now all names are his—until later, when his identity as Pozzo is established again (Beckett 2006; 69-76, 81). The very sudden change in Pozzo's condition, happened overnight, concretises the unstable and deteriorating condition of the characters' bodies.

Individuality is untenable in *Godot* as the characters are continually mutable. Their mode of being through materialisation, however, becomes available only against a background of dying, that is, through their willingness of going beyond enduring into nothingness. The life of the body is needed for the character to die, even if it is damned in the endeavour to escape identity. Suicide, in

itself a form of indifference and a direct consequence of the absurd, would be an excellent way to escape into nothingness, as it gathers the absurdly flowing time into a tranquil now moment. (Cornwell 1973, 45; Ionescu 2013, 82; Manschreck 1976, 86; Miskinis 1996, 1060-1061.) As we saw, the now is an empty moment, when the eternal struggle of contraries ceases for a moment, and pure nothingness can be attained. However, Kern argues that suicide is impossible for the characters as long as there is someone to bear witness to their existence (Kern 1962, 55-56). Estragon asks, "Do you think God sees me?" (Beckett 2006, 45), as if asking for a heavenly outside witness. Vladimir says to the boy who may be Mr. Godot's messenger, "tell [Godot] you saw us. [*Pause*.] You did see us, didn't you?" (Beckett 2006, 69), asking the boy to witness, to verify, their existence in historical time. But God is dead, and the messenger boy will arrive the next day having forgotten all about them. The literature of privation is not a witness to anything but its own impossibility, and Vladimir and Estragon plead in vain.

Suicide therefore does feature in the play quite prominently, especially in the putative mode of contemplating it: Estragon suggests hanging themselves at the end of both acts: "What about hanging ourselves?" (Beckett 2006, 9) and "Why don't we hang ourselves?" (Beckett 2006, 86), and Wolosky argues that erasing the self is also a form of suicide (Wolosky 1991, 220). However, though they wish to commit a shared suicide, they cannot, as it was argued that death evades the suicider like meaning evades the writer, and, furthermore, absurd logic is against suicide. Even the destruction of their self is never finished. (Cornwell 2006, 117; Ionescu 2013, 77.) Death is the prerequisite of meaning, and the very point of the play is its loss, and so there is always something preventing suicide: either the tree is judged to not carry both, or that they have no rope from which to hang (Beckett 2006; 10, 86). They cannot die, but neither are they really alive, so they live in the liminal state of Dying between the poles of life and death.

The state of Dying actually negates the division between mind and body, as the elimination of death in the literary realm exposes the constructedness of this mind/body divide (Miskinis 1996, 1060-1063). Lucky is a great example of this: His physical condition coincides with his speech, as it takes all three, Pozzo, Vladimir and Estragon, to subdue him during his speech, but when he is

mute, he is meek and appears to be "at his last gasp" (Beckett 2006, 19). The mind/body dichotomy is replaced by the ambivalent relationship between the emaciated corporeality and the eternal cycle of self-affirmation and self-annihilation of the materialised mind—the poles ceasing to be fixed opposites and becoming fluid categories with mutable boundaries. This cycle of self-affirmation and self-annihilation serves as the ontological basis of the structure of the play for all three aspects: the world is the concrete projection of the characters' consciousness, and their waiting arrests the flow of the time.

It could be argued that the ambivalence and the cycle of self-destruction and self-creation in *Godot* are a representation of the crisis of story-telling and the decline of the cultural authority of art that followed from the destruction of the Benjaminian aura. Yet by bringing the concept of fascination, of being absorbed by the work of art, Blanchot perhaps unintentionally brings about the harbinger of a new kind of aura: one that is in a new form of essential word, of shared language that is not communication, where the audience collaborates on the creation of the meaning for the work, for as was argued, through imagination the silence of experience and shared experience in the form of art can be reached. Perhaps this is what Cohn and Krieger mean by saying only the viewer or reader can force the text to continue (Bruck 1982, 163; Cascardi 1992, 106; Cohn 1962, 48; Krieger 1977, 988-991). This kind of collaborative creation of meaning, indeed, a collaborative creation of the aura, could be argued to take place when reading or watching the play: by being difficult to understand, the play refuses to be absent-mindedly consumed; by displaying insatiable hunger without object it refuses being turned into fodder for the hungry mass. Instead, it invites the viewer and reader to build it from a position of active surrender.

We have now solved a number of the problems the absurdist criticism brought up in 2.2. First of all, meaning is inescapable: the meaningless can only appear as the paradoxical negation without negation, privation that creates meaning. Secondly, the absurd world is not missing, it is the reflection of an inner, absurd, world. Thirdly, the physicality of the characters is reduced in itself, but its contours are transposed onto the mind that can transgress its limits in the form of speech. And lastly, the problem of the image and realism was countered by focus on the silence of the real

world beyond literature.

However, we are still left with one profound problem: materiality, not of the real world but of literature itself, on which all three aspects, world, time and self, hang, only emerges in the midnight, when the ambivalent cycle of struggling contradictions ceases. We have seen how the play actively defers the midnight and leaves the struggle of contraries unmitigated. Yet the materiality of language is, as we have just at length discussed, present in the play. How can this be? Even the Blanchotian meaningless leads to an untenable, though refined, paradox. We need one further framework for our refining analysis, one which legitimises the simultaneous presence meaning and meaninglessness, of nothingness and materiality: the grotesque.

4. Reading the Grotesque

We have discussed the absurd and the meaningless, and noticed that the problems "filtered" or brought out by the absurdist framework could be solved in the framework of meaningless, but this still left us with the problem of meaning and materiality. In our next section we wish to address these issues, hopefully bringing a satisfactory solution to the question of how meaning and meaninglessness, and nothingness and materiality can co-exist. Moreover, the questions of realism and identity are of special interest here, as the answers found in the previous sections have been inconclusive. However, let us return, again, to the character is Sisyphus: his existence is defined by his task which both gives and takes away his meaning—in this, he is very grotesque for the grotesque, too, is the simultaneous task of making and unmaking. Moreover, Sisyphus resides in the underworld (or the Hellenic Hell), which Bakhtin argues is a grotesque place (1984, 370).

Again the section is divided into three sub-chapters—world, time and self—in which we discuss the theme, and how the two main traditions of the grotesque, here called the subjective and the carnival-grotesque, parallel and interrogate one another. But first, let us start with some general observations.

4.1 What is the Grotesque?

The grotesque, while prevalent and easy to recognise, is notoriously difficult to grasp and analyse; it is, in fact, so nebulous that Geoffrey Galt Harpham concludes that it may not form an independent field of study at all, that it is more of an "intruder element", only inhabiting other genres (1982, xv-xvii). Even if this may be rather radical a view, it is more generally agreed that the grotesque can take a multitude of forms, and therefore categorising it is not a straightforward task. Perhaps, then, a more accurate description is that of a continually shifting continuum to which works can belong even only partially, or a stylistic structure which can be featured in a number of genres and styles, as Kayser argues that it appears in individual scenes or episodes rather than as the structural basis of an entire narrative. This would collapse the problematical distinction between "pure" and "applied" grotesque. (Clayborough 1965, 66; Harpham 1982, 44-45; Kayser 1981; 68, 180; Perttula 2011, 18-19.) Perhaps this confusion of categorisation is one effect of the grotesque, a defining feature instead of faulty analysis.

It is something of an established tradition to begin the introduction of the grotesque with a genealogical and historical overview of the phenomenon, but we shall refrain from that here. It will be postponed to section 4.2, where it will play more than a mere perfunctory role. Yet something of the history of the term itself could be said: it was established in the field of literary studies in the 1950's, denoting something abnormal, inherently ambivalent and divided, contradictory and clashing, and characterised in terms of the intention of the artist, the effect it has on the audience, and the traits or characteristics of the work itself (Clayborough 1965, 22; Kayser 1981, 180; Thomson 1972; 11, 20-27).

The general outlines are interpreted differently by the two main traditions of the grotesque: the subjective grotesque which is essentially grim and directed towards individual experience, and the carnival-grotesque which is essentially joyful and characterised by folk humour and physicality. Wolfgang Kayser is the main theorist of the subjective school and Mikhail Bakhtin of the carnivalistic school (Perttula 2011, 23). They create a historical continuum: the carnival-grotesque describes rituals and traditions found primarily in the folk culture of the Middle Ages and in the

literature of the Renaissance, whereas the subjective grotesque developed during Romanticism and early twentieth century modernism. The carnival-grotesque is therefore a precursor to the subjective grotesque, and the change from one to another is linked to the emergence of the modern subject. (Bakhtin 1984; 5-17, 36-38, 46, 274; Perttula 2011, 24.) This division is not absolute: we will see how the same concepts are developed and emphasised differently under both traditions. Perttula argues that the balance of laughter and horror is carefully maintained in both traditions even though both favour one or the other (2011, 24). Therefore the grotesque found in more contemporary fiction, Beckett included, does not fall completely under either category, but borrows features from both. Indeed, as an example of their interconnectedness, Bakhtin argues that the folk culture carnival spirit which permeates the carnival-grotesque is joyfully *cynical* in nature, and even in the later evolution of the grotesque it was not completely absent, albeit weakened (1984; 146, 276).

Bakhtin argues that the subjective grotesque does not grasp the true nature of the grotesque which "cannot be separated from the culture of folk humour and the carnival spirit" (1984, 46-47), and that the problem of the grotesque (whatever that is) can only be solved in relation to the carnival spirit of the middle ages and the Renaissance (1984, 51). However, Bakhtin's vision of the carnival-grotesque is notably coloured by nostalgia for the past, and like he himself noted, the difference between the subjective and the carnivalistic grotesque is created by historical development. As such, it seems natural that the differences in their appearance and emphasis are caused by the natural, historical change in the phenomenon they reflect in their own time—not by the decay of some true mirror. Furthermore, Bakhtin ignores the aspects of Kayser's theory which do suggest renewal and joy, and the place he reserves for the experience of horror in his own theory is minimal as the carnival-grotesque is "absolutely fearless" (Bakhtin 1984, 38-39). Let us now endeavour to create a composite view of the grotesque world, time, and self, that encompasses both traditions, the subjective and the carnival-grotesque.

4.1.1 The Grotesque World
We will begin our discussion with the ways the grotesque creates the world through its language.

The language of the grotesque paradoxical in form: it turns itself against itself by simultaneously asserting both sides of a contradiction, becoming unstable. This makes the grotesque not easy to contain in linguistic categories: it is "just out of focus, just beyond the reach of language" (Harpham 1982, 3), and gives voice and concrete form to the experience that defies satisfactory verbalisation, especially so in the subjective tradition, which deals with subjective experience. (Clayborough, 1965, 67; Harpham 1982; 3-4, 19-20; Kayser 1981; 11, 53.) It eludes rigorously structured thought by taking a multitude of forms and always inviting new interpretations; it has a surplus of significance. The grotesque is the essence of the surplus of meaning that arises from the contradiction inherent in all art. (Harpham 1982; xxi, 80, 178; Kayser 1981, 10.) (We may detect a similarity to Blanchot here.) The grotesque is found in the extremities and margins of art, both in exaltation and debasement—especially in the paradoxical process of exaltation through debasement (Harpham 1982, 185; Bakhtin 1984, 370).

As the combination of incompatible elements, the grotesque is characterised by ambivalence. As such, it is a liminal phenomenon and experience: it is on the threshold between two different categories (such as horror and laughter). It is never finished or fully formed. It is rather half-formed or re-formed, arrested movement from one form to another, or destroyed and made new (Clayborough, 1965, 17; Bakhtin 1984, 370). Its combination of horror and laughter, that is, tragic and comic elements, creates ambivalent reader reaction by undermining expectations. Tragicomedy, therefore, is an optimal genre for the grotesque (Kayser 1981, 11). The ambivalence of the grotesque combines with abnormality, which seems often to focus on the human body, creating physical abnormality (Thomson 1972; 8-9, 27). This makes the grotesque visual and physical, either in the sense of actual norm-breaking hybrids of humans, plants, animals, and others, physical abnormalities such as deformations, as well as the animalisation and objectification of humans (Perttula 2011, 18).

The grotesque can be detected on two levels: content and narration. It is a textual or stylistic structure and a subject-matter, and the dynamic between these levels is an inappropriate or shocking clash. On the level of content (or story) it is in the shape of grotesque characters and situations.

Though there is no inherently grotesque topic, theme, or motif, the grotesque often deals with "shameful" human body topics such as secretions and functions, madness, strange dreams, and animalistic behaviour. It also features creatures that are strange, disgusting, ominous, and disfigured, such as monsters, vermin, bats, and puppets. (Kayser 1981; 10, 22, 53, 181-184; Perttula 2011, 32-36; Thomson 1972, 2-7.) On the level of narration it can be seen as a clash which remains unmitigated and unexplained. The tension between these two levels, horrifying content narrated comically, in the co-presence of opposed phenomena contained within a single presentation, is the root of the grotesque effect: the clash of horror and laughter in the reader. Exaggeration and debasement are staples of the narrative tone. (Bakhtin 1984, 19-20; Clayborough 1965, 12; Harpham 1982; 7, 14, 36, 23; Kayser 1981, 79; Thomson 1972, 27-28.)

Furthermore, we will benefit from introducing a third level, the level of the text itself. Grotesque language is elusive, that is, its familiarity as a tool of communication can suddenly turn strange, push the reader away from familiar meanings and words into something inhuman and meaningless. Kayser mentions "verbal grotesque", where word formations and structures such as neologisms, ellipses and non-grammatical forms, reflect the spirit of the grotesque. (Kayser 1981, 154-157.) (We may note that neologisms, ellipses, and non-grammatical forms also form a part of privative tactics.)

The grotesque is borne of the simultaneous presence of elements that cannot co-exist, that repel each other: incomprehensible juxtapositions, horrifying content and humorous presentation, perhaps even different styles that traditionally are not combinable, with their unifying component somehow interrupted or not completely present. The grotesque legitimises multiple, mutually incompatible meanings, often in relation to dichotomies such as high/low, human/animal, normal/abnormal, light/dark, and life/death. (eg. Clayborough 1965; 3, 73; Harpham 1982, 14; Perttula 2011; 25, 32-36; Thomson 1972; 2-3, 7, 14.) We may be reminded of the absurd and the meaninglessness: how the world and language become suddenly strange. Clash and alienation are, indeed, central concepts in all three theories.

Though the basic feature of grotesque is the clash of incompatible parts and lack of

proportion, this incongruity is presented in what seems like a hybrid whole, once-separate parts strangely fused together (Harpham 1982; 106, 111, 178; Kayser 1981; 79, 116, 185; Perttula 2001; 26, 34). The clash is counterbalanced by a kind of dissolution of boundaries. The grotesque exists at the intersection between these two opposite tendencies: the unifiable separation of elements on the one hand and the impossible fusion of separate elements. There is therefore in the grotesque a simultaneous expansion and constriction of meaning and form: it on one hand compresses forms into meaningful ambivalence while on the other proliferates them into meaningless ambivalence, therefore creating not only play with forms but also with the act of representation: it invites the reader to search for meaning while presenting to us the simultaneous presence of meaning and meaninglessness (Harpham 1982; 38-40, 65). Play or playfulness is thus an important element of the grotesque: it features the free play of creation and experimental innovation, especially games with words which "release from the shackles of sense" (Bakhtin 1984, 423) are a staple of the carnival-grotesque; however, even the playful grotesque can have a serious, if not ominous element to it (Bakhtin 1984, 423-426; Kayser 1981; 21, 154-155; Thomson 1972; 15, 58).

This dynamic creates in the carnival-grotesque tradition an image that is ambivalent, and always shifting and moving. In the carnival-grotesque tradition this is manifest firstly in the language which is excessive, overly abundant, endlessly enumerating synonyms, and transgressing all limits, like Bakhtin says, or combinatory, degrading, distorting, inverting, exaggerating and multiplying, as per Perttula, The image thus created is one of unfinished or arrested transformation or metamorphosis, which while being neither end of the transformation, nevertheless encompasses both. (Bakhtin 1984; 24, 432, 306; Perttula 2011, 35.) Secondly this is "a game of negation" (Bakhtin 1984, 412): as the movement of transformation in the carnival-grotesque image is from duality into unity and from meaningless into meaningful, the grotesque playfully negates official negations and restrictions, revealing their superficiality (Bakhtin 1984, 412-415; Harpham 1982, 47; Kayser 1981, 60-61).

In the subjective tradition, on the other hand, this leads to the creation of horrible monsters, as the transgression of natural boundaries creates impurity and filth, and as the low, abnormal and

degenerate invade the high, normal and fully formed, creating mutilated hybrids that have no proportions, names, or counterparts in reality (Hall 1993, 6-8; Harpham 1982, 9-10; Kayser 1981; 24, 30, 187-188; Perttula 2011, 26). These hybrids pervert natural law and order, and therefore represent something between natural and unnatural—they are non-things which Kayser calls demons (Harpham 1982, 4-8; Kayser 1981, 6; Perttula 2011; 20, 30). These non-things are, already by virtue of name, related to the negation of meaning. For Kayser, the grotesque does not and even can not suggest a meaning for itself as it is opposed to rational and systematic thought, it is a "play with the absurd" (Kayser 1981, 187): a playful way of invoking the "demonic aspects of the world" (Kayser 1981, 188), that is, showing the absurdity, ultimate meaninglessness of the world. (Kayser 1981; 36, 184-185.) Familiar objects begin to look strange, and their meaningfulness is revealed to be only illusory. The subjective grotesque goes beyond negating official order, it negates the meaningfulness of that order, of the whole world. The paradox of the simultaneous lack and fullness of meaning is inherent in both traditions of the grotesque; Harpham argues that the real scandal of the grotesque is the ambivalent meaning within the apparently meaningless, as the lack of meaning is a solid basis for the abundance of meaning that is the grotesque (Harpham 1982, 3; Kayser 1981, 63).

Let us now turn to the world that the grotesque creates or reflects. The two traditions diverge dramatically: the subjective grotesque sees the world as nocturnal, absurd, inhuman and abysmal, whereas the carnival-grotesque shows it as light, fruitful and joyous (Bakhtin 1984, 41; Kayser 1981, 58). The views of the world in the traditions are parallel but diametrically opposed, yet they have similarities: both defy order and rationality in favour of heterogeneity, turmoil and disorder, and even the carnival-grotesque does have elements of alienation, as the prevailing order is exposed as false and oppressive, and in the subjective grotesque our familiar world view becomes suddenly defunct (Bakhtin 1984, 48; Kayser 1981, 184; Perttula 2011, 37). Furthermore, both conceptualise this in terms of the world having been turned upside down.

In the subjective tradition, the grotesque can be used to show the world as alienated or satirised, to shock the reader with showing familiar things as strange and hostile; it "pushes one into

the void" (Kayser 1981, 72; Thomson 1965; 18, 58). The world of the subjective grotesque both is

and is not our familiar world: it stems from understanding that our world is absurd, what seemed

familiar is turned upside down, alienated and invaded by what Kayser calls abysmal forces, it

creates fear as our world suddenly breaks apart and becomes inaccessible, inhuman—yet it is not

completely alien, there is a measure of reality to it (Bakhtin 1984, 38; Clayborough 1965, 71;

Kayser 1981; 31-37, 52, 184). It should be emphasised that the estrangement of the world is a

suddenly occurring process, an ominously tense state of action (Kayser 1981; 43, 163, 184-185).

This may be compared with the dynamic image of change in the carnival-grotesque tradition, and

with the Camusian absurd world—Kayser explicitly states that the grotesque world is absurd.

On the other hand, in the carnival-grotesque, the world is turned upside down in the sense that

hierarchical order is reversed, the high or lofty degraded and debased, invaded by the low or earthy

(Bakhtin 1984; 10, 20-21; Hall 1993, 6-8). Everything that is alien and terrifying is turned familiar

and laughable: the carnival-grotesque language aims at materialising and bringing the world closer

through what Bakhtin calls coarse words, that turn fearfulness into joy by transforming terrifying

images into scenes of eating, drinking and defecating, and the alienated world into a fruitful,

renewing earth (Bakhtin 1984; 21, 38-39, 174-176, 187, 394). Its function is to liberate people from

dominant ideologies and to create the world anew; indeed, absurdity is a characteristic of the "old

world" which is to be fearlessly killed in order to bring about a new, better one (Bakhtin 1984; 34,

394). This is in notable contrast to views expressed by Camus and Blanchot, who respectively

argued that the absurd world is our only world, and that the literary realm is not finer or better than

the old world.

The main figure of the grotesque world and language is the mask: Kayser argues that in the

twentieth century the inner and outer worlds are separated, and the mask is the concrete image of

the alienated self: it hides and solidifies identity, eventually destroying it. In the carnival-grotesque

tradition the mask is the image of metamorphosis, non-conformity and violation of natural

boundaries, it reveals the deeper reality of archetypes. (Bakhtin 1984, 39-40; Harpham 1982, 109;

Kayser 1981; 61-62, 137, 146-147.) Notably, Camus and Blanchot discuss the mask as well: For

Blanchot, writing literature is conceptualised as looking at the naked mask, it is seeing literature when it appears as disappearance (Blanchot 1982, 171-172); for Camus, the mask is the mask of meaning that covers the absurdity of the human condition, and the absurd man wishes to tear it away. It is quite obvious that Camus, Blanchot and Kayser attach similar connotations to the mask, that it distorts what it covers, and, most importantly, what it covers is nothingness. For Bakhtin the idea of distorting natural boundaries may come close to this, but, as with most everything, the mood he gives the mask is completely opposite to Kayser.

Though the grotesque is unnatural and estranged, it is not antithetical to realism or nature: the alienated world must be, as already mentioned, our world. It cannot be a fantastical nightmare realm, but it cannot be accepted as undistorted and real either; things are not presented in the work itself as incongruous with the norm, but recognised by the reader as such. When readers cease to experience the grotesque as incongruous, or when it is mitigated by offering some rational explanation, it ceases to exist (eg. Clayborough 1965; 15-16, 56-60; Kayser 1981, 138; Perttula 2011; 3, 20-22, 38). Of course, the work of art has qualities that are not found in reality, its constructedness comes from selecting and directing what is real, and the unnaturalness of the grotesque is to be found only in the work of art (Kayser 1981; 90, 100).

Therefore the relationship between the grotesque and realism is a complicated one, as both Kayser and Bakhtin argue that the grotesque can be used to reveal the truth about something or deeper reality (Bakhtin 1984; 208-212, 369; Kayser 1981, 159). The grotesque may be situated in the liminal space between art and something beyond of outside it, and derives part of its strength from its realistic framework (Harpham 1982; xxii, 50, 189-190; Thomson 1972, 8). Even Kayser agrees that the grotesque has a place in realism, though according to him, the carnivalesque emphasis on comical elements detracts from it (1981, 123); Bakhtin goes so far as to directly link them, as he argue that realism receives vitality from the grotesque. Perhaps to underscore this, he calls Renaissance grotesque literature "grotesque realism" (1984, 52). The grotesque may, naturally, as a label be attached to natural objects as well, as Clayborough notes (1965, 7). But this meaning is very different, and therefore not of interest to us.

However, the grotesque may also be used to blur the boundary between what is real and what is not: the grotesque is "the art of disgust", and, Harpham argues, disgusting works evoke the same emotion as disgusting objects, and thus annihilates the distinction between art and world (1982, 181). The grotesque is characterised by familiar objects becoming "possessed" or malicious, as if having a life of their own, undermining reality, and some elements are grotesque specifically because they are used for this effect, like the puppet-play and the mise-en-abyme (Kayser 1981; 91, 111, 119, 137). The dissolution of reality gives the subjective grotesque a dream-like quality, it is a nocturnal realm of "participation in a different kind of existence" (Kayser 1981, 22), between waking and dreaming (Kayser 1981; 79, 176). For Bakhtin, too, the grotesque creates a "second life" (1984, 5) but this life is not dream-like, it is on the level of deeper reality. To conclude, it seems safe to say that the image of the world, and the link to reality and the natural, that the grotesque presents to us is highly ambivalent.

4.1.2 The Grotesque Time

Let us now turn towards the view of time that can be read from the theories of the grotesque. This section will be somewhat shorter than the other two, primarily for the reason that the temporality of the grotesque is mostly implied in its world view, and thus has not been discussed as much. What can be retrieved, however, from implicit and explicit statements will be opened up and studied.

There is something about the grotesque that is simultaneously ageless or ancient and very contemporary: Perttula argues that it features mythic or primitive elements in otherwise modern content; Harpham argues that it embodies the tension between the ancient and the modern, pushing both to the fore, making them interrogate and deconstruct each other, thus bringing the past and the present together, overlaying them (Harpham 1982; 49, 56, 178; Perttula 2011, 21). Kayser, too, argues that the grotesque can reveal something about the modern age (Kayser 1981, 11-12).

We, again, detect very interesting differences between the two main traditions: the carnival-grotesque focuses on the movement between history and the future whereas the subjective grotesque is concerned more with the deconstruction of the poles and the emerging middle point,

the present. The meanings given to these vary also in the same way as with the world; in the carnivalesque tradition, time is merry and bright, and in the subjective, it is gloomy and dark.

The carnival-grotesque time is the time of biological life, that is, there are two phases of development running simultaneously and in parallel: beginning and end, life and death (Bakhtin 1984; 24-26). This leads to a cyclical understanding of time where each death brings about a new birth, new life conceived but not yet formed. The transformation never reaches its completion but remains always in flux, always on the brink of becoming. (Bakhtin 1984, 24-26; 52-53.) Thus life and death, the womb and the tomb, are inextricably linked: death is an indispensable part of life and rebirth, and in this ambivalence even death is merry and regenerating (Bakhtin 1984; 49, 150). This ceaseless cycle is, according to Bakhtin, a determining trait of the carnival-grotesque: it lightens the burden of old age, and turns the inevitable progression of historical time into a "sequence of gay transformations and renewals" (1984, 24; 394). Even acts of violence, such as beating, dismemberment, and abuse, are all transformed into acts of creation and renewal in the temporality of the carnival-grotesque, death becomes the giver of life (Bakhtin 1984; 211, 357, 435). Birth and death, past and future, become fused into one, a moment of death-birth.

Furthermore, the temporality of the carnival-grotesque is humanised and materialised, embodied: a concrete, realistic awareness of history takes form in the shared body of the people: a "living sense" that each person belongs to the shared corporeality of the people, and contributes to the creation of history, being thus relatively immortal—this immortality is the very core of the carnival-grotesque (Bakhtin 1984; 244, 255-256, 324, 367). This historic awareness brings a deeper understanding of reality as the unceasing progress of time, and exposes any so-called "eternal truth" (like Heaven) as ridiculous (Bakhtin 1984; 208, 212, 403-407). Most of all, the carnival-grotesque orients itself towards the future, towards the victory of the new over the old, assured and made fearless by the immortality of the shared corporeality. In this framework, the past is denigrated as something old, corrupt, and, notably, absurd. It is a "monster" to be chased away and conquered. (Bakhtin 1984; 256, 391-394.) For this purpose the carnival-grotesque employs, among other

things, games: they condense life into a miniature image,[5] orient the players toward the future, renew time on the bodily level, and "uncrown gloomy eschatological time" (Bakhtin 1984; 235-238). We have seen that the carnival-grotesque time is rooted in the shared corporeality, but what happens when the carnivalesque mass is separated and turned inward in the subjective tradition? Bakhtin argues that fear (a central feature of the subjective grotesque) can only enter an individual that has been separated from the carnivalesque mass, and that the shared corporeality and bodily abundance are absent from the subjective tradition (1984; 48, 256). Perhaps then it is the case that in mind of the isolated individual the carnival spirit is transformed into the spirit of the absurd? (It is also worth noting that Bakhtin himself argues that the carnival spirit remains in the subjective grotesque in a "weakened" form.)

Following this, let us have a look at the temporality of the subjective tradition. Bakhtin argues that the notions of time, change and crisis are missing from Kayser's theory of the grotesque (1984, 48). However, we will see that this does not hold true; all these concepts are present in the theory, but they are, as mentioned, implicit rather than explicit. Most obviously the notions of change and crisis are implied in the world: the world is suddenly changed into a hostile and absurd, unknown realm, creating a crisis of world view. In this, in the word *sudden* is the crux of time as well, as Clayborough notes that Kayser emphasises the suddenness of the grotesque (1965, 65). There is no circularity, no ambivalent change of life and death like in the carnivalesque tradition: life and death are gravely opposed, "torn apart" to use Bakhtin's words (Bakhtin 1984; 49, 150). The sudden moment of the world turning inhuman is an instantaneous process when temporality is materialised into spatiality, and narrative compressed into image—it "impales us on the present moment, emptying the past and forestalling the future" (Harpham 1982, 16), arresting the differences between epistemological subjects and objects (Harpham 1982, 11).

The suddenness of the subjective grotesque is inherently dark or nocturnal as the estranged world is the creation of a strong imagination corrupted by an indulgence of the whims of the mind

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5 The mise-en-abyme falls under this category; the contrast to its function in the subjective grotesque, that of alienating the world, is again not very different, but presented in a completely different mood.

(or of the subconscious?). Kayser writes that it "appears in the vision of the dreamer or the daydreamer or in the twilight of the transitional moments" (1981, 186). The subjective grotesque time is the time of the night. (Bakhtin 1984, 41; Harpham 1982, 131; Kayser 1981; 22, 30-31, 49.) It appears in the liminal time between dreaming and waking (Kayser 1981, 176). The emphasis on meaninglessness, nocturnality and the present moment, the now, leads us to think of the nocturnal phenomenon of our previous section, the night of literature. The midnight is a moment of utmost meaninglessness, fragile, temporary balance between the struggling contraries, obscureness of details and boundaries between objects (in the grotesque framework this translates immediately into grotesque hybrid combinations), the eternal now, and the emergence of the materiality within immateriality. The concept of the (mid)night of literature is surprisingly similar to the temporality of the subjective grotesque, and seems to lend itself well to parallel reading; indeed, the grotesque emerges in the twilight, but it is nocturnal by nature—the grotesque *effects* this change from twilight to night. It "pushes one into the void" (Kayser 1981, 34).

We may conclude that the subjective grotesque is not very different from the carnival-grotesque even in terms of materiality and temporality: the subjective tradition finds its materialised time in the thickening of the (mid)night when the materiality within immateriality emerges, and the carnival-grotesque in its historical movement *as* the body of the people. Again the main difference is in the mood of the phenomenon, though the cyclical thinking of the carnivalesque tradition is inarguably missing in the subjective tradition.

4.1.3 The Grotesque Self

The last section deals with three different aspects of the self of the grotesque: the reader, the writer and the grotesque character, as the grotesque is often defined through all three. Especially the subjective grotesque is very centred on the experience of the reader (Clayborough 1965, 63).

The grotesque is to be found between laughter and horror, at moral extremes, and so critics identify three very different reactions to the feeling of discomfort it causes: it is either shrugged off as humour or nonsense, it is found distasteful, disgusting, and outrageous, or it is deemed

fascinating, significant, and suggestive of "a deeper, freer, more enduring world" as Clayborough puts it (Clayborough 1965, 80; Harpham 1982, 184; Thomson 1972, 3). The grotesque effect is therefore emotional and intellectual, it requires the recognition of the element of alienation, and if the reader were to accept the internal harmony of the grotesque hybrid, making it not a hybrid but a unified whole, it would cease to be grotesque (Clayborough 1965; 16, 70-71; Kayser 1981, 143; Thomson 1972, 5). The grotesque is so independent on the reader's emotional and intellectual response that virtually anything may register as grotesque, depending on the reader (Clayborough 1965, 109; Thomson 1972, 58).

The grotesque is, to a large extent, a question of interpretation: being weird and incongruous with ordinary experience, understanding it necessitates interpretation which it also eludes by defying the very possibility of categories of interpretation and understanding. In this way it turns the reading process back to the reader. (Clayborough 1965, 12; Harpham 1982; 3, 80, 178; Perttula 2011, 27.) It suddenly appears to accuse the reader of creating monstrosities, of harbouring sordid fantasies. Being in a state of arrested understanding—between understanding and not understanding —is what creates the grotesque, Harpham argues (1982; 3, 15-16). In the world turned upside down, the reader is confused, repulsed but also, strangely curious and fascinated (Clayborough 1965, 71-73).

The emotions the grotesque awakens are indeed ambivalent and conflicted, horror and laughter, disgust and fascination, and these conflicted emotions are in a tense balance (Clayborough 1965, 74; Kayser 1981, 31-32; Perttula 2011; 27, 34; Thomson 1972; 5, 14). The subjective grotesque specifically describes feelings of helplessness and disparagement as the world becomes absurd (Kayser 1981, 78)—this could well be contrasted with what Camus says of the feeling of the absurd before it is vanquished by determination. Yet the grotesque not only alienates the reader, it also fascinates and pulls the reader in, and "reduces [his] distance to the work", to use Kayser's own words (1981, 118). This sounds familiar to us from our discussion of Benjamin and Blanchot: the fascination of the grotesque erases the distance between the work and the reader, making the reader surrender to the strange, inhuman world of the grotesque. The grotesque reflects the attempt to read

it back to the reader, as argued earlier, showing the reader's own features as disgusting. The grotesque work is there to be devoured and to devour the reader also, as its fascination may be explained, Clayborough argues, by the very structure of the human mind (1965, 110).

Perhaps the explanation to how the grotesque attracts people may reside in the fascination of the repulsive, as the grotesque is the art of disgust: it is non-aesthetic, unnatural, hideous, anti-classical, indecent, and most of all, against good taste, norms and decorum. Indeed, the grotesque is only recognisable "in relation to the norm it exceeds" (Perttula 2011, 25), such as good taste, and the function of all systems of decorum is to keep the low in its place. (eg. Harpham 1982; 34, 74, 111, 181; Perttula 2011; 20, 25; Thomson 1972, 27.) The grotesque upsets this hierarchy by turning it upside down, letting the low invade the high, and by freely disintegrating and redistributing the parts of natural wholes "to suit the taste of the artist" (Clayborough 1965, 3). This brings us to the writer of the grotesque who brings together two familiar but so far apparently separate roles: that of the absurd man, and that of the Blanchotian writer.

It was noted that the writer is an absurd character, but he is also a grotesque one (Kayser 1981, 175; Clayborough 1965; 22, 111; Thomson 1972, 20). The absurd man and the grotesque creator share many similarities: the world view of the grotesque creator is unimpassioned and distanced, cold, and he sees the world as an empty marionette play. He rebels against what Kayser calls "fatalism", that is, lack of freedom, fear of dark inexplicable forces and being determined from the outside. This outside determination is what appears as "the shackles of sense". (Bakhtin 1984, 423-426; Clayborough 1965, 68; Kayser 1981; 91, 186.) The creator feels dread in the face of the world turning inhuman and absurd, like the absurd man, and the urge to show the absurdity to others through his art—this was argued about the writers of the Theatre of the Absurd as well. However, like the absurd, the grotesque also effects a "secret liberation" (Clayborough 1965, 67): its playfulness frees the writer and the reader, from the abysmal horror, mitigating the fear (Kayser 1981; 132, 154, 188). Clayborough seems to consider the release from rigid logic and the liberation of the mind from fear as somehow two different things, and, furthermore, he considers the rebellion against fatalism as incompatible with the coldness of the world view (1965, 68). Camus shows us

however that these are not mutually incompatible—rather they complement each other.

The Blanchotian writer must more or less willingly surrender his personal identity for the Neutral, the inhuman force of literature itself; the grotesque writer feels the Neutral, which Kayser calls "Es", invade and posses the order of things—and his own soul—and beginning to control the process of creation (Clayborough 1965, 66-67; Kayser 1981, 185). Both Clayborough and Bakhtin interpret this "Es", an impersonal, autonomous force, as the Freudian subconscious Id, prompting criticism about the lack of creative freedom of the consciousness under the governance of the unconscious. Bakhtin calls for the "uncrowning" of the subconscious, and Clayborough interprets the banishing of demons as the Freudian method of psychoanalysis (Bakhtin 1984, 49; Clayborough 1965; 67, 79).

Naturally when the "Es" is interpreted as the emergence of literature itself such problems as the freedom of creation or the application of various psychoanalytic methodologies become redundant. The Neutral, the "Es", is owing to the unsettling and disgusting nature of the grotesque experienced as horrifying, and not the almost sublime feeling that can be read from Blanchot's theory, though Bakhtin, for example, argues that the grotesque and the sublime are, in fact, complementary (1984, 43). The dual nature of the literature in Blanchot's theory, its nature as the simultaneous presence and absence of meaning, is perhaps reflected in the grotesque writer's dual role: he "not only makes; he unmakes" (Clayborough 1965, 58) and cannot ascribe meaning to his own work (Clayborough 1965, 65). This, in its turn, naturally becomes the ambivalent meaning/meaninglessness of the grotesque itself which we have already discussed. As a side note, it is quite interesting that for Camus the absurdity of the world is a (near) sublime experience, but for Kayser the absurd world is grotesque: perhaps the grotesque and the sublime really are, like Bakhtin argues, at least to some extent complementary.

Our third and final aspect of the grotesque self is the grotesque character, the grotesque body being its central aspect, especially for the carnival-grotesque. Characters are grotesque on three levels, according to Kayser: 1) their appearance and movement are grotesquely distorted; 2) their mental faculties are distorted to eccentricity, if not insanity; 3) they are "demonic" with grotesque

appearance and uncanny skills (1981, 105-106). Furthermore, they are most often somehow monstrous, strange and ominous—they "[rise] out of the void" (Kayser 1981, 71)—whether natural creatures (like bats or vermin), unnatural physical combinations (like the fusion of machine and flesh) or familiar made strange as in the case of puppets and mental anomalies: in the subjective tradition, the madman appears grotesque because some alien force has possessed him and made him strange, in the carnivalesque tradition madness is a merry "parody of official reason or truth" (Bakhtin 1984, 39; Kayser 1981, 68, 184). The puppet relates to category 3 in the subjective tradition it is grotesque when it is given uncanny, that is, strangely familiar or life-like skills and features. However, in the carnivalesque tradition the live/dead reversibility is not relevant, and therefore the puppet is a laughable creature only, albeit grotesque. Grotesque characters can also be *like* puppets: they are human beings, but their behaviour is influenced by such eternal impulses or ideé fixes that they appear as puppets guided by an alien hand rather than their own inner life or personality. Sometimes they can also appear almost weightless or bodiless. (Bakhtin 1984, 39-40; Kayser 1981; 41, 92, 119-123, 183.) The focus on monstrosity shows to the reader the aspects of human nature which are usually glossed over and glorified, like animalism, bodily functions, and violence, which Bakhtin argues to be a form of renewal and affirmation. Grotesque characters may indeed seem aggressive and violent toward one another. (Bakhtin 1984, 211; Kayser 1981, 119-120; Perttula 2011; 30, 33-34.)

The central aspect and the root of the grotesque is the physicality of the human body, which is especially essential to the carnival-grotesque. It is mal- or deformed, hideous, and it symbolically destroys the idealisation and hierarchical control which is manifested in its opposite, the classical body. However, physical deformity is not enough to make it grotesque, as Kayser notes: the body also needs to have a grotesque function. (eg. Bakhtin 1984; 26-29, 315, 322; Harpham 1982, 177; Kayser 1981, 57; Thomson 1972; 1, 8, 12.) The grotesque function of the body for the carnival-grotesque is that of exaggeration and reversal of natural order: the grotesque body is excessively large, (Perttula observes that it is rather more rarely excessively *small*), unindividualised, and the inside/outside separation is collapsed through the openings and protuberances of the grotesque

body: it is open to the world with emphasised organs, apertures, and appendages such as the mouth, the genitals, belly, nose, buttocks—all the places where the outside contaminates the inside. It is also temporal and narrative process compressed into an image. The grotesque is sinful vitality (the classical grotesque border lures the eye away from the spiritual text by its playfulness), and Bakhtin argues that it is from the grotesque that realism gets its vitality. (Bakhtin 1984; 18-19, 52, 303; Harpham 1982; 11, 35-36, 107; Perttula 2011, 28-30.) This has interesting parallels to the absurd: Manschreck argues that the absurd in the hearts of men is like a "cancerous original sin" (1976, 92), and Camus says that the absurd is "sin without God" (1991, 40).

The grotesque body in the carnival-grotesque is not a single person but a shared corporeality of the carnivalesque mass, continually growing and dying, transgressing its own limits. The carnival body is "contained not in the biological individual . . . but in the people" (Bakhtin 1984, 25). This body, furthermore, is in a state of constant flux, simultaneously giving birth or growing and dying. (Bakhtin 1984; 19, 24-26.) Laughter is a central bodily aspect of the carnivalesque mass. The reversal of order happens through laughter that is directed at everyone and everything simultaneously, even the laughers themselves, even God, and its function is both delighting and deriding. It destroys and revives by bringing all lofty to the material, bodily level, to bury in order to grow anew. This laughter may be borne of our delight at physical cruelty, abnormality and obscenity. (Bakhtin 1984; 11, 19-20; Thomson 1972, 8-9.)

Linked to laughter and debasement as renewal are eating and defecating, as both are bodily actions, mediators between the self and the world, and part of an organic cycle of recreation (Bakhtin 1984; 148-151, 281-283; Harpham 1982; 4, 56). In the acts of eating and defecating, the body transgresses its own limits, outside becomes inside and vice versa. In eating, the line between the consuming body and the consumed body is blurred, man conquers the world in his mouth by devouring it, making it part of himself, and in the act of defecation, the world is ejected out as a hybrid product of inside and outside, the mediator of the self and the non-self (Bakhtin 1984; 225, 278-283; Harpham 1982, 4). Fear and suffering are debased by transforming images of terror into scenes of eating and defecating: excrement combines the womb and the tomb in the least terrifying

way, making it nearly divine; yet in the subjective grotesque this link is severed (Bakhtin 1984, 174-176; Harpham 1982, 56). Bakhtin does not make it explicit, but meat is the grotesque food par excellence.

The subjective grotesque is, on the other hand, as indicated by the name, focused on the individual and the life of the mind. Perttula argues that the change from the carnival-grotesque to the subjective grotesque is linked with the birth of the modern subject (this is related to the separation between the inner and outer worlds that Kayser mentions), and Bakhtin calls it the individual carnival, saying it has a "chamber character" (1984, 37): though it may appear playful, horror and fear run as its strongest currents, describing the sense of isolation, the life of the mind and the psyche, experiences of subjective horror and alienation from the world. (Bakhtin 1984, 36-37; Clayborough 1965; 39, 63; Kayser 1981; 37, 52; Perttula 2011, 23-24.) In the subjective grotesque the body is individuated and isolated from the shared corporeality, the cycle of renewal disrupted. It is rather seen as an outward projection of an inner state. However, it still cannot be finished and closed off, like Bakhtin argues, as it still retains the element of the lower stratum, though losing the force of renewal and sanctity. (Bakhtin 1984; 23, 321; Harpham 1982, 56; Perttula 2011, 31.) Instead, the subjective grotesque turned towards what Bakhtin calls the interior infinite: the depth, complexity and the inexhaustible resources of the individual mind (1984, 44).

Let us note how the interior infinite may be analogous to the shared corporeality: as Bakhtin argues that the body and its ambivalent cycle of death and rebirth lost their positive, renewing aspect, retaining only the negative aspect in the private sphere of the individual (1984, 23-24), the focus turned inwards onto the powers of destruction and creation of the mind and the subconscious (which Freud and Jung, among others, argue to be shared by all humanity, a shared consciousness). We argued earlier that the materiality or corporeality of the subjective grotesque is to be found in the nocturnal aspects of the grotesque, and this is supported by Kayser, who notes that of bodily creatures, especially grotesque are nocturnal ones (1981, 181).

The laughter of the subjective grotesque also changed as it, too, ceased being bodily: it became cold and almost exclusively destructive instead of destructive and regenerating, and satanic

instead of lowering and materialising the hierarchy represented by God; instead of conquering and grasping the world, laughter is used to annihilate and alienate it, and show the void of meaning behind it. Arguably, though, some elements of renewal still remain, as evidenced by the liberation from the demonic and horrifying the subjective grotesque, too, can manage. (Bakhtin 1984; 11-12, 37-38, 41-42, 51-52; Kayser 1981, 54-59, 187-188; Thomson 1972, 58.) The laughter of the subjective grotesque is not, however, free like in the carnivalesque tradition, is horrifying elements invade and turn it against itself, becoming bitter, cynical (Kayser 1981, 186; Thomson 1972, 58).

We have seen how the grotesque legitimises the simultaneous existence of meaning and meaninglessness, and materiality and nothingness, as a liminally situated hybrid. It also addressed the issues of realism and identity. Next we shall apply this theory to *Waiting for Godot*, and learn how it negotiates the tradition and the division between them.

4.2. Reading the Absurd, the Meaningless, and the Grotesque in Beckett: A Resolution

Let us begin with a revisit to the Theatre of the Absurd; it is apparent that the strict definition of 'absurd' as 'opposed to reason' is not very accommodating for much further development, and therefore, as was argued earlier, the meaning is narrowed (according to Grossman) or expanded (according to Thomson) by Camus and the Theatre (Grossman 1967, 473-474; Thomson 1971, 29-31). The changed scope of the term allows for a great deal of overlap between the absurd and the grotesque: they may be used to describe the same texts or other phenomena, or they may be each others' consequences in the sense that large-scale grotesque leads to the notion of prevailing absurdity, as grotesque forms are a favourable breeding-ground for the absurd (Clayborough 1965; 4, 18; Kayser 1981, 146-147; Stankiewicz 1972, 54; Thomson 1971, 31).

Furthermore, Esslin traces the roots of the Theatre into history as far as the Medieval festivities, putatively even further (1985, 327-335). The genealogy, when viewed through the lens of the grotesque, seems familiar. It seems, indeed, that the roots of the Theatre are firmly planted in the tradition of the grotesque. Esslin does call the Theatre grotesque on many occasions without further specification, but we shall see that such a vague (and especially vague in the context of Beckett's

works where Esslin hardly discusses the grotesque at all) reference does not quite reflect the fact that the Theatre seems to be inextricably bound with the grotesque.

Though the traditions of the grotesque and the absurd may not have existed in any form that resembles their current, they go hand in hand. Their pre-history begins in the cave paintings, at the very dawn of humanity's art and capability of feeling disparagement and alienation (Cornwell 2006, 3; Harpham 1982; 49-59, 178; Manschreck 1976, 92; Perttula 2011, 21). Both traditions have borrowed aspects from Greek and Roman arts: Greek tragedy and comedy, and Roman miming theatre *mimus* (with grotesque characters) and ornamental paintings (eg. Bakhtin 1984, 31; Cornwell 2006, 33-35; Esslin 1985, 330-332; Kayser 1981, 19; Oliver 1963, 225-226; Thomson 1971, 1-12). Medieval and Renaissance can be said to be the first historical time when the grotesque (and perhaps the absurd as well) truly emerge as a cultural phenomenon: Medieval folk carnival (especially commedia dell'arte and a type of humorous clowning theatre called the sottie) and Renaissance literature were a golden era for the grotesque in Bakhtin's view; it was then that the grotesque style developed dramatically—and the Theatre of the Absurd has borrowed many aspects from the traditions (Bakhtin 1984; 15-17, 31-38, Cornwell 2006; 42, 228; Knight 1971, 183-188; Oliver 1963, 227). In the nineteenth century both the absurd and the grotesque experienced a notable increase in popularity during the Romantic period, when the grotesque acquired its gloomier form, and the kinship between the traditions grew even closer (Bakhtin 1984; 11, 36-38, 44; Clayborough 1965, 11; Cornwell 2006, 43). Finally during the twentieth century both the grotesque and the absurd came to flourish during the modern period and the time of Beckett (eg. Bakhtin 1984, 46; Cornwell 2006; 44-55, 74 Kayser 1981; 130, 136; Oliver 1963, 226; Musgrave 2003; Thomson 1971; 11, 29-31).[6]

In addition to this, it is argued that drama, and tragicomedy (such as *Godot*) specifically, is especially well-suited for the showcasing of the grotesque: It is analogous in form to the grotesque, being a hybrid of two opposites, it is itself a grotesque genre, lacking the narrating voice of prose

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6 It should be emphasised that of the ten sources cited, only three (Thomson, Knight, and Cornwell) explicitly juxtapose the grotesque and the absurd to any extent.

which calmly dispels the ominous ambivalence of what is narrated (Harpham 1982; 68, 130; Kayser 1981; 11, 85). The question of whether or not a theatrical piece has a narrator seems answered: no, it does not.

The interconnectedness of absurdity and the grotesque, or Beckett and the grotesque, is supported by the fact that Beckett's works in general (or *Waiting for Godot* in specific) receive passing mentions from Thomson (1971, 1), Kayser (1981, 72), and Clayborough (1965, 61) in their analyses of the grotesque; furthermore, Esslin (1965, 41), Cornwell (2006, 221-223), Musgrave (2003), and Schevill (1977, 230) argue Beckett's works have (variably undefined and undiscussed) grotesque features. Therefore in both traditions it is taken as self-evident that Beckett's work can be read as grotesque, but Musgrave alone endeavours to study its specific form in the prose trilogy *Molloy/Malone Dies/The Nameless*; according to him, Beckett's grotesque significantly develops the concept further into the realm of abstraction, where "the metaphysical aspects of the traditional grotesque are extrapolated into the nth degree" (Musgrave, 2003). We will see that his formulation, while showing great insight, is not as informed on the various aspects of the grotesque, which is its greatest shortcoming. We will, in our present analysis, endeavour to take into consideration a fuller picture of the grotesque, and found our analysis on the absurd and the meaningless already discussed.

Furthermore, we may hark back to 2.2 and Tsur's argument that critics are trying to reconcile the uncertainty of meaninglessness of *Godot*, to turn its absence into presence by applying a theoretical formula to it: like the meaninglessness of the play, the grotesque is interrupted by offering rational or allegorical explanations that seek to interpret, to close it off (Harpham 1982, 18; Kayser 1981; 72, 103, 138; Tsur 1975, 779-783). Clayborough proposes in his book a certain mindset, one that rejoices in the contradictions of meaninglessness and inexplicability, to be the creative well of the grotesque: it is dissatisfied with the superficiality of the real world, and therefore defies common sense, depicting the real world as a stage and its inhabitants in a chaotic manner. This mindset is an inherent tendency of the human mind, and therefore describes both the author and the work, and contributes to the ambivalent reaction of being repulsed and fascinated by

the grotesque. Furthermore, fairytales and allegories are not a product of this mindset, which rejects the possibility of *Godot* being "a negative fable". (Anders 1965, 140-141; Clayborough 1965; 73-75, 81-92, 101-107, 111.) After situating the grotesque with the claims made in the frameworks of the absurd and the meaningless, let us turn to the application of the theory to proper analysis. As with before, we will discuss the three thematic areas of world and language, time, and self.

The grotesque can be detected on three levels: form, content, and language, and this division is quite clear in *Godot* too. The discoveries made here will be studied in more detail in the coming pages. Starting with the perhaps easiest of the three, the level of content, it was argued that the grotesque is created by a certain way of handling different topics, and therefore there are no inherently grotesque themes, but there are some topics and figures that a perhaps more attractive to the grotesque. Among these there are "shameful" human body themes such as excretions and violent, bestial behaviour, and as independent figures were listed dreams, puppets, and strange and disgusting creatures.

It was argued already in 2.2 and 3.2 that the characters are like puppets in *Godot*, and we shall return to the topic in 4.2.3, but it is perhaps worth noting here that the "shameful" body is the most prevalent grotesque motif in the play: though it does not immediately arrest the attention, the play actually abounds with anecdotes about genitalia, masturbation, defecation, farts and other topics which Bakhtin identified as belonging to the lower bodily stratum. And perhaps the most notable thing about them is the surprising and inappropriate situations they appear: in the midst of lyrical dreaming about a better future, attention is suddenly drawn to a fart someone has let out, and while comparing their respective suffering, attention is again suddenly drawn to the lower bodily stratum: "ESTRAGON: [*Pointing*.] You might button it all the same. VLADIMIR: [*Stooping*.] True. [*He buttons his fly*.] Never neglect the little things in life." (Beckett 2006; 2, 74) In the latter example, the attention to the open trouser front, and thus to the genitalia beneath, may be an implication that the ailment Vladimir suffers is a venereal disease, which in itself is, according to Bakhtin, a grotesque topic (1984, 161). Perhaps the sudden, intrusive attention to the phenomena of the lower bodily stratum is a symptom of the inescapable corporeality of the characters that was argued in 3.2.

The play also features other typically "grotesque-friendly" themes, such as dreams and violent behaviour.

Seemingly missing are the Kayserian strange, disgusting, nocturnal creatures. However, they, too, appear in the text as Vladimir and Estragon abuse each other verbally (Beckett 2006, 67). They call the other with progressively worse names such as moron, vermin, and sewer-rat, which fit the description of grotesque creatures well enough. More interestingly, morpion, cretin, curate and critic are on the worse end of the list. Morpion, evocative though meaningless in English, is French for 'crab louse', whereas cretin is a person who suffers from cretinism, that is, physical and mental deformity. Curate, on the other hand, is a low-ranking member of the Catholic clergy—insult, perhaps, in its own right, but there is also an idiom, "curate's egg", which indicates something patently bad which is nevertheless euphemistically downplayed. This aspect may, naturally, only be a contributing factor. Lastly, the final insult on the list, critic, is perhaps funny in that it stands out from the list of more obviously insulting names, and it is declared with such finality as to truly seem the worst one. Noteworthy is that these themes are on a purely linguistic level: the characters are not shown masturbating, farting or defecating, the creatures are words only.

In terms of form, the text of the play features fast-paced dialogue, which often consists only of one word of dialogue per line. This alternates with the famously dense stage-directions. This creates the impression of the text alternating between "narrow" and rigorous formulation, and "wide" and structural chaos (the names of the characters are printed in capital letters, intruding dialogue in standard typeface, and the stage-directions themselves bracketed in Italics, creating a confusion of styles). Conflict in reader response is a prerequisite for experiencing the grotesque, and certainly the reading process of this text differs from reading uniform text: the eye skips automatically over the dialogue parts, especially during episodes of repeated words and synonyms. Encountering the long confusions of dialogue and stage-directions is a jarring experience. The movement of the eye slows down, and the reader must make note of who speaks, who acts, and what happens:

POZZO: Leave him in peace! [*They turn towards* POZZO, *who, having finished*

eating, wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.] Can't you see he wants to rest? Basket! [*He strikes a match and begins to light his pipe.* ESTRAGON *sees the chicken bones on the ground and stares at them greedily. As* LUCKY *does not move,* POZZO *throws the match angrily away and jerks the rope.*] Basket! [LUCKY *starts, almost falls, recovers his senses, advances, puts the bottle in the basket, returns to his place.* ESTRAGON *stares at the bones.* POZZO *strikes another match and lights his pipe.*] What can you expect, it's not his job. [*He pulls at his pipe, stretches out his legs.*] Ah! That's better. (Beckett 2006, 19)

The reader is in pains to follow the text, whereas the viewer would receive two separate processes, one through the faculty of vision, and the other through hearing. Furthermore, sometimes even the stage-directions become repetitive as they describe repetitive action (best example being the episode where Estragon and Vladimir exchange hats) and the eye grows tired of following precisely identically repeated words, but it cannot start skimming the stage-directions, or else it may miss something. Indeed, Harpham notes the importance of movement of the eye for the grotesque: when the grotesque was mainly found in intricate border decorations in the Bible and other Christian texts, it lured the eye away from the religious content of the text to its nonsensical visual play (1982, 35-36). How the eye is dragged across surfaces by the grotesque has been a part of the grotesque experience from the start. It is therefore interesting to note that the eye is important to the Benjaminian aura as well, which is created in the way the work of art is looked at.

Moving to the level of language, Kayser argues that the verbal grotesque can be seen in structures and formations such as neologisms, ellipses and non-grammatical forms, and in the way its familiarity as a tool of communication suddenly turns strange and pushes the reader into inhuman meaninglessness (1981, 154-157). This reminds us of the Blanchotian essential word which annihilates the world and substitutes itself, perhaps blurring the boundary between what is real and what is fiction—as the grotesque does. "Weird" word formations are noted already in the absurdist criticism, as Brater argues that the combinations of strange words and positions is a central factor in Beckett's effectiveness, citing the word 'knook' as an example. Perhaps interestingly, Robert Cohen argues that the word may refer to an elf, bringing us back to the grotesque, malformed human body. (Brater 1975, 205; Cohen 2011.) Yet the grotesqueness of language in the play goes even deeper, as Musgrave argues that characteristic of Beckett's grotesque

is how his words are fused with silence, making them a grotesque, hybrid combination in themselves—silence is not "a passive absence but rather an active presence which contributes to the shape of the work as a whole" (2003). Perhaps this active silence is the "dead voices" which Vladimir and Estragon hear (Beckett 2006, 54). It was identified in 3.2 as the voice of the Neutral: the murmuring, whispering voice(s) ceaselessly telling stories, which Vladimir and Estragon hear behind the sound of their own voices. Perhaps this is Beckett's active, grotesque silence—after all, the voices negate the difference between life and death, human and non-human, by talking about their lives and sounding like leaves.

It was argued that the grotesque is born of inappropriate juxtapositions, such as horrifying content being narrated funnily or strange mixtures of genres. Esslin's argument that Beckett devalues language, that is, uses the clash between image and word (1985, 24-26), could be read as a form of grotesque juxtaposition, as the clash is created by foregrounding of incommensurate elements. The point of these juxtapositions of language and image is the attempt to communicate when it is impossible, as Esslin argues, noting Beckett himself saying the attempt is "horribly comic" (1985, 32) which certainly brings to mind the two main emotions of the grotesque, horror and mirth. Tragicomedy as such is an example of a grotesque combination of genres, as it is characterised by these very emotions.

In the grotesque, the incommensurate juxtaposed elements are mitigated or unified, but only to an extent: the unifying component is present but interrupted, and therefore the outcome is a continual struggle of the elements that are "forcibly" yoked together. Perhaps the uneasy co-presence of word and image in *Godot* is a symptom of this: their mutual rhetoric is interrupted and turned into a clash. This may be the reason also for why Esslin argues that there is catharsis in *Godot* even though it is obvious there is not, and, furthermore, in grotesque there is not: according to Esslin, it offers relief to the viewers by confronting them with "concrete projections of the deepest fears and anxieties" (Esslin 1985, 70), but such elements belong to a classical, "well-made" play, which *Godot* is not, and therefore the experience of catharsis is interrupted before it is finished, experienced fully. (Esslin 1985; 28, 70; Perttula 2011, 38; Spanos 1971, 346.)

Devaluing language, Beckett seeks the means to express beyond language. The same function can be attached to the grotesque: as it eludes linguistic categorisation, it gives a concrete form to experience that cannot be verbalised. Furthermore, the simultaneous assertion of both sides of a contradiction, the "double strategy of debasement and excess" (Rabaté 2012, 56), is a staple of grotesque use of language, and also how Beckett was considered to search for the means of expression beyond language—that is, the means of devaluing language. (Esslin 1985, 85-86; Harpham 1982; 3-4, 19-20; Kayser 1981, 53.) The "double strategy" involves silence and materiality, or to borrow Peter Fifield's terms, embodiment and abstraction, as its opposing poles. They are simultaneously asserted, as Fifield argues that abstraction is a compression of physicality, an "obsessive, distorting focus not only on appearance but on the sensation of being clothed in flesh" (2009; 57-58, 69-70). Indeed, the poles are brought together so closely as to be almost fused together.

Some clarification in the use of the terms 'embodiment' (as 'materiality' or 'excess') and 'abstraction' (as 'silence' or 'debasement') is perhaps in order, as they are somewhat misleading from our perspective. Musgrave names his findings the "abstract grotesque" because, in his view, Beckett's grotesque is characterised by the abstraction, that is, condensation, of traditional grotesque elements, and the conjunction of the material and the silence (2003). Yet we cannot be content with the word 'abstract', as it erases the struggle between the image and the silence. Esslin already argues that Beckett refused to "deal in abstractions" (1965, 8) and Kayser argues that the grotesque objectifies the abstract (1981, 109). We may bring Bakhtin's idea of materialisation into this: the abstract is materialised in the grotesque. But what, then, do the terms 'debasement' and 'excess' mean?

First of all, in 3.2, the word 'debasement' was decoded as 'atrophied', and 'excess' as 'gratuitousness', but now the meanings have flipped: in the grotesque framework, we saw that debasing means materialising, making earthly and material, and the meaning of 'excess' is shaded towards 'excessive', in the sense of 'unnecessary' or, even 'nonexistant', as Beckett's words are undermined by being hybridised with active silence. The excess or unnecessariness of language is

therefore a means of reaching beyond language, and an integral part of Beckett's work alongside debasement as the lowering of the high and ideal onto a lower, earthly, level. Together they create the basis of the grotesque language emblematic to Beckett's works.

As we have seen, *Godot* has been interpreted in a variety of mutually incompatible ways, and this is one indication of its grotesqueness: grotesque language is characterised by legitimising multiple, mutually incompatible meanings, and subsequently dissolving clear boundaries between categories, creating a dual tone of the continuous struggle of incommensurate elements, and an indistinct fusion of elements that should not be fused. One feature showcases this tendency especially clearly in Beckett's grotesque language: the incomplete syllogism or the enthymeme, which Musgrave argues to be unique to Beckett's grotesque. It blurs the boundary between premise and conclusion by omitting the clear chain of deduction, and these gaps represent Beckett's silence, as Musgrave argues that they are "fundamental to the architectonics and structure of the work" (2003). The repetition with slight variations which we have discussed in earlier sections emphasises the enthymemes, the gaps between individual sentences and meanings, and the leaps of logic that are required to grasp even an approximation of the whole. (Musgrave 2003.)

For example here, the second premise "cutting the air flow to the body induces blood to flow to the penis" is omitted, and the leap of logic from hanging to erection seems arbitrary. This is used, naturally, for its startling and humorous effect of combining dying and sexual excitement—we may note that Estragon is "*highly excited*" by the very idea:

> ESTRAGON: What about hanging ourselves?
> VLADIMIR: Hmm. It'd give us an erection!
> ESTRAGON: [*Highly excited.*] An erection! (Beckett 2006, 9)

The enthymeme represents, presumably, the "rigidity of logic" or the logic of the absurd from 2.2 that Cornwell and Suciu speak about, since it certainly seems like a parody of a formal deduction. Furthermore, Cornwell argues that it is the extreme form of the comic, and Musgrave argues that the enthymeme is a "defining character of all true humour" (2003). (Cornwell 2006, 19; Suciu 11.) On the blurring between premise and conclusion, we may ask if getting an erection, after all, is the conclusion here? Or is it another premise, and the chain of deduction breaks before the conclusion?

Moreover, in a very Bakhtinian spirit, the exchange blurs the boundary between death and life by reversing the causality.

The dissolution of boundaries leads to a sort of "dual tone", especially notable in a dialogue between two characters, which manifests itself in grotesque speech as endless enumeration and exaggeration, abundance of figures and synonyms, transgression of limits and negation of logical progression. Grotesque speech reflects the general ambivalence of the grotesque by bringing together heterogeneous things like different registers or their parodies, simultaneous praise and abuse, and the opposites of dualities (such as lie/truth, light/dark, life/death). It is simultaneously malicious, abusive, and familiar, friendly. It is delivered in a rapid, puppet-like manner which destroys logical and syntactical connections, thus appearing beyond human comprehension and reason. Its tone is one of laughter—either the renewing laughter of the mass, or the satanic, satiric laughter of a lonely madman. Furthermore, it is also finds a concrete equivalent in beatings, and may even be a way of temporarily "reviving" the folk carnival in a "closed chamber conversation" (Bakhtin 1984, 421). (Bakhtin 1984; 41, 160-168, 187-189, 198-203, 265, 306, 432-434; Kayser 1981; 63, 66, 71.) For Bakhtin, it was noted, this creates a shifting, dynamic image of struggling contraries; for Kayser, this gives birth to monsters—nameless non-things that negate meaning and identity. Indeed, it was already noted how the characters of the play are ambivalently nameless, without identity and their speech negates meaning; perhaps they are monsters that look like humans, in a very non-restrictive interpretation of the word?

The varieties of grotesque speech in *Godot* use elements from both traditions. Unexpected combinations of words, dualistic oppositions (such as movement/stasis, materialism/idealism, dark/light, human/non-human) and literalisations of curses are a staple of the dialogue between Vladimir and Estragon. Culik argues that the fusion of these opposites is deferred, perhaps because, as Cavell argues, the dialectic between them is suspended. Furthermore, Krieger argues that there are no speaking human subjects which is revealed by the prevalence of the opposites. (Brater 1975, 205; Cavell 2001, 150, Culik 200, 139; Krieger 1977, 987-991.) The "dual tone" that Bakhtin mentions is most obvious in Vladimir and Estragon's back-and-forth dialogue. On the other hand,

Lucky's speech represents the Kayserian variety of puppet-like automatic speech that negates logical and syntactic connections. It is notable how the subjective and the carnival-grotesque traditions combine or run parallel in all aspects of the language of the play.

It was argued that the mask is the central image of the grotesque language and world, but we may now refocus the statement: it is the image of the poles of debasement and excess almost brought together. It is the concrete manifestation of both turning inwards from the world and the materialisation of identity, and Musgrave argues that in Beckett's work it is not indicative of the interior infinite nor of the Bakhtinian non-conformity and metamorphosis, but "abstracted", perhaps reminiscent of the realm of archetypes that has been noted previously, and by Bakhtin (Kayser 1981, 61; Musgrave 2003). While the mask is not mentioned in the play, nor is one worn by any characters, perhaps it is still present in an "abstracted" form—perhaps the characters wear the Blanchotian "naked mask": the mask is a cover over nothingness, so the characters wear their faces, their archetypical identities, as masks over the nothingness that is their empty identities. In this way the mask in the play takes on both Bakhtinian and Kayserian elements, creating an interesting hybrid of its own. Let us now turn to the world created by this language.

We established that the world of Godot is a projection of the characters' inner world, mental landscape made concrete. Its constriction is a reflection of this, as it is argued that absurd drama, especially Beckett's, takes place in a close, and, notably, round spaces. Bakhtin similarly argues that the atmosphere of the (carnival-)grotesque is that of "the great belly" (1984, 221), inside of the body being represented or projected in the world, and evoking also a closed and round space. (Blau 1961, 120; Fifield 2009, 67.) Allon White proposes the concept of the prosthetic grotesque, where the world is not turned upside down but *inside out* (1993, 169). Indeed, as the concrete manifestation of the inner world, the world of *Godot* can be viewed as having been turned inside out. But is it a metaphor for how the characters feel or experience themselves, or can it be read as a physical representation of their minds? Answering this, let us remember that the grotesque world is on the limit of our familiar world, as its shadow. In the subjective tradition, the comfortingly familiar world is alienated, it is suddenly hostile, absurd, and dark, and the grotesque experience

springs from this sense of alienation. In the carnival-grotesque tradition, on the other hand, turning the world upside down signifies the reversal of hierarchical order, materialising and debasing the high and lofty, and turning horrifying and alien into familiar and laughable. It could perhaps be argued that the world of *Godot* borrows from both: as we have seen, the concrete world represents the inner world of the characters, it is a sort of movement inwards within a movement outwards. Moreover, the absurd is founded on the experience of the familiar world turning suddenly inhuman and strange.

As was argued in 2.2 and 3.2, the world and thus language are meaningless, the "ultimate void" in its "grotesque derision", as Esslin puts it (1965, 14; 1985, 84-85.). Vladimir says it is "indescribable. It's like nothing. There's nothing.", but then, at the very end, he adds, "There's a tree." (Beckett 2006, 79). The world is first strange and empty: the word 'like' has multiple interpretations—it resembles nothingness, it has no parallel, or even both. But there is also something, a tree. And, as noted in 3.2, there is also the country road and the stone. However, Kayser argues that in the grotesque world, familiar objects become malicious, strange, or "possessed", and, surely, the characters struggle with "non-human antagonists", as Brater argues (Brater 1975, 204; Kayser 1981, 111). The tree may actually be a bush, Estragon struggles with his boots throughout the play, their trousers will not stay up, and their hats do not fit their heads. The grotesque world, according to Kayser, is also "without heart" (1981, 119-120), meaning that it is dream-like and its inhabitants seem bodiless, indifferent, and aggressive towards each other—all of which we have argued to be characteristics of Godot. Truly, the world of the play seems inhuman, nocturnal and abysmally hopeless, like the world of the subjective grotesque. (Kayser 1981, 58.)

However, the carnival-grotesque vision of world is not unknown to the play either. The power dynamic between Vladimir and Estragon and Pozzo is turned upside down: in the first act, Pozzo is or at least claims to be the owner of the land (and he fits the image of the modern individual subject), and chastises Vladimir and Estragon for loitering around, but finally forgiving them with "*magnanimous gesture*" (Beckett 2006, 16); in the second act, Pozzo is, as noted, inexplicably blind and helpless, falls down, and begs for help and pity. Vladimir and Estragon consider kicking him in

the crotch and asking for "tangible return" for helping him. (Beckett 2006, 69-75.) Kicking Pozzo in the crotch, lowering him to the lower bodily stratum (which does not eventually happen—then again, what does?) is the finishing touch on the reversal of their hierarchical order. As was noted earlier, such Bakhtinian debasement permeates the play in a variety of forms: Vladimir and Estragon call each other names, Lucky kicks Estragon and Vladimir hits Pozzo, Vladimir and Estragon make references to masturbation, venereal disease, farting and vomiting. Vomiting is in a considerable role in the play in the form of word-vomit in Lucky's speech. There is even a funny scene where all the characters fall down inexplicably unable to get up again, until they simply decide to with the comment: "Child's play." (Beckett 2006, 76). (Bakhtin considers tripping and falling down a form of debasement also.) Through this type of debasing humour, we may argue, the play turns the strange and hostile absurd world laughable, into a "gay monster", to use Bakhtin's words.

Thus the play makes a twofold move: it simultaneously alienates the world and makes it laughable; the gloomy, absurd inner world of the characters is materialised and made merry by debasement and hierarchical upturning. It is a concretised metaphor, speech made material. The play thus quite elegantly combines the world view of the subjective and the carnival traditions. Here we return to the prosthetic grotesque for Kari Matilainen argues that it carnivalises the basic categories of the Bakthinian carnival-grotesque (and therefore the corporeality of the play seems odd, reduced), because after the medieval carnivalesque body came under control, the carnival spirit detached from exterior rituals and became internalised: the rejected social phenomena of the carnival returned at the individual level as phobias, fantasies, fears and desires, and the grotesque turned into a forbidden and dirty internal experience that destabilised the separation between the subject and the object. (Matilainen 1996, 55-58; White 1993, 171.) But the characters, as reiterated again and again, have no personality, no fantasies, fears or desires. They are fixtures of the world like the tree is. The prosthetic grotesque erases the separation between the subject and the object— perhaps: the play as the object and the viewer/reader as the subject. Following this, perhaps then the world of the play is a concrete projection of the feelings of disgust and dejection (but also

amusement, it is after all a part of the absurd) the *reader/viewer* feels about his or her own world in a time when the great narratives that once held the world together are belied, in a world which in itself is schizophrenically obsessed about discovering some ultimate truth while revealing it, too, as mere illusion.

Turning to the grotesqueness of time in the play. We established that the essential difference between carnival-grotesque and subjective grotesque traditions is twofold: firstly, the mood, which in the former is merry, and the latter gloomy, and secondly, the emphasis on different aspects, as the former is interested in the cyclical change from history to future, and the latter in the present moment. The figure of night combines the two traditions in the play, on one hand it encompasses the awaited moment of nightfall, but it is also a symptom of the eternal recurrence of time, as it was established in 3.2 that the time the characters are waiting is nightfall, for Godot is to arrive then, but the circular, recurrent force of their waiting games prevents them from ever reaching that silent moment of the balance of struggling contraries and time's forward progression. Instead, the night always falls with sudden force, and in a matter of seconds, the twilight of early evening is full night, signalling the renewal of their wait.

Beginning with circularity and the time of the carnival-grotesque tradition, it was established that it is the time of biological life, cyclical and self-renewing. It orients itself towards the future, and it is seen in the play in the image of waiting. In *Godot*, waiting is concretely present in Vladimir and Estragon's games, such as competitive name-calling, playing at being Pozzo and Lucky, as they always note how each distraction "passed the time". Among the most notable instances of games is the hat-changing episode:

> [ESTRAGON *takes* VLADIMIR*'s hat.* VLADIMIR *adjusts* LUCKY*'s hat on his head.* ESTRAGON *puts on* VLADIMIR*'s hat in place of his own which he hands to* VLADIMIR. VLADIMIR *takes ESTRAGON's hat.* ESTRAGON *adjusts* VLADIMIR*'s hat on his head.* VLADIMIR *puts on* ESTRAGON*'s hat in place of* LUCKY*'s which he hands to* ESTRAGON. . .] (Beckett 2006, 63-64)

Vladimir and Estragon go through a needlessly complicated routine of handing and trying on hats back and forth with the only purpose of Vladimir changing his hat for Lucky's. It is obvious that

without a stated goal, the routine is a game. Indeed, Bakhtin argues games to be an essential part of the carnival, as they orient the players towards future, and also to carnivalise and materialise "gloomy eschatological time" (1984; 231-238). Thus they are also part of destroying the dialecticality of time. In the hat game, which was also used as an example of the maliciousness of objects, subjective grotesque spatiality and carnival-grotesque temporality are fused. Perhaps this is why the hat game is not very merry: the superfluous hat is simply dropped to the ground, and the new hat does not make a great difference compared to the old one, even though the old hat "irked" or "itched" Vladimir (Beckett 2006, 64). Esslin argues that the games played in Beckett's works are those of imagining the two extreme limits of human consciousness: the moment of being born, and the moment of dying (1965, 9). Games (and waiting) thus do move their time forwards, but it does orient them towards the future, but towards death *as* the future. Games also become thus co-articulated with another central theme of circularity of the carnival-grotesque time, that of the merry moment of death-birth, when life and death run parallel neither assuming the primary position.

The confluence of death and birth is a theme in *Godot* as well: it was argued that the characters detest life and therefore yearn for death as a happier or reverse birth, and the movement of death and birth is a "meaningless circle" from nothingness into nothingness, with life but a flash between them. (Bruck 1982, 161; Cornwell 1973, 41-44; Metman 1965, 127-128.) As Pozzo says: "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 . . . one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? [*Calmer.*] They give birth astride a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more." (Beckett 2006, 82) We can see how the moment of death-birth is essentially present in the play, but it is anything but merry; rather, it is intolerable, a moment of utmost despair.

Bakhtin's image of death bringing forth life, the senile hag giving birth is fascinatingly reversed in the play: "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. The air is full of our cries." (Beckett 2006, 83) Are the cries in the air the cries of a newborn child, or the cries of an old man in his

death-throes? Or both? The grotesqueness of this image is noted in passing by some critics, it is called a "macabre transubstantiation" (Miskinis 1996, 1047), but not much else is made of it (Tsur 1975, 183-184). Yet if we consider it more carefully, does the image of the hag not depict a transformation of substance that is macabre as well? The only real difference is the change of mood; the grave-diggers forceps views the cycle of death and birth from the viewpoint of death instead of birth.

Furthermore, in the absurd context, waiting—or living for the future—is actually living as a slave for death. This may illuminate why the moment of death-birth is not merry for the characters, but grim and hopeless. Yet they still do not commit suicide, perhaps in some way they are, after all, renewed by death. Perhaps the loss of corporeality plays a part also: the shared corporeality of the carnivalesque mass lends it a kind of immortality, and the characters of *Godot* may be argued to be immortal in the circularity of their time. When nothing changes, no one dies. The absurd man, too, draws strength from the inevitability of dying. It was speculated that the spirit of carnival becomes the spirit of the absurd as the subject turns inwards; may this be the ultimate reason for the lack of merriment of the carnival-grotesque figures? Waiting in the play is a time when death and birth are, in fact, not separated. As the spirit of the absurd prevails, the moment of death-birth is simply afforded a negative mood by focusing on the pole of dying instead of being born.

Turning now to the subjective tradition and the night, it was argued that the play takes mostly place in an eternal twilight between evening and night. The time of the subjective grotesque is one of instantaneous process, in the present moment with the future and the past emptied of meaning. As Bakhtin argues, life and death are strictly opposed, and death loses its renewing aspect (1984; 49, 150). It was previously argued that the characters of *Godot* have no future or past, firstly as absurd characters they are deprived of those, and secondly because the eternally recurring now of their waiting annihilates temporality. The games that are supposed to orient them towards the future only orient them towards death, which has a gloomy renewing aspect in the play.

Furthermore, according to Kayser, the grotesque appears "in the vision of the dreamer . . . or in the twilight of transitional moments" (1981, 186). *Godot* is characterised by dreams or dreaming

and twilightt on many levels. It is argued that Beckett uses the "half-light of suggestion" rather than "overt symbolism" (Esslin 1985, 71), and that the world of *Godot* is a "twilight world" where nothing is certain, and where the characters are not released into either the full consciousness that is identity, or into the state of full unconsciousness that is death or madness, but instead they are kept in the liminal stage of Dying within their inner world, in a "hellish" state of twilight or half-light. (Cornwell 1973, 50; Metman 1965, 122-124; Postlewait 1978, 746.)

Esslin argues that the Theatre of the Absurd relies on dream realities (which he notes are grotesque), and Beckett shows reflections of dreams and nightmares instead of real-life situations (1985, 22-25). Certainly the reality of the play is more reminiscent of dreams with its closed-off boundaries and self-contained spatiality and temporality than of the real world. Dreaming is a recurring theme in *Godot*. In both acts, Estragon sleeps and dreams, but Vladimir wakes him up, refusing to hear what he dreamt about. In the first act, Estragon asks: "This one is enough for you?" while gesturing "*towards the universe*" (Beckett 2006, 8), clearly seeking what Clayborough called a "deeper, more enduring world" of the imagination. In the second act, Estragon describes his dream as falling from the top of something, perhaps recalling Vladimir's earlier regret of not committing a shared suicide with Estragon by jumping "hand in hand, from the top of the Eiffel Tower" (Beckett 2006, 2). This vision of suicide in the process (in the dream he was not yet dead but falling) came to Estragon in his sleep like the grotesque world occurs to the dreamer. Moreover, once more we have interrupted dying, albeit this time a dreamed one.

The grotesque emerges from the twilight, but it pushes one into the night (or void), and the subjective grotesque indeed is nocturnal in nature (Kayser 1981; 36, 58, 71, 79). We saw that the Blanchotian literature is nocturnal as well, it opens a void between itself and the world, and the boundaries between familiar objects disappear into nightly nothingness. In this void, the materiality of language emerges. There is, indeed, is "no lack of void" (Beckett 2006, 57) in *Godot*, where language "echoes in a void" (Postlewait 1978, 483). The materiality of literature, which was argued in 3.2 to permeate the whole play but appeared to be incongruous with the theory, becomes now clear.

The night, or in the case of *Godot*, nightfall, emerges with the experience of the grotesque: boundaries dissolve, a balance of contraries wherein they are not mitigated but the struggle ceases momentarily, creating a grotesque hybrid whole, is reached, and time begins to flow again. Esslin in fact argues that time will *stop* and stable identity will be established once Godot arrives, but actually the opposite of this happens, and Vladimir, mistaking Pozzo for Godot, says: "Time flows again already" (Beckett 2006, 69; Esslin 1965; 53, 90). Naturally Godot will not arrive, but a "secret liberation" is attained: it mitigates the hopelessness of the absurd, and frees the reader and the characters from the abysmal horror of existence. (It was already argued in 2.2 and 3.2 that the hopelessness is mitigated in some way.) In the darkness of the nightfall, the characters are released from the pressures of outside reality, and only uninterrupted, unformed consciousness stays awake in the newly established temporality, as human consciousness is linked to the experience of time (Cornwell 1973, 43; Krieger 1977, 991; Postlewait 1978, 473; Spanos 1971, 347). The half-light of consciousness without individuality, the elusiveness of the self, is not a burden. It is a freedom. Perhaps, then, even the reader (even only for the duration of the play) is released from the exigence of monolithic reality and identity and into the delights of the playfulness of the grotesque. As a final note, we may draw our attention to how in the play the polarities of the carnival-grotesque and subjective grotesque aspects of the temporality of the play are flipped: the carnival-grotesque elements were gloomy and dark, and the subjective grotesque aspects were, if not cautiously positive, at least liberating. This leads us to last section on the grotesque self. The discussion is divided to the reader, the writer and the characters.

The grotesque is born in the mind of the reader; what is experienced as incongruous with the norm and what eludes understanding appears as grotesque. Perhaps similarly, it was argued that only the reader or viewer can force *Godot* to proceed: the act of reading encompasses the oppositions found in Beckett, and the experience of the reader furnishes Beckett's characters with their corporeality. The reader invests the text with meaning and existence—the importance of the reader was similar for Blanchot. Furthermore, the experience of Beckett's actor (not often discussed in conjunction with the grotesque) is noted by Brater; the experience of incongruity, a disconnected

connection between speech and action, wholly different from other types of drama, could also be read in terms of a kind of grotesque experience. (Brater 1975, 205-206; Fifield 2009, 71; Krieger 1977, 990-998.)

The appeal of *Godot* is difficult, if not impossible, to explain, as reading or watching it creates an uneasy feeling. The characters are boring, the action is boring, the staging is boring. There is no plot. There is something vaguely disgusting about it. Still it was among the most popular plays of its time, and its favour continues. Like the grotesque, the reader or viewer may not be certain what has been seen or read, and thus the reading process is turned back to the reader: suddenly the interpretation tells more about the interpreter than the piece itself, the viewer or reader sees himself in the characters, and his life in their lives. The way the play shifts into the reflection of the reader/viewer is a grotesque movement. It simultaneously evokes laughter and horror, like the grotesque, and holds a certain fascination in its gloomy absurdity. The grotesque, too, provokes fascination alongside revulsion, which reduces the distance to the text, and may be explained by "the polarity of the mind" that Clayborough mentions which is torn between the need for explanations and the enjoyment of the incomprehensible. This recalls the writer, to which we shall turn next.

The same ambivalence of mind characterises the writer as well: the grotesque is a product of a mind that rejoices in the inexplicable and the ambivalent. It is characterised by "dream thinking", that is, distortion, dream-like logic, and rejection of organization of thought, but still capable of "organized thinking" (Clayborough 1965, 75). Clayborough adapts this theory from Jung, and Metman's Jungian analysis of *Godot* has shown us that as such, the Jungian framework is not completely applicable to *Godot*. Indeed, the writer is pushed out of his work, and he may not try to grasp it again. Beckett's text reverses the bond of dependency and thus beings to control its author and attain a life of its own (Krieger 1977, 996). Furthermore, the grotesque writer was seen to occupy two positions: that of an absurd character, and of a Blanchotian writer.

The parallels between the absurd man and the grotesque writer, as well as Esslin's view of Beckett and the absurd man were noted. The image of Beckett as a lone, courageous figure who

stands proudly before the void of meaning in the world is paralleled in the grotesque writer, who has an impassioned and rational view of world, and who rebels against being defined from the outside. The grotesque writer endeavours to show the absurdity of the world, and according to Hurley and Oliver the writers of the Theatre of the Absurd share this goal (Hurley 1965, 635-636; Oliver 1963, 234-235). We may come to the conclusion that the public image of Beckett as an author of the absurd (Esslin's view of him is, after all, very influential still) bears a great resemblance to the grotesque writer.

Turning next to the grotesque writer as a Blanchotian character, we read the Kayserian "Es" previously as the Neutral of literature invading the personality of the writer, and the horrifying nature of the grotesque transforms the experience from a sublime into a horrifying one. Furthermore, the grotesque and the Blanchotian literature share the tense ambivalence of meaning and meaninglessness, indeed, the grotesque writer "not only makes; he unmakes" (Clayborough 1965, 58) the meaning in his works—as Beckett does (Krieger 1977, 996). This discussion on the interconnections between the absurd, the meaningless, and the grotesque with Beckett and *Godot* as a site of co-articulation shows us how the grotesque framework is capable of encompassing the absurd and the meaningless—at least in the context of Beckett's works.

Turning to our last topic, the grotesque character. Characters can be grotesque on three levels: in their anomalous appearance, anomalous mental faculties (especially madness), and in monstrous appearance and skills. The characters of *Godot* do not appear monstrous and uncannily skilled in any obvious way (though it was argued they may have some characteristics of the Kayserian non-thing regarding their lack of identity and meaning) but generally might pass as normal, as Pozzo says: "You are human beings none the less. [*He puts on his glasses.*] As far as one can see. [*He takes off his glasses*.] Of the same species as myself. [*He bursts into an enormous laugh*.] Of the same species as Pozzo! Made in God's image!" (Beckett 2006, 15) The derogatory tone may be an indication of Vladimir and Estragon's unkempt appearance as they are apparently homeless. Lucky, on the other hand, looks perhaps somewhat unusual, as Vladimir guesses he suffers from hypothyroidism, but still is "not bad looking" (Beckett 2006, 18). Though Lucky appears to have at

least some degree of deformity, it hardly crosses to grotesqueness.

The relatively lacking anomaly of the characters' physical appearance is, however, compensated for by the anomaly of their mental faculties. The characters seem abstracted, like people in a dream, the cores of their personalities elusive and mutable. Metman argues that they have "an overplus of something" in them. (Esslin 1985, 90-91; Cavell 2002, 131; Metman 1965, 124.) Perhaps this "overplus" is madness: it was argued that the characters escape isolation through madness, which can also be a way of transgressing the limitations of language, as Cornwell argues that absurdity of consciousness is mitigated either by silence or by madness, and we have seen that silence is fused into words in Beckett's grotesque, leaving only madness (Cornwell 2006, 8; Cornwell 1973, 50). Indeed, it was argued that the change from the carnival-grotesque to the subjective grotesque transformed the carnival spirit into an interior experientiality—by the name of hysteria. In hysteria, the openings of the body do not function as a two-way permeable route for the body to take in and go out into the world; in hysteria, the body escapes itself, its own grotesqueness, through the openings. (Matilainen 1996, 55-56; White 1993; 160-168, 177.)

Madness takes two different meanings in the two traditions of the grotesque; in the carnival tradition it is a parody of official truth, recalling perhaps the absurd logic of the characters which seems like a parody of formal logic, and in the subjective tradition it is tragic and isolated, recalling Cornwell's arguments. Vladimir implies that their endless chatter is a way of preventing their "reason from floundering" (Beckett 2006, 72), but if at first it worked, it has become a habit ("a great deadener" [Beckett 2006, 83]) which only contributes to their predicament. He notes, "But has [our reason] not long been straying in the night without end of the abyssal depths?" (Beckett 2006, 73) He denies having been born mad, which suggests that indeed the waiting has made them so. Madness is also a form of meaninglessness: it permits of no name for the condition suffered, it permits no sense to be made of world, life, or self. Thus in the image of madness (and especially hysteria) the division between the subjective and the carnival-grotesque collapse.

Related to madness is its reverse image, the figure of the puppet: the puppet can be considered a form of mental anomaly as well, as Kayser argues that the puppet (or marionette) can manifest in

actual human beings who, lacking substance and nuanced inner motivation, appear to be guided from the outside (1981; 41, 92, 184). Indeed, it has been put forth by Esslin already that the characters of the play are like puppets: It was argued that they are like mechanical puppets, depersonalised and indifferent, whose restricted movements are manipulated from outside as if in an abstraction of the puppet play. Robbe-Grillet argues that the whole play is as if Beckett is simply manipulating puppets; even the actors are turned into Beckett's puppets. (Esslin 1985, 22-24; Figlerowicz 2011, 86; Musgrave 2003; Oliver 1963, 228; Reid 1993; Robbe-Grillet 1965, 116; Spanos 1971, 349.) (Critchley argues that even the critic is turned into Beckett's puppet [1997, 144].)

The characters move about apparently without motivation, the best example is at the beginning of act II, Vladimir enters the stage "*agitatedly*", moves about, for no reason breaks into the dog song, after which "[*he remains a moment silent and motionless, then begins to move feverishly about the stage. He halts before the tree, comes and goes, before the boots, comes and goes, halts extreme right, gazes into distance, extreme left, gazes into distance.*]" (Beckett 2006, 49) This reminds us of the "ominous hustle and bustle" which Kayser described; he is not looking for Estragon, he is not going anywhere, there seems to be no goal to this action, it is as if an outside force moves him from left to right on the stage like a marionette or a puppet. Musgrave argues that the puppet is the "aesthetic principle of the abstract grotesque" in its "immanent grace" (2003), though the specific nature of this gracefulness is questionable, as Vladimir and Estragon are described as "*grotesquely rigid*" (Beckett 2006, 12), implying the very opposite of grace—in fact, implying that the puppetry of the play is inherently grotesque.

Let us discuss next the central characteristic of the grotesque, the body. It was argued in 3.2 that tense ambivalence of the materialised mind takes the place of corporeality, and the contours of the mind are continually transgressed by the ceaseless speaking. However, as Fifield argues, the body is not completely absent from the play, as Beckett has an "irresponsible" attachment to the human form as the crossroads of "embodiment and abstraction" (2009, 57-58). Again we may note how the subjective and the carnival-grotesque views of the human body are combined in the play:

the corporeality of the play is in constant fluctuating transgression of its own limits, collapsing the boundary between the inner and outer worlds is reminiscent of the carnival-grotesque tradition; on the other hand, reminiscent of the subjective tradition is that the body is not a physical entity in itself but an outward projection of the interior infinite or the consciousness, and laughter is not delighted and materialising but linked with annihilation of meaning: "VLADIMIR: One daren't even laugh anymore. ESTRAGON: Dreadful privation." (Beckett 2006, 3) The relationship between the characters and the modern subject was discussed in 3.2.

Furthermore, White argues that madness and fear turn the flesh of the body into a viscous substance between the solid forms and liquid (1993, 164-169). The bodies of the characters thus can be read as metaphorically viscous. However, even more viscous are their identities, which are in a constant flux: it was argued that the characters shift the boundaries of their selves (mentally and physically) by the power of their speech. Speech therefore constitutes a part of their bodies, indeed, it could be read as an abstract prosthesis. White writes of the prosthesis that it *parodies* the proper limb (or other body part), and it is defined by the very absence and deficiency it is intended to cover (1993, 171-173). The speech of the characters, too, has been noted to be an amalgamation of different discourses, and constantly reminds the characters of what they are lacking—space and movement. Figlerowicz's argument, noted in 3.2, that the character's bodies are not the mind's prosthesis, could thus be modified and reversed: speech is the body's prosthesis.

Beckett's characters were likened to abstracted Cubist paintings, but as Fifield notes, their abstraction is not the geometrical fragmentation of Cubism, but the abstraction of corporeality in general, the exaggeration of curves and protuberances, though their corporeality is "compulsively placed in doubt" (Cavell 2002, 131; Fifield 2009; 58-59, 69-70). Furthermore, bodies in Beckett's works are mutilated, deformed and malfunctioning, and it was argued that the abused, dismembered body is grotesque in its openness to the outside world (Bakhtin 1984; 26-27, 211; Fifield 2009, 59-60; Perttula 2011, 28-30). Noteworthy is perhaps that the grotesque body is more often large, excessive, rather than small. This is perhaps Bakhtin's influence, but in Beckett's works, the body is often *excessively* ambivalent, constricted and expanded simultaneously.

While Vladimir and Estragon are the self-evident examples of the viscous corporeality of the prosthetic speech, Lucky serves this purpose as well: As noted, his physical strength varied according to his ability to speak. Furthermore, his speech negotiated the divisions between double entendres and academic discourse, associative lists and other dichotomies, and physically he negotiates the liminal space between male and female, health and sickness, and life and death: he is strong which implies masculinity and health, but also "a trifle effeminate" (Beckett 2006, 18) and suffering from goitre and deformities—he also has a running sore on his throat. Furthermore, he looks "at his last gasp" (Beckett 2006, 19), and his eyes bulge grotesquely out of his head. Lucky demonstrates the collapse of the mind/body division, and the resulting ambivalence of the grotesque body.

Two grotesque bodily phenomena require special attention: laughter, and the reversible actions of eating and defecating. Starting with laughter, in the carnival-grotesque its function is debasing and derision (and through them, renewal), and the laughter in *Godot* much resembles it; it features debasement in the form of crude physical humour (such as falling down), parodies and name-calling (Esslin 1985, 47; Suciu, 9-10). Debasement is closely linked with laughter as laughing induces a pain in Vladimir's pubic area: "[VLADIMIR *breaks into a hearty laugh which he immediately stifles, his hand pressed to his pubis, his face contorted.*] . . . [*Laugh of* VLADIMIR, *stifled as before, less the smile.*]" (Beckett 2006; 3, 11)

Vladimir's laughter is soon stifled, and so the laughter in the play is not the merry, free laughter of the carnivalesque mass. The humour of the play is more in line with the black humour of the subjective grotesque in that it is a "mask over an abyss", as Cornwell says (Cornwell 2006; 43, 116; Schevill 1977, 236; Thomson 1971, 16). Indeed, the play turns the grim humour back on the readers and viewers: while we laugh at the meaningless hustle and bustle and the meaningless word games on the stage or on the page, we are in actuality laughing at our own predicament, our own meaningless lives—though it was argued that the play illustrates the quintessentially modern *conditio humana*, its continued success indicates that the sense of the meaninglessness of life is not solely a twentieth century phenomenon. Thus even though the humour is physical and debasing, it is

not renewing.

Secondly, eating and defecating—or in the case of the play, vomiting, was already discussed in 3.2, but let us have a closer look at it now. Oliver argues that the images of pained and obsessive eating, vomiting, defecating, and general uncleanliness, of "man's impotent degradation" as he calls them, signify the failure to live with the absurd (1963, 233). However, in the carnival-grotesque framework, eating and excrement are closely linked with laughter, and are the main ways of debasing suffering and fear, as excrement combines the womb and the tomb "in the least terrifying way" (Bakhtin 1984, 176). In the act of eating the body transgresses its own limits, and conquers the world. (Bakhtin 1984; 147-151, 174-176, 281-283, 380.) Moreover, meat is, as noted, the quintessential grotesque food, indicative of abundance and fullness of life, but in *Godot*, everything that remains of the banquet of shared meat are the bones: Estragon "makes a dart at them", greedily "gnawing" them, until pocketing them with apparent satisfaction (Beckett 2006, 20-21). But earlier on Estragon noted how "the more you eat, the worse it gets", and Vladimir says that for him, "it's just the opposite" (Beckett 2006, 13). The characters of the play take an emaciated, starving version of the world into their mouth and for their conquest, and fittingly so, for the world is noted to be sparse.

However, conquering of the world in the mouth that is effected by eating is reversed in the act of vomiting which is prevalent in the play. It is even more prominent than defecating, even though Beckett's works convey a "scatological impulse" (Moody 2011, 71). White argues that the body expels "phobic monstrosities" that the mind cannot acknowledge through vomit (1193, 164). Though literal vomiting is absent from the play, Lucky's word-vomit was noted already in 3.2. It is interesting to note that the grotesque is the art of disgus", and word-vomit is the only way of communication, the explosive expelling of stories. But it is not only words which are expelled from the characters as vomit, as Estragon says: "I've puked my puke of a life away here, I tell you!" (Beckett 2006, 53) Life and language are such "phobic monstrosities" that are to be ejected from the bodies of the characters.

Thus there emerges from the play a central, and very grotesque, figure: the mouth. The mouth,

as an opening of the body that both takes in the world and ejects it out, and as a "cave" where the grotesque originates in the form of cave paintings, is perhaps the foundational grotesque body part. It is argued to be a fixation in Beckett's works, and, furthermore, that it is the point of intersection between the non-material and the material world (Esslin 1985, 89; Fifield 2009, 63-66; Harpham 1982, 59). The mouth is foundational, if not essential, for the play as well, for it, far more than any other part, moves the characters, moves the time of the play, moves whatever lingers there of the plot. It also conjures, through speech and as the verbalisation of imagination, into existence most of the phenomena of the bare, inhuman world of the play. It is also the birthplace of the literary realm as the voice that murmurs incessantly. The mouth is where the foundational dichotomies of the play, vomiting and speaking, body and mind, world and human, and the inner and the outer worlds, meet and become co-articulated. And most of all, it is the place where the absurd, the meaningless, and the grotesque intersect.

5. Conclusions, Last Words

The hope that the method employed in this thesis would prove itself was expressed in the Introduction of this thesis. As we have now reached the end, we may reflect on how it has succeeded.

It is in the nature of this "filtration method" as it was called that through each strata of theory and analysis we refine our understanding of the key concepts (world, time, and self), and through those, there emerges a refined image of the work as a whole. The extent to which the very different theories supported each other was not expected: this will be apparent as we summarise the main discoveries of each framework shortly. The method worked in such a way that the concepts grew organically firstly from the theories themselves, and secondly from the previous sections. However, the method requires a process of writing which is very time-intensive, for though the general outlines drew themselves relatively quickly, the process of including and excluding minor key terms was almost cyclical: if a term in a later framework suggested itself very powerfully, analysis had to revert to an earlier phase to compare what had been written of it before.

Yet the purpose of this method is not only to study the strata of meaning of a single play, but to study the strata of meaning of (a limited set) of critical discussions as well. Thus we saw emerging a kind of historical aspect of progression to the analysis of different frameworks: looking at the years of publication of the bulk of criticism in this thesis, it is surprising to notice that the majority of the absurdist criticism is from the 1950 to 1970's, whereas the criticism of meaninglessness is from 1980 to 2010's, and lastly the commentators on the grotesqueness of Beckett's works from the 2000's. This lends some further credibility to the structure of this thesis, which is, after all, constructed so as to give an impression of movement through ever more refined strata of analyses. Of course this is to some extent artificial; the selection of works and themes for discussion under each topic is not accidental, but it must be emphasised that the "historical" aspect has not been a consciously sought outcome. It is purely incidental—and therefore perhaps all the more meaningful?

As a summary, the absurdist tradition viewed *Waiting for Godot* as an essentially finished piece—a fairytale, an allegory, Beckett's personal nightmare; it also read it in terms of Beckett's personal experiences and personality, even though this was explicitly stated to be reductive. However, the fundamentals of what constitute the central themes of the play were discovered, and the division to world, time, and self emerged. The main conclusions that we came to were that the play refuses meaning and narrative; its world is reduced to uncertainty, if not nothingness; its time is circular, and has the form of the placeholder action of waiting, which was waiting for nothing; and the characters had no genuine selves, they were likened to puppets or archetypes.

Moving to the tradition of the meaningless, it viewed *Waiting for Godot* as something unfinished or downright unfinishable—eternally recurrent, or eternally disrupted in the process of becoming something. It also read the play in terms of a more general, open-ended framework than Beckett's personal history and personality. In fact, it was explicitly argued that the writer cannot be used as a framework for the work at all, and that the relationship between the writer and the work is characterised by distance and indifference. We also developed the key concepts discovered in the section on absurdist criticism: Beckett's language attempts to defer signification by the method of

excess and atrophy, but meaning cannot be avoided; the world of the play is the concrete projection of the inner world of the characters, and it is characterised by simultaneous expansion and constriction; the time of the play has two aspects: the time of the artwork which was the time of waiting, which actually deferred Godot's awaited arrival, and the time of Dying which was the absent centre of waiting as the nightfall; and lastly the selves of the characters are characterised by the collapsed mind/body dichotomy which happens through the materialised mind and the emaciated body pushing the polarities of the dichotomy towards each other. It became clear that the two traditions, absurd and meaningless, were in opposition on many aspects, though they were essentially derivative of each other.

Lastly, it was seen that the tradition of grotesque reconciles the apparent or superficial differences between the absurd and meaningless traditions by using this very clash as its starting point. The tradition of the grotesque itself was seen to be fundamentally divided into two, the subjective and the carnival-grotesque traditions. The main discovery was that in all three main aspects of the study, the play combines the traditions of the subjective and the carnival-grotesque, creating a composite, if not new, grotesque. The effect of the grotesque, as a whole, was that of reflecting the studied phenomena back to the reader/viewer, in a movement which relocated the locus of meaning onto the reader/viewer, thus truly legitimising simultaneous meaningfulness and meaninglessness.

The discoveries of the individual aspects could be summarised as following: Beckett's language is a hybrid of speech and silence which pushes the poles of dichotomic opposites towards one another; the world of the play is a concrete projection of the emotions, the fear, disgust, and amusement, the reader/viewer experiences in an unstable world of searching for and jeopardizing any ultimate truth; the time of the play was again divided into two: into the time of waiting and games which was the gloomy yet renewing moment of death-birth in the spirit of the absurd, and into the time of the nightfall into which the grotesque finally pushes the play and the reader/viewer, releasing both from the pressure of outside reality and identity; and lastly the self in the play: discovering the intersection of all three frameworks in the image of writer, but more importantly in

the image of the mouth where the foundational dichotomies of the play, vomiting and speaking, body and mind, world and human, and the inner and the outer worlds, meet and become co-articulated. And most of all, it is the image where the absurd, the meaningless, and the grotesque intersect. It is interesting to note how the carnival-grotesque tradition corresponded with the absurdist tradition in its themes and assumptions, whereas the subjective grotesque tradition corresponded more closely with the tradition of the meaningless. The grotesque was thus discovered "buried" into the earlier established criticism itself as a palimpsest tradition, oblique and only occasionally glimpsed at.

Indeed, the grotesque forms and meanings that emerge from the margins of *Waiting for Godot* are analogous to how the grotesque emerges from the margins of the criticism: "between the lines" and "buried" beneath the other strata of meanings, only hinted or suggested at on the explicit level, but as we begin our filtration work, it opens new possibilities of mitigating, but importantly not negating, the clash of the incommensurate elements of the play. The grotesque has travelled as a shadow passenger all along the history of Theatre of Absurd, all the way from Esslin and his notes on the mouth; Thomson argues that the grotesque acts as "potting soil" for the absurd: grotesque "on a grand scale leads" to a "notion of universal absurdity" (1971, 31). Though *Waiting for Godot* seems not to invite grotesque meanings, they grow out of it, so much like strange, disgusting and beautiful, flowers, given the opportunity.

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