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**‘one other living soul’: Encountering Strangers in Samuel Beckett’s  
Dramatic Works**

This essay seeks to explore an admittedly minor area of the study of Samuel Beckett’s drama – the encounter with strangers, and one’s relations with strangers. It is the rarity of such situations that makes it perhaps worth investigating, because these encounters shed light on Beckett’s more general dramatic concerns. As is well acknowledged, Beckett’s theatrical work tends to focus on small groups in close and clear relations with one another, or indeed with individuals enduring memories or voices that will not let them rest (here one might nominate, as examples, *Eh Joe* or *Embers*). Setting aside those individuals, the tight concentration of Beckett’s writing upon a few individuals in a specific relation to one another – as in perhaps *Come and Go* or *Play*—is one of the playwright’s most common dramatic elements, and likely represents an aspect of his famous efforts towards concentration and compression of dramatic experience. By studying the opposite of these instances, particularly when his characters encounter or remember encountering strangers, this paper hopes to gain some insight upon the more general trends of Beckett’s stagecraft and dramatic themes.

It should be acknowledged at the outset, however, that there are a number of ambiguous situations in Beckett’s drama relating to the question of how closely individuals know or relate to one another. A simple survey of people who are obviously strangers or are clearly known to one another is not easily accomplished in Beckett’s drama. An illustration of this is provided by *Quad*. Beckett’s directions indicate that the players should seem quite similar, perhaps suggesting some manner of unity, either of identity or of fate. The players are described as being ‘as alike in build as possible. Short and slight for preference...adolescents a possibility. Sex indifferent.’ (Beckett 1990: 453) When filmed or performed, they are differentiated by the colour of their gowns (excepting in *Quad II*, where the robes appear in black-and-white as a dull grey), yet they all look remarkably similar, and move at a necessarily regulated pace required by the rigorous theatrical blocking of their movements near and around one another. Although their musical cues are different, suggesting different identities, the similarity of their clothing, and the uniformity of their pacing and actions, suggests at least a similarity of destiny or of task. Their avoidance of the central section of the square is visually compelling, because it is at that point that they meet; it might be suggested that they are individuals performing the same task (or penance) who shudder away from meeting others in the same plight. Yet Beckett somewhat undermines this assessment by noting in his directions ‘E [the central place the

players avoid] supposed a danger zone. Hence deviation.' (Beckett 1990: 453) One might reasonably posit that the area of potential meeting or collision is a 'danger zone' precisely because it is where one is forced to confront others; yet there is equally nothing to suggest that it is not a danger zone for other unexplained reasons.

This mention of *Quad* is made only to illustrate the earlier point that some of Beckett's dramatic characters, particularly in the later plays and television works, do not exist in a clear relation to one another. It is entirely possible to argue that the players of *Quad* are people who do exactly the same thing because they have been condemned to the same repetitive fate, potentially forever; it does equally no injustice to the text or the performance to suggest that they are people similar in stature, mobility, and clothing who repeatedly avoid the one chance they might have to encounter one another. This simple observation is merely intended to clarify the remainder of this paper: it attempts to identify and analyze Beckett's use of strangers and the encounter of strangers in his dramatic works, yet to determine whether or not Beckett's players really know one another is sometimes a question of interpretation dependent upon one's own textual reading.

This might also be true of *What Where* and *Catastrophe*. In *Catastrophe*, it is clear that the director and the assistant know their victim on the plinth; yet it is never made particularly clear whether or not the figure on the plinth knows his assailants. This is something that is textually unclear, and largely the purview of the directors and actors of productions. For the purposes of this paper, however, the point is merely that the figure on the plinth has no clear relationship with the people abusing him, at least in terms of whether or not he knows them and has previous experience of them. His resistance may suggest familiarity. In a slightly analogous manner, *What Where* would seem to depict—or at least, so this paper would argue—a specific group of people known to one another. Bam, Bem, Bim, and Bom are all figures similar in clothing and name, and the Voice of Bam refers to them as a collective: 'We are the last five. In the present as were we still.' (Beckett 1990: 470) In dialogue they refer to one another occasionally by name, although also occasionally by the vaguer pronoun 'he.' Beckett's intention appears to be to suggest their uniformity, particularly as his instructions state clearly 'Players as alike as possible.' (Beckett 1990: 469) Yet one might posit an interpretation of *What Where* in which these players were not particularly known to one another, and may indeed be strangers, and were simply elements of a mechanism of repression. The similarity of their names could suggest fictitious identities or assumed names, and their similarity of clothing might suggest, in some sense, the uniforms of a group. This is not an interpretation advanced by this essay, yet it would at least 'make sense' of the players' readiness to give each other the works, apparently without remorse; if they were unknown to one another, or were merely similar functionaries in a system, they might be more willing to turn on 'alike' others with viciousness.

Having noted that there is some ambiguity in Beckett's dramas regarding the precise relations of some characters with others, it is then useful to identify those dramatic works eliminated from consideration here, and to explain by what criteria. Some of these

again present ambiguous relations, and readers may wish to object to the eliminations here. This may be exemplified by the previously noted *Eh Joe*. There is no actual meeting on the stage or screen, and the precise relation of the voice to Joe is a debatable question; is she an unstilled voice Joe has been unable to silence with his ‘mental thuggee,’ as seems most likely? Is she the voice of his conscience? Numerous interpretations are available, yet it would be perverse to suggest that such intimate knowledge of Joe and his mental processes would in any sense be available to a stranger. Because of that improbability, *Eh Joe* is excluded from consideration here, despite an ultimately unclear relation of the voice to Joe.

*Come and Go* provides an illustration of a more clear elimination. Flo, Vi, and Ru all appear incontestably to know one another. They refer to one another by name, and make clear references to past acquaintance: ‘What do you think of Vi? I see little change’; ‘How do you find Flo? She seems much the same.’ (Beckett 1990: 355) It is therefore clear that these individuals know one another, and have known one another before the action of the play begins. What is less clear is their exact relation. They might be sisters, or friends, or old colleagues, or any number of other potential relationships among women. Yet it would seem a strange interpretation to suggest that they were strangers in any employable sense of the word.

Thus, this paper proposes not to consider the following dramatic works, for the following reasons. *Act Without Words I* contains only one character. It is uncertain who or what is doing the actions to this individual, specifically the whistling, throwing him from the wings back onto the stage, and raising and lowering properties such as the carafe and the scissors. But there is nothing to suggest that this is a stranger. In *Act Without Words II*, A and B do not interact. They may be strangers to one another, but they do not encounter one another. That they carry one another, perhaps unwittingly, is a gentle suggestion of human commonality. *Breath* has no characters as such. ‘...but the clouds...’ contains no clear strangers; the ‘she’ invoked appears to be a known individual who has a history with the speaker ‘With those unseeing eyes I so begged when alive to look at me.’ (Beckett 1990: 420) *Cascando* certainly deals with the question of being misunderstood by others (both Opener and Woburn seem to feel misunderstood by others, or threatened by their ability to recognize him, in Woburn’s case), yet there are no evident strangers in the text. *Catastrophe*, as mentioned, indicates that the director and the assistant are familiar with the protagonist figure on the plinth, and the uncertainty of his relation to them is not sufficient to suggest that *Catastrophe* should be included in this analysis. *Come and Go*, for the reasons elaborated above, is also excluded, as is *Eh Joe*. In *Footfalls*, May and the Mother clearly know one another; Amy’s involvement is less certain, as Stephen Watt notes: ‘Is the Mother talking to May or Amy, or are they one and the same person?’ (Watt 2009: 34) However one chooses to answer this question, it would seem obtuse to suggest that May, Amy, and the Mother are in some sense unknown to one another. *Ghost Trio*, Beckett’s haunting television play, portrays a man waiting; yet the woman’s voice on the screen does not appear to be audible to him, and the child who appears and shakes his head is indeter-

minately related to the listener. *Happy Days* revolves around two individuals, Winnie and Willie. Although the vagueness of the Showers, or Cookers, suggests lack of familiarity, the audience does not see them, and there is nothing definite to suggest that they are unknown to Winnie. *Nacht und Träume* has no suggestion that the dreamer, and his dreamed self, are in any sense different beings. The hands that succour him are not identifiable. It is comforting to imagine them as the consoling hands of a stranger, but that is not an assumption validated by the text itself—they may be delusory hands dreamed in hallucination. *Not I* shows us the arresting spectacle of a gibbering mouth, yet it seems that the mouth expresses a desire for alienation, not alienation itself. Her refrain is negating—'What? Who? No. She!' (Beckett 1990: 377) The fascinating auditor of helpless compassion has no clear relationship with the mouth, be it friend, ally, or empathetic bystander; the compassion argues against a foe. If it is a stranger, it suggests a unity of human commiseration that the 'mouth' has never experienced. *A Piece of Monologue* has no obvious strangers noted in it. *Play* shows three individuals united in some Dantescan eternal groaning triad, lamenting their relations, but clearly known to one another and unable to break free of one another. The casually mentioned individuals, Erskine the butler and the 'bloodhound' private detective, never appear. *Quad*, as discussed previously, is open to numerous interpretations of the relations amongst the players, yet it is eliminated here as being too ambiguously constructed to serve a useful purpose in an analysis of this manner. *Rough for Radio I* reveals an uncertain relationship between the woman and Macgillicuddy, but there is little to suggest that they are strangers. *Rough for Radio II* shows us 'the same old team' (Beckett 1990: 275) beating Fox; his mention of Maud, and his evidently unspawned twin, are untraceable. It is an intriguing but surely unintended thematic linkage to *All That Fall*, with the woman who 'had never really been born.' (Beckett 1990: 196) *Words and Music* seems to portray characters so well known to one another that they may make parodies of each other's expressive patterns.

It is worth pausing here for a moment to reflect on the previous eliminations. They constitute most of Beckett's dramatic output, at least numerically. Some of these eliminated represent Beckett's most accomplished or transgressive works, such as *Happy Days* for merit and *Not I* for radicality. This indicates the intensity of Beckett's focus upon individuals or small groups of people in tight, clearly defined relationships. It is also worth observing, in the context of this paper, that these exclusions also apply across Beckett's dramatic works—we see the presence here of plays for the stage, radio, and television. Yet let us then look at those dramatic works that demonstrate a character, or characters, encountering unknown individuals.

*All That Fall* poses fascinating questions in regard of the relationships amongst its characters. Mrs. Rooney appears to know and be known by the people she encounters; she greets by name Christy, Mr. Tyler, Mr. Slocum, Tommy, Mr. Barrell, Miss Fitt, Dan Rooney, and Jerry. This is almost the entire cast, with the exception of the 'female voice' and 'Dolly', both minor characters peopling the train station. The play depicts what is clearly intended to be a small, tightly-knit community in which everyone seems to know

everyone else, making the potential implication of Mr. Rooney's evident pushing of the child off the train all the more shocking. Yet it is precisely the ambiguity of Mr. Rooney's involvement that is so unsettling. The text is notably indefinite about Mr. Rooney's actual involvement in the child's falling under the tracks, although his remarks seem implicative and culpable. It is certainly disquieting that he should choose the day of this death to remark 'Did you ever wish to kill a child? Nip some young doom in the bud. Many a time at night, in winter, on the black road home, I nearly attacked the boy.' (Beckett 1990: 191) His later desire to prevent Maddy from questioning the boy Jerry, and his strange possession of 'a kind of ball' certainly look suspicious at the least. But the text never commits itself to identifying Mr. Rooney as the agent of the child's death, so his exact involvement—if any at all—is uncertain. There is no reason to suppose that the child was known to Mr. Rooney in any case, thus making the child one of the only strangers in the play—and, presumably, Mr. Rooney to the child. In the context of this paper, however, it is notable that Mr. Rooney makes no mention of a child's death, even if he did not cause it. His story relates to thinking that the train had arrived in a station, concluding that this was an error, then pacing after a feeling of confinement, followed by a trip to the lavatory compartment. He makes no mention of a dead child, giving the impression that in *All That Fall* strangers are either indifferent observers of one's demise, or direct assailant causing that death.

*Eleutheria* is less illuminating on the subject of strangers. This is largely because the humorous elements of the play depend, to a degree, on the ludicrous lack of distance separating characters who have just encountered one another. The Glazier, for example, appears immediately upon Victor's breaking the window with his shoe, introduces his assistant as though none of them had ever met ('this is my assistant. He carries the putty.' (Beckett 1996: 66)), and then intrudes into Victor's life for the remaining two acts. The arrival of Dr. Piouk is met with the offbeat banalities that seem to pass for polite conversation in the Krap family. A Spectator simply joins the players on the stage, commenting on the action, and speaking with the cast, as though this were the most natural response to a play in performance. Two different thugs appear at different times to menace Victor: Joseph the 'hatchet man', and Chouchi the 'Chinese torturer.' (Beckett 1996: 3)

Where *Eleutheria* offers matter of interest for this essay lies in the conception it depicts of strangers and alienation as being unavoidably intrusive. As noted above, the Glazier involves himself quite extensively in Victor's life, both to conduct interrogations of Victor and to protect him from Joseph. Yet Victor quite clearly does not know the Glazier: 'What's more I don't owe you any explanations. Who are you? I don't know you. Chuck it in. And fuck off.' (Beckett 1996: 82) Towards the end of the questioning of Victor in Act 3, he exclaims 'Saints, madmen, martyrs, victims of torture—they don't bother you in the least, they are in the natural order of things, They are strangers, you will never be one of them, at least you hope you won't.' (Beckett 1996: 145) This, in a sense, is the core of *Eleutheria*, in that the 'saints, madmen, martyrs, victims of torture' are people entirely outside banal bourgeois society from which Victor wishes to be free. Their inability to integrate themselves into society, or their refusal to do so, represents a kind of freedom to

which Victor aspires. He yearns to be a stranger, unlike the Glazier and the Spectator; yet he cannot alienate himself from his family or himself, however hard he may try. His family finds him, his fiancée is able to find him, Dr. Piouk can track him down with fatal doses, and he is never beyond the reach of their reproaches because he depends upon his mother for subsidies. When he, therefore, expresses his desire to be free, it is, in a certain sense, the desire to be a stranger not only to others, but also to himself: 'At first I was a prisoner of other people. So I left them. Then I was a prisoner of myself. That was worse. So I left myself.' (Beckett 1996: 147) As Beckett later demonstrated in *Film*, to leave oneself is the most radical and difficult separation of all.

*Embers* also raises pointed questions of self, identity, and the presence of others. Henry's various attempts to summon (or evoke) the dead suggest that he has no one still with whom to speak, except perhaps Addie. His father is dead, and Ada comes to him this last time. These are obviously people very close to him, whether or not Ada was ever properly a wife. His world, possibly excepting the sea and the shore, is almost entirely in his head, even his companions. As his ability to summon listeners fades, he resurrects an old unfinished story about Bolton and Holloway, and they too are old friends. Bolton summons Holloway, and he comes, but he reflects on how badly he has been treated, particularly by a friend: '...doesn't understand, call a man out, an old friend, in the cold and dark, an old friend.' (Beckett 1990: 255-6) Friends, therefore, in *Embers*, are the people one inconveniences with summonses, until one drives them away and they return no more, as Ada apparently ceases to do in the play.

*Embers* does not involve strangers as such, except as evidencing the extremity of Henry's isolation. As Ruby Cohn observes, *Embers* 'peoples a mind to show the aloneness of living.' (Cohn 1973: 218) Notably, Ada states to Henry 'the time will come when no one will speak to you at all, not even complete strangers.' (Beckett 1990: 262) It is arguable that this time has already come; the audience hears what seem to be only the sounds in Henry's mind, and there is no reliable evidence that anyone interacts with him on the shore upon which he walks and sits. Because Henry appears to need auditors, and chooses those who had been close to him, the fact that he may soon be rejected even by strangers, and may already have reached that state, is suggestive of his isolation.

*Endgame*, perhaps Beckett's most claustrophobic and confined play, depicts the entangled quartet of Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell. The ferocity of the play lies in their simultaneous dependency upon, and resentment of, each other. Yet strangers do appear in at least two contexts in the play: one through memory or invention, and the other as a real child. The intrusion of a stranger is the body of Hamm's narrative. In it he tells of a man who has crawled 'three whole days' to obtain some food for his sleeping son. It is never entirely clear whether or not this was an occurrence or an invention of Hamm's; if a real event, it seems unavoidable that this is meant to suggest how Clov came into Hamm's orbit. Yet what is of importance in the story is not the potential origin of Clov – which is unprovable on this evidence anyway—but the treatment that the 'I' in Hamm's narrative provides to the crawling man. In a world of scarcity and hunger, the narrator agrees to take

this man into his employ, and to allow him to bring his son. This, we must assume, indicates a willingness to feed them in exchange for work, particularly as the item specified in this scene is corn kept in granaries. This is telling because it suggests that the crawling man received slightly more compassion than the apparently real individual Mother Pegg, who was rebuffed in her need, as Clov reminds Hamm: ‘When old Mother Pegg asked you for oil for her lamp and you told her to get out to hell, you knew what was happening then, no? You know what she died of, Mother Pegg? Of darkness.’ (Beckett 1990: 129)

An apparent act of kindness appears startlingly later in the play, when Clov believes that he has spied a boy from the window. Clov’s initial reaction is to venture forth and club him with the gaff, but he is stopped in this by Hamm. Clov marvels at this leniency for ‘a potential procreator’, yet Hamm insists that the child has no future: ‘If he exists he’ll die there or he’ll come here.’ (Beckett 1990: 131) There is obviously no female with whom the child could procreate in Hamm’s bunker, so the extinction of his bloodline would be assured in either eventuality. Yet the reference to the child as a ‘potential procreator’ aligns him with Nagg, who is abused for being an ‘accursed fornicator’ and an ‘accursed progenitor.’ (Beckett 1990: 96) This is curious, in that Hamm repeatedly abuses Nagg verbally, yet he has mercy on an unknown child who may commit the same atrocity—human reproduction—of which Nagg is guilty. It is a strangely compassionate moment in an otherwise bleak depiction of the world.

*Film* is worth noting here simply because of the reactions of the individuals encountered by the perceived individual who keeps rushing from self-perception. There is nothing to indicate that they know or do not know the man, yet his interactions with them seem casual and unintended. Their reaction, however, is one of shock and despair, as they come also to be perceived and, perhaps, to know that they are being perceived. Beckett’s phrase for this condition is unsurpassable: ‘an agony of perceivedness.’ (Beckett 1990: 325) In this sense, *Film* is relevant to this study because it demonstrates that the most chance encounter with another may, even without that other’s desire or aim, bring about a startling and traumatic understanding of oneself.

*Krapp’s Last Tape* depicts a desperately isolated individual, also sequestered in a room, but one who keeps company only with the past. Yet where Henry from *Embers* must summon his friends and family from his invention or memory, Krapp does so through his recorded birthday diaries. That he must keep himself company and has no one with whom to share his recollections is evidentiary of his loneliness. It seems that his only interactions now are with the past, as we see enacted on the stage, and his transactions with Fanny, the ‘bony old ghost of a whore.’ (Beckett 1990: 222)

What is open for question is how much Krapp ever interacted with others in any sense. He mentions living with Bianca on Kedar Street, but we learn nothing further about her except that he feels himself ‘well out of that.’ (Beckett 1990: 218) Then there is the girl in the boat, of whom we again learn nothing much except that they agreed that it was ‘hopeless and no good going on.’ (Beckett 1990: 221) These affairs at least suggest a man capable of attracting women’s attention, even if he later loses or squanders it through

neglect. Yet it is significant for this paper that he shares a major moment of his life—the death of his mother—in the company of strangers. As he describes the situation he recalls 'hardly a soul, just a few regulars, nursemaids, infants, old men, dogs. I got to know them quite well – oh by appearance of course I mean!' (Beckett 1990: 219) The emphasis on 'by appearance of course' indicates that he does not actually know these people, and merely recognizes them because they are 'regulars.' When he at last notices that his mother has died, and the blind been drawn down, he is companioned only by a small white dog. Beckett denotes Krapp's solitude and isolation by emphasizing the commonality of these moments – 'Her moments, my moments. The dog's moments.' (Beckett 1990: 220) Curiously, these are the last moments for his mother, and he shares them not with her, but with the dog – a moment oddly reminiscent of Hamm's mention, in *Endgame*, of 'My father? My Mother? My...dog?' (Beckett 1990: 93) It appears that Beckett associates the companionship of animals with the isolation of the individual from other human relations.

*Ohio Impromptu*, Beckett's strange and elegant late play, gives readers or audience members one of Beckett's most compassionate depictions of the visitation of strangers. As in several of his later works, the players are essentially mirror images of one another, suggesting a fusion or replication or echoing. Yet this duplication does not have the horrific violence of the similarity of Bam, Bem, Bim, and Bom – here, the reader has come, directed by the lost dear one, to comfort the auditor. 'A man appeared to him and said, I have been sent by – and here he named the dear name – to comfort you.' (Beckett 1990: 447) The comforting appears to be reliving the story of the dear one, as read from the worn book carried by the reader. It is this act of providing comfort that unites them, as the text states unambiguously: 'with never a word exchanged they grew to be as one.' (Beckett 1990: 447) This compassionate act is coming to an end in the performance the audience sees. It is nominated as the last time, and the auditor states clearly and repeatedly, 'nothing is left to tell.' (Beckett 1990: 448) Although this mission is coming to an end, and another visit is stated as being beyond the reader's power, it is their unity that is striking in the play. Having lost the dear one, the auditor is now comforted by her messenger, whose mission has given him the characteristics of the one he is comforting. It provides a pleasant contrast to the violence bred of similarity we observe in *What Where*.

The two *Roughs for Theatre* are apparently little-known outside of Beckett scholarship, which is unfortunate, as they are both engaging dramas and both contain material apposite for the present study. *Rough for Theatre I* presents the audience with two beggars, each apparently unknown to the other. One is blind whereas the other has one crippled leg. The immediate response of B is to propose companionship to A: 'we join together, and live together, till death ensues.' (Beckett 1990: 227) He later expresses the belief that 'we were made for each other.' (Beckett 1990: 229) This supposition is justifiable, in that they each call the other 'poor wretch' and have corresponding, yet curiously complimentary, disabilities (they are also, of course, characters in a play, and thus certainly are made for each other). Yet the willingness of B to abuse A with his stick, even during a moment of kindness, causes a breach between them. This is quickly passed over, however, by A's ap-

parent willingness to assist B, who remarks ‘I struck him and he succoured me.’ (Beckett 1990: 231) At the end, A ambiguously seizes B’s stick, but whether to strike back, or merely prevent himself from being hit again, is unclear. What makes the play intriguing for this essay is the demonstration it provides of casual strangers offering each other potential menace and potential compassion. These two individuals demonstrate a willingness to share time with one another, and A helps B even after being struck, but B hits A for no supportable reason, and A may, as mentioned, in the end intend to hit B back. It is a small but effective distillation of Beckett’s concern for the ambivalent possibilities strangers pose for threat or assistance.

*Rough for Theatre II* also has two characters called A and B, although their names are revealed in the text to be Bertrand and Morvan. They are some type of agents of destiny, although they curiously rely upon dossiers and testimonials. It appears that they have come to provide a final assessment of whether or not a man standing in a window frame should jump to his death. Yet they seem not to know him. They rely upon documents gathered from his friends and associates, ‘the best sources. All weighed and weighed again, checked and verified. Not a word here that is not cast iron.’ (Beckett 1990: 238) In the context of this essay, what is compelling is the idea that people may assess one—friends, or these strange agents – on the basis of incomplete understanding and little individual knowledge. There is little, or nothing, in the documents to keep the man from jumping, and A and B seem content to let him jump, yet he does not. In this we may perhaps see Beckett’s continuing preoccupation with the perceptions of others, and the inability or unwillingness of the individual to kill oneself, even if there are no good reasons not to do so.

*That Time* presents us with one of Beckett’s isolated characters, and would therefore appear to be excludible from this consideration. The play reveals a man hearing voices; he has, in Hugh Kenner’s phrase, ‘a past to resuffer, transmute or destroy.’ (Kenner 1968: 224) Yet in the latter stages of the play the voices relate of his experiences with others, as an object of their observation: ‘not a curse for the passers pausing to gape at the scandal huddled there in the sun.’ (Beckett 1990: 393) It is at this point that ‘it dawned that for all the loathing you were getting you might as well not have been there at all the eyes passing over you and through you like so much thin air.’ (Beckett 1990: 394) *That Time* therefore merits inclusion in this study, as it demonstrates the revulsion with which strangers observe a man in extremis, as well as his response. Their interaction is damning—the passersby cross the street or look at the man and ignore him, and he does not engage them except to note their repulsion and indifference, and remember it. It is a damning indictment of human interactions.

*Waiting for Godot* is without doubt Beckett’s greatest meditation on the influence of strangers upon an individual or group of individuals. It is a world in which one is beaten, but one doesn’t know whether it was ‘the same lot as usual.’ (Beckett 1990: 11) Vladimir and Estragon are clear companions, but whether or not they have ever encountered Pozzo and Lucky is uncertain. As Vladimir remarks to Estragon, towards the end of the first act, ‘We know them, I tell you. You forget everything. Unless they’re not the same...’ (Beckett

1990: 47) In *Waiting for Godot* it is the ambiguity of relationships that makes for such tremendous theatrical unease; Vladimir and Estragon are uncertain whether or not their nighttime assailants are the same people, they cannot recall whether or not they have met Pozzo and Lucky before, they are uncertain whether or not Godot arranged to meet them at this specific place and time, and they cannot recall whether or not the boy messenger is the same individual who has come to them before.

It is notable, however, that we see one interaction of apparent strangers in *Waiting for Godot*, when Pozzo and Lucky appear on the stage. Vladimir and Estragon remain generally polite and courteous, and Lucky remains mute. Yet Pozzo, it would appear, seeks to intimidate or overwhelm them; Beckett's stage instructions specify that the actor employ a 'terrifying voice' to declare 'I am Pozzo!' (Beckett 1990: 23) It is apparently Pozzo's habit to dishearten or alarm strangers, just as he controls Lucky.

In a more general sense, *Waiting for Godot* is about how one encounters others. Vladimir and Estragon are famously where they have agreed to be; in a world without order or reliability, at least they have kept their appointment. Godot's absence reflects badly upon him, a point that is oddly uncommonly made – Godot is, in a persuasive sense, not *worth* waiting for. That he sends a boy to communicate a message is slightly mitigating, although the child conveys merely a message of reappointment only, not a rational reason for missing the meeting. Lucky, abused though he is, is considered 'wicked. With strangers.' (Beckett 1990: 23) He has every right to be: even his closest associate is a master who drives him on, apparently whips him, does not appear to treat the rubbing sore caused by the rope on his neck, makes him dance and think as showpieces, and intends to sell him at the market. Pozzo is imperious and masterful, as befits one in power. His roars and commands are the bluster of the arrogant, the assumed authority of the presumed superior.

There is, of course, also the question of Godot himself. The characters clearly do not recognize him, as they are initially uncertain whether or not Pozzo is Godot. Pozzo himself expresses interest in Godot, as they seem to mistake him for the unknown man. It is uncertain how the arrangements were made; although Vladimir seems quite certain that there has been some exchange of information – 'He said by the tree' (Beckett 1990: 15) – even this is imprecise and allows for transmitted speech. It is entirely possible that they have only dealt with emissaries, another possibility suggested by Vladimir's identification of the child in Act I, despite the child's negations, 'I have seen you before, haven't I?' (Beckett 1990: 49) Again, Beckett's text suggests that this is a misidentification or a misremembering, yet it is significant that Vladimir asserts that he has met some messenger of Godot previously, as it indicates that they may never have interacted with Godot in any sense other than through emissaries. In this sense lies the greatest contrast between the apparently consequential Godot and the seemingly downtrodden Vladimir and Estragon – it is the latter who have done the courteous thing and kept their appointment. Whatever their miseries, they treat strangers with courtesy (a fact evidenced also by their generally courteous treatment of Pozzo and Lucky).

In the end, as may be seen, Beckett's primary dramatic focus is not upon encountering strangers. Beckett is much more readily identifiable as the creator of tightly woven interpersonal dramas, or interior monologues expressed through dreams, groans, or hallucinations. Yet it may be profitable to examine those instances in which Beckett depicts the encounter with a stranger in his dramatic works, as these instances give indications of general trends in his drama. Notably, three points seem justifiable and notable. 1) It is remarkable how comparatively rare strangers are in Beckett; he is very much a dramatist of the interrelations of known individuals, or interior monologues. 2) It is notable also how many of the characters in Beckett's plays exist in ambiguous relations to one another. Many of the exclusions made above might well be contested with justice. Similarly, a number of relations examined herein may appear to readers to suggest that one or more players has been falsely identified as a stranger. The potential validity of these objections demonstrates how equivocal and enigmatic the relations are amongst many of Beckett's characters. 3) It is striking how often strangers harm one another in Beckett's writing. Whether it be Mr. Rooney potentially knocking a child off the train, the Glazier smashing Joseph the hatchet man unconscious, strangers beating Estragon in the night, the readiness of Clov to gaff a young boy (he appears ready, despite being stayed by Hamm), or the willingness of Bim, Bam, Bom and Bem to beat one another into weeping and confessions, it seems common in Beckett's drama that one should seek to minimize contacts with strangers, because they bring with them intrusion, potential peril, and physical harm. Strangers occasionally show mercy, as do Vladimir and Estragon to Pozzo and Lucky, A and B in *Rough for Theatre II*, or the reader in *Ohio Impromptu*. Yet in Beckett's drama the compassion of strangers is uncertain, and the menace they present is all too alarmingly consistent. It seems clear that in Beckett's world strangers rarely feel the ethical compulsion of Levinas to care for the other: '...since the Other looks at me, I am responsible for him, without even having taken on responsibilities in his regard; his responsibility is incumbent on me.'

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ენდრიუ გუდსპიდი  
(მაკედონია)

## „სხვა სულიერი“: უცხო სამუელ ბეკეტის დრამატურგიაში

### რეზიუმე

**საკვანძო სიტყვები:** სამუელ ბეკეტი, დრამატურგია, უცხო, დაპირისპირება.

სტატიაში განხილულია უცხოს არსებობა სამუელ ბეკეტის დრამებში, აღწერილია უცნობ ინდივიდთა შეჯახება. ბეკეტის დრამატურგიულ ნაწარმოებების, სასცენო დადგმებისა და რადიო-ტელევიზიო კომპოზიციების განხილვის საფუძველზე, გაანალიზებულია ის უცნობი მოქმედი პირები, რომლებიც, სცენასა თუ ეკრანზე, კონტაქტს ამყარებენ მთავარ პერსონაჟებთან. კვლევის შედეგად ირკვევა, რომ უცხო/უცნობი გმირები ბეკეტის დრამატურგიაში მცირე რაოდენობით, თითქმის ყველა პიესაში გვხვდება, მისი პირველი განუხორციელებელი პიესით – „ელოთერია“-თი დაწყებული, ბოლო პერიოდის ნაწარმოებების ჩათვლით, როგორცაა „რა სად“. უცხოებთან ურთიერთობის აუცილებლობა მისი ყველაზე მნიშვნელოვანი ტექსტების მთავარ ელემენტად ყალიბდება, მათ შორისაა ყველაზე სახელგანთქმული – „გოდოს მოლოდინში“. კვლევის შედეგად, სტატიაში გაკეთებულია დასკვნა, რომ უცხოთა შეჯახება ბეკეტის დრამებში, ჩვეულებრივ, უკავშირდება სხვისი უფლებების მითვისებას, საკუთარი აზრის თავსმოხვევას, დესტრუქციასა და პოტენციურ ძალადობას უცნობებს შორის, თუმცა, იშვიათ შემთხვევაში უცხოთა ურთიერთობა თანაგრძნობის, ურთიერთგაგებისა და სიმპათიის გამომხატველიც არის.