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BECKETT'S THEORY OF REPETITION

BY

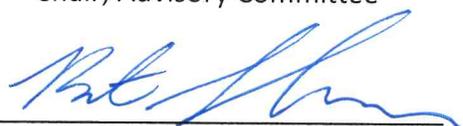
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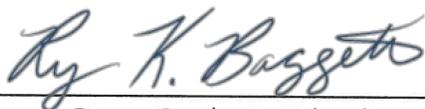


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Date: 8 May 2022

SAMUEL BECKETT'S THEORY OF REPETITION

BY

KENNEDY CARPENTER

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Eastern Kentucky University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

2022

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis explores playwright, Samuel Beckett, and his use of repetition within four of his plays. The way in which repetition is discussed and shown in his plays displays Beckett's own theories about repetition such as the futility and meaningless of life that repetition brings about, how repetition causes stagnation, repetition is something people are both trapped in and willing go towards for comfort, and the only way to break out of repetition is by involving others in one's life. After literary analysis of repetition in Beckett's works, his theories are then applied to Beckett's personal life as a director and producer. This is then applied further to Beckett's plays when they reach the rewrite stage and the production by other companies.

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## Introduction

When Samuel Beckett's first play *Waiting for Godot* initially premiered in America in 1952, it took the audience by surprise. Audiences were baffled when the play's second act directly mirrored and revisited the same moments, actions, and themes of the first act. The performance sparked the Irish reviewer Vivian Mercier to famously state, "Beckett has written a play in which nothing happens, twice" (Mercier). Mercier's statement brought to the attention of readers and spectators repetition as an important aesthetic principle in Samuel Beckett's work. Since then, scholars have made many theories and works centered on repetition – often inspired by the philosophical work of Freud, Derrida, Deleuze, and Butler.

For example, in 1988, Steven Connor wrote the theoretical monograph, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory, and Text*, in which he argues that repetition is "a central and necessary concept within all attempts to understand individual and social being and representation," and because Beckett's works explore identity, being, and representation, they are inevitably involved in repetition (Connor 1). Repetition does not just repeat originality as an exact copy, but it can also change slightly to insert and build upon the original intention, reflecting Deleuze's concept of "naked" vs "clothed" repetition (Connor 6). In his review of Connor's book, Paul Davies states, "repetition — in any of its forms, translations included — is not only repetitious (in that it copies things) but also creative (in that the reproduction may significantly or richly differ from what it is reproduced from)" (Davies 170). Connor contends that repetition acts as a principle reinforcing essence and identity but also displaces and diminishes through difference, or the space from the time between moments (Connor 15); that is, repetition

prevents an individual from feeling complete due to not evolving through time but allows the individual to feel a continual and steady sense of identity due to the lack of change. Connor argues an understanding of the dual nature of repetition illuminates how the characters of Beckett's works interact with it through words, actions, and moments happening the same time after time, thereby creating habit. The formation of habit serves the need to keep a semblance of continual self due to new experiences not enacting change on the individual. The individual does not have to grapple with new obstacles and complications in identity due to repetition stagnating a person's growth (Connor 54). Additionally, habit creates a sense of shape to both the days and oneself, protecting the individual from wasting away into a formlessness even though one cannot evolve in the state. Despite the protection from formlessness, Connor argues the habit in characters and the structure of the plays themselves create linear and circular repetition which work in tandem to "indicate not endless reduplication, but entropic decline" and "the impossibility of any stable present because past future are ranged about it so ambiguously" (Connor 135). Time overlaps and the days do not have a clear linear structure, fusing the days and weeks together, making time seem as if it can no longer move forward. Individuals trapped in this "entropic decline" feel stuck in the same moments, creating a spiral into nothingness. Nothing formed from days that no longer evolve, and thus no longer hold meaning. This infuses Beckett's works with a feeling of meaninglessness and a stagnation in the identity of the characters, despite the clear and concise structure from habit. Connor continues to frame his argument around the presence of his theory of repetition in Beckett through the performances explaining that repetition can generate power and authority due to how it evokes an importance in

the actions and words deemed worth repeating (Connor 15). Repetition can become a display of Beckett's own power through his authorial control of his works by his translations and his imposing of strict following of original text in productions and furthered by the insistence of Beckett writing his own translations. Connor views the power in Beckett's works when turned into performance and translations and believes despite a desire for repetition, change from time is set upon the productions that develops the performances into something new, but also cause for a separation and distance in what was originally intended for the play, and potentially changing the identity of the play.

A decade later, Nursel İçöz in "Repetition and Difference in Beckett's Works" developed Connor's insight to argue "repetition always repeats originality, yet originality is always different from its original, to however a small degree" (İçöz 281). The change from difference is an inevitable aspect of repetition. While İçöz agrees the essence of an individual and the formation of being becomes stagnated in circular repetition, she differs in her argument stating that the difference also creates a new meaning in the repeated, physical moment/performance. When discussing the performance of *Happy Days* and *Waiting for Godot*, İçöz argues, "The circularity of form brings everything to its initial situation. The first time through will strike us as new, and the second is likely to seem a derivation from the first, but the ubiquity of repetition deprives (the audience) from a sense of priority or finality" (İçöz 282). Each reprise relays a different meaning, thereby causing the repetition to change and create a distance and displacement from the original moment. İçöz claims repetition reveals new meaning and "often intensifies the meaning of the original and reveals the work's

hidden meaning” (İçöz 283). While entropic decline and a lack of meaning litter Beckett’s works, a hidden meaning can be found through the physical reenactments placed upon the characters and the plot. İçöz acknowledges and explores the duality of meaning in Beckett’s works arguing the characters are without meaning due their repeating of the same words and the same actions, but through the repetition the audience can begin to derive their own meanings, and build upon them every repeat. However, İçöz follows Connor in claiming the formation of habit does create a sense of decline and meaninglessness to their lives, and develops the theory further by arguing the need for the other. She states, “the existence of couples is a necessity because the ability of characters to exist depends on an 'Other' who acts as a witness and whom they use as a barrier against the void” (İçöz 286). İçöz insists the necessity of the other to bear the suffering of the world and its meaninglessness.

Connor’s groundbreaking work on repetition in Beckett became foundational in Beckett studies, as attested by İçöz’s and others’ scholarships in the 1990s and 2000. Yet much of this scholarship tends not to put immediate emphasis on the productions of Beckett’s plays, especially the plays with Beckett as director, or the plays to follow the original productions that worked to change and develop the original works. The scholarship typically concerns itself with either a singular aspect of repetition or just Beckett’s desire for control over his works. Yet few argue how these insights apply to the productions of Beckett, his directing career, and the limits put upon his productions in a holistic manner. Beckett’s own philosophy of repetition begins to take shape when one begins to analyze the theories surrounding repetition along with Beckett’s own

works. Beckett's plays demonstrate theories of repetition and how they present in an individual's life.

In this essay, I will take Beckett's thinking about repetition, as it appears in his plays, and apply it to his work as director. Beckett's time as a director, the written control he places in his works through stage directions and rewrites, and Beckett's and the Beckett estate actions against changed productions display how repetition is not only present in Beckett's plays, but in his life and the production of his works. I will look at Beckett's plays, analyzing how Beckett used theories of repetition in his writing and molded them into a performable format. Then apply it to Beckett's desire for control over his works due to it paralleling the same repetition found in his plays, which both diminishes and elevates his original written works through production. Taking these theories, I will examine accounts of Beckett as a director and his influence on performances, both during production and due to his rewrites and new publications. Beckett's interaction with his productions unveils how his theories of repetition continue in his actual life, due to his striving for perfect repetition of his plays from performance to performance. Finally, I will pull in productions that deviate from Beckett's written works and how both Beckett's adherence to perfect repetition and the allowance of breaking repetition creates the same effects of repetition explored in Beckett's plays. Beckett's role as director, the rewrites he undertakes, and the allowance and banning of productions mirror the same theories of repetition present in Beckett's plays, thus proving the validity of the theories.

### Overview of Repetition in Beckett's Plays

*Waiting For Godot*

*Waiting for Godot* (1953) introduces his theory of repetition and its physical presence in everyday life by focusing on the characters Vladimir and Estragon. The two friends stay by a tree day in and out, waiting for a man named Godot to show up, but he never arrives. Due to the pair's mission of meeting Godot never coming to fruition, the pair is forced to remain in a state of repetition. In Act II, Vladimir and Estragon discuss whether they are happy, and, rather than answering directly, Vladimir states, "There you are again... [Indifferent.] There we are again... [Gloomy.] There I am again" (Beckett 51). The shape of their days is unchanging and repeats time and time again. The pair of friends get trapped in this state serving to highlight Beckett's philosophy of futility and meaninglessness inherent in life. The play opens with Estragon sitting by a tree trying to pull off his boot. Estragon's battle with his boot ends with him saying, "Nothing to be done" (Beckett 1). Beckett from the get-go displays how the characters enact meaningless tasks to which they are both oblivious and aware of the slight impossibilities of accomplishing the tasks to their fulfillment. However, they reenact these tasks day after day, just as they wait for Godot day after day. The futility of the endeavor and Estragon's hopelessness highlight Beckett's exploration of repetition as a consistent aspect of life, and it creates a sense of doom and hopelessness for all who are trapped in it.

Beckett portrays life as a meaningless cycle with other characters as well. While waiting, Estragon and Vladimir encounter the travelers Pozzo and Lucky. During their interaction with the waiting pair, Pozzo demands that Lucky think, sparking Lucky's monologue. Lucky repeats the line "wastes and pines, wastes and pines" (Beckett 36) to describe the cycle of life everyone interacts in. Days are not filled with meaning or

purpose. Nursel İçöz focuses not just on the meaning behind the characters' lines but also the frequency in which the same words and phrases are said. She argues for the circular nature of time and that the use of the same words by Beckett's characters stresses how words hold no meaning. She states, "It is a very clear image of rhetoric reduced to habit and the destruction of the power of words to signify by habitual repetition" (İçöz 285). When the same words are said too often, the weight of them begins to wear off, reducing the power the words held and eventually causing the words to mean nothing. İçöz furthers the meaninglessness of words and applies it to the prospect of the characters, claiming the characters are unable to form meaning in their lives due to their own rhetoric holding nothing. İçöz argues that if words hold no meaning, neither does life. The physical form of repetition through the saying of the same words again and again works to reveal the philosophy of Beckett of life as meaningless. For if actions have no payoff with one's days leading to death and words cannot hold meaning, then life must be devoid of it as well.

Beckett not only uses repetition of phrases and words to demonstrate the meaninglessness of life. After Pozzo and Lucky depart, Vladimir and Estragon reflect on the last moment, and Vladimir wonders if the two travelers change to which Estragon replies, "Very likely. They all change. Only we can't" (Beckett 41). Estragon reveals how he and Vladimir don't change much like the rest of humanity. Pozzo and Lucky can change, a capacity seen in their Act II entrance with Pozzo now blind and Lucky now mute, due to traveling and not living the same days and events day in and out. Vladimir and Estragon, on the other hand, are unable to change into anything better as a result of staying in the same spot and enacting many of the same rituals from the

day before. They are stuck in a vicious cycle of sameness causing them to no longer be able to change, evolve, or grow in a positive manner. Estragon and Vladimir become stagnant creatures in their lives because they never experience any changes to their essence or sense of being. According to İçöz, repeating causes stagnation because “repetition also activates difference, which prevents the formation of full being” (İçöz 281). İçöz accepts Connor’s theory of repetition working to form habits in an individual. But the habits created allow the individual to not enact change, thus creating a distance between their stagnant self and the self they could achieve through change. At the end of each act the characters discuss, “Well, shall we go? / Yes, let’s go.” but the stage directions indicate, “They do not move” (Beckett 47 and 87). Beckett displays the theory of repetition in preventing the formation of self by not allowing his characters to express movement or change both physically, by not leaving the stage, and intellectually, with them not having a difference in thought.

Repetition leading to stagnation is highlighted throughout the play, especially in the exchange of thought between the main two characters. On the second day, Estragon and Vladimir are trying to remember what exactly they did the day before, for the days now just meld together due to their similar natures. Estragon observes about yesterday, “We spent about blathering nothing in particular. That’s been going on now for half a century” (Beckett 58). Estragon reveals not only are the pair stagnant in their movement, for they never leave the spot they have marked out as their meeting place with Godot, but they are stagnant in thought. They cannot form new ideas and new conversations, only empty conversations that amount to very little, creating an almost meaningless daily routine. Connor argues “it is impossible to say anything in a language

in which there is no repetition but is equally impossible to say anything if one merely repeats oneself” (Connor 18). When the characters relay the same information, they display how they are unable to say anything. They are unable to grow in thought and create a growth from thought. The pair is immobile in the same train of thought due to them sticking themselves in a cycle of never-changing days. The characters saying the same words, phrases, and thoughts represent the circular nature of time which creates the same days and the same self, solidified by habit.

Vladimir and Estragon’s repetitions create in them a desire to be taken out of the never-ending cycle of their lives. They realize what is keeping them in this cycle is their need and desire to wait for Godot, as seen in the following exchange:

Estragon: And if he doesn’t come?

Vladimir: We’ll come back tomorrow.

Estragon: And the day after tomorrow?

Vladimir: Possibly

Estragon: And so on.

... Vladimir: You’re merciless. (Beckett 8)

Their reenactment is triggered and furthered by their desire to wait for something that they understand may never come. They understand the potential futility of the repetition, and thus they seek a reprieve from the torment that comes from the experience. They debate hanging themselves on the tree, suggesting, “Yes, but while waiting?/ What about hanging ourselves?” (Beckett 11). They explore the option as a way to pass the time and to potentially break out of the repetition they are doomed to. The reiteration of days derived from the waiting is endless and a marker of life, thus the

only way to be completely released is for the pair to die. When the pair talk about how they will hang themselves, they hesitate in their plan, realizing one of them will die first and the other will be left alone. The two dissuade themselves from releasing themselves from the torturous days, due to realizations of what can make life bearable.

For life —and the repetition therein— to be combatted one must take in the company of others. In his final speech, Pozzo describes how life and death come to be, saying, “They gave birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it’s night once more” (Beckett 82). The view overall is quite bleak, for it relates how life is only lived for one to die, harkening back to how Beckett presents life and the general cycle as meaningless. Repetition is its own slow death that occupies the time between birth and the grave. But Pozzo reveals there is a light in which we as an individual can find hope for life. The question becomes what provides life with that light? The answer comes from what stops Estragon and Vladimir from hanging themselves. If one hangs himself before the other, then the other is left alone, thus leaving the singular human alone and having to face the world and its repeating cycles by himself. The same sentiment echoes when Estragon attempts to take a nap in the middle of the day. When he goes to lie down, Vladimir is left alone and begins to become nervous. He immediately wakes up Estragon declaring, “I felt lonely” (Beckett 10 and 12). Vladimir could not wear the days on his own, showing the repetition inevitable in life is only bearable if we have others around us. İçöz argues the need for others, claiming the companionship creates a dependency and limited freedom for the individual. However, it is overridden by the need the characters have for “a barrier against the void” (İçöz 286), a barrier found through the relation one has with another. The other works to give

company to an individual as well as provide comfort and a sense of belonging for the individual. One cannot bear this life alone, for life repeats and exposes its futile nature. The relationships maintained with others bring about warmth, a type of light, and potentially a meaning to one's existence. The actual creation of a pair, rather than only having either Vladimir or Estragon waiting, demonstrates Beckett's own theory of the other and the need to be accompanied by others through life, for the suffering of life to be halved.

### *Endgame*

*Endgame* first took stage on 3 April 1957 after *Waiting for Godot* had time to be produced globally (Cooke 9). The play centers on Hamm, who is paralyzed from the waist down, and his relationship with his servant and caregiver Clov. The audience watches the two carry out their day and all the habits they have developed while stuck in a house after a world-ending event. Much like *Waiting for Godot*, the play centers on the daily events, or rather non-events, of the primary characters and the characters' attempts to maintain sanity in a life where they must repeat the same actions day after day. *Endgame* once more displays how repetition causes stagnation in the participant and how one needs others to be able to weather life. But here Beckett examines the reason why people allow themselves to be drawn into repetition and how it diminishes the original moment.

The stagnation of self, stemming from repetition, is explored once again; however, it gets complicated by the idea that stagnation is not only a consequence put upon the participant of repetition, but also a desired state of some who decide to place themselves in repetition. In *Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon have only a vague

understanding that their lives repeat. But in *Endgame*, Clov and Hamm are aware their days are the same, causing them to be incapable of reaching a better state of identity or self. Despite their awareness, the pair still engage in the same behaviors. Clov and Hamm engage in a quick discussion about Clov's feelings towards being stuck in the house and engaging with the same days in and out. Clov expresses a desire to leave, but Hamm will not have it. Eventually, the conversation pivots when Hamm says, "Then there's no reason to change" (Beckett 95). Hamm fully sees the state of the life the pair live and how each day just repeats the last. Due to the state of his life never changing, Hamm no longer sees a reason for him to change, therefore willfully stepping into stagnancy. If the circumstances surrounding the participant of repetition do not change, then the participant feels no need to change himself. As Connor argues, the paradoxical nature of repetition produces both a stagnation in identity but also creates a strong sense in the plateaued identity. He states there is an opposing nature to repetition with one side of repeating stemming from, "the repetition of habit, which protects the self from the formlessness of being" (Connor 55). Connor claims the habit the characters in Beckett's works assume, while creating a stunted identity, also allows for the individual to have the feeling of form, a clear schedule in his/her days that determines basic nature self. A self that feels solid and not lost in formlessness. While Beckett establishes the philosophy that reiterations can create distance and an unrealized self in *Waiting for Godot*, he complicates the theory by displaying how the nature of Hamm and Clov reveals repetition can create a form, a practiced and measured way to conduct the day in which the current day is conducted identically to the last, to the days in which the participants find comfort.

The idea of an individual willfully allowing stagnation from the formation of habit reveals itself in more ways as the story progresses through the characters Hamm and Clov. Beckett reveals why a participant would willingly engage in repetition despite the consequences accompanying it through the dueling, cyclical conversations of Hamm and Clov. At the end of an exchange in which Hamm has asked a series of questions, Clov says, “You’ve asked these questions millions of times.” When Hamm replies, “I love the old questions. Ah the old questions, the old answers, there’s nothing like them” (Beckett 118). He admits to being a willful participant in stagnation. However, the moment also reveals that Hamm repetition brings comfort to him. It prevents him from being surprised by life’s obstacles. If he already knows the answers, then he does not have to encounter any unpleasantness. Likewise, Clov questions why he takes Hamm’s treatment and why he stays in the house. Hamm answers, “Routine. One never knows” (Beckett 114). Hamm shows that routine can be appealing even when one does not like the actions they are entrapped in. For the actions alone are not what keeps the participant in repetition, but rather the overall comfort one has in repeating, in keeping a routine, in creating a form or structure to both self and the day. Connor argues the structured form allows the characters to get through their days no matter what. He states, “in Beckett's work repetition is what enables characters to survive and carry on speaking, even when there is nothing to say” (Connor 18). The characters are given a schedule for their day, a schedule they don’t need to ponder or worry over. There are no surprises that could end in disaster and a formlessness to their lives. They have their script, and it gives a structure and sense of control over their days. There is comfort

because at least one knows what the day is, what this life holds. And for now, repetition is better than the alternative of the unknown.

Where *Waiting for Godot* suggests how it is easier for an individual to deal with repetition and its futility when one has others, *Endgame* shows the paradoxical nature of repetition by presenting the dueling sides of the relationship. In *Waiting for Godot*, both Vladimir and Estragon want to be attached, whereas in *Endgame* Clov and Hamm express dueling thoughts. While both find comfort in reenacting the same moments, Clov does not want Hamm's company and expresses a desire to leave the house. On the other hand, Hamm is content to live in the house for the rest of his days and finds himself wanting Clov's company. Clov even questions, "Why do you keep me?" and Hamm says, "There's no one else" (Beckett 96). Hamm demonstrates the earlier thought that life is only bearable when one has company, for being alone makes all the futility of everything far too overwhelming. However, this sentiment still does not stop Clov from wanting to leave. The back and forth of Clov wanting to leave but Hamm not allowing it continues throughout the play and comes to a head in the final moments with Clov leaving. The interaction of the two throughout the play displays how repetition can be both a positive and negative force. If one willfully reenacts their days and is prepared for the consequences, like Hamm, then repetition can become a comfort. But if one is forced into the role, then they will find it to be stifling and maddening.

Beckett continues to develop his original theories of repetition concerning originality in *Endgame*. He shows through the telling of a joke how relaying the same information can cause the original moment, in which the repeated actions are derived, to diminish. One of Hamm's companions, Nagg, who is stuck in a vase of sorts, tries to

retell a joke of his. Nagg's joke ends up falling short with Nagg remarking, "I never told it worse. I tell this story worse and worse" (Beckett 107). Nagg tells the story time and time again and finds it only gets worse every time he tries to retell it. He finds trying to recreate the same moment causes him to fail in creating humor. As Connor argues, the Deleuze approach to "clothed" repetition means a reenactment of the original moment adds to the source, therefore making perfect repetition an impossibility (Connor 6). The "clothed" repetition places an importance on difference, a central theme to both Deleuze's and Connor's thinking. Difference occurs when there is a distance in meaning created due to the moment around the repeated action or phrase changing. Connor explains, "there can never be any such thing as pure or exact repetition. In order to be recognizable as such, a repetition must, in however small a degree, be different from its original" (Connor 7). The source cannot be reproduced due to the difference of moment and time placed upon the recreation. When one tries to repeat the original, they are striving to gain a lost moment. The act is futile, for true duplication can never happen due to the context surrounding a moment never being the same as the original context. Nagg's joke can never be as humorous as the first time he said it. The repetition ignores what helped make the joke funny in the first place: the context in which it was shared.

İçöz agrees with Connor, stating when recreating a past moment, "repetition thus causes the subject of the subject to grow progressively more and more distant" (İçöz 283). The distance creates a greater divide between the present moment and the past. The attempts to recreate become more and more futile, for distance changes the context in greater increments. When the context changes, so does the original moment,

thus making true recreation an almost impossibility. İçöz states, “Repetition always repeats originality, yet repetition is always different from its original, to however small a degree” (İçöz 281). In the end, much of the original moment will be lost. Through the performed moment, Beckett demonstrates that striving for repetition is a futile endeavor that works to turn the original moment into a potentially different and less interesting moment.

### *Happy Days*

The short, one-act play *Happy Days* opened in 1961 and centers on a woman named Winnie as she is sucked slowly into the ground, introducing a new kind of physicality into Beckett’s plays. Winnie navigates the day and tries to hold onto normalcy during the impossible situation. All the while, her husband Willie is next to her, providing her with company and occasionally with materials she wants to go about her daily routine. The premise of Winnie being slowly sucked down into the earth demonstrates the futility and meaninglessness of life. She is trapped in a situation she is unable to change and is forced to repeat the same activities and conversations from previous days. The play reveals Beckett’s continuing philosophy on repetition established in *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*: the need for others, and how repetition can be a positive force for some. But with the performance of *Happy Days*, these concepts are explored in new depth.

The entire play centers on Winnie ignoring the fact she is sinking into the ground. She occupies her mind by recounting happy yet uneventful moments and letting them keep her company. She focuses on these memories, so she does not dwell on the foreboding situation at hand. Instead, her mind and actions are occupied with trivialities

and vanity such as brushing her hair and applying lipstick (Beckett 278). Additionally, Winnie revels in her current situation because as she says, “No better, no worse, no change” (Beckett 279). If she is stuck in a stagnant position, then nothing bad can touch her. Unlike in *Endgame* and *Godot*, Winnie’s situation is physically limiting her and shapes her day. Beckett takes this limit on physicality and rather than allowing it to demonstrate the impending doom of the world, he uses it to further the theory that repetition creates a stagnation that the participant can find comfort in. Winnie views her situation as an endless cycle, but also an event that allows her to not have to counter any unknowns.

*Happy Days* also suggests that we need others in life to help break up the repetition and the feeling of hopelessness from futility. But Beckett takes his original theories concerning the other and broadens them. He not only displays how the other helps with making life bearable, but also how different levels of interaction with another changes the effectiveness of the other by making life bearable. Throughout the play, Winnie is accompanied by her husband Willie. He doesn’t take a great speaking role in the play, but his presence is felt the whole time. Winnie even says to him, “or go away and leave me, then what would I do, what could I do, all day long, between the bell for waking and the bell for sleep” (Beckett 282). Winnie continually talks to Willie, giving the impression the one-sided interaction is enough to keep her going. She needs someone else to be able to face her current situation and to make it manageable when she no longer feels the same comfort from repetition. But the one-sided conversation is not enough to sustain Winnie. Eventually, Willie responds to Winnie, and she says, “Oh you are going to talk to me today, this is going to be a happy day” (Beckett 283). The

statement reveals having company is not enough to fulfil the needed companionship that helps with dealing with the same cycle of days and the futility of life. Full interaction with others, where there is a give-and-take relationship, is what helps one weather life and the inevitable repetition. A shared conversation is needed for Winnie to feel comforted and better able to withstand her current predicament.

### *Play*

Beckett's *Play* (1963) presents three characters – W1, W2, and M – in urns. The stage light signals whose turn it is to talk, and each character tells a story from his/her life. The three stories don't work in tandem, but they do relay how these three people knew one another in life before. The repetition comes into full force, however, once the three characters are done recounting their stories with the stage direction stating, "[Repeat Play]" (Beckett 366). The characters must go right back to the beginning of the play and repeat their stories. There is no set number of times listed for the play to repeat, only the word itself is listed. Essentially, the text of the play can be repeated multiple times during a singular performance. The radical utilization of repetition reveals new concepts concerning the element. The play highlights the negative aspects of repeating the same moment.

Repetition becomes a punishment for the three characters. The three characters are unwilling participants in the repeating of their past lives. The stage light forces each one to speak and each one to keep narrating the same event over and over again. The chronicling of the stories keeps the characters stuck in the past, unable to move past their old mistakes and lives. The characters despise the reprise(s) to such a degree that they begin to speak to the light and beg for a meaning behind their actions. They

wonder why they are being punished (W1), are there other consequences they can endure (W2), and if this is all just play (M) (Beckett 361 and 365). They need to find meaning in this punishment so they can be slightly sated. The retelling is greatly unbearable to them because they are unable to see any meaning in their current actions. As Connor argues, the routine they are forced into has created a life with a very specific form, but unlike in *Happy Days* and *Endgame*, the characters do not find solace in the form but rather a great discomfort. The inclusion of the same habits day in and day out leaves the characters in a state in which sufficient meaning cannot be derived. If life is meaningless, then repetition is futile due to it holding no true purpose. The punishment of these three individuals is they must recount their past mistakes and then not be allowed the knowledge why they must repeat. By not finding meaning or purpose, these individuals can no longer grow and are forced, depending on their view of their punishment, into stagnation.

It must also be noted, the physical limitations on *Play* are significantly greater than the previous works of Beckett. In the four plays discussed, the characters are gradually more and more constrained physically as the years progress for Beckett. In *Waiting for Godot*, the characters move around the stage freely. Hamm and Clov are stuck inside a building, with Hamm unable to walk in *Endgame*. Then in *Happy Days*, Winnie is trapped in a sinkhole swallowing her and finally in *Play* the characters are encased in vases. The theme of repetition becomes more and more accompanied with restriction and immobilization, stagnation. The increased restriction suggests Beckett felt the idea of repetition changing throughout his career and related those findings in the progression of his works. Beckett relays how undergoing the same events limits the

participant until they are immobilized, unable to grow, to evolve. *Play* specifically highlights how this is a punishment for the characters forced upon them. Beckett makes it clear in his works repetition is meant to be seen as an overall hindrance and prison for his characters.

## Director Beckett

### *Form Over Meaning*

The first Beckett play produced and performed was *Waiting for Godot* on 5 January 1953 in Paris at the Théâtre de Babylone. *Waiting for Godot* continued to premiere across the world with a production in London directed by Peter Hall in 1995 and later the same year in the U.S. with Alan Schneider. *Waiting for Godot* was the hit that put Beckett on the map and his following plays: *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, and *Play* soon followed from 1958 to 1963 gaining acclaim as well (Cooke 8-9). However, Beckett became infamous for not only introducing the world into the complex and confusing world of modern drama but for having a hands-on process in the productions of his work. Beckett integrated himself in the process of the productions of his plays and acted as a consultant on most of the big premieres of his work. The integration caused Beckett to mirror the same theories of repetition found in his plays. His theories of repetition in reality displayed highlight both the validity of his theories of repetition and the consequences of falling into the same behavior.

Michael Worton details the relation of Beckett with both his director/production side and the playwright side, and he highlights the different theories concerning the gray areas in Beckett's works. He argues that Beckett leaves gaps in the interpretation due to his allowance of "perhaps" in his works. And to further the speculation of his work,

Beckett was generally unwilling to explain the meaning behind the writings. Worton describes how Beckett interacted with ongoing productions of his work stating, “he initially allows for the total freedom to directors, actors, and critics, but then wishes to correct their interpretations” (Worton 67). Beckett would take a step back from production to allow incoming directors and actors explore his work, only to then come crashing in with how the plays can better represent the source material. Worton claims Beckett let others take a stab at interpreting his difficult and shrouded texts, but when he saw they were deviating too far from his vision, he would pull back the reins. Many directors found the playwright’s fastidious notes about production overbearing and Beckett became known as a controlling presence in the process. Beckett wanted the plays’ manifestations to perfectly portray his deceptively simple works and to stay true to his original intention the whole way through. While some directors were put off from Beckett’s works due to his repetition, others reveled in the playwright’s participation. This included Schneider who became one of Beckett’s top picks for directing his work, especially when the plays were still new and shiny to both the public and the acting community.

Beckett enjoyed a whole new level of authorial control when he directed a production of *Godot* in 1966. Before this endeavor he said, “I felt the need to create for a smaller space, one in which I had some control of where people stood and moved, above all of a certain light” (Beckett 69). The transition for Beckett to go from playwright to directing his own works felt seamless enough due to Beckett’s heavy hand with his involvement in the production of his plays. Wilma Siccama states, “Beckett started to direct and translate his own works out of the need to preserve his

original intention” (Siccama 175). Siccama claims Beckett participated in repetition in the “afterlife of his texts,” which resulted in a difference between Beckett's primal word and his word as director. Siccama argues Beckett wanted to keep his work safe and as close to his original intent as possible when the works underwent the production process. Just as Beckett’s characters Winnie and Hamm find solace in the control repetition gives, so does the playwright. For Winnie, she feared if she broke out of repetition, she would succumb to the ground swallowing her and she would be devoid of her happy days and thoughts. Hamm is afraid of the unknown of the outside world and chooses to repeat the same days in the bunker he knows. For Beckett, he fears his play will be handled by incapable directors who squander his original vision due to their desire to not wholly repeat the original text. Beckett needs to ensure that his plays be performed as he intended and thus runs to control and his repetition of form directing. The start of Beckett directing marks key moments of his control of the theater due to his relentless pursuit of repetition. Beckett’s interaction with his plays from then on and his striving for repetition causes a stream of moments in which Beckett both displays and contradicts the themes of repetition present in his very own plays.

Director Samuel Beckett ran his productions with a strict focus on the physical performance of his actors. Beckett focused on every detail of his plays, ensuring every word and physical element and performance aligned exactly with his intent. Anne McMullan relates that Beckett “had been aware of every movement of the actors even before he wrote the dialogue” (McMullan 198). McMullan analyzes Beckett as a director and hands-on playwright and the specific way in which he gave feedback and the incorporation of the feedback into the productions. She argues Beckett’s works,

when performed in the exactness that Beckett wanted, had a musical rhythm, an essential element to his plays that justified his behavior. McMullan views the mechanical exactness Beckett strived for as lesson in mastery but believed there was an accompaniment failure in his works. Audiences struggled to grasp the meanings of his work, making his work the relaying of a paradoxical mastering and failure. The insight Beckett had pertaining to his works gave him the ability to value every sentence, every pause that he originally wrote. During the production of *Endgame*, Beckett would have his actors rehearse the plays and it was commonplace for Beckett to interrupt after every line. He would stop the actors, walk to the stage, and perform their role for them, with the intention of them repeating his exact body motions, and inflection. Beckett wanted the actors to mirror his vision, not to distort it in even the slightest way. Upon seeing Beckett's directing style up close, Ruby Cohn wrote that Beckett would "beat time" when rehearsing *Krapp* and many other plays, placing great importance on not only the accuracy of the words but the exact timing of every word said (Cohn 36). He required an exactness to be found in the form of his plays.

The precision in Beckett expected out of his plays and the actors was unparalleled at the time and displays Beckett's belief in the value of form over meaning. Form is the structure of the play, the exact words said by the actors, the beats indicated between, the stage directions, and general stage layout/set. Form is the actual physical, tangible, concrete elements involved in the production of the play, whereas meaning is the abstract and conceptual elements. Cohn, through detailing Beckett's directorial career from learning the craft to heading his own works, argues Beckett spent time focused on the form and the details of the plays, and didn't spend time on the meaning.

He tended to put the physical aspects of the productions above any other elements. She writes that for, Beckett, “once speech begins, pattern reigns; once movement begins pattern reigns” (Cohn 293). Beckett blatantly put the form above the meaning of the play. He believed by focusing on the overall form of the play, only then can the play reach its true potential, meaning is unimportant in the production of a play. Not only were the words paramount to keeping the form of the plays, but so were the pauses, Worton agrees with Cohn’s claims about the director Beckett and details his own understanding of Beckett production, stating, “Such pauses leave the reader-spectator space and time to explore the blank spaces between the words and thus to intervene creatively- and individually in establishing the plays meaning” (Worton 75). Every beat, every moment was dictated to such an exactness. Beckett believed anything less would result in the work not reaching its full potential. Beckett’s themes of repetition rely heavily on form, so for the theme to be fully presented the form of the play must be exact to the source material. When describing his reasons for keeping his format as close to the source material as possible, Beckett described how precision brought out his own themes of repetition. Beckett said, “When in a text, actions are repeated, they ought to be made unusual the first time, so that when they will happen again -in exactly the same way- an audience will recognize them from before” (Cohn 292). The form dictates the overall effectiveness of the theme of repetition. According to Connor’s theory of repetition, Beckett as director tried to accomplish a “naked” repetition. He wanted to capture the original source without transforming the source upon reproduction. This all adds up to Beckett developing a reputation of being uncompromising in his desire to recreate, and to repeat the form of his original works.

However, the emphasis on form over meaning brought confusion to Beckett's productions and paralleled the same themes found in Beckett's plays. Cohn writes during production; actors would ask Beckett about characters' motivations and "Beckett shakes his head at questions that stray from concrete performance" (Cohn 294). Cohn argued to Beckett only the concrete exists, and the rest should be filled in by the audience, not the performers. By emphasizing form over meaning, Beckett threatened the success of his own productions, leaving many of his actors confused. Much like Vladimir and Estragon, the actors repeated the same motions day in and day out, stuck in repetition, without a reason. The exclusion of reasoning puts the actors in a situation where it can become harder to evolve and think and to create. Like the pair in *Waiting for Godot*, the repetition binds the participants into a place where growth becomes difficult, but not impossible. The actors found it hard to find a version of the character in which they felt like was theirs and portrayed any meaning at all. Much like the characters in *Play*, the actors were given a script they must relay in exactness and repeat it in the same way until the light or Beckett stops prompting them. They do so on command and are given no meaning behind their actions, only to keep repeating their actions again and again. Worton claims Beckett, "considers structure to be more important than any message for the communicative functioning of a play" (Worton 75). Thus, Beckett leaves many of his fellow actors clueless as to the very production they are working so diligently on, causing them much worry and ache at the throes of the seemingly meaningless repetition.

Walter D. Asmus reflects on his time shadowing the 1966 production of *Waiting for Godot*. Asmus kept a journal of his assistantship and argued for Beckett's detail in

production and how he related to the actors both left the actor confused and satisfied. He argued that while Beckett was fastidious in his demand of strict form, he had struck up a camaraderie with the actors. Beckett acted as another actor, miming the entirety of the play so the actors knew how exactly they should position themselves, the inflection needed for the lines, and what pauses to take. In Asmus's account, Beckett worked closely and intimately with the actors, which earned respect from his cast, but he still denied them explanations as to why the characters carried out their lives in the ways they do. Asmus wrote, "Content is not being discussed, only (if necessary) situations are cleared up, and with that explanations about the characters are given" (Asmus 281), but what was considered necessary was left up to Beckett, who was fickle in his answers. Asmus related Beckett would dismiss a question one day and answer the same one the next. The actors thus had to learn when to build and create their own inflections to make the performance more accessible to the audience, who were many times equally confused as to the meanings of the plays.

Billie Whitelaw, an actress who worked on many of Beckett's plays from *Happy Days* to *Rockaby*, learned how to navigate the directorial demands of a Beckett play. She said she played a character who "is meant to not speak with 'any color' or inflection" (Kalb 10). However, Whitelaw said that is not enough and gave emphasis and inflection on select words when the production came around, assuring the audience understood her intent and creating a more enrapturing performance. Jonathan Kalb states, "her performance builds on the ambiguities Beckett wrote into his text" (Kalb 12). Kalb analyzes the performances of various Beckett productions and shows how important it is to have actors who can elevate Beckett's work by not only following the

script but also by knowing when to deviate and add. The breakage of form by Whitelaw demonstrates how Beckett's strict following of form is not the best way forward. But breaking repetition and evolving the performance as an actor allowed the meaning to become clearer and more accessible to both the performers and the audience.

The strict repetition of Beckett's actors also offers another perspective of Beckett's preference of form over meaning. The value of form causes strict repetition to be the key staple in the role for the actors allowing them to be potentially given an insight many are precluded from. McMullan recalls something Whitelaw said in making of *Happy Days*: "Actors and actresses always stress the discipline required of the Beckettian actor. You don't have to do anything because he has done it. Something weird and extraordinary does happen as long as you the actor don't get in the way" (McMullan 202). Whitelaw understands the difficulties and the restraints put upon the Beckettian actor having played Winnie in *Happy Days*, who is physically limited throughout the entire performance. The reenactments are grueling and can almost be regarded as a punishment for the actor's imagination. Beckett demonstrates repetition as a prison for the minds of his characters, especially in *Play*. But Whitelaw believes that when the actor gives way to form, they can have a performance that produces great meaning, even if the meaning to be drawn is unknown. Meaning may not come first, but it can be revealed and explored through strict form. This line of thinking aligns with Connor's own theory of the paradoxical nature of repetition. Connor argued that repetition wasn't just dependent on the original source, but rather the original source was reliant on repetition. Repetition could work to shape and give meaning to the original source and even add to the original in the recreation. However, this reading of

the production would put it under “clothed” repetition which does not align with Beckett’s want of “naked” repetition, repetition “humbly obedient to its original, which merely and simply reproduces it without any addition or distortion... ‘mechanical’ or ‘naked’ repetition” (Connor 6), showing how Beckett’s specific category of repetition may not be possible.

In his essay analyzing Kierkegaard’s philosophy of repetition, Edward J Mooney writes, “(repetition) is also, paradoxically, the delivery of new and surprising meaning” (Mooney 287), thereby relaying how reenactment is a way for the participant to find new meanings that were unbeknownst to them before. Mooney argues that artificial repetition, forcing situations to repeat form, is not an achievable goal due to it not capturing the original meaning. However, natural repetition (repetition that looks beyond the original meaning and strives to recreate, and build) is plausible, thereby showing the same argument as Connor with “naked” vs “clothed” repetition. But Mooney believes with natural repetition a new meaning can be discovered. This concept can be applied to Beckett’s productions. The actors repeating the same form endlessly do not have to be a burden or a stifling of their performance but could potentially become a way to reach the meaning they were alluded to earlier. The idea of being able to form meaning from repetition heavily parallels Beckett’s *Play*. Like W1, W2, and M, the actors are confined in a reprise, repeating the same moments day in and day out, with the light (Beckett), asking them to repeat it the same way again and again. Like W2, the actors ask for meaning but are given none and realize that maybe they must repeat to find the truth. Perhaps form comes before meaning, for meaning to be derived eventually from strict form.

While the form can both give meaning and potentially take it away, it's vital to look at an overarching theme of Beckett's works in the frame of repetition. Beckett writes life as meaningless, and repetition only highlights the minutiae of the day and the nothingness found within. This is prevalent in *Waiting for Godot*, with Vladimir and Estragon waiting for nothing to come, waiting for life to present its own meaninglessness. When analyzing Beckett's rewrites (Beckett adding additional stage directions to new publication of his already published works in order to relay how he wants the productions to be blocked), S.E. Gontarski argues about both the state of text in production and the addition of the "other" for Beckett's works. Gontarski claims the written word in plays as the literal interpretation and the only containment of the original moment, which even Beckett as the author no longer possesses once he has written and published his works. For this reason, he states, "text is performance. This explains [Beckett's] fastidiousness not about interpretation per se but about stage directions" (Gontarski 141). Staying true to the script is all the performances require, and the rest will come. The text speaks for itself, meaning does not need to be found, and perhaps there is no meaning. Beckett's works hinge greatly on the futility of life, and repetition is a result of the meaningless in which humans take part in. Worton agrees, stating, "Beckett writes chaos into his highly structured plays not by imposing his own vision but by demanding that they be seen or- especially-read by receivers who realize both that the form is important and that this very form is suspect" (Worton 75) Perhaps the repetition and Beckett's focus on form can reveal a truth and a great meaning, but it also holds the promise of presenting the audience with nothing. Just as

life contains no great meaning, Beckett sees his plays as made to not hold meaning as well, thereby allowing him to put form above meaning.

### *The Other*

In his works, Beckett shows the only way to cut through the meaninglessness of life and make it bearable is by being with others and interacting with them. In the context of Beckett directing his works, the involvement of others in the process is complicated and creates a process where perhaps the meaningless prevails and the repetition causes stagnation rather than a way to the truth of Beckett's works. Beckett's insistence on putting form above meaning creates a process of performing and rehearsing of his plays limiting the collaboration between the people involved and Beckett. The complete experience of having someone else is not fulfilled. In *Happy Days*, Winnie has Willie and talks to him throughout the day. She repeats the same days over and over with him, but he rarely speaks. The relationship Winnie has with Willie, and him rarely engaging in conversation with her, mirrors Beckett as a director. Beckett has others, he has the cast and crew, but the conversation is not give and take, for his desire to create the exact form through repetition, greatly limits what the others around him can contribute. Beckett consults his own writing in order to direct the play. Gontarski argues "the work he did in seclusion" (Gontarski 141) and that Beckett needs another when creating the productions. He claims Beckett work stagnates and holds itself in time due to Beckett's only working with his own previous thoughts, a self-collaboration of sorts. Beckett is the only one who can contribute to this style of directing, consequently not allowing him to escape the repetition of life and causes him to be surrounded by life's meaninglessness, which then is reflected in his productions.

The production still holds meaning, but the meaning found is cut short due to the conversation with others not being fulfilled. Beckett's own works display how to gain something new from repetition and life in general or at least for life to be bearable, others must be involved. The way in which Beckett worked in the staging of his plays suggests while others were a part of his creation, they weren't involved to where they could break the repetition. Gontarski argues that the inclusion of others in the creative process of Beckett works would allow the productions to rise above their current level, which is already at a commendable and respectful place.

Beckett's collaboration with others is limited by his form over meaning style, yet the need for others is still present in his directing. In his plays, Beckett stresses companionship is essential to existence. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon consider death as an escape from the repeating days, but their desperation is abetted only by the thought of being alone and away from one another. In *Endgame*, Clov despises Hamm but never leaves because that would mean he would no longer have Hamm's company. According to Beckett, the need for others is great and must be within one's existence. When directing, Beckett paradoxically fulfilled this need in his collaborations by collaborating with himself; Gontarski argues, "practical theatre has offered him the unique opportunity for self-collaborations through which he rewrote himself that is invented himself as an artist" (Gontarski 131). Gontarski claims Beckett tried to fulfill his own need for the other by his invention of himself. He maintains Beckett's original intent is contained in the author Beckett and this original intent gets lost when Beckett reinvents himself as director. Beckett, the director, is a different artist than Beckett the author. The time between Beckett writing and directing *Godot*

amounted to thirteen years. The context in which he wrote the play differs from when he directed the play. The self-collaboration made Beckett review his text as open and ongoing but only with himself. Beckett still wanted for the author-self to be the main player for “primacy, if not hegemony, was initially given to the playwright self” (Gontarski 132). Beckett’s insistence on form is what allowed for the collaboration to play out in such a way. Beckett is no longer fully the writer; Worton claims, “When he comments on either text or productions, he is just another critic, just as eligible for skeptical examination as anyone else” (Worton 68). Worton highlights what Gontarski argues, which is that Beckett no longer has the original source and moment available for a true “naked” repetition to take place. Not only is Beckett expected to use his writing as a guide when he directs, but he is also expected to give a critical eye to the original work and ask if this is the best way to interpret the work. No longer as the writer containing the work’s original intentions. This provides a degree of room in which Beckett does not follow the form to the exact pinpoint in which he was striving. If the original intent is unattainable, then so is the repetition that Beckett strives. Thus, Beckett begins the next stage of his interaction with his plays, the re-writing.

### Rewrites and Futility

Beckett directed his own works with the production of *Eh Joe* in 1966 and soon followed with *Endgame* in 1967, and *Happy Days* in 1971, and finally returned to *Waiting for Godot* in 1975. His first interaction with play production occurred with *Waiting for Godot* under director Roger Blin in 1953 (Cohn 291). Beckett discovered aspects of his play in which he felt there was room for improvement. However, the improvement Beckett wanted was unconventional in its detail and shaped both how he

wrote his later plays and the requirements he had for productions. Gontarski states, “mounting a production brought to light recesses previously hidden, even from the author himself” (Gontarski 133). When he started production Beckett found the writing of *Godot* to be lacking, when he started production. He felt the wording and stage directions were too misleading. It led the actors to interpret the scene in ways that acted against his believed original intent. Beckett rewrote his play for it to better fit the production he produced, thereby having the form fit the performance, rather the other way around, the way in which he is adamant on. Beckett realized how production and performance can cause for a new greater interpretation; however, he then took this and almost doubled down on other’s creativity. He waited to publish his works or put out new publications based on how he staged his previous works, thus telling those who produce his work that not only should their show match in form but in performance as well. Beckett saw the intricacies of the directing and staging process, in which a work evolves based on a director’s vision. However, he did not change his opinion on the importance of staying true to form, stifling many directors. He wanted directors to not find their own innovations but to completely mimic the ones he's found. In Gontarski’s view, Beckett’s edits represent “that the theatre space.. is an arena for creative discovery” (Gontarski 140). The play will evolve and change because life moves. But it felt as if this discovery was reserved for Beckett, himself, and did not extend to other directors of his plays. Beckett’s rewrites both go against and display the stagnation produced by repetition, thereby paralleling the same theories of repetition found in his plays.

In addition to creating new rewritten versions of his plays, the written plays made after *Waiting for Godot* expanded directions. For example, director of Beckett's *Happy Days*, Jason Zinoman said, "It seems like linguistic fascism or something" (Zinoman). Zinoman argued that Beckett's control over production limited creativity and stunted his plays. Zinoman detailed his own troubles with not Beckett specifically, but his estate that was carrying out his wishes after Beckett's passing. Zinoman was adamant that the overuse of stage directions did not allow for freedom to play and discover the right way to go about production. However, Beckett ensured that no one could misinterpret the form of his plays, thus confining the form to an even more strict value, despite meaning becoming harder to grasp. Beckett only allowed for plays to run when they followed the form he intended even, insisting: "any production of *Endgame* which ignores my stage directions is completely unacceptable to me" (McMullan 196). Beckett's fixation of form over anything sacrificed the chance for Beckett's plays to evolve and get better with time. Instead, he chose to trap everyone in the same cycle of repetition that he engaged in, thereby causing stagnation. Beckett's plays are steeped with the theme of stagnation. The characters are both physically, like in *Play* and *Happy Days*, and mentally trapped in the same place, due to the repetition they enact. Beckett put the same fate upon his plays when he began the rewrites and obliged other directors to follow the same style of form over meaning.

In 1973, the newly revised plays were published. The rewrites didn't change the overall content or dialogue of the play but relayed the specific vision Beckett had for the physicality of his plays. Despite Beckett's desire that his plays always repeat in production from one director to the next, the rewrites caused the opposite effect to begin

to take place. Siccama contended, “Beckett’s many rewritten versions of his plays display a ‘failure to control’ (Siccama 184). The more Beckett tried to gain control the more it eluded him. The publication of Beckett’s rewritten plays only proved to confuse audiences and the theater community. The rewrites were not widely known so many production companies did not get their hands on them before they began their own productions. The rewrites caused multiple versions of a single Beckett play to exist, thus causing confusion on which play should be heeded. For example, with *Play*, Beckett originally wrote a stage direction detailing the characters response to light as, “The response to light is not quite immediate” and it stayed in the Grove book edition. But in a later publication by Faber, Beckett changed the line to “The response to light is immediate” (Gontarski 144), thereby giving two different directions to how one should respond to the light providing potential for at least two different productions. Additionally, the rewrites showed many directors that the original scripts were not gospel as they may have once seen. The production of the plays did not have to follow exactly as written, but liberties could be taken to enhance the meaning the directors saw in the work. The rewrites signaled that Beckett plays are changing. After the rewrites, Beckett and the estate cases occurred with most of the cases happening in the 1970s to 1990s, and a few occurring in the 2000s (Hartley). Theatre producers took the rewrites as permission to evolve Beckett’s work in accordance with their own visions, to which Beckett and his estate pushed back against.

Beckett’s failure of creating perfect production raises the question of whether repetition is a possibility in the production of plays or if the seeking of it is a futile act. In *Endgame*, Beckett demonstrates true repetition is unattainable and the act of seeking

it can create a potentially diminished version of the original. The moment when Nagg tells his joke and remarks that it only gets worse the more and more he tells it, Nagg searches for the original moment and the same feelings the original moment captured by repeating the form. However, Siccama declared, “The replaying of old doesn’t recapture self but fissures it into clear pieces” (Siccama 176) She argued too much repeating of form can gradually begin to distort the original and cause for the original meaning to diminish. Nagg’s joke mirrors Beckett’s need for repetition through the publishing of the rewrites. Beckett couldn’t maintain the original intent of his works due to the active need to repeat the original intent and to maintain a sense of control over his works. Siccama continues, “Beckett already gives his words away when he allows his plays to be put on stage. Such a transformation results in a loss of the creator’s primary words” (Siccama 182). She believed Beckett’s mission is futile due to director control being unattainable and thus so is repetition. Beckett relinquished his control of the work when he granted it to the world, and the world puts its influence on the work; the two are intertwined. The world’s influence changed the context and does not allow for the repetition of form to be enough to uphold Beckett’s plays original meanings. Mooney agrees with Siccama and said that when creating repetition, the recreator “cannot be bent on forcing (the original moment’s) reappearance” (Mooney 290) because the original moments was a product of not only the form but the context surrounding the moment and the context will always be changing. Trying to stay in a moment that no longer exists caused works to stagnate, making the work unavailable and foreign to the new audiences and created a desire to transform the form so the meaning can be regained. The work will be different because it will always be situated at a different

time. It displayed the true futility of Beckett and why potentially adapting and changing to a different moment is just as important as letting the moment shape what is trying to be repeated. If the new moment was already changing the meaning, then perhaps to better shape the meaning to Beckett's original intention then one must change the form. Meaning will always change, so form must change to direct meaning.

### Breaking Stagnation and Estate Control

Many production companies performed Beckett's works due to their interesting form and plots, but their devotion to the works didn't stop them from experimenting with the style in which they relayed Beckett's plays. The development in the staging of Beckett's plays both before and after his rewrites allowed for new interpretations of his works that both worked to entertain and inform. However, the plays produced left Beckett feeling as if his plays were being mangled. He felt the changes many individuals wanted to take with the form of his plays proved to lose sight of Beckett's original work. Beckett began taking legal action against the plays he deemed unworthy to display his name and to tell his stories. Plays across the world would get shut down or would be presented with a list of changes the play must undergo for it to be produced. When Beckett passed, his estate took over the cases. The estate is headed primarily by Beckett's nephew, Edward Beckett, and Beckett's legal team. They ensure the rights of Beckett's plays are upheld with performances both giving credit to the director as well as following the playwright's desires in concerns to the performance of his plays. Beckett and his estate took control over the voice of his plays and found ways to make directors and producers fulfill the repetition of form. Directors took great offence at the changes and limitations put upon Beckett's plays, feeling their creativity

and story-telling capacity to be great. Additionally, the limitations and the forced repetition created a stagnation in the plays of Beckett, preventing them from evolving with the modern era. The directors, such as the ones listed below, tried to break up the stagnation and let the plays evolve. While many plays of Beckett were blocked due to their innovations, others were praised and promoted by Beckett. The allowance of plays that differ in form display how when Beckett and his estate do let others collaborate on the works of Beckett, the form improves and can be presented for audiences in unintentional but powerful and impactful ways by tracing the varying productions of *Waiting for Godot*. The interactions as a whole and the allowance of some plays and blockage of others validates the points made in Beckett's written works about what happens when stagnation is forced through strict repetition versus when repetition no longer is enforced, and change is allowed.

The ban on women to perform *Waiting for Godot* brought attention to the limits Beckett and his estate put upon directors and productions of his work. In the Netherlands in 1988, a production of *Waiting for Godot* planned a women-led cast. Beckett tried to stop production, but the production said there were no rules against it and the production went on. In response, Beckett and his team created new stipulations to ban women from performing his male roles. The estate declares, "No additions, omissions changes in the sex of the character or of the performer as specified in the text... or alterations of any kind or nature in the manuscript and presentation of the play as written" (Whalen). The rule has held up to this day, preventing some productions to perform and having other productions remove the name of Beckett from their playbill, making it clear Beckett did not approve of the women-led productions.

In 2006 in Tuscany, a women-led play of *Godot* was shut down due to Beckett's estate's interference. The production tried to reason with the estate, stating how even though the main characters were played by women, the characters themselves were still men. Canonically, Vladimir and Estragon were still men and acted as such. Despite the appeal, the estate remained firm on their ruling and their play was shut down promptly (Whalen). The ruling has shut down countless performances. In his article, "Beckett's Legal Scuffles and the Interpretation of the Plays" Alexander Hartley details the multiple lawsuits enacted by Beckett and his estate, arguing the estate held a too tight hold on Beckett's works, as seen by the lawsuits, but the estate was also incredibly fickle in what plays they allowed and banned, letting some performance go on despite closing others for the same reasonings.

By not allowing women to take part in the productions, countless iterations and takes on the famous work were unable to be shown to the awaiting public. Hartley argues, "We've been exposed to Beckett in this precise form for fifty years... so the style no longer surprises" (Hartley 132). What allowed Beckett's plays to reach and amaze audiences in its first productions doesn't resonate as strongly with the average audience of today, resembling and validating the same point made when Nagg tried to retell his joke in *Endgame*. The plays must evolve to fit the evolving world. Beckett's philosophy of repetition creating stagnation and an inability to change manifests in the moments in which he and, currently, his estate does not allow the form of his plays to fit the evolving moments surrounding the productions. The cycle of the estate displays stagnation based on "naked repetition": reenacting the same actions producing an exact copy. The repetition forced on productions causes not only a stagnation of the physical

action, but also of thought. The plays cannot add, cannot build naturally on Beckett's original work.

The cycle continues when Beckett prevented a production of *Waiting for Godot* performed by an all-African American cast in New York in 1957 (Hartley). The cast underwent six performances but was shut down. Beckett did not want to support a performance of his play that is politically charged believing the political message, not the cast itself, took away from the original form of the play. Edward Beckett, declaring on the behalf of Samuel Beckett, "The author denounced any attempt to narrow or politicize the meaning of his works" (Whalen). He believed it took away from the form and inserted new meaning onto the piece. Beckett had set up a style of directing his works where he put form first for the repetition of his works to shine and for his works to be more able to repeat themselves and his philosophy to take root. But by doing this, he pushed away his own idea of what the plays mean and caused the same repetition in his plays to be paralleled by the events surrounding the productions. Beckett put the meaning of his plays in the hands of his audience and the multiple interpretations of his work "reveal(s) a process whereby meaning becomes increasingly suggestive and open, while the text is shaped into even more precise semantic and sonorous patterns" (McMullan 198). However, this backfired when plays like the two described above are put on. The nature of Beckett's plays, especially *Godot*, depict waiting for something that will never come and feeling an endless, dreadful repetition to one's days hits home for many communities, especially marginalized ones. When those communities place the meaning, they have taken from Beckett's plays and created their own productions, they are taking the obscure meanings Beckett never explained and presenting their

interpretation in a way that provides great importance for the evolving world. The estate shuts down such plays “on the premise that the Beckett written plays are so precise, thus giving a clear direction that should be followed” to which director Thomas Pallen questions, “Does not allowing this hold the play back from reaching continuing generations?” (Pallen 38) Beckett was so entranced by repetition and form, that he does not see what is transpiring right in front of him. Beckett ran to repetition and form to feel a sense of control over his works, just as Hamm wanted to stay inside his house of sameness, for his works to still feel like his, something he knew and that felt safe. The theoretical repetition Beckett set up in his plays about what happens when someone runs towards the comfort of habit formed from repetition gets fully realized by Beckett’s actions, validating his theories and showing how a heeding of his own theories could prevent the follies from repetition.

While Beckett and his estate stopped many plays from being put on, they also allowed plays to be performed that did change the form to impart a greater meaning. Communities who were marginalized and had great injustices placed upon them flocked to *Waiting for Godot*, due to the characters placed in similar situations to their own. For these communities to allow these plays to fully resemble their situation and provide a solace and companionship to their own lives, the productions would manipulate the form to fit the meanings they found. A few famous and critical instances of communities claiming and performing *Godot* as their own (like in Cape Town and the San Quentin Prison), with the backing of Beckett, displays Beckett’s theories of the other and repetition in the real world, and how repetition can work to embolden and empower rather than to stagnate.

In 1980, director Donald Howarth put on a *Godot* in Cape Town, South Africa, to protest apartheid. The cast was mixed, with Vladimir and Estragon played by Black actors, white actors playing Lucky and Pozzo, and Godot's messengers acted by mixed actors. Elliot Leffler describes how the touring of this production sparked both inspiration and outrage globally. Leffler argued that the production could not be separated from the locals who performed the play, stating, "plays – even ones that are hailed as universal – are received and interpreted in a fundamentally local way, which may be at odds with the intentions of the artist" (Leffler 53). The productions cannot extricate their meanings imposed on the plays due to the locations and situations, so the productions might as well embrace it. The production involved African elements in the play, making it clear that the land in which Vladimir and Estragon stood setting, "the play on the edge of a rubbish mound where black people would scavenge for food and other goods discarded by South Africa ... it was a setting that would be easily recognizable to every South African" (Leffler 58). The changing of form to fit the community allowed the play to take a greater meaning that helped to inspire the oppressed. It stood against discrimination and segregation and Howarth used the play to display what it means when basic human rights are disregarded. It causes people to be lost in an existence that doesn't change and holds no promise of change, in which they feel trapped in a prison that hurts their own finding of essence and self. The people of Cape Town saw how Beckett's philosophies of repetition of thought and the suppression that comes with it reflects in their own lives and felt a need to perform the material. The theory of repetition wasn't just beholden to the production, but was present in the life of the audience. The production and the changes they placed on the

play, acted as the other sorely needed to break up the meaningless of life and the harrowing feeling of stagnation and the prison it creates. By allowing the other to fully collaborate with his works, Beckett allows his works to improve and give a meaning far above what he originally intended.

The anti-apartheid production of *Godot* displayed what allowing the other in can look like and how it can transform performances of life's meaningless into plays that provide a sense of companionship to those who see the play. The allowance of the other, and the change of form that can result does not just apply to the production's director and cast but also applies to the audience. The audience is a constant other that imposes on the performances and takes part in the bringing of Beckett's philosophy to the physical. However, the interaction the audience has with the play and Beckett is limited in most cases. The rules placed upon an audience to be only receptive listeners and reactors transformed for *Waiting for Godot* in 1957 at San Quentin Prison. A California production company performed at the prison due to the new Prison warden thinking live performance could benefit the inmates. No one knew what the reception of the complicated and minimalistic play would be, but most hoped it would help serve as a piece of entertainment at the very least. The reality exceeded expectations, with the inmates deciding to not be passive audience members. The inmates began interacting with the performers shouting remarks displaying their own understanding of Vladimir and Estragon's situation. Erin Koshal argues *Godot* "is an experimental play that frames a relation between the drama onstage and the audience in the immediate performance space...explore(s) the relation between norm and exception" (Koshal 188). Koshal claims the play's themes relate to those who feel different from the norm and that it

allows the audience to break the expectation and interact with the play in new ways, as seen with the inmates. The inmates are moved by the play and assume the position of the other naturally. Koshal argues the San Quentin prisoners, “received Beckett’s fictional detainees hospitably, offering them advice as to change their alienating predicament and finding through this means to transform their own” (Koshal 201). They interrupt production and thus change the ongoing form, a form that is not unable to be repeated due to the original moment not having a firm shape and made from habit. The audience as the other allowed for “clothed” repetition to occur in which the original is built on and not an exact copy and the building upon brings out new meaning that works to inspire the prisoners, for many of them made their own performance company in the prison. Koshal even claims that Beckett took the meaning found in the prisons and inserted it into his own productions of *Godot*. Beckett began wanting his actors to demonstrate “two caged dynamics” in their movements and he wanted to have “shadows to look like bars” on some of his productions of *Godot* (Koshal 190). Thereby evolving Beckett’s own philosophy by seeing repetition as a prison, a theme that is furthered through the restraints Beckett puts upon his characters as he continues to write. The addition of the other allowed for collaboration and for the production to be built upon. The involvement of the other inspires and makes one not feel as stuck in their prison, just like with Valdimir and Estragon.

## Conclusion

Beckett created works that were not stagnant in nature. The works are filled with deep rooted meanings that touch many walks of life. But Beckett’s need to fulfill the desire to recapture his original intent—a futile mission—through the pushing of form

and repetition caused his works to still for a moment. The stagnation resulted in Beckett's works taking on his own theory that life is meaningless. But through the visions of directors, Beckett's plays began to take shape for new generations and began to evolve again. The directors and the audience and all who work to build on the original Beckettian plays act as the other that Beckett needs to brave life and to break out of stagnation. The addition and involvement of the others in the creative process allowed Beckett to evolve his own philosophy due to the physical being finally allowed to change. By letting the meaning take precedence over the strict form, Beckett's works can achieve "clothed" repetition over "naked" and can begin to not only change the physical nature of repetition but what the philosophy means as well. The philosophy of repetition is not only that repetition brings a meaningless cycle nature to one's life or that the formation of being is unachievable, but rather it could also mean that new meaning can be extracted and revealed. The theories present in Beckett's works are not contained solely in his works whether they are in writing or performance. Beckett's theories of repetition are seen in the real world by example of his own story of being a director, the rewrites, and his response to other productions. The prevalence of his theory in his own life reveals the validity of his theories. If one heads the theories of repetition in Beckett's works then they may be less susceptible to the follies of repetition in their own life, allowing the individual to grow and realize their full self.

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