

When the words fail - The tragedy of the Modern Subjectivity through the Beckettian experience

I have to speak, whatever that means. Having nothing to say, no words but the words of others, I have to speak (...) I have the ocean to drink, so there is an ocean then.
(BECKETT, 1965, p. 316)

Some initial words:

This article was motivated by the impact created in my experience of Beckett's work. Beckett's writing evoked me the experience which Noga Wine (1992) suggests about the consciousness of the self as constituted in the confrontation of its most radical difference. The author tells us that in Hegelian thinking the consciousness, in its desire to know itself and to be recognized, needs to recognize differentiation in another live consciousness, in order to reaffirm and recognises itself in a new structure: the structure of reflexive consciousness. I understand that Beckett's work invites the audience to reflect upon this very point throughout the experience of his play.

Thinking with Margaret and Michael Rustin in "*A mirror to Nature*" (2002), Beckett's work was hugely influenced by the Second World War's experience. From the perspective of the creation of the play, the outside world, the war (thinking in the Beckettian experience), moulded the being's consciousness (in the Hegelian term), leading to the reciprocity: from this perspective the consciousness in Beckett will look at the world through his own psychic reality: a disintegrated world is seen through a self that has experienced devastation deeply. The world has a phenomenological character, being the means through which consciousness can recognize itself. Beckett's art was situated in the experience of death, and I particularly believe that his work leads us to the point where consciousness emerges and confronts its most radical limit (death), and it is in this confrontation that might emerge capacity for reflection and emotional development in his spectators. We must consider that the consciousness needs another consciousness, exterior to it, to create new contrasts in order to apprehend itself. It is an empty place for new inscriptions, since the truth is not in the world, but in the consciousness of itself. Beckett's work tries to

inscribe something in the empty register that is left to the being (that in the Hegelian understanding is the consciousness) not by denying it but by bordering it (to Lacan it is not possible to apprehend the empty register since it was instituted before the symbolic. It is only possible to be approached by the edges, bordering, getting close to it, but not fully). Beckett approaches it with the notion of a world devastated by the war, with the beings struggling to find a place for themselves in themselves, in this empty place that is the Hegelian consciousness. From a psychoanalytic perspective, John Robert Keller affirms in his book *"Samuel Beckett and the primacy of love"* (2002), that: "Beckett's work reveals a constant struggle to maintain contact with a good internal object, a contact that allows a nascent self to avoid the feelings of disintegration and annihilation." (p. 24.) We can suggest that in Beckett there is a constant search for this "something" that is initially exterior and that will, later on (from its existence therefore confrontation), allow the "being to be".

Considering the congruence of Hegelian thinking with Freudian considerations in *"The Project for Scientific Psychology"* (1895), we can affirm that in Freud's understanding there is a primeval urge for an object that was created during the first human experiences (initially experienced as a real external object, that gives some consistency to the being). This object that was exterior is inscribed in its negativity in the being, as an emptiness, as a mark (what Lacan would later call a signifier trace) that allows the subject movement in the search for itself. Wine (1992) tells us that this movement that marks emptiness bears two losses: the loss of "in itself" and the loss of the object (referring back to Hegel, if the consciousness loses its being as stable, it needs an exterior consciousness to make contrast and give it consistence, leading to the paradox that we have seen before: the truth is not in the world but in the being). That is what Lacan calls the failure of the subject's being, since it does not have access to all aspects of its existence. The external object that comes to remember this emptiness, that Freud named as "das Ding", is called by Lacan an evanescent object (object a) that cannot fulfil the gap left by "das Ding". The marking of emptiness, "das Ding", is where the primary repression happens, and is where language starts having a fundamental role in marking a trace in the loss, as emptiness' mark. The signifiers will circulate around the subject after the primary repression, allowing in these contrasts negations-transformations, a search for a discourse that can be apprehended as

the subject's truth. In this panorama I would like to introduce Beckett's work as a profound art that is extremely thought provoking with respect to the subject's position in the world. With this in mind I will think of Beckett considering the Freudian and Lacanian notion of emptiness, bearing in mind the Object Relation theory of absence in order to understand the unfoldings of emptiness in the Beckettian theatre.

The aesthetic of emptiness in Beckett: finding the sense in the non-sense

I believe that Beckett's plays suggest and evoke in the audience a feeling of emptiness that might invite them to digest for themselves what it may provoke. The humour that is so characteristic in this theatre helps to make it possible to be given new meanings in this empty register that is left open.

Martin Esslin, in his book *"The Theatre of the Absurd"* (2001), tells us that originally the word absurd means "out of harmony with reason or propriety, incongruous, unreasonable, illogical" (p.23). He tells us that the Theatre of the Absurd has for its essence freedom and unfettered exploration, and that each of the writers has their own individual version of it, making it more difficult to be understood and seen as a literary movement or a school. It is a mixture of two elements: a return to old traditions, and a rejection of language as an instrument for expression of meaning's deepest levels. It is structured on verbal non-sense and scenic effects that suggest an allegorical meaning, and it does not present a plot, stating a denial of the recipes for the "well-made play". It might stir a feeling of strangeness since it reevaluates procedures that are familiar and accepted, by presenting them in different contexts in order to provoke an "out of place" feeling.

I must be getting mixed, confusing here and there, now and then, just as I confused them then, the here of then, the then of here, with other spaces, other times, dimly discerned, but not more dimly than now, now that I am here, if I am here, and no longer there.

(BECKETT, 1984, p.102)

In this article I will focus on a Beckettian play that I consider as the most metaphorical for what I suggest is the author's main *motto* in his work: the imprisonment in life. Beckettian characters are alienated of themselves, trapped in their own drives and do not notice their own non-sense and therefore cannot make any movement in life. I will focus on "*Happy Days*" as an epitome of mankind's alienation through symptom formation as a way of dealing with emptiness. "*Happy Days*" is a great example of the Theatre of Modern Subjectivity, of humankind's conflict between consciousness and repression, since the symptom formation has the task of dealing with the subject's inner urges, to juggle with the unconscious urge and reality.

Furthermore Lacan states that to form an ego and to be introduced into the symbolic world supposes a necessary alienation, in order to keep participating in culture, the sharing of meanings. In his understanding humankind sacrifices its own truth to order reality. What he means is that humankind is never cured from life, as everyone that has entered the symbolic register has passed through this process of "alienation". Finding in the play a way of reflecting upon the incompleteness of mankind's essence, and considering it as a struggle to deal with the emptiness through alienation, the symptom creation is one of the unconscious ways to make border in the register of what hasn't been yet symbolized. Trying not to smooth over all the spaces left open by the author, I will make an effort to "digest" the play through the Freudian, Lacanian and Object Relation school perspective, leaving also the inevitable inconclusive spaces, as its understanding is boundless.

The play has two acts. In the first one the main character, Winnie, represents the human condition as a cheerful, plump woman who sinks into the ground. She is buried up to her waist on the top of a mound. She speaks to her husband who hardly takes any notice of her and is concentrating on his newspaper. In the second act she sinks up to her neck, and has

only her face out of the ground. In the first part of the play Winnie is busy with actions like painting her lips and fixing her hat. Her constructed routines are a means to deal with her reality and make it bearable once her condition is hopeless. Her non-stop chatting to a husband that does not seem to listen to her, and the fact that she keeps being active by doing trivial things, guarantee her some reality. When she is out of things to say she then decides to “do” something, which means to check things in her bag or to brush her teeth. These simple actions give her scope for entertainment and talk.

3.1 - Localizing Symptom and Anguish in the Modern Subjectivity

Freud writes in his paper “*The Uncanny*” (1919) about the feeling of awkwardness evoked in the symptom as he noticed that this feeling was associated to the repressed material, demonstrating to be, once repressed, rather familiar. Since they are repressed, the symptoms are not recognized by the patient; they sound unreal, senseless; it is like a metaphor, and needs to be deciphered as a riddle, through symbolization. Lacan (1962) believed that this feeling of strangeness that emerges with the symptom is anchored in the register of the real, considering that its metaphor was not already signified, given meaning to, elaborated. That is the sense we might get when we read the play, a metaphor of a mismatch between the situation presented and what we think is “reality” that only starts gaining sense when we name it. It suggests a confrontation with reality itself when it loses symbolic meanings, exposing its senselessness, a state of perplexity, as there is no possible ready understanding of it.

The repetitions and element of strangeness in “*Happy Days*” are part of Beckett’s aesthetic, something that he states to us. In “*Happy Days*”, anguish is more localized and dislocated to a “symptom”, in a specific situation: stuckness. The state of stuckness is the principal subject in this play, since the main character, Winnie, would transfer her “pain of living” to her impossibility of moving, as her “chosen” object for the anguish. We could also think that stuckness can be a metaphor for the impossibility that the symptom implies, since the symptom inertial supposes a system of drive’s opposition that creates an irreversible character to it. It suggests the ambiguity of symptom formation, that is to bring gratifications that are related to the death drive (what Lacan names “jouissance”, as the

continuous repetition that does not cease to inscribe itself in the subject, as well as in the subject's speech, as he later on related to the language) in an effort of the subject to juggle with these two elements: "jouissance" (1975) and desire. It is through this manner that he positions himself as a subject of desire, approaching the gap between desire and "jouissance" through stuckness. Inasmuch as Winnie struggles with it, there is an impossibility of digging herself up, since she is lost in "jouissance", in a complete stagnation, presenting the fantasy of omnipotence. This omnipotent fantasy presupposes a fundamental impotence that sustains the urge to not see. The mourning, acceptance of the lack, and production of new meanings to her existence would be a fundamental structure to the constitution of Winnie's desire, a way of digging herself up.

What do Beckett's human beings do when the words fail? My understanding of the play is settled from the perspective of the myth, since the character is not a clinical case, it is a metaphor, as the myth is a way of dealing with psychoanalytical impasses since Freud. The play's most disquieting uncanniness is due to the fact we are touched by an image that primarily is hard to identify with, but it still reflects traces of our own subjectivity, resulting in the feeling of strangeness, an approximation of ourselves without noticing it. The play, as a myth, suggests a rounded situation that seems to be continuous. That is exactly what represents humanity since we do not need to localize it in time, it could be thought of as a representation of human kind in any era: *sicut erat in principio* and so it will continue until the end of times that is the truth that the myth brings.

My understanding of Winnie is positioned in a paradoxically similar place to Antigone (Sophocles). Antigone is in the intermediate zone, symbolically dead but not buried alive (Regnault, 2001). Winnie is half buried and half symbolically dead, from her own "decision" the debt will be paid by leading to alienation. The guilt is to be paid by Winnie with her stuckness, due to the fact that the king of destiny (the one that is in charge to punish Antigone) is no longer alive. Regnault (2001) affirms that in the modern subjectivity the subject feels alienated from himself. From Regnault's position I consider "*Happy Days*" as a mythological projection of the repressed, where the sublimated part of mankind, the ego, sacrifices the drive and ends up producing a symptom. Regnault affirms that the modern

spectator repeats the experience of the antique one, experiencing what Freud says in *"Inhibitions, Symptom and Anxiety"* (1926) that what has not occurred in the manner it should, in conformation with the desire, is annulled by its own repetition in another way. What Freud is saying in this passage is about the symptom's emergence, its coming to occlude an unconscious desire that could not be satisfied, through the death drive. And that is what Winnie can teach us as well.

In *"Remembering, repeating and working-through"* (1914b), Freud investigated the question of repetition in the clinic, and later on he noticed the occurrence of the phenomenon of the compulsion to repeat. With an unconscious origin and, therefore difficult to control, this compulsion becomes for the subject an urge to put himself repeatedly in painful situations, replicating primitive experiences. Dias (2006) says that to a greater extent we can say that since Freud in *"Os caminhos da formação dos sintomas"* (1917), the symptom is already considered as related to the death drive and what Lacan would call a "real satisfaction" (jouissance), since it is a satisfaction that was not symbolized. Even so, it is very restricted and veiled. Firstly we can hardly conceive it as a satisfaction as it involves unpleasant feelings. Lacan believed that the libido of the formation of the symptom is fixed in the experiences of the beginning of life, when the subject experiences a state of absolute helplessness and dependency, causing a very traumatic effect.

3.3 - Symptom as a response to anguish

The symptom comes to make this anguish manageable, but when it is discontinued for some reason, the subject is overwhelmed by anguish again (it needs a continuous flux in the symptom for the anguish not be awakened). Anguish emerges from an occlusion of the lack's image. This means that beyond our image that was built in the Other (alterity, an otherness which transcends the imaginary otherness because it cannot be assimilated through identification, it corresponds to the symbolic order. The big Other *is* the Symbolic insofar as it is particularized for each subject), there is a lack in the Other that represents our lack. It is a presence that marks an absence. Lacan (1962) says that the subject is in

between the register of the real and the Other, where the subject is constituted by assuming a place in the symbolic world. The subject can only be inserted in culture through the apprehension of a language that, the most it is veracious, it is still a fictional structure since it is only a representation. Lacan affirms that the logic of desire falls in the same trap, since the place for the desire is resolved in the form of a demand; as we cannot speak of the desire itself, we have to find other significations (in metonymy) to it (since what is approached through language is already symbolized). The lack is apprehended through symbolization; it is then possible to approach. The symptom is a defence against anguish, but against what anguish is a signal: the lack, the incompleteness, and it is from this realization that Winnie recurs to defences. Winnie demonstrates that she feels this big eye, the Other, looking at her. And it is in this territory, of anguish, that she does not know what she is supposed to do.

And now? (*long pause. Low.*) Strange feeling. (*Pause. Do.*) Strange feeling that someone is looking at me. I am clear, then dim, then gone, then dim again, then clear again, and so on, back and forth, in and out of someone's eye. (*Pause. Do.*) Strange? (*Pause. Do.*) No, here all is strange. (*Pause. Normal voice.*) Something says, stop squander all your words for the day, stop talking and do something for a change, will you? (*She raises hands and holds them open before her eyes. Apostrophic.*) Do something! (*She closes hands.*) What claws! (*She turns to bag, rummages in it, brings out finally a nail file, turns back front and begins to file nails. Files for a time in silence, then the following punctuated by filling.*) (1963, p. 31)

Winnie's way of containing her anguish at the infinite time spent inert is through her routines; checking her bag, making her toilet, remembering good times etc, in order to persuade herself that it was "another happy day". When there is a halt in the symptom's flux and she sees herself with no more words to say, she is thrown in deep anguish, desperate to come out of stuckness, and she finds pretence of "not moving" through filing her nails, sinking back into her symptom as a way of dealing with her anguish. Taking a different perspective of the sentence that the character keeps repeating "When the words fail", we can suppose it relates to the idea of the symptom as something that keeps being inscribed, which is not in the order of what was yet symbolized. In the *Seminar* book 11 –

“Os quatro conceitos fundamentais da psicanálise” (1964), Lacan restates that what is repeated in the symptom is the miss-*rendezvous* with the object (it’s a point unacknowledged out of the pleasure principle). The need to repeat is in order to try to symbolize what is real, a trauma. When there are not words enough to speak about the experience, something that is traumatic in the order of the real emerges, as a symptom. Even though Winnie keeps talking her “non-sense” - that she does not perceive as non-sensical – she establishes an empty speech by the mitigation of her anguish through the silence’s fulfilment with her non-stop chatting, addressed to someone that does not listen to her, in hope to be saved from the lack. Winnie’s insistence to speak the same old words with Willie could be understood as an attempt to deal with the huge gap between them, the trauma of the lack of object.

Winnie through the object relation perspective

3.4 - Winnie and Steiner’s *“Psychic Retreats”*

To start thinking the play through the Object Relation school and its notion of an absent object, I suggest that Winnie evokes John Steiner’s main subject in his book *“Psychic Retreats”* (1993). Steiner focuses in this book on a clinical description of the kind of patients who are stuck and with whom it is very difficult to make meaningful contact. He describes a kind of personality that becomes, in a relationship, rigid and stuck with little opportunity for development and change. We could easily relate his description to the play *“Happy Days”* since Winnie is literally trapped in a completely rigid mode of being, as in a Freudian notion of symptom. Since she doesn’t change, she becomes each time more stuck in her situation, sinking deeper and deeper, as Steiner describes in his analytical process with these patients:

Their building material: a goodly amount of projective identification, idealization, serious compromise of their sense of reality. The analyst observes psychic retreats as states of mind in which the patient is stuck, cut off, and out of reach, and he may infer that these states arise from the

operation of a powerful system of defences (1993, p.2).

The psychic retreat is a defence found in the patient by the analyst, as a way of avoiding contact with the analyst and reality. In the play, Winnie's behaviour is a stereotype of this kind of *modus operandi* in the clinic. At the same time that she claims for Willie's attention, her relationship with him is absolutely devitalized. She repeats the same pattern in a circle, giving little space for thinking capacity, as she seems to be far away from reality. Her life is absolutely awkward, giving the audience a feeling of strangeness. These retreats, Steiner tells us, serve the patient to provide a respite from both paranoid-schizoid and depressive anxieties. Taking refuge from the world of real relationships, establishing a protected place, even though in the end one cannot avoid the pain. I believe that we can say that the "Psychic Retreats" are strongly related to difficulties with the process of mourning and I consider that Winnie's relation to mourning is also something that should be taking into consideration. Her behaviour suggests a struggle with the loss of object as a consequent difficulty with separateness. It is as if she were still stuck in the first phase of mourning where relief depends on the continuing presence of the object. Even though it seems that the object is "no longer there" she cannot accept the separateness. As Steiner formulates it:

My patient clearly found reality very difficult to bear and, instead of facing it and allowing herself to develop, she idealized earlier periods of her life when she phantasised that she could control and possess her objects so that they could not accept their loss and not only longed to regain the previous state but was bitterly resentful when the reality of her situation confronted her. She could never mourn her objects and let them go. Her resistance to this process was connected with a fear and a hatred of reality and took the form of denial and misrepresentation of reality. If reality cannot be faced, mourning cannot proceed and the patient cannot regain the parts of the self she has disowned. (1993, p.63)

Winnie's psychic retreats create the illusion of a guarantee, a "salvation" in a Godotian thinking. A full guarantee of certainty that in her case is gained by causing suffering to herself, through masochistic gratifications.

That is what I find so wonderful, that not a day goes by-(*smile off*)-to speak in the old style-(*smile off*)-hardly a day, without some addition to one's knowledge however trifling, the addition I mean, provided one takes the pains. (*Willie's hand reappears with a postcard which he examines close to eyes.*) And if for some strange reason no further pains are possible, why then just close the eyes-(*she does so*)-and wait for the day to come-(*opens eyes*)-the happy day to come when flesh melts at so many degrees and the night of the moon has so many hundred hours. (*Pause.*) That is what I find so comforting when I lose heart and envy the brute beast. (1963, p.16)

3.5 - Winnie and Meltzer

Another aspect of Winnie brought to light through the object relation theory is a massive projective identification on Willie, her husband, who is in charge of being the "poor thing", and deserves all excuses for not listening to her. He is the one that is being awfully dirty in his hole (which is itself terribly suggestive of dirtiness in a dubious manner). Meltzer teaches us in the "*Psycho-Analytical Process*" (1967) that massive projective identification is intensified in relation to difficulty to separate, due to a great difficulty to recognize the absent object as a good one. Only when this mechanism is diminished can other problems be worked through. Winnie and Willie have a relationship that is presented almost as if they were opposites: since she keeps all the goodness (keeping the good breast to herself), she leaves him with the badness (not noticing that in the end they are the same, not being able to really see themselves and the other, they are both stuck in that relationship). They cannot fully communicate but cannot separate either.

Winnie is literally positioned, during the whole play, at the height of the mound, (she is stuck in the dome of a mound, something describable as a breast shape) seeming stuck in the idealization of the breast, while to Willie is regarded the role of the "Toilet-breast" (MELTZER, 1967), spending his time in his cave and with dirty jokes. We can see that Willie is essential to Winnie, in order to maintain the place things are, as Metzger tells us in "*The Psycho-Analytical Process*":

It would appear that before the internal “toilet-breast” has been established the unavailability of an object in the outside world capable of containing such pain throws the ego back on massive projective identification with an internal object: if this fails to control the anxiety, states of schizophrenic withdrawal into delusion or autistic fragmentation, separately or in tandem, appear to be the only recourse (1967, p.23).

Winnie’s position suggest a really primitive stage where she struggles with the absence of the object and that is why Willie’s presence is a necessity, not to throw Winnie back to her primitive anxieties, an escape to anguish. Winnie defends herself by hallucinatory wish fulfilment of projective identification, denying her reality most of the times, as we can see in the beginning of the play:

(She turns modestly aside and back to her right to spit out behind the mound. In this position her eyes rest on Willie. She spits out, she cranes a little farther back and down. Loud) Hoo-oo! (Pause. Louder) Hoo-oo! (Pause. Tender smile as she turns back front, lays down brush.) Poor Willie-(examines tube, smile off) running out-(looks for cap)-ah well-(finds cap)-can’t be helped-(screws on cap)-just one of those old things-(lays down tube)-another of those old things-(turns towards bag)-just can’t be cured-(rummages in bag)-cannot be cured-(brings out small mirror, turns back front)-ah yes-(inspects teeth in mirror)-poor dear Willie-(testing upper front teeth with thumb, indistinctly)-good Lord!-(pulling back upper lip to inspect gums, do.)-good God!-(pulling back corner of mouth, mouth open, do)-ah well-(other corner, do)-no worse-(abandons inspection, normal speech)-no better no worse-(lays down mirror)- no change-(wipes fingers on the grass)-no pain-(looks for toothbrush)-hardly any-(takes up toothbrush)-great thing that-(examines handle of brush)-nothing like it- (examines handle, reads)-pure...what? (pause)-what?-(lays down brush)-ah yes-(turns towards bag)-poor Willie-(rummages in bag)-no zest-(rummages)-for anything-(brings out spectacles in case)-no interest-(turns back front)-in life-(takes spectacles from case)-poor dear Willie-(lays down case)-sleep for ever-(opens spectacles)-marvellous gift-(puts on spectacles)-nothing to touch it-(looks for toothbrush)-in my opinion-(takes up toothbrush)-always said so-(examines handle of brush)-wish I had it-(examines handles, reads)-genuine...pure...what? (1963, p.10-12)

The split-off in Winnie is frequent, since within it she does not have to face life and death issues, and to have Willie keeps her going in that limbo state. She projects on Willie the responsibility to live and think, while her role is to make a critique on what he does, either of not doing much, or being the “poor Willie”. The chief subject in her projective identification is the guarantee she gets by leaving to Willie the responsibility to be free, with the onus that this implies. We could think the hole, the dirtiness, the lack of manners and bad words are a metaphor for being “alive”, while her stuckness guarantees her the maintenance of keeping herself always tidy. To live seems to be related with dirtiness, since she has to come out of the height of her mound and deal with not being ideal all the time. It seems she cannot tolerate that. Winnie is in the feeding-breast while Willie is down the cave, representing the toilet-breast. They cannot make contact and are separated by their positions. She is there, stuck in her idealizations of a good breast, denying, struggling not to see what happens down the cave with Willie. This separation leads to a painful mismatch as they are doomed not to meet each other. A contact is impossible for them, since the establishment of what Meltzer calls “the zonal confusion” was rooted in a powerful way. Winnie struggles with the threshold of the depressive position as she presents a huge denial of seeing her situation. To reach the depressive position is needed a working-through, the painful mourning of the absent object. Winnie keeps herself locked in the schizo-paranoid position by living things as either lovely or misery: she is in the ideal while Willie is in his terrible situation, as she puts it. She is still not able to implicate herself in what she is living, since despite her disgrace, Winnie keeps saying throughout the play: “No better, no worse, no change, no pain”, as if her “sameness” and “stuckness” would be a guarantee of no suffering. She is stuck, but at least she considers it a guarantee of no pain (that is what she “finds so wonderful” as keeps repeating to convince herself, creating a real anguish in whoever witnesses her). She says, although she is the one who is stuck, “poor Willie”, glorious to feel that she is in control of her little world, of her rituals. The “choice” of not moving could be thought as a need to keep things under control, as if moving were too dangerous. There is an articulation of herself, she is idealized and lost in this idea, a signification of herself that grows in opposition to Willie’s, she tells Willie to do something for a change and then asks herself what is one to do all day long, day after day. The answer to this question is her “old style.” That is linked to the idea of killing the time, not to have to

think. She avoids the “*momentum*” of taking action, since for that she would have to relate with her frustration differently, without defences.

In the beginning of the play Winnie is about to spit out the toothpaste when she sees Willie. This intention of spitting will be much repeated (although symbolically) throughout the play, since she “spits out” on him all the unbearable feelings that she has. Winnie, as she said, “cannot be cured” from her changeless state of idealization. This is presented in her concentration on her toilette and her continuous praise of herself for the painless state she is in; as if, as she says about the toothpaste, her state were guaranteed...genuine...pure. She seems to try to guarantee an idealization of herself that leads to her immobilization. The reason why she cannot come out of her mound is that she cannot bear losing that feeling she can actually control her things, her objects, and so she is stuck. Meltzer suggests that the omnipotent defences are a way of dealing with the anxiety created by the absent object. It is very difficult for the patient to realise his state of defence and lessen his feeling of empowerment that his defences guarantee him. Winnie tries to maintain her omnipotent defences through the need she has of controlling the “object that keeps coming and going”, this suggests to be the reason why she is so attached to her bag (since it is the reachable object that she can actually master). The continuous action of controlling it is really important as a source of pleasure; she can take things in and out of the bag as she wishes (the things in her bag seem precious as they are almost given some life through the action of being taken in and out), suggesting the relation of Winnie to her internal objects as she tries to master them. She relates to the bag as something to cling on to when the sense of emptiness takes over.

Yes, there is the bag. (*back front.*) But something tells me, Do not overdo the bag, Winnie, make use of it of course, let it help you...along, when stuck, by all means, but cast your mind forward, something tells me, cast your mind forward, Winnie, to the time when words must fail-(*she closes eyes, pause, opens eyes*)-and do not overdo the bag (1963, p.25).

When she seems to struggle with the sensation of the absent object. She recurs to it, not

forgetting it must be spared as a last source of anxiety containment. I believe that her stuckness can be read as her inability to achieve the depressive position. She is trapped in her schizo-paranoid defences.

3.6 - Winnie's inability to develop thinking capacity

Winnie has many expressions that are repeated throughout the play, reinforcing the sense of "sameness", as "the old style" that she says of something praiseworthy, giving an idea of tradition, an ideal, but it adds up to the idea of her stagnation which I connected to Steiner's "*Psychic Retreats*" (1993). In a way this stagnation is highly valued. As we have seen through Meltzer, she wants to maintain her pretty face and is truly devoted to keep herself looking nice, but static, forever, extending one moment ad infinitum, making sure nothing happens meanwhile. Another of her sayings that she repeats *ad nauseum* is "this is going to be another happy day"; for example, when Willie finally answers her. She keeps talking nonstop and her interlocutor has the task to exist, in order to give existence to her speech, and herself, in consequence. Thinking with O' Shaughnessy (1999) on the important capacity for projective identification as the first mode of communication (which is different to the pathological projective identification described in Meltzer), we can consider that the pathological projective identification takes place when the early one could not occur properly. We can perceive Winnie's urge for having someone with good capacity for containment and that is why Winnie is still ever so grateful to have Willie there, close to her while she speaks. She seems to be "in hope" for the possible capacity for reverie in her interlocutor and she gives great value to it, even though most of the time he does not even answer her. Willie's presence allows Winnie to address her feelings to someone, in hope of being understood:

Ah yes, if only I could bear to be alone, I mean prattle away with not a soul to hear. (Pause.) Not that I flatter myself you hear much, no Willie, God forbid. (Pause.) Days perhaps when you hear nothing. (Pause.) But days too when you answer. (Pause.) So that I may say at all times, even when you do not answer .and perhaps hear nothing, something of this is being heard, I am not merely talking to myself, that is in the wilderness, a thing I could never bear to do – for any length of time. (Pause.) That is what enables me

to go on, go on talking that is. (1963, p.18)

She could not bear having to speak to herself and it is patent that she is not willing to notice that in reality that is what she is doing. She is taking refuge in a schizo-paranoid wish-fulfilment mode to evade this reality of loneliness, as Willie does not really seem to care about what she says. He is unable to digest her speech. We could maybe suggest that her speech is non-sense because she does not have anyone with capacity for reverie to “read” it, to make meaning of it. He is physically there, witnessing and giving her some life, although her mode of living suggests that she is not really existing. She is half-alive, as if she were not born yet, not ready to bear life, as if escaping from living as much as she can. When she tries to deny to herself how lonely she is in the moments she gets overexcited with Willie’s monosyllabic answers, she actually exposes her loneliness. O’ Shaughnessy (1999).points out that the pleasure principle is a way out of what is unbearable through omnipotence, a provider of the hallucinatory gratification. Frustration tolerance comes with the reality principle, with the capacity to accept reality, through thinking. The omnipotence frees us from frustration by creating a world of falsity. Winnie, despite her disgrace, keeps saying that it is another happy day, and supposes everything is just fine. The “sweet old style”, her ritual, is one of the things that keep her going, occupied, and I related this to what Bion says in “Second Thoughts” (1967) about the avoidance of doing something good with the time:

The relationship with time was graphically brought home to me by a patient who said over and over again that he was wasting time - and continued to waste it. The patient’s aim is to destroy time by wasting it. The consequences are illustrated in the description in Alice in Wonderland of the Mad Hatter’s tea-party - it is always four o’clock. (p. 113).

Winnie is always waiting for the bells to ring, to be able to go to sleep, to have another day passing by, and to restart all over again, with not much capacity to think about her existence. Bion explains the evasion of frustration through its denial: “If the capacity for

tolerating frustration is inadequate, the bad internal, 'no-breast', that is a personality capable of maturity ultimately recognizes as a thought, confronts the psyche with the need to decide between evasion of frustration or of its modification" (1967, p.112). Winnie denies her reality all the time, affirming everything is the best possible, resembling Voltaire's *Candide*, (2005) *motto continuum*: "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds". The lack of freedom, her inertia and optimism despite all her disgrace, suggests a completely alienated state. Her not being able to move, not being understood or even seen by others, directs her to a state of deprivation, which she is lost in their own psychic reality and not noticing she is actually sinking.

The moments Winnie touches her gun demonstrate her ambivalence towards the way she deals with her stuckness: she is in between finding it good or terrible. Either she pretends she is fine, she still has her "sweet old style" to distract herself from living, or she feels compelled to end her misery straight away. In those moments of complete despair she hides the gun away from herself, seeming afraid of acting out. She then turns back to her comforting and secure place, "the sweet old style", to ensure herself some safety. She affirms that something seems to have occurred but nothing had occurred: since she has lost her thinking capacity, it is all the same. Things will be always the same way the following day. She states that is what she finds so wonderful and starts crying. At the same time she avoids changes she feels confined. "One loses one's classics. (*Pause.*) Oh not all. (*Pause.*) A part. (*Pause.*) A part remains. (*Pause.*) That is what I find so wonderful, a part remains, of one's classic, to help one through the day." (1963, p.43) There is a strong relation with the passage of time and memories in the play. Both of them seem to give Winnie a sense of existence, as if, through her memories, she could keep the object present and she recurs to memory as a last source of pleasure. I believe that her frequent statement "that is what I find so wonderful, one more day passing by", implicates a relation to loss, since time marks life and death is its certain end. The bag seems to also represent what is indestructible, what will not perish with time, as she points out that even when Willie has gone the bag will still be there: it will last, despite time.

In the second part of the play, Winnie struggles to see herself when she is buried up to her

neck. She tries to puff her cheeks in order to see a bit of herself, but in vain. At this point it makes it really hard for her to feel alive. She then speaks of her hallucinations, the voices she hears in her mind. The worse they seem, they are still something she could grip on to, something at least, instead of nothing. Winnie asks Willie for help in the middle of a story she is telling, and then she says it is too late. In a way we could think that it is too late to have his participation in telling her life story, to have his help with her experience of a life time. As he does not have capacity for reverie she carries on her thoughtless life. She concludes, resigned, that when you are changeless there is never a difference between one fraction of the second and the next and asks: "Do you ever hear cries, Willie?" (1963, p.46). I wonder if these cries can be read as her own cries for help to Willie. Winnie says: "Do you think the earth has lost its atmosphere?" (1963, p.39), as if she felt lost in space, with no air to breath, as a little baby that suddenly is out of the womb and taken to the outside. She is not ready to make it for herself. Bion writes about the alpha function, the function that the self has to be conscious of itself. Winnie is "not born yet" as she does not manage to be conscious of herself. As I indicated in the introduction through the Hegelian thinking, it is with the confrontation of another live consciousness that the being can create his reflexive consciousness. It occurs to me now that the word reflection implies two meanings: capacity of thinking, to be reflective, and to be seen, as our image is reflected in the mirror. As in the myth of Narcissus, we need something (another person) to reflect ourselves on, and it is through this possibility that our selves are based on. Winnie does not have someone (another consciousness) to enable her reflexive capacity. Therefore she cannot gain consciousness of herself and consequently develop thinking capacity. In Bion's words:

I have described previously (...) the use of a concept of alpha-function as a working tool in the analysis of disturbances of thought. It seemed convenient to suppose that such a function exists if we are to assume that the self is able to be conscious of itself. Yet the failure to establish, between infant and mother, a relationship in which normal projective identification is possible precludes the development of an alpha-function and therefore of a differentiation of elements into conscious and unconscious. (1967 p.115)

3.7 - A query about the Freudian, Lacanian and the Object Relation theoretical position to emptiness

I would like to mark here some basic differentiations between the Freudian, the Lacanian and the Object Relation school's conceptions of emptiness, since I have made use of the three theoretical approaches along this work. I understand that there is a "water division" in the understanding of the Freud-Lacanian and the Object Relation theories, but I do not consider this as an impediment to use them as complementary. The fact that I used Freudian and Lacanian theory in my writing was due to the consideration that, aesthetically, I consider that these two theories reveal Beckett's proposition of "indelible lackness". What I mean is that according to the Freudian and the Lacanian conception, Beckett's subject is a metaphor of humankind's constant struggle in the world. Beckett's play evokes for me the unsolvable mismatch between the subject and the object. The establishment of desire is a result of this, and its consequent search for the occlusion of the lack that will never be fulfilled is experienced in the subject's latter desire to know, in order to give this primal lack a meaning. The urge to articulate desire in words sets up an impossibility that will never be resolved, meaning that the subject is doomed to look for something that he will never find. From this perspective - the Freudian and Lacanian understanding - no preconceived object is there to operate a change in the subject's position, and that is the idea that matches the world presented by Beckett.

Thinking with Klein and Bion, there is in the infant a preconception of the breast, as the awaited object that will come to operate the fundamental function of being "the object" to the infant. We can, right from this start, delimitate its division to the Freudian idea of an object that is lost forever, since the Object Relation theory presents a more approachable solution to the being in that sense. Actually, for the Lacanian thinking, there is no object to mark the satisfaction of this first experience (that won't be recovered even with the mother's presence), while to the Kleinian understanding the question is how to keep the object (that is obviously not static).

In Lacanian theory, this experience of lack institutes a regime for which there is no

salvation of humankind, a constant search established during the infant's first experiences that will never succeed, while in the Object Relation understanding there is an object to start with. If there is an object there is a way of relating to it. The Object Relation theory is focused on the relation to the object, while the Freudian-Lacanian is focused on its "negativity", the lack of it. To the Object Relation school it is not a matter of looking for the object that does not exist, but it is about a regulation that will take place between the infant and the object.

If for the Freudian and Lacanian conception the object's absence is connected to the empirical origin of desire, to Bion the experience of frustration is also needed to make a start in thinking capacity, considering that the mother would be present to help the infant in this brave new world where thinking process takes place without the need to fall in defences mechanisms traps. Having that in mind, we must consider that from this perspective the object is there to support the being in his own way towards establishing for himself a strong-enough ego to bear life as best he can. Taking into account that Beckett's work mostly presents an eternal miss-rendezvous with the object and consequent emptiness, I think the perspective of a lack of object resonates deeply to Beckett's appreciation of the world and invite us to produce new meanings for the absence that Beckett leaves unsolved.

With these considerations I finalize my writing with the consideration that Beckett's work is an externalization, an invitation to each of us to work through our own incompleteness through the emotional experience that he offers by the contact with his work. A way of awakening our inner urge to produce something, to allows life's flux to continue through the development of reflexive consciousness and therefore dealing with the sense of emptiness triggered by the experience of his play.

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