

## **Laughing with Beckett in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame***

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*This paper examines the use of laughter as redemption in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*. By acknowledging the somatic life of characters, Beckett's humour problematises un-embodied philosophies of life. Challenging Hugh Kenner's claim that Beckett's humour is not redemptive because of the dryness and repetitions involved, it is argued that the foregrounding of fragility and vulnerability is a way of expressing deeply humane laughter in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*. While highlighting that the dialectic of lack and excess is one source of Beckettian laughter, the main thrust of the argument emphasises the possibility of transcendence in a comic situation. The play of lack and excess, rather than suspending transcendental redemption, presents the human condition in its existential mundane realities. Accordingly, visceral and repetitive laughter are discussed in the two plays to bring to the fore the ironic and redemptive aspect of the comic, especially in the scenes where some sort of existential humour is implied.*

### **Keywords**

Samuel Beckett; Humour; Redemptive Laughter; Lack/Excess; *Waiting for Godot*; *Endgame*

### **Introduction**

Early Greek philosophers viewed laughter as a threat to order. Plato, for example, viewed humour as an entity that would lead to an unrestrained state of self, which he despised. Plato considers laughter to be a sign of ignorance; those who ridicule others, with the exception of the stupid, are stupid themselves, because they ignore one of the most important Delphic maxims (inscribed on the Temple of Apollo), "know thyself". Plato in his

*Laws* has gone even further to say that harmful laughter should be banned (Gilhus 47).

It is with Kierkegaard in the nineteenth century that Socratic irony (we know Socrates only through Plato) becomes an existential human condition, a kind of self-knowledge. Kierkegaard in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846) writes about the tragic and the comic in relation to this knowledge:

The difference between the tragic and the comic lies in the relationship between the contradiction and the controlling idea. The comic apprehension evokes the contradiction or makes it manifest by having in mind the way out, which is why the contradiction is painless. The tragic apprehension sees the contradiction and despairs of a way out. (515,516)

Contradiction lies at the heart of the comic by Kierkegaard's account, and Beckett is a writer of many contradictions. But Todd McGowan in *Only A Joke Can Save Us: A Theory of Comedy* (2017), considers contradiction in light of the Lacanian notion of lack and excess, which theoretically better explains how humour is created (31). The dialectic of lack/excess also connotes contradiction or incongruity – the latter two terms have been used interchangeably in the present paper.

To demonstrate lack and excess in humour, McGowan uses an example from Terry Jones and Terry Gilliam's *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975). The example entails the fight between Arthur and the Black Knight. In the fight, the Black Knight loses his limbs, but every time he gets dismembered, he does not give up, and is sure he will be victorious. He recounts the injuries as a scratch or a flesh wound. The worse his situation is, the surer he is of winning. This behaviour is incongruent. The Black Knight simultaneously represents lack and excess, or to put it differently, lack and excess collide in his character. His lack is his dismemberment and his excess is his determination in winning in spite of this; thus, making him a comedic figure (13-14). In *Waiting For Godot* (1952), when Vladimir and Estragon are bidding goodbye to Pozzo and Lucky, repeating "Adieu" (45-46) multiple times, we are witness to the tragi-comic dialectic of lack/excess. The prolonging of goodbyes anticipates the absence of Pozzo and Lucky later. In *Happy Days* (1961), Winnie in the first act is in the sand up to her waist, and in the second act up to her neck, and despite this, she finds the slightest of reasons to label her day as happy. Lack and excess here collide while we see her struggle. However, this humour is mixed with sympathy.

An additional source of humour is irony, which creates a space for the audience's introspection and reflection. Richard Bernstein in *Ironic Life* (2014) invokes Jonathan Lear and Kierkegaard to talk about irony as a way of life. Lear states that each person's practical identities are what constitutes them. These identities tend to be created as variations of social roles. Lear uses Kierkegaard's notion of "pretence", meaning "to have a claim":

The possibility of irony arises when a gap opens between pretense as it is made available in a social practice and an aspiration or ideal which, on the one hand, is embedded in the pretense – indeed, which expresses what the pretense is all about – but which, on the other hand, seems to transcend the life and the social practice in which that pretense is made. The pretense seems at once to capture and miss the aspiration. (qtd. in Bernstein 12)

Irony involves a recognition of lack and the anxiety to live up to the idea, however excessive it might turn out. The recognition could also be part of the identity of a reflective person, so how is experiencing irony achieved? There seems to be no consensus. Still Kierkegaard knows himself and Socrates to be the ones that definitely experience irony.

Bernstein uses Freud's notion of "the uncanny" to give a better account of an ironist, where the familiar becomes unfamiliar in a disruptive event. Disruptive in the sense that one cannot go about one's practical identity in one's old ways. The disrupted person takes into account one's privileges and re-evaluates and considers every aspect of the assumed practical identity. Thus, this ironic uptake might entail an identity crisis of some sort. Similarly, Beckett's characters have always a tendency to lead us to this type of questioning and outlook. The figure of the fool and the clown as examined by Mikhail Bakhtin, best represent that ironic feeling of lack/excess. Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) mentions how these two figures create their own world, by adopting the pose of the "other". This "other" sees past the world order and can make use of any situation for comedic effect. The fool and the clown are not a participant in life; rather, they are blunt figures or masks, who point out the truth (159-161).

## Lack/Excess

The source of Beckett's humours is expansive, and the "clownish" – a figure of lack/excess – is implied in different ways. In "Beckett, Böll, and Clowns" (2008) Mary Bryden examines the different types of clowning to argue that more than farce and mere merriment, it is the sense of introspection that the clownish creates in Beckett's works. Interestingly, Bryden quotes Kierkegaard: "the more competently a person exists, the more he will discover the comic" (165). A clown has to uncover the comic and make it tangible while living a threshold life of familiarity and strangeness. Here, the character of Lucky from *Waiting for Godot* (1953) comes to mind. There is indeed something very clownish about Lucky when he dances and thinks. Still, we feel sympathetic for him as humour lightens the sense of absurdity.

The clownish features that Beckett's characters possess are also incongruous, that is, a form of a heightened sense of lack/excess. The clownish antics are evident in the way the characters are described. Vladimir, for example, is described as "short, stiff strides, legs wide apart" (*Godot* 10), Clov and Hamm are described as red-faced, Nagg and Nell as white-faced (*Endgame*), and in *Krapp*, the eponymous character is described as having a purple nose (215). The clownish similarity of the main characters in *Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Krapp* is intensified by the similarity in their actions, more specifically their dogged – often to the point of compulsive self-destruction – persistence. This feature is reminiscent of the figure of *Stehaufmaennchen*, a toy that cannot be kept down despite being pushed down or aside which bears an uncanny resemblance to clowns. We laugh at clowns when they persistently do things that hurt themselves. We can treat Vladimir, Estragon, Hamm, Clov, and Krapp in the same vein. As much as they are worn out and profess their disdain of or agitation with going on, they still continue doing their habitual actions. As we see in *Godot*:

VLADIMIR: [Hurt, coldly.] May one inquire where His Highness spent the night?

ESTRAGON: In a ditch.

VLADIMIR: [Admiringly.] A ditch! Where?

ESTRAGON: [Without gesture.] Over there.

VLADIMIR: And they didn't beat you?

ESTRAGON: Beat me? Certainly they beat me.

VLADIMIR: The same lot as usual?

ESTRAGON: The same? I don't know. (10)

...

VLADIMIR: Who beat you? Tell me.

...

ESTRAGON: You couldn't have stopped them.

VLADIMIR: Why not?

ESTRAGON: There were ten of them.

VLADIMIR: No, I mean before they beat you. I would have stopped you

from doing whatever it was you were doing.

ESTRAGON: I wasn't doing anything.

VLADIMIR: Then why did they beat you? (56)

Estragon's fear of lack – literalised by showing him barefoot – and the assumed omnipresence of Christ collide and create humour. We laugh at Estragon's excessive desire to be crucified. Yet, ironically, Estragon comparing himself to Christ outrages Vladimir as it perhaps does us. Lydia Amir notes in *Humor and the Good Life in Modern Philosophy* (2014) that in Christian theology the ideal human – and by extension an ideal attitude towards humour – is no doubt Christ (102). We sympathise with Beckett's characters in such situations, most notably because of their loneliness and unhappiness as well as their persistence in the face of events that unfold, in short, because of the stubborn dialectic of lack and excess. Interestingly, sympathy is mixed with some sense of detachment and relates to how the search for "identity" itself causes dark laughter. The following scene from *Godot* is suggestive:

POZZO: You are severe. [To Vladimir.] What age are you, if it's not a rude question. [Silence.] Sixty? Seventy? [To Estragon.] What age would you say he was?

ESTRAGON: Eleven. (28)

Lack and excess here collide, because of not only the discrepancy between the number mentioned and the actual age of Vladimir but also because this is how Estragon perceives him, as a child. In act two of *Godot*, we read:

VLADIMIR: All right, you may go.

BOY: What am I to say to Mr Godot, sir?

VLADIMIR: Tell him ... [He hesitates] ... tell him you saw us. [Pause.]

You did see us, didn't you?

BOY: Yes, sir. (51)

Later we read in the same play:

VLADIMIR: Your boots. What are you doing with your boots?

ESTRAGON: [Turning to look at the boots.] I'm leaving them there.

[Pause.]

Another will come, just as ... as ... as me, but with smaller feet, and they'll make him happy.

VLADIMIR: But you can't go barefoot!

ESTRAGON: Christ did.

VLADIMIR: Christ! What's Christ got to do with it? You're not going to compare yourself to Christ!

ESTRAGON: All my life I've compared myself to him.

VLADIMIR: But where he lived it was warm, it was dry!

ESTRAGON: Yes. And they crucified quick. (51-52)

If in tragedy, pity and fear create catharsis, we could argue that in comedy, sympathy and irony do the same. Sympathy is a significant notion in humour studies because it stresses the possibility of laughter as redemption. Redemption is normally associated with a religious connotation and it is even mocked in *Endgame* because of this association. Beckett himself says, "I have never read philosophers [...] I never understood anything they write [...] I am reading Schopenhauer [...] But I am not reading philosophy, nor caring whether he is right or wrong or a good or a worthless metaphysician" (qtd. in Fifield 220- 224). Indeed, it seems out of sync with Beckett to do a metaphysics of laughter in his works. What we see rather is visceral and somatic humour employed to foreground embodied human experience. In other words, the body is a site of laughter in Beckett. In *Either/Or* (1843) Kierkegaard says that our age

Will remind one of the dissolution of the Greek city-state: everything goes on as usual, and yet there is no longer anyone who believes in it. The invisible spiritual bond which gave it validity no longer exists, and so the whole age is at once comic and tragic because it is perishing, comic because it goes on. (19)

We need no big imaginative leap to move from the dissolution of the Greek city-state to the disintegration and perishing of bodies and minds in Beckett's works, while noting that in the latter, life, whatever it is, goes on and on. Comedy disrupts everyday life experience as it is a coming together of disparate elements. McGowan considers comedy an insight to the social cohesion that we experience by bringing to the fore the ever-present struggle of lack and excess in society (20- 21).

Lydia Amir in *Philosophy, Humor, and the Human Condition: Taking Ridicule Seriously* (2019) examines in detail what she calls the big picture philosophy of humour. She makes certain proposals as to what human beings should do in the face of a pervasive and engulfing sense of absurdity and tragedy. One of her main claims is that the dichotomy between tragedy and comedy, as clear-cut demarcations, needs to be deconstructed because the everyday experience of life is beyond such a distinction (129). According to her, to have a better life we need to accept our own ridiculousness or the *Homo risibilis*; something that Beckett's characters never do. They continue to wait for an answer like Vladimir and Estragon in *Godot*. Hamm, Clov, and Nagg even pray to God in silence and then drop their earnest attitude immediately when nothing happens. Furthermore, Hamm and Clov, make a game out of ending. The possibility of redemption, in its purely religious sense, is mocked in *Endgame*:

CLOV:

...

Do you believe in the life to come?

HAMM:

Mine was always that.

(Exit Clov.)

Got him that time! (121)

The writer seems to be giggling at our attempts to pull some wisdom tooth of redemption from his works. However, Beckett's comic antics have a redeeming quality of their own.

The comic brings about two types of redemption. A transcendence in lower key and the other in higher key; in lower key, in the sense that, it sets itself apart from the well-ordered world and in its own world, the comic, rules and assumptions of the empirical and well-ordered world are suspended. And in high key, certain qualities of the comic suggest a form of transcendence that

is unlike the first one, not temporary at all. These qualities include a discrete structure of reality, time, and space that is assigned to the comic, like any other human experience. The world or the province that the comic presents is light, thin, effervescent and sometimes shared with others. However, our everyday reality is a dense and compelling one that is shared with everybody (Berger 190-191). Religious experience, as a province of meaning, also posits a similar world to the comic. As Berger puts it “both phenomena bring about the perception of a magically transformed world” (191).

The Christian notion of redemption, promises a world without pain, so does the comic. McGowan considers reflection on humour as something that can transfer us into another plane of experience (3). Thus, both the comic and religious transform the excessive reality of ours to a reality with less importance. This relativisation also happens in different ways in theatre, especially in the Theatre of the Absurd. Berger uses Eugène Ionesco’s terminology in the word “dépaysement”, which literally means losing one’s country to emphasise this dimension of the comic. While entering the other world (comic or religious), albeit temporarily, we possess a dépaysement feeling. To put it in another way, what we already took for granted as reality now appears unreal. While experiencing and embracing this notion, the counter-world that religious or comic experience presents, seems even more real than the empirical world (Berger 192). This relativisation can be extended to examine the clown figure in Beckett’s works, especially in terms of detachment and reflection.

Beckett’s characters in the plays mentioned thus far, with their words and actions, often work as a revealing lens for the audience and in this way reinforce the redemptive aspect of humour. With the clown-like antics and their ironic uptake, the characters bring about transcendence in both low and higher key. Considering Beckettian humour from the notion of lack and excess, it challenges us to see more of this structure in our day-to-day lives. Furthermore, we can turn to Nietzsche and his notion of metamorphosis of self to the three figures of the camel, lion, and child. With the figure of the lion, Nietzsche asks us to challenge the old values as a required metamorphosis that we should undertake. This transformation promises freedom in the face of absurdity (Gordon 367-368; 376). The struggle with the old values and old meanings can be seen in *Endgame*:

HAMM: Go and get the oilcan.

CLOV: What for?

HAMM: To oil the castors.

CLOV: I oiled them yesterday.

HAMM: Yesterday! What does that mean? Yesterday!

CLOV: [Violently.] That means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent. (118)

Language as the main element involved in upholding our age-old values and meaning is considered to be troublesome. Furthermore, ironic uptake arises, questioning the old and established concept of “yesterday” as an unfamiliar concept.

David Michael Kleinberg-Levin in *Beckett's Words: The Promise of Happiness in a Time of Mourning* (2015) argues that Beckett's works have self-reflective values that keep “the promise of happiness” alive without particularly a need for theodicy. Kleinberg-Levin attributes the promise of happiness to language, since it is the way we communicate (7). He states that we cannot attain happiness, until everybody achieves justice. Achieving this happiness has been impossible; therefore, the promise is yet to be fulfilled (9-11, 80). Beckett's works are an arena that represent the world as it is, devoid of justice for all; his characters are affected by some type of injustice. Vladimir and Estragon reminisce about how they could go to the top of the Eiffel Tower but they would not be allowed near it now (*Godot* 11). In another example in *Godot*, Pozzo goes blind in the second act for no apparent reason and Lucky is presented as mute. In *Endgame*, Hamm cannot see or walk, Clov cannot sit and Nagg and Nell inhabit dustbins. Thus, Kleinberg-Levin mentions Beckett and Nietzsche as witnesses to the deterioration of old values and language (49). Humour is still present even in these horrid conditions. In *Endgame* we read:

NELL: I am going to leave you.

NAGG: Could you give me a scratch before you go?

NELL: No. [Pause.] Where?

NAGG: In the back.

NELL: No. [Pause.] Rub yourself against the rim.

NAGG: It's lower down. In the hollow.

NELL: What hollow?

NAGG: The hollow! [Pause.] Could you not? [Pause.] Yesterday you scratched me there. (106)

The notion of humour and redemption are entangled with pain. Nell and Nagg are no longer able to touch each other, but the humour is tangible. Sometimes the ironic uptake – which intimates redemptive laughter – is hard to come by for Beckett's characters. This exchange in *Endgame* can be illuminating:

CLOV: I'll leave you.

[He goes towards door.]

HAMM: Before you go ... [Clav halts near door] ... say something.

CLOV: There is nothing to say.

HAMM: A few words ... to ponder ... in my heart.

...

CLOV: [Fixed gaze, tonelessly, towards auditorium.] They said to me, That's love, yes yes, not a doubt, now you see how –

HAMM: Articulate!

CLOV: [As before.] How easy it is. They said to me, That's friendship, yes yes, no question, you've found it. They said to me, Here's the place, stop, raise your head and look at all that beauty. That order! They said to me, Come now, you're not a brute beast, think upon these things and you'll see how all becomes clear. And simple! They said to me, What skilled attention they get, all these dying of their wounds.

HAMM: Enough!

CLOV: [As before.] I say to myself – sometimes, Clav, you must learn to suffer better than that if you want them to weary of punishing you – one day. I say to myself – sometimes, Clav, you must be there better than that if you want them to let you go – one day. But I feel too old, and too far, to form new habits. Good, it'll never end, I'll never go. [Pause.] Then one day, suddenly, it ends, it changes, I don't understand, it dies, or it's me, I don't understand that either. I ask the words that remain – sleeping, waking, morning, evening. They have nothing to say. [Pause.] I open the door of the cell and go. I am so bowed I only see my feet, if I open my eyes, and between my legs a little trail of black dust. I say to myself that the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit. [Pause.] It's easy going. [Pause.] When I fall I'll weep for happiness. (136-137)

Love, friendship, beauty, and order have all lost their meaning and for Clav, he is too old to form new habits or create his own meaning. When he says "Good, it'll never end, I'll never go. [Pause.] Then one day, suddenly, it ends, it changes, I don't understand, it dies, or it's me, I don't understand that either",

there is a dry smile on the audience's lips. The audience sympathises, because they, too, have struggled with understanding notions of love, friendship and so on. The problem of language persists in many of Beckett's works just as Kleinberg-Levin mentions, which is true of our world, as Beckett writes in *Watt* (1953), "words enclose" a certain "nothingness" (247), which can be clearly read both ways: words save us from nothingness, or else, words mean nothing.

## Laughter Redux

In this section, we argue for the redemptive aspects that Beckett's characters offer. Hugh Kenner in *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (1961) implies that the repetitive world that Beckett's characters inhabit seems to be a prison (185-186). For Kenner, "Beckett's comedy is not particularly humane, since it derives its effects from the driest and most abstract of human activities, nor is it particularly redemptive, since it emphasises the inevitable repetitiveness and closure of human thought" (qtd in. North 142). However, with the element of sympathy and detachment, it seems, we laugh at Beckett's characters, because we see ourselves. In other words, we see how vulnerable we are. Because it is even more pronounced in our daily routines, so a sense of humanness engulfs the comic. Sometimes the inherent irremediability of characters' actions can bring about the redemption; the back-and-forth exchange that happens quite often in *Godot* between Vladimir and Estragon is funny for this very reason. At one stage of the play we read:

ESTRAGON: And if he doesn't come?  
 VLADIMIR: We'll come back tomorrow.  
 ESTRAGON: And then the day after tomorrow.  
 VLADIMIR: Possibly.  
 ESTRAGON: And so on.  
 VLADIMIR: The point is –  
 ESTRAGON: Until he comes.  
 VLADIMIR: You're merciless. (15)

The above exchange creates a sense of circularity, a timelessness which is similar to the momentary loss of time in hearty laughter. Furthermore, the conversation about waiting arises multiple times throughout the play.

Kenner calls Beckett's plots "either an infinite series, or else an impasse" (188). However, as Vladimir puts it there is some merit in it: "We have kept our appointment, and that's an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?" (*Godot* 78). Here, it seems that the redemption for the characters lies in their waiting. The repetitiveness in the above scene can be redemptive for the audience too. The illuminating factor here is that we can reflect upon our daily routines and repeated actions and words. Reflection is encouraged in *Endgame*, as seen by the previous example on the concept of "yesterday". Elsewhere we can see the meta-theatrical aspect of this work:

CLOV: I'll leave you.

HAMM: No!

CLOV: What is there to keep me here?

HAMM: The dialogue. [Pause.] I've got on with my story. [Pause.] I've got on with it well. [Pause. Irritably.] Ask me where I've got to.

CLOV: Oh, by the way, your story?

HAMM: [Surprised.] What story?

CLOV: The one you've been telling yourself all your ... days.

HAMM: Ah you mean my chronicle?

CLOV: That's the one.

[Pause.]

HAMM: [Angrily.] Keep going, can't you, keep going! (126)

Hamm is playing a role and encourages Clov to keep going. Theatricality helps us reflect on the humorous condition. To make another example, reflection is accompanied with a retrospective detachment in *Krapp's Last Tape* as the old man in the play broods over his younger self while listening to the recorded tapes. The audience is engaged too and are invited to reflect on their past. The intimations of lack create dialogic involvement.

Matthew Davis, in "Someone Is Looking at Me Still': The Audience-Creature Relationship in the Theater Plays of Samuel Beckett" (2011), is certainly at odds with the notion of Beckett's meta-theatricality, as he points out that there is no boy with the promise of salvation at the end of Beckett's plays, no winks, or aside or nudges or underplots going on. He claims that all that happens in Beckett's plays are just minor calamities. Davis ascribes a limited view on the events that unfold in Beckett's plays. There are other examples of Beckett's characters being reflective, and references that go

beyond the stage as we recounted in the previous example. In another scene in *Endgame*, we read:

HAMM: ... [Pause.] Put me in my coffin.

CLOV: There are no more coffins.

HAMM: Then let it end! [CLOV goes towards ladder.] With a bang! [Clouv gets up on ladder, gets down again, looks for telescope, sees it, picks it up, gets up ladder, raises telescope.] Of darkness! And me? Did anyone ever have pity on me?

CLOV: [Lowering the telescope, turning towards HAMM.] What? [Pause.] Is it me you're referring to?

HAMM: [Angrily.] An aside, ape! Did you never hear an aside before? [Pause.] I'm warming up for my last soliloquy. (135-136)

Hamm's performative reaction, as it is followed by references to an "aside" and a "soliloquy", is certainly at odds with Davis' understanding of Beckett's plays. The meta-theatricality of this scene opens up room for an ironic reading of the play, one that would encourage the audience to be ironic. This ironic uptake will lead to a place where the detection of disparate elements of lack and excess in our everyday lives is easier than before. The redemptive power of Beckettian humour is thus revealed.

As can be seen in the above-mentioned example, there is a harshness in the way that Hamm and Clov communicate. The master-servant relationship, because of its inherent lack and excess dichotomy, opens the space for humour. In the above example, humour can be found in Hamm's excessive behaviour towards Clov's lack of awareness of Hamm's intention, which some might rightly consider cruel. The dialectic of lack/excess refigure the dialectic of master-slave. Another example of this type of lack/excess can be seen in *Godot* when Lucky goes on a "thinking" spree, and he is only stopped because his hat is removed by Vladimir, Estragon and Pozzo, after much effort. Here the humour comes from the fact that when we first see Lucky, he is treated appallingly by Pozzo. He must be told everything by Pozzo. He never talks except for this scene. In fact, he is told to think aloud. Thus, the collision of talking, or more accurately, unremitting rambling, that can't be stopped unless by force, is humorous.

Hannah Simpson in "'Strange laughter': Post-Gothic Questions of Laughter and the Human in Samuel Beckett's Work" (2017) discusses Beckett's characters' laughter and the laughter that they provoke. Both are labelled as inappropriate.

She argues that since the laughter happens in situations that are most often not considered humane, it cannot be labelled as human laughter (3). She also notes that Beckettian laughter often besets anxiety, similar to the one elicited by the gothic (8). Simpson theorises laughter as a communal act. She mentions how for Wolfgang Iser, in Beckett's works, it seems that laughter is stripped from communality and is no longer contagious (12). Simpson seems to think that this kind of inappropriate laughter makes the audience question their own humanity. There is no indication in Simpson's essay of the fact that this questioning can have ironic undertones. She furthermore identifies Beckettian laughter more non-human than human, stating that, "even when Beckettian laughter does suggest the human rather than the non-human, to be rendered recognizably human is not necessarily to be redeemed. Beckettian laughter provokes revulsion, fear, or at best pity or empathy, rather than any sense of liberating, healing redemption" (14-15). However, an ironic outlook on Beckettian humour has shown us the opposite. The non-human aspects that Simpson mentions, because of impropriety of actions or words, are in fact all too human to be ignored. All the awkwardness and revulsion, lack and excess, are more reason for Beckett's characters to be capable of offering us a sense of redemption.

Manfred Pfister in "Beckett's Tonic Laughter" (2001), states that Beckettian laughter, that is laughter elicited by Beckett's characters, does not even qualify as a cure but a tonic at best (50). Pfister calls laughter and silence the two most radical reactions in the face of language's inadequacy to deal with the disproportionate reality (50). Beckettian laughter, in this sense, becomes a defensive mechanism, since the body is a site of pain and defects (50). We argue that tonic laughter is good enough laughter.

Here, another example from Beckett will be provided as a closing example in order to conclude what Beckettian humour is and could offer us. In *Endgame* we read:

CLOV: [Anguished, scratching himself.] I have a flea!

HAMM: A flea! Are there still fleas?

CLOV: On me there's one. [Scratching.] Unless it's a crablouse.

HAMM: [Very perturbed.] But humanity might start from there all over again! Catch him, for the love of God!

CLOV: I'll go and get the powder.

[Exit Clov.]

HAMM: A flea! This is awful! What a day!

[Enter Clov with a sprinkling-tin.]

CLOV: I'm back again, with the insecticide.

HAMM: Let him have it!

[Clov loosens the top of his trousers, pulls it forward and shakes powder into the aperture. He stoops, looks, waits, starts, frenziedly shakes more powder, stoops, looks, waits.]

CLOV: The bastard!

HAMM: Did you get him?

Clov: Looks like it. [He drops the tin and adjusts his trousers.] Unless he's

laying doggo.

HAMM: Laying! Lying you mean. Unless he's lying doggo.

CLOV: Ah? One says lying? One doesn't say laying?

HAMM: Use your head, can't you. If he was laying we'd be bitched.

(134)

This example contains the clownish antics, or the somatic aspect of Beckettian humour when Clov is using insecticide on his private parts. The excessive behaviour of Clov is what makes us laugh. Another aspect would be the “reflection” of Hamm on humanity. The disparate elements of “love of God” and the terror of humanity starting all over again are humorous. Moreover, the scene points to the notion of the problem of language with the word “lying”. The inadequacy of language enables a comedic moment. Thus, Beckettian humour can be looked at from the Lacanian – as understood by McGowen – notion of lack and excess in such a way that enables us to see more of it. The clownish antics and the ironic uptake, involving detachment and reflection on actions and words, operate as a revealing lens, that open up room for detecting the ever-present lack/excess in our day-to-day lives.

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