

Samuel Beckett's 'The Way' and *Stirrings Still*: Analysing the Self from 'Schopenhauerian Buddhist' Perspective

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Samuel Beckett is considered an exemplar of 'placeless' expression in world literature today. He acquired an international reputation after the premiere of *Waiting for Godot* in 1953 and received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1969. The award confirms Beckett's status as a writer who extends a considerable literary influence beyond cultural boundaries. In the light of his commitments to 'ignorance' and 'impoverishment,' this article addresses the expression of nothingness in the idea of the self. The nothingness of the self, portrayed in Beckett's late short prose pieces like 'The Way' and *Stirrings Still* can be characterised as disintegrated, dependent and essenceless. This highlights a positive aspect of nothingness, embedded in the expression of the self that flourishes beyond Western cultural boundaries. These characteristics of the presentation of the self in Beckett's literary works in turn, owe much to the influence of the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who, in turn, owes much to the Eastern philosophies of Buddhism and the Vedas. These intercultural exchanges make Beckett an interesting case for world literature.

David Damrosch writes that Goethe coined the term *Weltliteratur* while speaking to Johann Peter Eckermann in January 1827 and also affirms that "the work enters into world literature by a double process: first, by being read *as* literature; second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural points of origin" (6; emphasis original). Beckett's writings fit into this category since the literary works embody formations of self in a way that showcases the inner observations of the self beyond cultural margins. I would argue that 'Schopenhauerian Buddhism' is one way Beckett goes beyond his 'linguistic and cultural points of origin' to enter world literature.

Schopenhauer's knowledge of Buddhism helps illuminate Beckett's artistic representation of positive emptiness, which I will call 'Schopenhauerian Buddhism.' This term was also used by Urs App in *Richard Wagner and Buddhism*. The reason for Schopenhauer's philosophical convergence with Buddhist philosophies of emptiness lies in his understanding of two aspects of Buddhism. First, there is the belief that the existence and formation of phenomena are the result of an interrelation between different elements that constitute a thing or person. Deriving from this understanding, Schopenhauer defines his principle of sufficient reason: "Nothing is without a ground or reason why it is" (1974, 6). Schopenhauer is perhaps the most important Western philosopher to talk about the principle of sufficient reason, which is similar to the Buddhist understanding of dependent origination. Bhikkhu Bodhi, in 'Transcendental Dependent Arising' notes that dependent origination in Buddhism is a process that derives "from the arising of this, that arises; from the ceasing of this, that ceases." Second, self and object lack essence or inherent nature. This means "that things exist but their existence is never self-standing" (Burton 177). Crucially, this concept can be applied to the formation of the self. The example of a tree given by David Burton explains the meaning of this principle. Burton writes that a tree is made up of various components such as the trunk, root, branches, bark, leaves, and so on. This tree is also dependent upon various factors of the environment such as water, sunshine, air, soil and so on. The doctrine of emptiness in Mahayana philosophy contends that what we call 'tree' is a combination of these various parts and external conditions that help the 'tree' be a tree. There is no single 'tree-entity.' When the search for a tree-entity is undertaken, nothing is found. Hence, "tree is simply a name, a concept, which the mind attributes to these various conditions" (Burton 180).

On closer inspection, ‘the self’ is also seen to be simply an ever-changing interplay of these constituents, famously called ‘khandha’ in Buddhism (which translates as ‘aggregates’ in English). ‘Khandha’ is a Pali word, meaning ‘a pile, a bundle or heap’ (Thanissaro 2010, 2). Aggregates play an important role in the understanding of the world and the self. Discussion of the aggregates of the self is elaborate in Buddhism. Thanissaro, in ‘The Five Aggregates,’ defines the constituents of the self like this:

- Form covers the physical phenomenon of the body.
- Feelings include happiness, unhappiness or neither happiness nor unhappiness.
- Perception labels or identifies objects.
- Consciousness recognises the six senses, counting intellect as the sixth.
- Fabrication is the action or process to create by combining or assembling things or making up stories, untruth, fib or deception.

In this view, the formation of self is dependent upon these five aggregates, and the constant interdependence of aggregates forms the self. In other words, the self is more of an on-going process than a stable, fixed and solid form.

The second characteristic of emptiness in Buddhism is essencelessness. This is similar to Schopenhauer’s understanding of nothing as derived from the *Prajana-Paramita* of Buddhism in the following terms: “the point where subject and object no longer exist” (Schopenhauer I 1969, 412). So, there is no core of the subject or object which can be pinpointed as its essence. Schopenhauer characterises this understanding of essencelessness as an “empty dream” and a “ghostly vision” (Schopenhauer I 1969, 99). For Schopenhauer, the emptiness of a self or a thing has a dependent character, owing to its essenceless quality:

Knowledge and plurality, or individuation, stand and fall together, for they condition each other. It is to be concluded from this that, beyond the phenomenon, in the true being-in-itself of all things, to which time and space, and therefore plurality, must be foreign, there cannot exist any knowledge. Buddhism describes this as *Prajana Paramita*, i.e., that which is beyond all knowledge. (Schopenhauer II 1969, 275)

The doctrine of Buddhist emptiness bears much in common with Schopenhauer’s philosophy. For this reason, the combination of Schopenhauer and Buddhist thinking provides a useful insight into acknowledging not only the phenomena involved in the construction of the self but also shows how suffering originates when the connection between different elements of the self is formed and the essence of the self is taken to be ‘I.’

Beckett’s interest in Schopenhauer’s philosophy is well documented. Biographical, archival and textual sources confirm it. Beckett’s appreciation of Schopenhauer began in 1930, as is evident from a letter written to Thomas MacGreevy: “I am reading Schopenhauer” (Beckett *Letters I*, 32-33). In 1937 when Beckett was ill with gastric influenza, he returned to Schopenhauer and, in another letter to MacGreevy Beckett wrote that “I always knew he was one of the ones that mattered most to me, and it is a pleasure more real than any pleasure for a long time” (Beckett *Letters I*, 550). Matthew Feldman in *Beckett’s Books* has shown that in Beckett’s mid-1930s ‘Philosophy Notes,’ he took reading notes on Schopenhauer and showed a personal affinity with the philosopher, calling him ‘dear Arthur.’ In these notes, Beckett mentions Schopenhauer several times, seemingly in a familiar way: “Irrationalism comes to full development in Schopenhauer by removal of religious element” (Beckett 10967/252v) and “Schopenhauer became – leaving the weaknesses of his system aside – one of the greatest philosophical writers” (Beckett 10967/478).

Much of Beckett's work illustrates this essencelessness by showing the protagonists via disintegrated aspects of the self; as eye, hand, physical body, voice or mind and the various combinations in which the different aspects of the self, interact without naming any of them as part of the self. In *Murphy*, the protagonist's mind can distinguish between the mental and the physical world, and he "finds himself split between the two, a body and a mind. They had intercourse apparently, otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common" (Beckett 2009, 70). In Beckett's late work, *Company*, the narrator addresses the protagonists as 'he' and 'you,' suggesting that the thoughts of the speaker accompany the hearer, challenging the very notion of the singular 'I' that represents all the elements of the self with a name: "you are on your back in the dark" (Beckett 2009, 3); "Another devising it all for company" (Beckett 2009, 21). This suggests their disintegrated state of the body and the mind in which the protagonist is not clear about their identity and brings to the fore a sense of touch that comes through hands, breath through nostrils, and light from the lamp, all without using the senses of perception (sight, smell, touch) to associate an idea with them. This non-identification with identity as singular shows disintegration and essencelessness since the protagonist is not able to pin down their essence in body or in mind and the idea of 'I' is broken. The significance of this recognition of no 'I' is in discovering the grace of emptiness because the self is an amalgamation of many elements and also essenceless in nature. The protagonists of Beckett's late works are represented through separate constituents of the self and are able to see the relationship between these components. This helps to recognise the rise of suffering due to the habit of forming automatic connections between the various elements of the self. This is evident in the protagonists of the late writings who are presented in disintegrated forms. The result of showcasing the self in disintegrated form directs towards 'graceful' emptiness: "Grace to breathe that void. Know happiness" (Beckett 2009, 59). In *Murphy*, the protagonist begins "to see nothing, that colourlessness which is such a rare post-natal treat" (Beckett 2009, 246). Despite a gulf of nearly fifty years, both *Murphy* and *Ill Seen Ill Said* celebrate the experience of the void as 'treat' and 'happiness.'

The short prose works written in the final decade of Beckett's life focus upon the obscurity of the self and the self in relation to the world by allocating to the characters, only disintegrated elements of the self. Beckett's post-Nobel prose works draw upon the fragmented nature of the self through contemplation. In this process, the protagonists have thoughts and imaginations, which end with an emptiness, equivalent to an understanding, filtered through the 'Schopenhauerian Buddhist' framework. As Grendon asserts:

[...] although there are some references to characters many of who appeared in Beckett's earlier novels who seem to correspond to the traditional subject in that they are endowed with a name and a familiar human physical form, these identities do not remain stable long. (50)

Decades after 'Three Dialogues' in which 'B' mentions that there is nothing to express, the obligation of expression comes through an awareness of the self in Beckett's works which represent bare combination of the elements of the self that are constantly interacting.

This article is concerned with this fragmented self in Beckett's shorter prose works from the 1980s – the shorter 'The Way' (1981) and *Stirrings Still* (1989). These compressed works pay rigorous attention to each activity within the self. Beckett's earlier attempt to yield an awareness of the self into the text is evident in a 1960 conversation with Lawrence Harvey in which he gives a significant status to contemplation and says that it plays a consequential role whereby "getting below the surface, concentrating, listening, getting your ear down so you can hear the infinitesimal murmur" are reinforced (247). This appearance and disappearance in the construction of the self can be read

through ‘Schopenhauerian Buddhism’ which emphasises how the word ‘I’ embodies multiple aspects without essence. For Schopenhauer, this brings clarity in understanding how an illusion (veil of Maya) is formed in the sense of the self. When Schopenhauer writes, “the world is my representation,” he draws upon the Buddhist expression of emptiness and the Vedic deception present in the idea of things and the self. To this end, Schopenhauer further remarks that “the world must be recognised, from one aspect at least, as akin to a dream, indeed as capable of being put in the same class as dream” (Schopenhauer II 1969, 4).

The protagonists of these late prose works are divided into an inner and an outer self: “his ears from deep within” (Beckett *Stirrings Still*, 114); “self and second self” (Beckett 2009, 110); “head on hands he saw himself rise and go” (Beckett *Stirrings Still*, 107) and “He speaks of himself as of another” (Beckett *Company*, 16). The relationship between the elements within the mind, such as ears and eyes, are observed without reactions or perceptions as in ‘Ceiling’: “For some time after coming to the eyes continue to. When in the end they open they are met by this dull white. Consciousness eyes to of having come to” recognise self as it is (Beckett 2009, 129). For example, a thinking mind thinks about a memory. This memory is a fragment from the past, but no label, either good or bad, is attached to it. The protagonists are aware of emergent memory in the mind, which is also a product of habit as in the 1931 *Proust*. The awareness of memory and habit is generally unnoticeable, and Schopenhauer explains this through a simile: “The most accurate seems to be that of a piece of cloth, which after being folded frequently, again falls automatically, as it were, into same creases” (Schopenhauer I 1969, 216). This relates to the automatic mental passing over of the process of interdependence. Beckett’s late works grasp unawareness at the moment of its occurrence and lay bare memory, perceptions and thoughts at the moment of happening, portraying the distinctive nature of how memory and habit work.

This dissolution of the self in Beckett’s works comes through protagonists who are aware of the self’s different constituents. A ‘Schopenhauerian Buddhist’ framework makes it clear that for the protagonists, there is an identification with the mind and other constituents of the self separately and, moreover, that the construction of the self is based on its various elements. The most difficult part of the sense of ‘I’ is to grasp or define it, because there is no essence behind the illusory sense of self. It is impossible to pin down ‘I’ in any of the constituents of the self, as is clear from Schopenhauer’s principle of sufficient reason. Read into Beckett’s late prose, this suggests a fragmentation of the self. Thus the ‘I’ is like “[o]ne’s own person [which] is then split up into the knowing and the known, into object and subject, and here, as everywhere, these two face each other inseparably and irreconcilably” (Schopenhauer II 1969, 6). This view identifies the self as split and dependent.

The idea that ‘nothing remains to say’ about the self becomes a key aspect of self-awareness that dispels the illusion, embedded in the sense of the self. Thus, Schopenhauer understands, “the senses are merely the seat of an enhanced sensibility” while “each sensation as a modification of the sense of touch or the ability to feel”, “extends over the whole body” (Schopenhauer 1974, 239). This means that the representation of the elements of the self is shown as aspects that are normally taken as a singular self, which in fact it is not. Beckett’s literary observation focuses upon the breakdown of the elements of the self. In turn, this reveals the fragmented phenomena comprising the self.

The monologues in these late works display inconsistent narrative structures, and the voices appear in non-representational patterns, which evoke the failure of words to describe a thing or event. Beckett’s use of these structures suggests the underlying meaninglessness of words, which restrict understanding of phenomena under consideration. The failure of language is presented in the text. On

the level of interpretation, basic comprehension is not possible. For example, consider the opening lines of *Imagination Dead Imagine*: “No trace anywhere of life, you say, pah, no difficulty there. Imagination not dead yet, yes, dead, good, imagination dead imagine” (Beckett 1974, 63). Adrian Hunter argues, “what punctuation there is has the effect not of assisting but of further breaking down any chain of meaning in the language” (92). In a similar strain, Hugh Kenner argues that Beckett “seems unable to punctuate a sentence, let alone construct one. More and more deeply he penetrates the heart of utter incompetence, where the simplest phrases, the merest three-word sentences, fly apart in his hands” (1995, n.pag.). Both Hunter’s and Kenner’s evaluation can be contradicted by applying a ‘Schopenhauerian-Buddhist’ framework that helps specify how Beckett’s language obliterates the various elements that construct the self. Thus, Beckett’s approach to language is that which performs exactly what observation shows. A reason can be found in Schopenhauer’s Eastern philosophical perspective: his principle of dependent origination and the concept of Buddhist emptiness, both express how the self is made. Therefore, the nature of language in Beckett’s work is such that it gives a complete “telegraph communicating arbitrary signs with greatest rapidity and the finest difference of shades of meaning” (Schopenhauer I 1969, 39). In general, language is effected through pictures, conditioning of mind, habit and imagination. Schopenhauer writes: “our learning of a language consists in our linking together a concept and a word for all time, so that this word always occurs to us simultaneously with this concept, and this concept with the word” (Schopenhauer II 1969, 134). Hence the process involved in language “connect[s] the image of the person or thing with any quality of perception” (Schopenhauer II 1969, 134) and this kind of association is likely to “seize any impression that has been left behind, and thus is temporary and deceitful” (Schopenhauer II 1969, 134). In this way, naming relates to the singularity of the self and the perception formed is not from direct observation. This yields an instantaneous veil over reality, which is the veil of perception created for the object. Beckett’s late prose works are shining examples where language does not pose any threat to the observation of the self, as language is just describing the self as it is.

This article now turns to the fragmented conditions of self present in Beckett’s last prose works. They represent the mind and its formulations through representation, the mind’s interaction with thoughts, and the ‘nothing’ found at the bottom of thought processes and memory. Although Beckett separated the functional entities, such as both listener, reader and voice of consciousness, he continued to represent the awareness. These representations of aspects of the self in the form of various elements of the self that are interacting and performing the assigned tasks are attempts to overturn the image of the self as singular. For example, eyes are seeing, legs are moving and noses are breathing, and the achievement is the attainment of understanding the self by “annihilating its deception” (Schopenhauer II 1969, 148) and bringing about awareness through observation.

A. ‘The Way’

Beckett’s short prose text, ‘The Way,’ written in mid-May 1981 – at the time of his Schopenhauerian entries in the ‘Sottisier Notebook’ – emphasises this depersonalisation of the self, which has been identified above as drawing upon a specific ‘Schopenhauerian Buddhist’ formulation that stresses the illusion of a singular self. The depersonalisation of the self lifts the illusion (Maya) of the self as singular by direct observation. This observation is not undertaken by thought, or perception formed by thoughts, but experienced reflexively. A perceptual haze suggests that the elements of the self are difficult to isolate within the measurements of time and space. ‘Perceptual haze’ here refers to the ambiguity created by the thoughts in relation to the understanding of the mind as an element of the

self. No pronouns or names are given in 'The Way.' The absence of names or pronoun is an indication that the analysis is done on one's own self.

The self in Beckett's late texts participates in a maze that one encounters while travelling within oneself. This is akin to the form of Buddhist meditation in which attention is trained inwards and the self becomes an entity comprising various aspects. This movement toward meditative introspection in Beckett is presented across the body from "foot to top and thence on down another way. On back down"; "the ways crossed midway more and less than midway up and down"; "the way up back down" or "in part from on the way" (Beckett 2009, 125). Here, the text presents an observation of the self, but does not name it as such. Rather 'The Way' records the movement of observation of the self from top to bottom, the way it is. According to a 'Schopenhauerian Buddhist' framework, after the attention is trained across the body, it seems difficult to pinpoint which part of the body can be labelled as self, and thus the text expresses confusion over how to pinpoint a specific place in the corridors of the body that purports to record the elements of the self.

The conception of the self as a dependent entity comes from Schopenhauer's Buddhist-derived view on the emptiness of the self. When the attention is trained inward, as in the case of meditation, one can experience elemental parts of the self, which are divided into feelings, form or consciousness via a 'Schopenhauerian Buddhist' framework, feeling is a part of the self, while feelings have an interaction with the sense of a singular 'I' which is dependent in nature. However, feeling takes on the sense of 'I' automatically because insufficient attention is paid to its nature. 'I' then is an illusion (veil of Maya) because the element of the self, which is feeling, is not recognised separately and also the dependent nature of feeling and perception is ignored. It is only through knowing the dependent and essenceless characteristic of the self as feeling, perception and consciousness that there comes "freedom once at foot and top to pause or not. Before on back up and down" (ibid). The observation suggests an understanding of the self as disintegrated, and thus freedom from the illusion that the self is a singular 'I.' This representation of the different parts of the self suggests that feelings, form and perceptions are all arising and passing away, and the automatic connection between mind and feeling to form a perception is broken. So, when perception is not formed for the feeling in relation to the sense of 'I,' suffering is eliminated. Hence, Schopenhauer's principle of sufficient reason regarding the dependent aspect of the self, and the positive emptiness of the self where no essence is found in any particular aspect of the self, helps to peer behind the veil of illusion - the connection between thought and perception which is broken in 'The Way.'

'The Way' distinguishes each part of the body separately – mind, feeling, perception, eyes, ears and so on – followed by the effort to tag any part as the self, embodied in spaces. There is a literary detachment of the elements of the self as a speaker, thinker, hearer and watcher. The same is true for the evaluation of time in terms of dependent characteristics. According to Schopenhauer, time is a dependent entity and its dependence is based on space. Here, time is measured as "a foot, a second, a mile, an hour and more" (ibid). Thus, the various formulations of time extend over space and cannot be measured in terms of time alone, as time is also a phenomenon, present in the mind. So, only when time is attached to the category of space, can it be perceived. "For it is precisely through the union of space with time, to form the complete and general representation of the complex of experience, that the representation of coexistence arises" (Schopenhauer 1974, 196). The experience is complex because 'I' is attached. Therefore, time is not bound to past or future in the text since past and future are the result of dependent variables.

Beckett depicts the way to reach a distinct 'self' in the "same mist always." The ambiguity of reaching any essence of the self is indicated. Since there is no singularity of the self when read through 'Schopenhauerian Buddhist' perspective, this haze is everlasting, because to pin down one element of the self as self is impossible. The mixture of various elements that accompany the formation of the self, from top (thoughts) to bottom (senses) and the "same half light" of undifferentiated elements are cobbled together to give the feeling of 'I,' is like "loose sand underfoot," with "no sign of remains, no sign that none before. No one ever before so" (Beckett 2009, 125). Thus, the self remains in fragmentation and the illusion of the singularity of 'I' is like the 'loose sand underfoot' upon which our understanding of 'I' is dependent, and the feeling of 'I' is a false consolation. The narrator's effort to provide a noun or a pronoun to identify all elements of the self in a singular way is exhausted, and remains – for the narrator – 'barren.' The self is stained with the "same ignorance" of identification. Hence, "no sign of remains a sign that none before. No one ever before so-sigh" (126). The non-recognition of the self as plural is the main cause of illusion, and when this illusion of 'I' is clear, suffering bids adieu.

Applying 'Schopenhauerian Buddhist' framework, the 'inmates' (form, feeling, perception, consciousness) of the self in 'The Way' can be seen as wandering and interacting: "Forth and back across a barren same winding one-way way" (125). Yet they seek no relief, 'so-sigh.' This interaction between the elements of the self is constant and never stilled. Thus, the dimensionless projection encompasses the elements of the self without pinning down any particular point from where the self either starts or ends. One becomes aware of the precarious nature of the so-called self, which has no absolute point of reference; it is "loose sand underfoot." Activities taking place in consciousness nonetheless linger in Beckett's textual imagery. Retrieving the essence of the self is impossible because the formation of the self is a process of interaction between different elements that constitutes the self. The representation of the self is "[i]n unending ending or beginning light" (126). In 'The Way' there is no subject-object union, but an interaction between the elements that can be seen in the light of interdependence. This key point is also made by Schopenhauer in his notes: "dependence of subject on the object [...] nothing is a mere concept of relation" (Schopenhauer 1990, 319). As Dirk Van Hulle suggests, it is "[w]ell on the way to inexistence" (xi); or, in the words of *Ill Seen Ill Said*: "as to zero the infinite." This suggests that the inexistence of existence is infinite. The same can be said about the concept of Schopenhauer's dependent origination when read through the expression of the self in 'The Way.' The self here is presented to show a chain of causes and conditions, which had constant interaction between the various elements of the self. The self is an interwoven web of causes and conditions. Filtering 'The Way', through 'Schopenhauerian Buddhist' framework, highlights the illusion of the self as singular.

B. *Stirrings Still*

Stirrings Still was published in 1989 and written at the request of Beckett's long-time American publisher, Barney Rosset. Beckett translated the text into French as *Soubresauts*. Van Hulle writes that *Stirrings Still* can be regarded as its last *Soubresauts*, a vain but heroic and moving attempt "to paint a still of the always stirring consciousness" (Van Hulle 1995, n. pag.). However, this stirring evokes an awareness of self-consciousness that remains in constant motion, thus depicting an aspect of the self. The text keeps the process present in the formation of the self on-going, maintaining the elements of the self in constant interaction. *Stirrings Still* can therefore be read as the representation of a disintegrated self.

The text opens with a physical body placed under observation. This state of observation is prior to thought. According to Schopenhauer, thought and knowledge of a thing are always

presupposed, and invariably far removed from what the thing actually is: “all knowledge inevitably presupposes subject and object” (Schopenhauer 1974, 207). A figure sits at the table with his “head on hands,” after which thoughts of other places arise in the mind. This is not physical travel of the body, but a travel of thoughts. Mental travel appears in *Stirrings Still*, argues John Calder, who also notes that “the ability of mind to leave the body and travel outside it, and to return, is believed by some spiritualist groups and many Buddhists” (44). Since no indication in the text is given that the mind has travelled outside the body, this travel can be read as the travel of thoughts, as in self-observation. This reflexive thought is an important aspect of Buddhist meditation. Another important expression is that the character is aware of thoughts in the mind, which means that the character is observing himself. This observation of the self involves a standing position of the body on the stool and looking through the window: “he would simply stand there high above the earth and see through the clouded pane the cloudless night” (Beckett 2009, 107). The portrayal of self-observation can be read as an act of meditation. Two clear and distinctive states of awareness are evoked in the first paragraph. This is the awareness of the self in both standing and moving positions as well as eyes that look at the clear sky. The self is created simultaneously as seeing and as the physical body. Two separate entities are taken up from the self simultaneously (ibid). Again, Beckett has produced two separate entities for a single person who “sat at his table head on hands” (ibid): thought and the physical body. This depicts the intended division of the self.

In the second paragraph ‘he’ (the mind) watches himself (the physical body) rise with difficulty: “first rise and then stand clinging to the table again. Then go. Start to go. On unseen feet start to go” (ibid). The feet are unseen for the physical movement of the feet is not associated with any perception. Then we read: “Waiting to see if he would or would not. Leave him or not alone again waiting for nothing again” (108). This suggests a wait for nothing to perceive from the physical aspect of the body, yet to go on observing seems difficult because “he disappeared only to reappear later at another place. Then disappeared again only to reappear again later at another place again” (ibid). The complex situation that is the disappearance of body and mind is accepted, and anticipates the ultimate disappearance associated with death: “as others would too in their turn and leave him till he too in his turn” (ibid). This waiting seems to be a waiting for death; until then there is a wait, and that is “for nothing again” (ibid). It is worth noting that this text was composed only a year before Beckett’s death. The disappearance of the self while alive – positive emptiness – is desirable, for in that state, the self is disintegrated and dissolved from a singular ‘I’ to a fragmented ‘I.’

There are visual allusions in *Stirrings Still*, starting with the participle ‘seen,’ which contrasts with the adverb ‘blindly’; ‘whithersoever’ he went blindly in the dark, he is always seen from behind (Hulle 1995, n. pag.). Two expressions mentioned here, refer to specific states, recognised during meditation. One is ‘seen,’ as in the understanding of a meditative state where the mind is aware of its own wanderings; the second is the blind aspect of a life journey, one where the search is always on for ‘a way out’ to reach the happiness, associated with positive emptiness (108). The strange condition of repeated activity is evoked by the mind: “Same hat and coat as of old when he walked the roads. The back roads” (ibid). The oft-repeated pattern of walking under similar conditions suggests an awareness of habit in time and place.

Thereafter in *Stirrings Still*, a revisiting of memories takes place in the mind. However, memories fade due to the disappearance of the boundaries between present and past, inside and outside. Such disappearances are only possible when the whole frenzy of the mind’s expression gets dissolved and the flow of thoughts is recognised. The strokes and cries are heard again, but “nothing to show not another where never” (110). Thoughts bring “strokes and cries,” but the self is aware now, and these cries are “now gone, now there again now gone again” (ibid). Arguably, the

constructed self is now fragmented, and the patience to observe the physical end of the body is underway. This end will eliminate: “end of time and grief and second self” (ibid). This second self can be seen as an inner self representing the ‘I.’ This waiting involves patience and acceptance in *Stirrings Still*, along with a representation of the dissolved self.

The meditative state is marked in the second part of the text. At this point, “what is more his remains of reason to bear on this perplexity in the way he must be said to do if he is to be said at all” (111). The thoughts of inner or outer visual scenes bring no respite for the wandering mind, save that of bringing focus to the impermanent and continual processes of self-reflection. Meditation opens the door to the self-awareness, or in *Stirrings Still*, “sink his head as one in meditation” (113). Eventually, these meditative observations bring about a gradual decline of knowing or finding essence in thoughts, memories or thought. The new, distinctive feature of profound self-awareness is displayed by “the strokes now faint now clear as if carried by the wind but not a breath and the cries now faint now clear” (ibid). This important passage suggests an awareness and renunciation of any singular essence behind the origination of thoughts. In this way, *Stirrings Still* subsumes “the meditator seated at his desk, the observer and the observed [...] separating and yet fusing the outer and the inner one” (Cohn 380).

The word ‘On’ also communicates the impression of successive forms of a disintegrated self, interacting between words and thoughts. The vain initiative to search for self in thoughts that identifies the person as ‘I’ is presented in the third part of *Stirrings Still*: “For how could even such a one as he having once found himself in such a place not shudder to find himself in it again” (Beckett 2009, 114). The mind’s sense of self is associated with thoughts that mark the self with happiness or sadness. Thus, it is very difficult to get out of the loops formed by thoughts that entangle the idea of self “such and much more such the hubbub in his mind,” and also time, sorrow, and the ‘I’ within which the self exists; all come to an end with a representation of the essenceless and dependent characteristic of the self, and hence “time and grief and self so-called. Oh all to end” (115). This kind of overlooking of the association between mind and thought is discussed by Schopenhauer: “we see mechanical, physical and chemical effects, as well as those of stimuli, ensue every time on their respective causes without on that account ever thoroughly understanding the process” (1974, 213). This points once more toward the ‘veil of Maya’ in which the various elements of the self and the process of dependent origination is missed and the self is taken up as a singular entity.

Conclusion

Beckett’s 1980s prose works portray an ever-growing disintegration of the self. Protagonists, in their search to locate the self, depict an intuitive observation that can be gained through Buddhist meditation. This provides a key insight into the way Beckett represents mind, physical body, thoughts and perceptions in his late fiction, as nothing but the dependent and essenceless nature of these aggregates of the self. This interpretative approach provides emptiness a positive focus, thus taking it beyond cultural boundaries. Gontarski claims that “Beckett distilled essences for some sixty years” (xi) and the end product is an inevitable interaction and fragmentation between the elements of the self.

This analysis has advanced four perspectives. First, that there are renderings of a meditative dwelling in the inner recesses of the self in Beckett’s late prose, depicting the nature of the universal self. Second, there is a portrayal of the disaggregated self as mind, body, form and feeling. Third, the attributes of the self are both dependent and essenceless. Fourth, the veil of illusion performs the task

of singularity in the formation of the self as 'I' is pierced, but soon returns, for achieving this awareness is difficult. These late prose works traverse a path of awareness, thus separating the elements of the self before receding to the formation of 'I': "Same pace and countless time. Same ignorance of how far. Same leisure once at either end to pause or not. At either groundless end" (Beckett 2009, 126). The various elements that construct the 'I' helps in leading to a disenchantment with any singular 'I.' Thus, Beckett's 1980s prose represents the phenomenon of the self as observed within, when it arises and passes away. These late texts therefore boil down attributes of the self to their basics, which are interacting, arising, passing away, yet they also include disturbances to that mode of self-examination. On the one hand, these works enact the influence of 'Schopenhauerian Buddhism' and thus become relevant to the inter and trans-cultural pursuits of world literature but on the other, they transcend cultural local colours to offer a universal notion of the self that is inimical to the 'culturalism' of a framework like world literature.

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