Journal of Research in Humanities
Vol. 61 (2), 2025, PP. 19-33

Dis-Ability: A Trialectics of Material, Imagined and Lived Spatialities in Beckettian Theatre

[i] ***Tehmina Yasmeen***
[ii] ***Farah Hashmi***

ABSTRACT: *Grounded in the broader existential limitation-and-dependency paradigm, dis-ability emerges as both an embodied reality and an extended metaphor in Beckett's plays, manifested through categorically dis-abled characters. In this study, I employ Edward Soja's theorisation of space, referred to as the "Trialectics of Spatiality" (Suja 57), as a framework for examining the dialectics of dis-ability and space in Beckettian theatre. By applying Soja's concepts of first, second, and third space as analytical lenses, this study investigates how Beckett's characters exist in dis/harmony with the conventional portrayals of dis-ability found in canonical literature. Furthermore, using this heuristic approach as a foundation, the research aims to define the poetics of the Beckettian model of dis-ability intricately woven into the narratives of his plays. The study is limited to a textual analysis of Waiting for Godot (1953), Endgame (1957), and Happy Days (1961) to ensure the analytical soundness of the arguments. From the first-space perspective, I concentrate on the embodied materiality of Beckett's characters and the physical spaces they inhabit in the selected texts. Through the second space lens, I explore the implications of the characters' imaginative situatedness as dis-abled beings, focusing on their desires, hopes, and actions as they relate to the plot of the chosen texts. Adopting the third space as a framework, I analyse the Beckettian universe as a liminal and hybrid space where the material and imaginative aspects collaborate to deconstruct the socially constructed binary of normalcy and disability. In doing so, I interpret Beckett's selected texts as illustrations of the third space, wherein real-life perceptions and their literary representations of normalcy and dis-ability hybridise into an interdependent mode of human existence*

Keywords: dis-ability, normalcy, hybridity, interdependence, third space

[i] m.khizar154@gmail.com
[ii] fhashmi@numl.edu.pk

Dis-ability as a Narrative Crutch

Literature's trajectory from a mere means of aesthetic pleasure to a tool of pragmatic value, chronicling society's practices, values, and struggles, has immensely contributed to opening new avenues of human thought and perception. By offering a substantial corpus of "the best that has been thought and said in the world" (Arnold 5), literature reigns supreme among the disciplines that seek to enhance the contours of human society. The literary canvas from ancient Greece to the present day almost invariably combines symbolic and interpretive strokes, creating landscapes that invite curiosity and reflection. However, the advent of the Age of Enlightenment broadened its scope as a historicised art form with a political un/concious. Literature is inevitably linked to the spatiotemporal contexts in which it is produced and received. "Texts are worldly; they are part of the social world, human life, and of course, the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (Said 04). The sociopolitical and cultural frameworks that shape and are shaped by the lived experiences of particular communities or groups serve as feeding streams for the critical discourses nurtured in the womb of literary texts.

Dis-ability occupies a unique yet complex space among numerous representations of reality in literature, as it "is a complex dialectic of biological, psychological and socio-political factors". It operates at multiple levels with varying intensities, contributing to a society where individuals are "disabled both by social barriers and their bodies" (Shakespeare 15-24). From ancient myths, where any corporeal deviance symbolised either divine wrath or extraordinary powers, to the most recent narratives—namely, Romance, mystery, and fantasy—that celebrate and fantasize about embodied difference and disability, disability serves as a poignant lens through which authors explore themes of otherness, identity, and resilience. In any case, disability has served as more than a mere backdrop for storytelling in literature; it functions as a vibrant epistemological site where aesthetic ideals, predominantly based on normalcy and perfection, converge and transform, often to stigmatise any form of deviance. The disabled "body remains primarily a text to be marked, traced, written upon by various regimes of institutional, (discursive and non-discursive) power" (Grosz 116). By unveiling the rich tapestry of disability representations in literature, one may encounter narratives that mainly reinforce stereotypes about dis-ability, with occasional appearances of narratives that resist the norm. Either way, it "has been used throughout history as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality and analytical insight" (Mitchell and Snyder 49). The power of normalcy that has operated through medical, religious, and sociocultural discourses about dis-ability confines bodies with physical or cognitive

limitations to the periphery of sociopolitical structures. It positions them as either a problem to be fixed or a lack that must be addressed. In either case, dis-ability is commodified as a dependent category. Under this dominant influence of normalcy, literature has also mirrored the models of segregation and marginalisation of the disabled, offering portrayals that align with the normalcy-backed socio-cultural construct of dis-ability.

From the blind prophet Tiresias in Homer's epics and the tragedy of *Oedipus Rex* (429 BC) to the crippled Nuada in Irish mythology, and from the hunchback Thersites in the works of Homer to the limping Volpone in Johnson's *Volpone* (1606) and the physically disfigured Carey in Maugham's *Human Bondage* (1905), dis-ability emerges as a recurring motif. In Shakespeare's oeuvre, *Richard* from *Richard III* (1633) and Caliban from *The Tempest* (1611) appear as political and moral metaphors during the Renaissance. In contrast, Milton's blindness imparts both loftiness and poetic grandeur to *Paradise Lost* (1667). The creature's physical grotesqueness in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) becomes a metaphor for societal rejection in the Romantic era. In the Modern period, disability features in Woolf's shell-shocked Warren Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), James Joyce's ailing Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man* (1916), and Faulkner's cognitively disturbed Benjy Compson in *Sound and the Fury* (1929). Disability is represented in the Post-Modern period through the mute protagonist in Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), the stuttering narrator in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), the stammering Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), and the blind population in José Saramago's *Blindness* (1995). These examples are just a glimpse of the broad spectrum of dis-ability representations in literature throughout literary history. A thorough examination of these texts reveals how disability is depicted as a conspicuously territorialised concept, representing either fixity or lack when measured against the prevailing normalcy paradigm. Given its significance as a 'utilitarian tool of transformation', literature has served as a medium for further "stigmatising disability in the imaginations of its audience" (Mitchell and Snyder 13).

Beckettian Model of Disability

Using a disability lens to study Beckett's characters is an emerging trope among the literary and theoretical frameworks commonly deployed to analyse his plays. A profound representation of dis-ability, infused with an intricate touch of unconventionality, marks a significant aspect of his dramaturgy. The disabled characters in Beckett's oeuvre are "invalid members of society whose outlier status is marked by atypical bodies or non-traditional forms of cognition," and they "unseat what we presume are normative versions of national, racial and gendered identity" (Davidson 12). From *Endgame* (1957) to

Waiting for Godot (1953), and from *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) to *Happy Days* (1961), dis-ability serves as a central motif in Beckett's dramaturgy, showcased through scenes of "abject dependency" (Davidson 22). Hanna Simson observes that in recent times, Beckett's plays have attracted numerous disability performances partly "because of their insistent attention on embodied existence and the universal experience of physical and mental impairment" (27). Furthermore, such performances have prompted "a re-evaluation of previously undetected indicators of disability in Beckett's scripts" (Simpson 27). However, contrary to the representation of disability in canonical literature, Beckett subverts the norm by placing disability alongside normalcy to demonstrate existential themes that unsettle the conventional frameworks of human agency, mobility, and meaning.

He strips his characters of every kind of grandiosity and places them in a minimalistic and enigmatic setting, which renders them physically incomplete, functionally limited, mentally confused, and emotionally unstable. The characters can be seen grappling with the fundamental question of "to be" (normative ab-normal) or "not to be" (normative ab-normal). In an "atmosphere of walking dead," Beckett's "living dead do not even walk. In the novels, they hobble and crawl; in the plays, they are remarkably stationary" (Langhaum 884). They do not seem to align with spatial, social, or cultural associations that Edward Suja theorises as illustrations of the "first" and "second" spaces. Instead, they are trapped in perpetual liminality, an equivalent of Edward Suja's notion of third space, where binaries integrate to create hybrid identities. With short, single names, they seem to "come from nowhere, belong nowhere, have no occupation, no place in the society" (Langhaum 884). They are not defined by their heroic actions but by their enduring presence in the face of despair and suffering. With their unfaltering struggles to maintain a sense of order, their enduring presence in the face of disorder in an otherwise disorderly situation, they transcend the personal and become trans-temporal and trans-spatial symbols of resilience, vulnerability, adaptation, and hybridity.

Though "impairment in Beckett has been addressed before; it has scarcely been approached as a marker of disability, instead understood as an example of existential anguish or inconsequential injury" (Gauvin 304). However, interpreting impairment as dis-ability, i.e., the sociocultural orientation of impairment does not appear to be an explicit aspect of Beckett's plays. Instead, the overarching influence of absurdity is equally disabling for both the normal and the impaired. His characters, whether or not they possess physical and cognitive deficiencies, transcend the categorical associations with dis-ability designed and "aggravated by a social or built environment" (Quayson 2). In doing so, they seem to endorse, albeit unconsciously, the perspective of critical

disability studies regarding the historicised nature of the divide between normalcy and impairment.

Beckett's delineation of disabled bodies is unique as it both affirms and disrupts the popular narrative surrounding disability. He subverts tradition as his characters with disabilities embody lack, stagnancy, dependence, and insufficiency, generating an "intense affective form of nervous response" (Simson 1) from the audience/readers that Atto Quayson describes as "aesthetic nervousness." However, he does not propose to resolve the problem of disability through cure, death, or normalisation, as is common in dis-ability representations in canonical literature. Instead of disrupting the narrative's coherence, disability constructs the narrative of Beckett's plays. Moreover, his plays do not present disability as a foil to normalcy; instead, he positions the able-bodied and disabled in a state of interdependence, complicating the binaries of autonomy/dependency and standard/deviance. The avoidance of ableist aesthetics by subverting "the models of achievement and failure" (Levin 171) creates opportunities to investigate his plays as alternative epistemes on dis-ability. He places his characters in complex, hybrid settings to challenge the rigid distinctions between health and illness, agency and passivity, normalcy and deviance, and life and death. In doing so, Beckett highlights the transformative potential of aberrancy, opening the possibility of (re)interrogating and (re)defining the (dis)ability trope as it is deployed in his plays. I intend to use Edward Soja's concept of "Trialectics of Spatiality" (25) with a particular focus on his theorisation of "third space" as a framework for studying the dialectics of dis-ability and space in Beckettian theatre. Furthermore, utilising Soja's concepts of first and second space as analytical lenses, this study investigates how Beckett's disabled characters exist in dis/harmony with the traditional portrayals of dis-ability in canonical literature. Moreover, by employing this heuristic approach as groundwork, the study also attempts to define the poetics of the Beckettian model of dis-ability intricately woven into the plots of his plays. The study is limited to textual analysis of *Waiting for Godot* (1953), *Endgame* (1957), and *Happy Days* (1961) to ensure the analytical soundness of the arguments.

In Beckett's magnum opus, *Waiting for Godot* (1957), characters are trapped in situations that amplify the impression of their physical and cognitive limitations. The pain persists throughout the play, restricting the characters' movements and leaving them dependent on one another. Estragon struggles with his boot, and Vladimir grapples with his bladder. Pozzo's trajectory from oppressor to blind, helpless beggar underscores the claims of the social model regarding disability as a universal condition. Moreover, it emphasises the fragility of power and ability, allowing for the deconstruction of the dis-ability

myth. *Endgame* (1957) is an absurdist, tragicomedy one-act play set in a post-apocalyptic wasteland symbolised by a barren room. The play focuses on the interactions among four characters: the domineering, blind, paralysed, wheelchair-bound Hamm; his elderly parents, Nagg and Nell, who are stuck in ashbins in the room; and his sycophantic servant, Clov, who cannot sit due to an unnamed, invisible condition. Hamm attempts to control Clove, who wishes to leave him but remains indecisive until the end. Nag and Nell, Hamm's legless parents, confined to ash bins in the corner of the room, appear sporadically to disrupt the play's mundane mood with conversations infused with bleak humour. The physical space that Beckett allocates to his characters confines them to an isolated room beyond which nothing exists; inside it, they are trapped in nothingness. The characters are bound in a paradoxical, need-based relationship. The cyclical nature of their activities undermines plot development, creating an impression of stasis and futility, a recurring motif in Beckett's works. However, despite their physical and existential limitations, the characters contribute immensely to creating a dynamic interplay of normalcy and deviance, the physical and the imaginary, the confined and the free, as well as need and desire, which can be explored through Soja's theoretical lens to study the portrayal of dis-ability as a manifestation of Third Space in the play.

In *Happy Days* (1961), despite being half-buried in the mound and the grimness of her situation, Winnie clings to her routine with an optimistic spirit. She engages in daily tasks such as combing her hair, applying makeup, brushing her teeth, and singing with the enthusiasm of a typical person. While doing so, she is acutely aware of the precariousness of her situation. She articulates her fears in monologues, the play's primary mode of communication, while her husband remains silent or responds with grunts and monosyllables. Winnie's recitation of prayers, memories, and poetry serves dual functions for her. In addition to being reminiscent of the past, these become her coping mechanisms to stave off despair. In Act Two, she appears further buried in the mound, with only her eyes and mouth able to function. Despite her deteriorating circumstances, she maintains her routine activities and seems unwilling to compromise her optimism. Her cheerfulness in the face of her tragic reality appears to challenge the traditional notions of misfortune, depression, and sorrow associated with impairment.

Representation, Resistance, and the Third Space

Scholars in critical disability studies interpret dis-ability as a social construct that, under the domineering influence of normalcy norms, disables people with physical or cognitive differences. The discriminatory practices against all forms of deviancy imply treating it either as a problem needing resolution or a misfortune to be lamented. Nevertheless, disability is viewed differently by

scholars in the field. For them, "the problem is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the problem of the disabled person" (Davis 1). While critiquing the ideal of a fully autonomous individual and traditional identity politics in the context of disability, William Henri Davis introduces the concept of Dismodernism, aiming "to institute the alternative ways to think about the ab-normal" (49). He perceives identity as fluid and relational rather than fixed. "If postmodernism fractures the subjects into multiplicities, Dismodernism goes beyond to suggest that identity itself is fluid, relational and contingent on technological and social structures" (33). As a thought paradigm and critical framework, Dismodernism implies human vulnerability and interdependence. By theorising bodies as incomplete and imperfect, Davis foregrounds the "partial, incomplete subject whose realisation is not autonomy and independence but dependency and interdependence" (30). In doing so, Davis challenges the notions of ability (independence) and disability (dependence) as fixed identities and seeks to dismantle the binary. He conceptualises the human body as fundamentally reliant on in/visible crutches and establishes impairment as a universal condition. "Impairment is the rule, and normalcy is the fantasy. Dependence is the reality, and independence is grandiose thinking" (31). By deconstructing the notions of self-sufficiency and control—the socially attributed features of normalcy—Davis dismantles the metanarrative of dis-ability. The severing of ties with either side of the binary necessitates the availability of an alternative space where the idea of interdependence can be embraced. Soja's concept of the third space can be employed here to fill the void.

In theory, the third space is a "mode of thinking about space that draws upon the material and mental spaces of the traditional dualism but extends well beyond them in scope, substance and meaning" (Suja 11). It is the only meaning-making entity that liberates us from the constraints of traditional binarism, where meaning is conceived through associations and oppositions. Edward Suja's concept of space, which he defines as the "Trialectics of Spatiality" (57), is grounded in Henri Lefebvre's conceptualisation of space as a triad and Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia. Lefebvre's theorisation of space was threefold, categorising it as "Spatial practice (perceived space), representation of space (conceived space) and representational spaces (lived space)" (33). "These three dimensions of space cannot be separated, save by abstraction" (Lefebvre 33). Edward Suja takes Lefebvre's framework as a point of departure to theorise his "trialectics of spatiality", which "unfolds through three perspectives." The first perspective "focuses on things that can be empirically mapped (material)". The second perspective concerns spatial imagination or "ideas of space". The third and most essential perspective deals neither with material space (first) nor with imaginary space (second), but with

"the representation of lived space", which he calls the third space (Suja 12-13). His idea of the third space differs from Lefebvre's concept of lived space, as he introduces it as a site where material and mental dimensions converge into hybrid forms. While synthesizing his notion of the third space with Bhabha's idea of hybridity, one may conclude that the third space is a potent fusion that emerges due to negotiations between opposites and implies new possibilities. With this inclusive approach, the third space challenges dualistic modes of thinking while advocating fluidity, hybridity, and multiplicity. He further adds, "I define Thirdspace as an-Other way of understanding and acting to change the spatiality of human life, a distinct mode of critical, spatial awareness that is appropriate to the new scope and significance being brought about in the rebalanced trialectics of spatiality, historicality and sociality" (Suja 57).

Suja equates thirding with Otherness. Stating "thirding as Othering" (61) lays the foundation for approaching the third space as a complex arena subject to multiple interpretations. His approach challenges rigid structures by incorporating historicity and sociality. Moreover, it provides frameworks to study phenomena believed to be socially constructed and historically protected. From this theoretical perspective, dis-abilities can be interpreted as a traditionally established sociocultural construct. "Third space or thirding is neither 'the things in space' nor 'the thoughts in space' but a 'fully lived space'. This 'Thirding' as 'the creation of another mode of thinking, thus points to how material and imagined dimensions of reality create specific situations in simultaneously 'real-and-imagined' places that provide the backdrop for and are the product of lived experiences" (qtd in Sebastian Haug, 2020). Hence, the third space is a critical lived space, an outcome of the intersection between material and imagined spaces shaped by lived experiences, cultural interactions, and social struggles. "It is a space of social interaction, of everyday life, of the lived experience of all people…it is a place of imaginative freedom and collective change, not just a spatiality of individual action and reaction" (Suja 56). Soja's theorisation of Third Space emphasises the denunciation of boundaries, the multiplicity of lived experience, and the dynamic interplay between social, symbolic, and physical spaces. The hybrid nature of the third space allows for connections to disability studies, which is "a complex, scalar, multi-dimensional phenomenon" (Shakespeare 11). This connection implies the possibility of revealing how dis-ability disrupts normative understandings of space and identity by advocating a distinction between dis-ability as a perception and a lived reality. Contrary to the notions of the first space, which Soja describes as exclusively physical, and the second space, which he describes as imaginative or idealistic, the Third Space combines the physical and the creative as a lived space. It is the realm inhabited by experience, imagination, and sociocultural meanings. (Suja 73).

Unveiling of the Normalcy Myth in Beckett's Oeuvre

Beckett's absurdist plays become meaning-making entities when viewed as manifestations of a third space where the ethics of Dismodernism, as outlined by Davis, work to present the seemingly grotesque as a meaningful re/presentation of interdependent human existence. He "challenges liberal theories of autonomy and independent agency by creating scenes of 'abject dependency'" (Davidson 22). Beckett exploits the socially ascribed parameters of normalcy, such as mobility, health, language, clarity of thought, and ability to decide, by introducing characters whose existential dilemmas challenge their association with the prescribed state of normalcy, creating space to investigate the socio-spatial dimensions of dis-ability in his plays where usually "nothing happens. Nobody comes, nobody goes" (Beckett Act 1), evil is not punished, and goodness is not rewarded. There is neither a hero nor a villain; there is no centre and no margin. We do not see advocacy for normalcy, nor policing of disability. Instead, the characters perpetually attract and repel each other while sharing in/different planes of existence.

When examined through Suja's framework, the space that an impaired body primarily occupies in literary narratives can be understood as constructed and interpreted on two core levels: material and imaginative. On the material level, it manifests as an embodied reality; on the imaginative level, it is perceived as a 'lack'. Beckett's plays challenge this norm by introducing a third level or space, as proposed by Suja. The third space appears as a lived experience where the first and second spaces converge in a state of hybridity (Suja 56). In this newly conceived space, disability does not act as a contrast to normalcy but instead intrudes into its domain, aiming to blur the boundary between them. Using Suja's classification of space concerning normalcy, one can see the first space as material reality expressed through embodied perfection. The second space is envisioned as capable of satisfying all needs or desires without being obstructed by physical or social barriers. The third space is the liminal realm, a threshold where normalcy is exposed as a lived reality. It is a space where concepts like perfection, movement, achievement, and ability engage in a complex interplay, creating a hybrid, multilayered notion of normalcy that exists in a paradoxical relationship with the first and second spaces. Here, "everything comes together. Subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure, and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and the unending history" (57).

In Beckett's dramaturgy, we can observe a dismantling of normalcy, as the characters seem to reject any explicit association with "normate" (Thomson 8), the socially constructed standard of normality, and do not engage with the social inscription of disability. While reading his plays, a parallel can be drawn between bodies with actual physical limitations and those with metaphorical ones. Hamme's immobility in *Endgame* (1957) pairs with Clove's inability to sit, and Clove's psychological dependence on Hamme retaliates against Hamme's physical dependence on Clove. Pozzo's blindness and Lucky's muteness parallel Estragon and Vladimir's inability to communicate meaningfully and perceive the end of their situation. Winnie's cheerfulness despite her complete inability to walk and her deteriorating circumstances challenges the notions of sadness, mourning, and dejection associated with disability. Beckett's avoidance of ableist aesthetics by subverting "the models of achievement and failure" (Levin 171) and his reluctance to employ cure or eradication of disability as a fundamental trope to impose order on an otherwise chaotic literary universe appear as a recurring motif in his plays. Through his dis-abled characters, he addresses themes of alienation, existence, and the absurdity of human life. His experimentation with characterisation, setting, and plot, under the directives of the theatre of the absurd, creates a narrative in which the spatial, social, and historical contours of human existence meet incongruously, generating ludicrousness as the only tangible notion. For Camus, "the absurd is essentially a divorce: it lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation" (6). For Beckett, one might argue that the absurd results from the collision of opposites: the material and the imaginative, the rational and the irrational, the tragic and the comic, the linear and the circular, and the dependent and the independent.

Within the Beckettian universe, absurdity emerges as an in-between state that defies binarism and dismantles contextual associations. The elusive nature of plots, the nightmarish atmosphere, and predominantly dehumanised characters can be interpreted as attempts to deconstruct popular narratives about the aesthetic (normal) and the repulsive (abnormal) aspects of life. His corpus incorporates the universal plight of humanity, fusing together the ordinary and extraordinary, optimism and pessimism, confrontation and submission, centre and margin, normal and deviant, and able and disabled in an exclusively designed space that can be interpreted as Beckett's notion of the absurd and as a manifestation of the third space when viewed through Suja's framework. Vladimir and Estragon stand as convincing illustrations of rootless, senseless, and traumatised humanity, whose past is an incoherent mess of scattered details, whose present is miserable, and whose future is uncertain. Though their incoherent babbling, stinking breaths, confused memories, and helplessness weaken their association with the socially constructed code of normalcy, their

unfaltering commitment to continue *Waiting for Godot* and their steadfastness despite the oddity of their situation restore the connection. Their state of waiting equates to having a goal and purpose, a trait commonly associated with normalcy.

"Vladimir: Why are we here, That is the question? And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion, one thing alone is clear. We are *Waiting for Godot* to come. ...We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment" (Act 1).

The tramps are simultaneously connected to the past, i.e., waited; present, i.e., waiting; and future, i.e., will stay, which disrupts their connection with the standard, linear progression of time and traps them in the absurdity of circularity. In their case, the present becomes the third space where the materiality of the past and the abstraction of the future coexist.

Vladimir: He didn't say for sure he'd come.

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.

Estragon: We came here yesterday. (Act 1)

Nell and Nagg, the legless parents of Hamm in the play, who are confined to ashbins, continuously attempt to romanticise their miserable present by referring to their past romantic life. Their escape from current misery into the fantasy of the past reinforces the notion of absurdity in Beckett's plays. The collision between the first space, i.e., ashbins, and the second space, i.e., suffocation, stirs in them a yearning for a third space, symbolised through their excursion into the romance of the past. "NAGG: We had got engaged the day before. NELL: Engaged! NAGG: You were in such fits that we capsized. By rights, we should have been drowned. NELL: It was because I felt happy" (Act 1). Winnie's cheerfulness, despite her worsening situation, seems absurd, as it

fails to recognise the possibility of overcoming her circumstances and instead suggests she has entered a third space, symbolised by her adaptation to the problem. “Winnie: Ah well, what matter, that's what I always say, it will have been a happy day, after all, another happy day” (Act 1). She violates the norms of gloom and frustration, traditionally associated with the limitations imposed by mobility constraints. By portraying a disabled life as happy, Beckett invents a third space in which narratives about im/mobility and happiness are subverted.

Regardless of the constraints that their bodies may impose, the characters in the selected plays are psychologically or corporeally confined. Their inability to express themselves through language, the futility of their actions, their dis/engagement with the past, present, and future, the mundane and desolate settings of the play, the apocalyptic atmosphere, and the absence of human society create the impression that they are dehumanised, atypical manifestations of sociohistorical constructions of normalcy and impairment. The stigma of lack, insufficiency, and stagnation traditionally associated with dis-ability as a marker of disqualification also undermines normalcy in Beckettian plays. “Across nearly all his works, the material and bodily conditions of Beckett’s characters are recurringly spotlighted, conditions which are often messy, repulsive, sore, sensitive, confusing, or in a perpetual state of oozing and decay” (Gauvin 301). The only feature that distinguishes Beckett's otherwise similar characters is their im/mobility. The presence of characters with impairments in the selected plays establishes “a dialectical relationship between mobility and immobility” and “Every move within this dialectic is constitutively dependent on its opposite, thus suggesting that impairment/disability/immobility and non-disability/mobility are part of a single continuum” (Quayson 06). The essentialism of their condition serves to enlarge the difference between the mobile Clove and the immobile Hamme, Nag and the blind Pozzo, and the seeing Vladimir, the dumb Lucky and the talkative Estragon.

Disability is constructed as “a master trope of human disqualification” (Mitchel and Snyder 3), a fixture in an otherwise dynamic plethora of functionality and productivity, which are distinctive features of normalcy and ability. The motif of stagnation, traditionally attributed to disability while denying the possibilities of growth, transformation, and becoming, is repeatedly deployed by authors in canonical literature. Unless a character surpasses corporeal limitations, i.e., cures their disability, they cannot be destigmatised for their inability. They either begin and end as an evil incarnate, i.e., Richard in Shakespeare, or lead a life of unrequited love, or remain suppressed and neglected, i.e., Quasimodo in Hugo. However, the characters restore the order

of growth, fulfilment, and achievement in their lives once they eliminate their disabilities, as in the case of Collin Craven in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess.* Beckett transcends this norm by developing a democratic alliance between the able-bodied and the disabled on the plane of needs, which can be interpreted as a third space, not a precondition for human experience and existence; instead, it is sharply connected to social and historical processes. His characters, irrespective of their physical and cognitive im/perfections, remain stuck in situations that dismantle the us/them dichotomy and necessitate their interdependence. Hamme's mobility constraints parallel Clove's psychological limitations. Hamme's inability to stand mirrors Clove's inability to sit. Furthermore, Hamme's desire to dismiss Clove equates to the latter's dream of leaving. Instead of abandoning Didi (Vladimir), the aggressive, schizophrenic Gogo (Estragon) prefers "embracing" him. Lucky sobs and weeps when he learns about Pozzo's desire "to get rid of him." Despite his dissatisfaction with Lucky's presence and his desire to dismiss him, Pozzo needs him the most. The characters seem trapped in a paradoxical relationship. We observe them oscillating between the first, second, and third spaces. The characters appear hostile towards each other when viewed through the lens of the first and second spaces, i.e., the material and the imagined aspects of their situation. However, their conflicts seem to resolve in the third space of need-based interdependence.

In Act One, Pozzo appears as a dominant, sane master, whereas the idiosyncratic Lucky is merely a beast to carry Pozzo's burdens. "Pozzo: "He wants to impress me, so that I'll keep him. [...] He imagines that when I see how well he carries, I'll be tempted to keep him on in that capacity"" (Act 1). The use of animal imagery further accentuates Lucky's dehumanisation. "Pozzo: Up pig...Up Hog!" (Act 1). In Act Two, Lucky is the guiding light, the torchbearer for the blind, staggering Pozzo. (textual lines). Estragon and Vladimir claim to be tormented by each other's presence, yet they desperately yearn for it. "Estragon: Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me!" (Act 1). Hamme is proud, aggressive, and dominating, whereas Clove is submissive and tame. However, their physical and psychological needs create a third space where their differences merge into a hybrid experience of coexistence. Their interdependence subverts the narratives about normalcy/freedom and disability/dependence. "CLOV: (Pause.) Why do you stay with me? CLOV: Why do you keep me? HAMM: There's no one else. CLOV: There's nowhere else" (Act 1).

The minimalistic settings of Beckett's plays can be interpreted as symbols of the alienated, uninhabitable, and hostile environments in which disabled individuals are compelled to live. In contrast, serene and aesthetically pleasing environments are typically associated with normalcy. However, we observe

Beckettian characters navigating the spatial conflict between the normal and the disabled. They abandon their socially allotted spaces and converge in third spaces, reserved for neither, such as country roads, mounds, ashbins, and dark, deserted rooms. The desolate landscapes in *Waiting for Godot* and *Happy Days*, along with the secluded location of the house in *Endgame*, reflect environments that are indifferent to the human condition and its needs. The characters within these bleak settings appear static or engaged in repetitive movements marked by bumps and falls. Winnie is ensnared in the mound, Nag and Nell in the ashbins, Hamm and Clov within the four walls of the house, Vladimir at the edge of a country road, Estragon in the ditch, while Lucky and Pozzo seem to have no place to claim. "We see a contraction of the lived body and lived space" (51) in Beckett's plays, which seems to have an across-the-board application. Every character in the selected plays, regardless of their physical composition, is ensnared in a space that is indifferently hostile towards them. Lucky and Pozzo stagger and fall multiple times in Act Two of the play. Hamm's wheelchair repeatedly strikes the walls, and Winnie sinks deeper into the mound with every passing moment; Estragon and Vladimir cannot afford to leave their place. The spatial constraints accentuate the characters' physical and cognitive limitations. They feel frustrated and outraged within that space, yet do not dare enter any other spatial zone.

Conclusion

Thus, dis-ability exists in the Beckettian universe not merely as a simple or superficial concept labelled as a "narrative prosthesis" (Mitchel and Snyder), but rather as a fundamental condition inherent to the human experience and a distinct mode of existence that profoundly influences the lives of characters in his works. This condition emphasises themes of limitation and dependence, which resonate as universal human experiences that everyone can relate to, to some extent. In this context, disability is depicted with a critical eye; it is neither sentimentalised nor pathologised in Beckett's plays. Instead, it emerges as an essential existential state that strips away the comforting illusions of wholeness and progress often associated with societal constructs of normalcy. Beckett's work does not shy away from the raw realities of existence, presenting a more authentic representation of the human condition. In navigating the complex terrains of his narratives, he transcends the limitations typically found in both the first and second spaces, which often confine characters to rigid definitions and expectations. He transforms his plays into compelling illustrations of what can be understood as the third space, a conceptual realm where the characteristics of hybridity and interdependence are thoroughly explored. This exploration provides audiences with a radical and thought-provoking perspective on embodiment and identity, challenging

conventional views and inviting deeper contemplation about what it means to live with disability in a world that often demands conformity.

Works Cited

Said, Edward W. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Harvard University Press,1983.

Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy*. Smith, Elder & Co., 1869. Mitchell, David T., and Sharon L. Snyder. Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse. University of Michigan Press, 2000.

Davidson, Michael. *Invalid Modernism: Disability, the Missing Body of the Aesthetic*. Oxford University Press, 2019.

George, Hannah Simpson, and Chris McAuliffe, editors. *Samuel Beckett and Disability Performance*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

Davis, Lennard J. *Bending Over Backwards*: *Disability, Dismodernism and Other Difficult Positions*. New York University Press, 2002.

Gauvin, Mitchell. 2022. "Citizenship, Pain, and Disability in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot." *Literature 2*: 300–314. https:// doi.org/10.3390/literature2040025

Quayson, Ato. *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation.* Columbia University Press, 2007.

Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature.* Columbia University Press, 1997.

Levin, Yael. "Univocity, Exhaustion and Failing Better: Reading Beckett with Disability Studies." *Journal of Beckett Studies*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2018, pp. 157–174. DOI: 10.3366/jobs.2018.0256.4o

Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts*. Grove Press, 1954.

Beckett, Samuel. *Endgame: A Play in One Act, Followed by Act Without Words: A Mime for One Player.* Grove Press, 1958. 4o

Beckett, Samuel. *Happy Days: A Play in Two Acts*. Grove Press, 1961.