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## ***Sanity and Insanity in footfalls***

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا ۚ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ (٣٢)

صدق الله العظيم

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## **Dedication**

To my Family..... To the one who stood beside me, to the hand that  
did not stop giving hope to me..... To my mother and my father, no  
words of thanks are enough for their right.

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## **Chapter One**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The term ‘Madness’ did not have the same definition or perception as it does today. Such perspectives were able to be conveyed through literature. There are two short stories in particular whose authors intent to represent insight on thoughts and behavior of an individual whose certain characteristics portray that of growing mental instability: “The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe and “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Interestingly, both writers share another trait; the period of time in which their texts were developed.<sup>1</sup>

In literature, the subject of madness has often been touched and exploited throughout the eras by a great number of writers with many perspectives. It has not only been discussed but also used as a symbol by the great artists as Shakespeare and Virginia Woolf to convey and expose deeper, metaphorical messages. In their works the state of insanity is used as a symbol of a superior cognition of the world or deeper sensitivities. The motif of madness as a symbol is also often exploited by many women writers of nineteenth century. As the perspective towards madness has been changed throughout the period from ancient Greece to modern, its usage as a certain symbol is also constantly changing. When we speak of madness in literature whether it springs from the works of Shakespeare, Hesse, Poe, or Kesey we invariably probe a state of being that transcends the normal, the average, the expected and polite.<sup>2</sup>

Madness or insanity is, by definition, a severe and perhaps dangerous state of mind, leading the possessor of the madness to break rules, threaten the status quo, and provoke a general state of anxiety and unrest.

Of course, at the same time, the madness extricates those afflicted from society's fetters, liberating them to do what is right rather than what is normal. And where would we be without madness? Hamlet flourishes most when he is mad, finding it is perhaps the only viable way to expose the treachery of his uncle. Montresor's insanity creates a venue for the most chilling and triumphant murders, and McMurphy's carefully diagnosed derangement frees him to question the real insanity of Nurse Ratched and the system in which he lives. Hawthorne's most celebrated character is Hester Prynne, a woman who is seen as both sinful and mad, and who uses this moniker and the scarlet letter that symbolizes it as a "passport into regions where other women dare not tread".<sup>3</sup>

Sanity mean mental illness of such a severe nature that a person cannot distinguish fantasy from reality, cannot conduct her/his affairs due to psychosis, or is subject to uncontrollable impulsive behavior. Insanity is distinguished from low intelligence or mental deficiency due to age or injury. Sanity, like many terms we use, is relative. Just like how twenty miles would be a short distance for a car but quite a run if one was on foot, sanity is relative to who we are and where we live. The ideas and expressions we use are defined by us, and likewise, we are defined by the society we live in. Many different cultures see certain behaviors in different ways, thus making a universal definition for what makes one 'sane' is nearly impossible. Just as we can look at the world we live in and see what constitutes as the social rules, we can also look into the fantastical and diverse world of literature and see what each books' social norms are.<sup>4</sup>

## Chapter Two

### Samuel Beckett

Samuel Beckett, in full Samuel Barclay Beckett, (born April 13, 1906, Foxrock, County Dublin, Ireland died December 22, 1989, Paris, France), author, critic, and playwright, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. He wrote in both French and English and is perhaps best known for his plays, especially *En attendant Godot* (1952; *Waiting for Godot*). Samuel Beckett was born in a suburb of Dublin. Like his fellow Irish writers George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, and William Butler Yeats, he came from a Protestant, Anglo-Irish background. At the age of 14 he went to the Portora Royal School, in what became Northern Ireland, a school that catered to the Anglo-Irish middle classes.<sup>5</sup>

From 1923 to 1927, he studied Romance languages at Trinity College, Dublin, where he received his bachelor's degree. After a brief spell of teaching in Belfast, he became a reader in English at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris in 1928. There he met the self-exiled Irish writer James Joyce, the author of the controversial and seminally modern novel *Ulysses*, and joined his circle. Contrary to often-repeated reports, however, he never served as Joyce's secretary. He returned to Ireland in 1930 to take up a post as lecturer in French at Trinity College, but after only four terms he resigned, in December 1931, and embarked upon a period of restless travel in London, France, Germany, and Italy. In 1937 Beckett decided to settle in Paris. (This period



of Beckett's life is vividly depicted in letters he wrote between 1929 and 1940, a wide-ranging selection of which were first published in 2009.)<sup>6</sup>

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As a citizen of a country that was neutral in World War II, he was able to remain there even after the occupation of Paris by the Germans, but he joined an underground resistance group in 1941. When, in 1942, he received news that members of his group had been arrested by the Gestapo, he immediately went into hiding and eventually moved to the unoccupied zone of France. Until the liberation of the country, he supported himself as an agricultural labourer. In 1945 he returned to Ireland but volunteered for the Irish Red Cross and went back to France as an interpreter in a military hospital in Saint-Lô, Normandy. In the winter of 1945, he finally returned to Paris and was awarded the Croix de Guerre for his resistance work.<sup>7</sup>

There followed a period of intense creativity, the most concentratedly fruitful period of Beckett's life. His relatively few prewar publications included two essays on Joyce and the French novelist Marcel Proust. The volume *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934) contained 10 stories describing episodes in the life of a Dublin intellectual, Belacqua Shuah, and the novel *Murphy* (1938) concerns an Irishman in London who escapes from a girl he is about to marry to a life of contemplation as a male nurse in a mental institution. His two slim volumes of poetry were *Whoroscope* (1930), a poem on the French philosopher René Descartes, and the collection *Echo's Bones* (1935). A number of short stories and poems were scattered in various periodicals. He wrote the novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* in the mid-1930s, but it remained incomplete and was not published until 1992.<sup>8</sup>

During his years in hiding in unoccupied France, Beckett also completed another novel, *Watt*, which was not published until 1953. After his return to Paris, between 1946 and 1949, Beckett produced a number of stories, the major prose narratives *Molloy* (1951), *Malone meurt* (1951; *Malone Dies*), and *L'Innommable* (1953; *The Unnamable*), and two plays, the unpublished three-act *Eleutheria* and *Waiting for Godot*. It was not until 1951, however, that these works saw the light of day. After many refusals, Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil (later Mme Beckett), Beckett's lifelong companion, finally succeeded in finding a publisher for *Molloy*. When this book not only proved a modest commercial success but also was received with enthusiasm by the French critics, the same publisher brought out the two other novels and *Waiting for Godot*. It was with the amazing success of *Waiting for Godot* at the small Théâtre de Babylone in Paris, in January 1953, that Beckett's rise to world fame began.<sup>9</sup>

Beckett continued writing, but more slowly than in the immediate postwar years. Plays for the stage and radio and a number of prose works occupied much of his attention. (This period of Beckett's life is treated in a second volume of letters, published in 2011, covering the years 1941–56.) Beckett continued to live in Paris, but most of his writing was done in a small house secluded in the Marne valley, a short drive from Paris. His total dedication to his art extended to his complete avoidance of all personal publicity, of appearances on radio or television, and of all journalistic interviews.

When, in 1969, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature, he accepted the award but declined the trip to Stockholm to avoid the public speech at the ceremonies. A substantial selection of archival and epistolary material was published as *Dear Mr. Beckett: Letters from the Publisher, the Samuel Beckett File* (2016), offering readers insight into his process.<sup>10</sup>

### Chapter Three

#### Footfalls play

Footfalls is a play by Samuel Beckett. It was written in English, between 2 March and December 1975 and was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre as part of the Samuel Beckett Festival, on May 20, 1976 directed by Beckett himself. Billie Whitelaw, for whom the piece had been written, played May whilst Rose Hill voiced the mother. It is a play of voices, maybe most plays are, but Beckett's more than most, where there is often no action at all, no interplay, just the haunting effect of voices. One aspect of voices-only drama is that the voices themselves can *change identity* in the way a physical actor cannot. Obviously it's two women, a dyad but, in a way, more dynamic than the characters, is the play's careful division into four parts: part 1 May and mother's dialogue; part 2 the mother's monologue; part 3 May's monologue; part 4 the brief coda with no-one onstage.<sup>11</sup>

*Footfalls* is a short play about an old woman and her daughter, middle-aged, who has lived with her all her life, taking care of her. The daughter in *Footfalls*, May, has had very little interaction with the outside world. She spends a great deal of the play pacing, slowly and methodically, back

and forth on the stage. *Footfalls* explores the monotony of time, with the paradox of the footfalls. While the footfalls very clearly, literally, mark time, the play moves at a glacial pace, creating the illusion that no time is passing. The play is full of pauses, and long moments of silence in which the only sound is the clomping of May's feet.<sup>12</sup>

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At one point, May asks her mother "Would you like me to inject you again?", and the mother answers, "Yes, but it is too soon." May then asks "Would you like me to change your position again?", and the mother answers, "Yes, but it is too soon." May follows this by offering a litany of services, from "Pass you the bedpan?" to "Moisten your poor lips?" concluding the whole list with, "Again." And the mother answers, "Yes, but it is too soon." (240) In this little interaction, Beckett uses a present moment to give us a sense of the entire continuum of these two's existence. Although May is asking her mother if she wants her to change her position *now*, she ends the sentence with "again," evoking a series of regular events that stretches far back into the past. And when the mother answers, she says it is too soon, evoking a series of regular events that will continue into the future, and an impression that there will never be an end to the "again" s.<sup>13</sup>

While the footfalls are an attempt to count down, and measure away the minutes and hours of May's life, they seem to have the opposite effect, only highlighting how endless and repetitive her existence is, as she repeats the same routines with her mother, and paces back and forth along the same line on the stage.<sup>14</sup>

The term madness in the *Footfalls* is divided into 4 parts by silence and the lights going down to blackness and then the distant chime of a church bell.

It is very unnerving when the lights come up on part two and May is no longer speaking, but is addressed by the Voice, the alleged mother, in a sustained monologue, revealing creepy details about the woman we observe continuing her endless pacing.<sup>15</sup>

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As the piece progresses their respective identities become more uncertain, as the Mother speaks vindictively about the daughter in part 2, before May appears to have a breakdown in part 3 as she becomes utterly absorbed into the anecdote about the mother and daughter in church, before she finally seems to reveal that the mother's voice is *part of her psyche*. And then all identities are cancelled when part 4 opens (briefly) on an empty stage. All gone like dreams, 'such stuff as dreams are made on' or, in this case, nightmares of personality disorder.

Beckett delights in the details of physical decay and decrepitude, hence the initial dialogue about the bedpan, dressing sores etc. Can the Voice really be 90 years old, 89 or 90? The woman onstage, May or Amy, she is quite old, too, certainly a wreck: 'disheveled grey hair, worn grey wrap hiding feet, trailing.' Very often Beckett throws in a swearword or two. Maybe he was restrained out of respect for a woman actor.<sup>16</sup>

## Chapter Four

### Conclusion

The dramatic works of Samuel Beckett (13 April 1906 – 22 December 1989) reflect the evolution of his interests in various means of artistic expression, as he composed plays for stage, radio, cinema, and television. In his stage plays, he parodies traditional dramatic action and borrows the techniques used in other modes of entertainment. His themes are not constant, but they are grimly developed through a steady mood of ironic laughter if not outright sarcasm. Like the character “O” who runs from the camera’s eye (“E”) in *Film*, Beckett’s art finds its form in a flight from conventional expectations and traditional observations. What seems meaningless and absurd is shown to be the only meaning possible in a universe where the human experience of consciousness (as subject) seems trapped by a nature and body (as object) without consciousness. Laughter is an intellectual triumph over material absurdity, and self-denial is self-affirmation. Beckett’s plays are made of such paradoxes.

Beckett is best known as the author of four intriguingly powerful stage plays; *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp’s Last Tape*, and *Happy Days*. His later work has begun to receive critical attention, particularly those plays that focus on women, such as *Play* and especially *Not I*. With

his first stunningly successful stage play, however, there is not a woman to be seen. Only two tramps, two strangely united male travelers, and a boy are on the stage of *Waiting for Godot*.

### Note

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