

**THE RECEPTION OF SAMUEL BECKETT IN JAPAN  
SEEN THROUGH BETSUYAKU'S PLAY  
*UMI YUKABA MIZUKU KABANE***

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Among the many avant-garde dramatists of Japan, Minoru Betsuyaku owes to Samuel Beckett the most. In spite of his indebtedness to Beckett in the 1980's, his more recent works reveal more clearly the affinities and differences in their basic attitudes to the human condition. In 1978 Betsuyaku began an adaptation of Beckett's play *Endgame*, but it resulted in an entirely new creation of his own. Hamm and Clov now were two veterans wounded in action, No. 1 being wheeled by No. 2. Nag and Nell became Man and Woman, presumably parents to No. 1. The two wounded veterans turn out to be fake, Man and Woman say they are parents not to No. 1 but to a soldier who committed harakiri. As Beckett, Betsuyaku is concerned about how man could retain any significance in his "being" in this world of uncertainty. Hamm will suffer the endgame without its ending. No. 1 will endure a self inflicted constipation. Thus Beckett and Betsuyaku play the same tune but in a different key.



**M**inoru Betsuyaku (b. 1937) is an avant-garde playwright of Japan, who, among his colleagues, owes the most to Samuel Beckett. It was in the early part of the 1960s that Beckett was introduced to Japan.<sup>1</sup> This was also the period when Betsuyaku began to take interest in experimental theatre activities on the campus of Waseda University where he was a student. He was fortunate to have as his partner Tadashi Suzuki, now an established figure in the world of experimental theatre. They collaborated closely, Betsuyaku writing scripts and Suzuki producing and directing them. Among those young enthusiasts of theatre, there was much discussion and experiment for a new theatre to express the times correctly. Translations and productions of Beckett's plays came timely enough.<sup>2</sup> But his *Waiting for Godot* was generally the only play that the Japanese theatrical world could take then, and by the end of the 1960s Beckett began to be put aside. Betsuyaku himself says that he followed suit, because he felt that Beckett was heading toward extremes in his art of

introspection and diminution. However, it seems that he was the only one that came closest to Beckett by sharing not only his theatrical methods but also his attitudes toward life and man. Therefore, although he drifted away from Beckett, he was obliged to return to him to seek a kind of drama that would express another later period. Betsuyaku deemed that in spite of his “extremes” Beckett had poignantly demonstrated the essentials of theatre. As modern theatre, since the latter part of the nineteenth century, defined man from a restricted perspective, it had to regain its freedom to see people in their true nature, and at the same time the theatre itself had to be reassessed. Hence his return to Beckett. He even predicted in an interview in 1990 that in the future the theatre would oscillate between a drifting away and a turning back to what is Beckettian (Interview 142).

In 1978, Betsuyaku wrote *Umi Yukaba Mizuku Kabane* [*When One is Sent to Sea to Fight One Must Be Ready to Have His Corpse Soaked in Sea Water*, henceforth abbreviated as *Umi Yukaba*], which, he says, he started with an idea of writing an adaptation of *Endgame*, but ended up with something very different from the original. In 1987, he published a book entitled *Beketto to 'Ijime'* [*Beckett and Bullying*] which explicates a method of drama which could express the times, that is, the latter part of the 1970s and the 1980s, and which discusses Beckett's *Come and Go* accordingly. This exposition of his dramaturgy that befits those years can explain what Betsuyaku had intended to do in *Umi Yukaba*. Furthermore, by analyzing this play, we may make clearer to what extent Betsuyaku was indebted to Beckett than we would by studying his plays of an earlier period when he publicly admitted Beckett's influence.

In the “Afterword” of *Collected Plays Of Minoru Betsuyaku*, Vol. 5, the author mentions that he began an adaptation of *Endgame* with the intention of working on and changing the dialogue only where it was necessary: “I had the intention of necessarily replacing Beckett's theatrical space and physiology with that which suited the Japanese style of life. As the work progressed I became so involved that I had transposed everything to what was purely my environment and lost all trace of the original” (251).\*

*Umi Yukaba* was first performed at the Studio Theatre of the Bungakuza Theatre Company in 1978. The play opens on a bare stage with only a tall electric lamp-post placed somewhere a little off the centre. The lamp-post is Betsuyaku's “licensed” property, his use of it being so frequent in many of his plays. He says the idea of it came from the single tree in *Waiting for Godot*. Instead of seeing in the tree the symbol of the Cross or the Passion of Jesus Christ or a number of other occidental interpretations, Betsuyaku saw the possibility of the lone tree on a bare stage in connection to spatial dynamics. He was certain that Beckett used the single tree for a similar effect

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\* Henceforth all quotations from Betsuyaku's writings, including his plays, are translations by the author of this article.

(*Betsuyaku* 1971:107). The singleness of the tree a little off centre would free and expand space beyond the three walls and the “fourth wall” of the proscenium stage. If the tree could be used for such an effect, Betsuyaku thought, a lamp-post could very well take its place, and besides, a lamp-post was useful to give the effect of everyday life from which the reality and truth of life could be discerned.

Onto this bare stage with a lamp-post, enter two wounded veterans of war, one in a wheel-chair and the other wheeling it. They are not named specifically but simply called Wounded Soldier No.1 and Wounded Soldier No. 2. No.1 is wheeled onto the stage covered with a dirty white sheet and holding an umbrella. The sheet is taken off him by No. 2 during the course of the play and placed back at the end. These two characters definitely suggest Hamm and Clov of *Endgame*. Betsuyaku has often used the sheet and umbrella as convenient instruments to hide oneself, a self-effacement, and as a sign for cutting oneself off from one’s surroundings. No.1, like Hamm, is blind and cannot stand; No. 2 has some trouble with his leg. The two plant themselves at the foot of the lamp-post. Dusk casts its receding light on the solitary figures huddled together, producing loneliness and an infinity of space. No.1 and No. 2 at this moment are more like Vladimir and Estragon forlornly telling themselves that Godot is failing them again that night. The following dialogue is the opening of *Umi Yukaba* and one can detect a number of similar situations and moods of the characters from both *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*.

No.1: (groans slightly)...  
 (No.2 looks about to see where the groan comes from.)  
 No. 1: (groans in a low tone again)...  
 No. 2: (realizes it is No.1 groaning) Is it you groaning, eh?  
 No. 1: (groans)...  
 No. 2: What’s wrong with you, are you cold?  
 No. 1: Eh?  
 No. 2: What’s wrong, I said.  
 No. 1: What’s wrong with what?  
 No. 2: It was you that groaned just now, wasn’t it?  
 No. 1: Yeh.  
 No. 2: Are you cold, I said...  
 No. 1: No, not cold...  
 No. 2: Well, stop making those funny noises, you scare me.  
 No. 1: It hurts...  
 No.2: It hurts?...  
 No. 1: Yes...  
 No. 2: Where?...  
 No. 1: You ask where ... It never hurt so much in my life...

- No. 2: Your chest?...You can't breathe?...(*tries to soothe him by rubbing him on the back*)
- No. 1: (*shakes his shoulders trying to brush No.2's hand away*) Stop it. Leave me alone.
- No. 2: But you said it hurts.
- No. 1: Of course it hurts.
- No. 2: That's why I tried to ...
- No. 1: Stop it. It's not you who's suffering. It's me ...
- No. 2: I know ... want some water?
- No. 1: No ... It's not as ... it's not as easy as you think.
- No. 2: Then try some pills, won't you? (*Opens the bundle he is carrying*) There should be some creosotes ... and aspirin, and digestives ...
- No. 1: I say, is there a dog around?
- No. 2: A dog? ... No, I don't think so ...
- No. 1: Ah ... thought there might be ...
- No. 2: What about the pills? ...
- No. 1: Didn't I tell you I don't want them? How many times do I have to tell you that ...

(121-129)

The style, tone and mood in which the two characters barter words echo those of Beckett's characters. The mutual relationship of the two is that of rejection and attachment, repugnance and a feeling of inseparableness at the same time. The dialogue quoted above continues with No.1 bickering with No. 2 about how the latter has become crippled not from an injury in action at war but from falling off the roof when he was working as a carpenter. No.1 continues to nag No. 2 by saying that if it wasn't for the pity No.1 shed on No. 2, he would have had to go hungry. But No. 2 does not seem to mind how derogatorily he is treated; he is the mild one. Instead, he reminds No.1 that he has been doing his best to make him comfortable. At one point, No.1 unexpectedly requests the other to help him stand up and walk, and walking, No. 1 blurts out how wonderful it is to stand and walk for a change. However, he says he is afraid of being caught and seen walking; that he must be cautious. Wasn't he supposed to be blind and unable even to stand? We have already been told that No. 2's being wounded in action is doubtful. Nothing seems to be certain. In Japan, for a long time after World War II, veterans wounded in action decorated the sides of the streets at shopping centres howling military songs to the accompaniment of half-broken-down accordions, singing for a penny. Eventually, fake "veterans" started to invade the territory of the honest ones. They would look pitiable, singing and begging, with both legs amputated, but at the end of the day, at dusk, they would stand up and walk away on two sturdy legs. Whatever the case, Betsuyaku practises two things through these characters; one is to give a familiar and down-to-earth scene, not an abstraction of a metaphysical nature

as that of Beckett, and at the same time, to evoke in the audience the feeling of unrest and uncertainty by depicting veterans of this type without a home, without next of kin, and most of all without the certainty of truth.

The "dog" is mentioned frequently by both playwrights. The dog features as a miserable "underdog" in the roundelay in *Waiting for Godot*, and as the song repeats itself the dog, with its tail curled in between its hind legs, seems to fade away with the song into oblivion. In *Endgame* it takes on another function. It is an incomplete toy dog, sexually undefined. Hamm is afraid of it because even though it is a toy he imagines that if its sex were to be stuck on there would be the possibility of a new life. For life to Hamm means only an endless obligation for the repetition of the "endgame." The dog is indirectly connected with birth and death. The dog referred to by Betsuyaku is mentioned in its relationship to human beings. Its function is to point out people's vain sense of superiority. The dog should be sent away with a stick for it must not come near people. When the dog barks at No.1, he cannot control his frustration and angrily shouts, "How dare he bark at me, me ... a one time officer of the Emperor's sacred military army!" (137).

Hamm uses the whistle to have Clov go about his daily routine and to order him about. No.1 uses it to test No. 2's loyalty and to bind No. 2 to himself so that he will not be left alone in the infinity of barrenness around the lamp-post.

In *Waiting for Godot*, eating the carrot, the chicken and chicken bone become the means to forget the time of waiting. Where food is concerned the baser and also comic side of man is played up. Betsuyaku's depiction of man is keenly measured by food and the act of eating, and these scenes are much detailed and extensive. Estragon's attitude in munching the carrot is reflected in No. 2 who crunches peanuts. Crunching peanuts is another skit which Betsuyaku often uses. The act of eating in Beckett loses meaning altogether when Estragon says that the more he munches the more tasteless the carrot becomes. Betsuyaku extends the function of eating to indicate a relationship between characters. There is no end to No. 2's crunching peanuts over No. 1's head, which gives occasion for No. 1 to voice his feeling of repugnance. "I feel nervous when you go crunch crunch...You smell too ... Go away" (146). Then there is a long and detailed scene of cooking, distributing and eating noodles, which I shall call "the ritual of the noodles." This ritual definitely gives significance to Betsuyaku's major issue of human relationships, and it will be dealt with in detail later.

*Umi Yukaba* can be divided into three parts. The first part consists of the exposition of the relationship between No. 1 and No. 2 where the former mistreats the latter continuously. No. 1 wants to get rid of No. 2. The relationship is suggestive of those of Pozzo and Lucky or of Vladimir and Estragon or of Hamm and Clov. No.1 says to No. 2, "Go away ... pretend you don't exist" (141), meaning he doesn't want No. 2 near him, but since he will

become lonely, he wants him to “pretend that he is not there.” At other times No. 1 orders No. 2 to be quiet “You always talk loudly ... can’t you talk quietly?” to which No. 2 says he will then shut his mouth. The feeling of repugnance and the wish to be left alone are immediately alternated by a desire for company and friendship. Thus No.1 instantly goes back on his words: “No, just talk quietly. Just don’t be loud, that’s all ... If you stop talking, I’d think there’d be nobody near me” (142).

The flickering emotive pattern of this sort in the Beckettian characters is treated more cryptically. Estragon says, “Embrace me! (*Vladimir stiffens.*) Don’t be stubborn! (*Vladimir softens. They embrace. Estragon recoils.*) You stink of garlic!” (12). Vladimir retorts that it is for the kidneys, and the subject is dropped altogether for Estragon is already anxious about “the pain of waiting.” In Betsuyaku’s case, the characters can address one another in harsh tones, but the real issue is indirectly hinted at. That is, there is the attitude of hiding oneself behind a mask of harshness from the fear of exposing oneself; there is the tone of ridicule and testing, with a delight in feeling superior to the other. There is hesitation and caution for the self, and picking on and taking digs at the other. The characters are depicted in detail as self-defending but hungry for companionship so that there is no end to the flow of conversation whether there be real communication or not. The style of conversation is not as regulated into geometrical patterns as that of Beckett’s but winds itself in and out unpredictably according to the characters’ emotional developments.

For example, thematic phrases in Beckett’s plays are reiterated with regularity. Estragon’s “Nothing to be done” or “What are we waiting for?” are measured so that they would be uttered at regular intervals when he tires of playing at “games” and when his self-consciousness returns. Hamm’s “Me to play” and Clov’s “It’s finished” are regular reminders for them to continue their game though it is an “endgame.” The repeated thematic phrase in *Umi Yukaba* is “I am in pain” uttered by No.1, but since that is pronounced at moments of No.1’s emotive responses to his own whims, the reiteration of that phrase is not regularly measured but comes sporadically as in daily conversation. Furthermore this theme is repeated variously from a groan to a detailed explanation of how painful it is and why. In Beckett’s case, even a slight variation invites attention.

Betsuyaku is fond of the noise of the wind, especially when it is heard passing over the lamp-post on a bare stage. In *Umi Yukaba* the noise of the wind is often alternated with No. 2’s titular song of the military slogan. The song itself has a noble melody composed by a contemporary around the early part of the twentieth century to evoke patriotism, and the original lyrics denoting bravery and loyalty to one’s lord were written by a court-poet of the eighth century, Ohtomo no Yakamochi.<sup>3</sup> But like Vladimir’s song about the dog who stole the bone, the effect is melancholic, with the tunes trailing off into the recesses of the void. No. 2 spreads a rough straw mat on the ground,

sits down on it and begins to sing to the accompaniment of his old accordion:

When one is sent to sea to fight  
one must be ready to have his corpse  
soaked in sea water;  
When one is sent to the inland to fight  
one must be ready to have his corpse  
grown over with grass.  
For the sake of our lord,  
one must not hesitate to sacrifice one's life.

Throughout the play, this is repeated, sung often at fade-ins after momentary fade-outs. This military song was the motto for the Japanese people symbolizing loyalty, resolution and perseverance during the war; but we must be reminded that after the war this military song was constantly sung by the wounded veterans turned beggars at street corners. Some were real veterans, some were fake. No.1, blind and in the wheel-chair, and No. 2, playing his accordion and singing, and both in dirty veteran's attire, can give the effect of ambivalence to the Japanese spectators who have experienced the war and its aftermath.

Towards the middle of this play two characters enter and join the Wounded Soldiers. They have no names and are only designated as Man and Woman. Hamm's parents have names, Nagg and Nell, but they are buried in ashbins, cursed for their sex and their giving birth to Hamm. Beckett diminishes his characters' faculties by such theatrical means, whereas Betsuyaku does the same by refusing to identify his by name. Since they are just Man and Woman without a name, they must not lose time in declaring who they are. They are the parents of No. 1:

WOMAN: I cried three days and three nights when I heard you were killed in action.

MAN: Poor boy ... Were your eyes blinded?

No.1: It's father, isn't it?...Yes, blinded, and the legs ...

MAN: Do they still hurt?...

(162)

Man and Woman continue to fuss over No.1 as any doting parents would, but they soon become presumptuous:

No.1: ... Mother, where did you put my glasses?

WOMAN: Can't you see I'm cleaning them for you now? But I think you'd do better without them.

No.1: ... But, mother ...

MAN: Let me see you stand.

No.1: What, stand?... No, I can't father. I told you a minute ago that my legs were wounded ...

MAN: But you said they don't hurt ...

No.1: No, they don't hurt ... but ... oh, bother! Isn't there anybody around?

(163)

He asks for No. 2 to help him, being irritated by their overbearing attitude. He even orders No. 2 to get rid of them, but they are determined to dominate. They become more meddlesome and even begin reprimanding No.1 as if he were a source of irritation.

Meanwhile, No. 2 has started cooking noodles on a charcoal stove. Man and Woman take over, fussing about how it should be seasoned; and when it is done their attitude grows even more presumptuous. They insist they will help themselves to the best part of it, leave a little for No. 2 and none for No.1. They behave greedily and even despicably, and have no concern for their supposed son. It is No. 2 who argues for No. 1. There is a squabble as to who should get the meat, the mushroom, the slices of onions, the little there is. Their seriousness verges on the trite and the nonsensical. In the end, No.1 implores them to be quiet but the Woman retorts by saying that she does not remember bringing up her son to be so rude and such a spoilt brat. A hostility between the Wounded Soldiers and the old couple emerges. The couple are preoccupied completely by the ritual of the noodles, whereas No. 1 is reminded of his constipation. We do not learn for quite a while that No. 1's groan, which began the play and which continues throughout, is caused by constipation. No. 2 suggests trying to get rid of the excrement but No.1 is obstinate and deliberately refuses to do so, and their argument continues on this issue. Occasionally the old couple turn to No.1 to scold him as if he were still a child, but otherwise the relationship between the two groups has now diminished to practically nothing.

In the end No. 2 succeeds in getting a single strand of noodle from the old couple and gives it to No.1, who relishes it with gusto. His usual arrogant tone has temporarily disappeared. He feels satiated, desires to sleep and therefore is covered with the sheet. No.2 exits with the pots and pans.

We next find Man and Woman in the deepening dusk playing at elimination games, singing counting-out rhymes of "zui-zui-zukorobashi gomamiso-zui" (equivalent to "eeny-meeny-miney-moe"). They play it in such a way that they can never get the words correct. The nature of this game together with the couple's repetitive corrections denote a never ending cyclical movement. Moreover, the game is a child's game and the two behave childishly and argumentatively so that the whole effect is that of ambivalence. It is also a ludicrous scene echoing that of Nagg and Nell's attempt at making love, both reminiscing about Lake Como, and Nagg trying to give Nell a peck on her cheeks, withered as they are.

No. 2 comes back with an orange which again is snatched away by Man and Woman and another argument follows as to whether they should share it with No.1 and 2. Beckett's characters are never devoid of bits of food but they all seem quite detached, whereas Betsuyaku's characters are quite



concerned. Nagg often asks for his sap, and Hamm uses it as a prize for listening to his story, but the sap is never Nagg's major concern.

The play is in its third section. No.1 wakes from his sleep and tells No. 2 about the soldier who appeared in his dream. This soldier happens to be the one who, being surrounded by the enemy, committed "harakiri" at the battlefield. In the dream he strongly persuades No. 1 to do something about his constipation. No.1 recounts his dream:

Yes, he came and he said..."Get rid of your excrement and fertilize the fields with it. That is the least you can do for the sake of your country. The rain will fall and it will flow into the rice-fields, the excrement will then melt into the soil and it will yield excellent crops ... don't you understand?" ... I said, no, I won't. I will definitely not ... even if I were to die! ... But then, I won't die. I won't die for it either.

(192-93)

Until quite recently human excrement was utilized as fertilizer in Japan. Whether he will fertilize his country or live on, both ways are acts of patriotism, yet the effect is sharply ironical. No.1 will live on, but he will resign himself to the fact that he has never had any parents at all. He has lost faith in parenthood. He wants to get rid of them all the more because they will not believe his having received wounds in action.

MAN: I am asking you. Have you really been to war?

In response to that question, No.1 stands to attention and begins to talk in military fashion:

In October of the 18th year of Showa [1943], I was drafted, and reported to Utsunomiya Regiment. In November of the 19th year of Showa, I crossed over to China Mainland, joined the Northern China Keijo Squadron, marched on to Touan Botankou in Manchuria. In July of the 20th year of Showa, I served in the 135th Division of Kantou Unit, was sent to Chouryu and while guarding the border one early morning, was suddenly attacked by the Russian army. While defending, I lost sight of the Unit (suddenly stands excitedly although he is supposed to be crippled) ... Lieutenant Yamada, Lieutenant Yamada ... the Unit ... I lost sight of my Unit ... (No.1 begins to walk about) ... and I led the group of soldiers into a mountainous area and Takabayashi! ... Duck ... Duck! The enemy is 300 meters in front of us. I continued fighting without knowing that the war was ended, and on the 23rd of August of the 20th year of Showa, was killed in action in the mountain area of Reizan Botankou.

(195)

Here, after a pause, No.1 denies his being the one whom he just impersonated and says that he was talking about his friend who was previously mentioned as having committed harakiri. Man and Woman agree. They are oblivious to the fact that they had treated No.1 as their son.

MAN: Yes, we know. That is the truth. That soldier is our son.

WOMAN: Yes, there is no doubt about his being killed in action, not knowing that the war had ended.

(196)

So saying the couple exit. Ordered by No.1, No. 2 climbs the electric lamp-post and flies a Japanese flag from it. The instant it is up, No.1 asks the condition of the wind. Thus the flag loses its identity as the symbol of nationalism and patriotism and becomes a barometer. No. 2 then reports on his observation of the sea which he saw with his telescope and says it is vaguely dark. His duty is akin to Clov's, and the lamp-post is his ladder.

As the play nears its end, No.1 wails in misery saying that his pain has gone, and because of that he has lost the purpose of staying alive. He repeats, "What shall I do?" We see Vladimir and Hamm repeat the same phrase but their cry is deeply tragic for their eternal pain is a metaphysical pain, whereas that of No.1 is more arbitrary. No.1 begins a game of dying in which he tells No. 2 to choke him. He is happy to feel the pain caused by No. 2's grip on his neck because it is evidence of his being alive and he fusses over how tightly he should be choked. No.2 does not want to go on with the game and leaves. No.1 alone blurts out that he has been alone ... always alone ... left to himself to endure the "pain." Betsuyaku meets Beckett here in his *Endgame* where Hamm mutters to himself "Old endgame lost of old, play and lose and have done with losing ..." (82), "Since that's the way we're playing it ... let's play it that way..." (84). Hamm then addresses his blood-stained handkerchief "Old stancher! You ... remain" (84). Beckett ends the play by the stage-direction "Brief tableau" (84), an indication that the "endgame" still remains to be finished. Betsuyaku ends No.1's life for he falls dead after a "mock salute" to the national flag. The old couple re-enter. No. 2 re-enters. He pulls the sheet over No.1. However, does he really die?

MAN: Is he dead?

No.2: Yes ... But he thinks he is still alive.

(204).

*Umi Yukaba* ends here.

Every Beckettian character wishes strongly for death, but none of them acts out a death, though there may be a scene where the act of dying is insinuated. They desire to be released from the pain of playing the game that will never end in order to "wait for Godot" or "to wake with the bell and go through the daily routine" or "to end the endgame," and so on. However, there is an exception in the novel *Murphy*. Murphy was only "a speck in Mr. Endon's unseen" (250), so he dies of an almost willful accident. No.1's suicidal game remains an enigma as to the actuality of it, but whatever it is, the point Betsuyaku wished to convey was "self-immolation" which is akin to that of Murphy's willful accident.

Since death comes not too easily for the Beckettian characters, they are at the mercy of the never-ending pain of being alive. The passive receptivity of their condition is the basic cause for their obsession with the Self. The attitude in which No.1 receives his lot remains enigmatic. Hamm asks for his painkiller but does not get it, whereas No.1 has easy access to it but rejects it. No.1 refuses to get rid of his constipation, but Hamm is more than anxious to end the endgame and Vladimir and Estragon to end their waiting. No.1 has put an end to himself and yet he, according to No.2, is still alive, enduring his pain. There is no denying that an Oriental attitude to life and the universe is at the basis of this attitude. No.1, dead but living, finds himself still enduring pain and feeling life within him. This irrational attitude could be partially explained by the words of the renowned monk, Daishu Ekai "To desire great *nirvana* is the karma of birth-and-death" (Suzuki 139). That is, to attain complete enlightenment one must experience suffering and at the same time transcend it. To encompass opposites without rationalizing is the Oriental way with which the Japanese have been living for aeons. Generally, they no longer talk of it explicitly today but this idea and attitude are still deeply rooted within them so that No.1 can be easily understood. And so, in turn, it could be said that Beckett easily found root in Japan, as pointed out by Betsuyaku (Interview 138).

As to the attitude of Beckett's characters, let us see what Richard Coe says of Murphy, the titular character of the novel. "There is every probability that Murphy is deliberately using these techniques [Yoga, Zen and Za-Zen] – the detachment from the world, the annihilation of desire, the hypnosis induced by ... the rocking chair in order to achieve his [Murphy's] intimations of the Void" (25). What is mentioned here of Murphy can also be applied to the rest of Beckett's characters. However Coe warns us that there is every "temptation to interpret" their attitude "in terms of a specific branch of mystical teaching – Taoist, Buddhist or Zen Buddhist" but he points out that actually "this, the least rational, is consequently the least important" in Beckett.<sup>4</sup> Coe argues that Beckett is essentially a rationalist and a Cartesian through Geulincx. Geulincx says that man's mind can act upon itself but its action in the outside world is not its own, but God's. The self is then its only scope and its significance lies within itself in introspection. But since Beckett will have nothing to do with Geulincx's God, for Beckett the mind remains a "Nothing" forever turned inward, "enwrapped in contemplation of itself." Thus Beckett's characters "contemplate in timeless ecstasy the Nirvana of the self," an attitude based upon "baroque rationalism" (Coe 23-33).

Although their basic stance differs, as pointed out above, it is interesting to see that both authors express the main issue of their work in much the same way. That main issue is the characters' "putting up with their pain."

Perhaps Beckett was conscious that the novel's prosaic quality could not contain the poetry of eternal undeath, and that the theatre was more "painfully" adequate to convey such a metaphysical probing of the characters.

Vladimir meditates on his condition thus “Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come ... We have kept our appointment and that’s an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment” (51). Are people to be saved from being “punished,” that is, from damnation, if they are to endure what they are, or where they have been thrown into? Beckett’s cry for mercy for the human plight seems to find no consolation except in having “kept [one’s] appointment.”

No.1’s favorite phrase is “to do something with the utmost effort.” No.1 reprimands No. 2 saying, “You’re not thinking seriously enough ... you must think hard, with effort” (154). Toward the middle of the play, we learn that the pain which makes him suffer is caused from his constipation. All the advice given to him to get rid of his excrement is ignored. The effort he exerts in retaining the pain is the sign of his perseverance. The absurdity of this very painful situation is significant for the plight of modern man. Beckett’s characters too undertake eternal suffering.

No.1 dies of his own accord. The direct cause of his death was the sudden disappearance of the feeling of pain which sustained his notion of “endurance” and therefore the existence of the sensation of being alive. His death was caused also by his giving up the thought of his being the son of the Man and Woman, as he was ejected from their relationship, and by being disgusted with them for not believing that he received his injuries on the battlefield. However, the true seed of self-immolation rests in No. 1 himself. His “endurance of pain” is genuine but it has an implication of self-torture. He does violence to himself by contradicting and deceiving himself in every way. He tries to define himself before the lamp-post, in the presence of No. 2 and Man and Woman to no avail. Isn’t he a wounded veteran who is supposed to be commended and pitied? As others start ignoring him, he begins to deny his very existence; and then he suddenly loses control and seeing no more value in “enduring pain” he lunges at himself. Cruelty and violence to oneself and others are also a part of Beckett characters. On the other hand they also show a craving for company but those characters are manipulated by a marionette’s string and are objectified. Betsuyaku’s depiction of his characters is tinged with touches of the author’s personal experiences.

Betsuyaku’s sensitivity penetrates into the lights and shades of the nature of the Japanese, allowing him to draw plausible characters. Minoru was born in Manchuria in 1937. His father died there in 1945 when Japan was defeated and Minoru fled back to Japan with his mother, sisters and brother after roaming around with scarcely anything to eat. Life back in Japan was even more difficult. Later he entered Waseda University, a prestigious institution, and there he started his theatre activities with Tadashi Suzuki. On campus, it was a time when theatre activities were part and parcel of student movements and leftist movements. After leaving Waseda University, Betsuyaku worked for the Labour Unions while continuing his activities in the theatre. His early experiences in human relationships are limited to the Japanese people in

Manchuria and at home but, as a critic has pointed out, what he experienced was more than enough to provide material for a study of human nature. Anyone experiencing the war and the confusion of its aftermath will have "more than enough" to think about and say.

In the 1960's, in their activities in the student theatre, Tadashi Suzuki and Betsuyaku knew what they wanted. They realized that language as inherited could not explain all of the modern condition. In search of attitudes and methods in the theatre, they were greatly influenced by the then European movement of the avant-garde, especially by Ionesco and Beckett.

After a period of collaboration with Suzuki, Betsuyaku became independent and since then has concentrated on writing. He wrote nearly thirty plays before writing *Umi Yukaba* in 1978, during which he passed through different stages in his ideas and style. In 1987, he published *Beckett and Bullying* where he reiterates the necessity of the right kind of drama to express the times. He then observes the changes in human nature, which was thought never to change, and changes in human relationships, especially during the 70s and the 80s. Thus opinions stated in this book explain and underline what occurs in *Umi Yukaba*. He takes up an actual incident of a boy's suicide in 1986 and equates the nature of that incident to Beckett's *Come and Go* (1965). He argues that drama of today must be a drama that can express the conditions of contemporary human relationships.

In *Come and Go*, Betsuyaku says, when Flo, Ru and Vi sit together, they are able to share the memories of the very far past but about the near past, the sharing becomes partial when words begin losing their meaning. In the present, nothing can be shared by words because words have lost their meaning altogether and the only possibility of sharing is by the touch of matter "I can feel the ring" (8). So, in contemporary society, Betsuyaku says, the existence of the other is only felt by the touch of matter and not the person with his words. Words function only by insinuation and deceit. Beckett's distrust of language has led him to express himself through the "shape" of ideas.<sup>6</sup>

Betsuyaku says that this negative aspect of the use of words by insinuation is not new to us in Japan since it has always been in our culture and is part of our nature. We have the habit of not transcribing into logic and expressiveness what has come to us by implication and insinuation. We do not seek to rationalize what is felt under the surface, except to conceive and express it in the extremity of condensation. "Haiku,"<sup>7</sup> the short poem, is literature born of this spirit. What the Japanese had traditionally, Beckett has done in the shape of mathematical arrangement and condensation of words. However we must note that the art of condensing functions differently with these avant-garde artists.

Betsuyaku thus points out that language plays its part in relation to how people have been reduced to a mere fraction of the whole. We see in *Umi*

*Yukaba* a constant deconstruction of human relationships in close connection with the loss of meaning of the words just used.

In emphasizing the need for a new dramatic form to express precisely the human condition of the 1980s, Betsuyaku begins the book by giving an analysis of why a highschool student in 1986 had to commit suicide as a result of a fake funeral set up in the classroom in his name. He says that at the root of suicides and murders today is the fear caused by the uncertainty of social relationships. Since it is only in the social relationships that people can be defined, if these are uncertain there will naturally exist trouble. By killing himself, the boy murdered the unnamable enemy, the very system of social relationships itself.

The weirdness and mystery of ambiguity and confusion as seen in this case is the phenomenon that characterizes the attitudes of the human world today. Two paradoxical and contrasting elements do not clash and conflict but merge into one another and become mysteriously one. The boy, confronting his own funeral, merely laughed, mumbled a few ineffective words, and himself took part in the joke. One has to submit to the rules of the game of that social group and become a part of it. Self-effacement is required: staying unidentified without a name. Thus one must deprive oneself of any positive action and remain merely a fraction of the whole. This is an attitude and not a positive action and is the most people can do towards self-assertion.

If the world is such, drama must express the mechanism of such human relationships and its complexities. It is no longer the story of the individual but the explanation of the mechanism of the relationship and that is the only way in which one can understand the human condition. The part people play in the drama of today is as fragments, a part of the mechanism of human relationships. This means that it is no more than to take an "attitude." To what extent can a person persevere and endure an attitude will show how far he/she can be eloquent in that condition. Words will eloquently explain, define and explicate his/her condition, but they will also lose their meaning subsequently with the futility of his/her attempts.

That neither No.1 nor Man and Woman have names, is significant of their having no real place in the world, of being merely a fraction. They nevertheless *are* human beings and feel an unfathomable uneasiness if they do not assert themselves as having a functional share in their relationship to the world. Therefore, No.1 and No. 2 are at least Wounded Veterans Nos.1 and 2, and that gives them some identity. But that is not enough. No.1 therefore asserts himself as *enduring* his constipation. This is an "attitude" and not "an action."

Thus according to Betsuyaku, drama today depends on how eloquently characters can repeat this game of keeping up an "attitude," and on the other hand, how it can disappear together with their words. Drama, in other words, is how these two contrastive conditions of "attitude" work on each other.

Characters of both playwrights keep “at it” and as Vladimir boasts “We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. No.1 endures “ambivalently” but courageously even in afterlife. Thus both playwrights feel the need at least to assert the dignity of humanity even when it is sacrificed to a nonentity.

However, it is in the next stage that we find a basic difference between the two authors. Beckett depicts his characters in a state of metaphysical suffering which is an essentially irretrievable condition. Therefore Beckettian characters remain passive in a trap. However, Betsuyaku places his characters somewhat arbitrarily in a seemingly futile and fantastic situation. He depicts people in their relationship with the tangible world and reassesses their function and duty there. In Beckett, there is a severity which does not permit the characters to abandon their lot. The more aware they become of their condition, the more stripped they will become. On the other hand, Betsuyaku has admitted that he is becoming more detailed in depicting the everyday. In him we see the spirit of unconditional acceptance of and resignation from the things of the world. This attitude is a Buddhist attitude. In Beckett we see in his attitude an Oriental leaning toward concentration and meditation, which could be another Buddhist attitude. Actually though, it is the result of a rational and Cartesian approach.

Any serious playwright whose writing career verges on the latter half of the 20th century, whether he/she be of the Occident or the Orient, is bound to acknowledge his/her debt to Beckett. Betsuyaku is no exception, and there is no denying that he is one of the leading figures of the 20th century in the history of Japanese theatre.

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### Notes

1. First translation and publication of a Beckett play was in 1956 *Waiting for Godot* trans. Shinya Ando, Hakusuisha Publications. Première of the above play at Bungakuza Theatre was in 1960, directed by the above translator.
2. From 1961 to the early part of the 1970's, *Act Without Words*, *Play*, *Happy Days*, *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Embers*, and *Not I* were premiered.
3. The poetry belongs to a type called Tanka or Waka which is of 31 syllables grouped into 5-7-5-7-7. It is said to have begun in the fourth century, but its real development was seen during the 8th to 11th centuries. It still remains popular because this type allows the most fluent expression to the Japanese sensitivity.
4. There are contradictory opinions to Coe's such as that of Paul Foster who points out that since western philosophy has become highly sophisticated, it is doubtful whether it is “an appropriate tool to deal with the psycho-religious considerations of which Beckett writes” (25).
5. Clov is reporting to Hamm on what the little boy is doing outside the window.

- This part is not in the English version but in the French, quoted and translated by Martin Esslin in his *The Theatre of the Absurd* (36).
6. Beckett once said to Harold Hobson and Alan Schneider "There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine ... 'Do not despair one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume one of the thieves was damned' ... I am interested in the shape of ideas, even if I do not believe in them. That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters." (Quoted by Martin Esslin in his *The Theatre of the Absurd* 19-20).
  7. Haiku is an even shorter form of poetry than Waka. It consists of 17 syllables grouped as 5-7-5. There is first mention of Haiku in the early part of the 17th century but its development was seen in the 19th century.

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Μεταξύ των πολλών πρωτοποριακών δραματολογών της Ιαπωνίας, ο Minoru Betsuyaku οφείλει πάρα πολλά στο Samuel Beckett. Αλλά πέρα από τις οφειλές του στο Beckett κατά τη δεκαετία του 1980, τα πιο πρόσφατα έργα του αποκαλύπτουν και κάτι άλλο: την προσπάθεια του Betsuyaku να καταθέσει ένα δικό του λόγο, πιο προσωπικό, επάνω στα δάνεια στοιχεία του. Το 1978 ο Betsuyaku άρχισε μια διασκευή



του έργου του Beckett. Το τέλος του παιχνιδιού για να καταλήξει σε μια εντελώς δικιά του νέα δημιουργία. Όπως ο Beckett έτσι και ο Betsuyaku ενδιαφέρεται για το πώς ο άνθρωπος θα μπορούσε να διατηρήσει κάποιο νόημα στο "είναι" του μέσα σ' αυτό τον κόσμο της αβεβαιότητας. Και ο Beckett και ο Bestuyaku παίζουν τον ίδιο σκοπό αλλά σε διαφορετική κλίμακα.