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FROM EXISTENTIALISM TO ECOLOGY: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF CRISIS IN

SAMUEL BECKETT

By

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BA English, Philosophy, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming 2014

Thesis

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## Introduction: Situating Beckett

*Literary criticism is not book keeping. - Beckett*

Samuel Barclay Beckett was born on Good Friday, 1904 in Foxrock, a suburb of Dublin, to May and Frank Beckett, and went on to write some of the darkest modernist literature of the twentieth century. Early in his life, Beckett showed immense promise as an academic. He received his BA in Romance languages from Trinity College Dublin in 1928 and then taught for roughly a year and half at Trinity College. Hugh Kenner remarks: “The post at Trinity seemed the fulfillment of many years’ diligent costly preparation....scholarship, teaching, these seemed clearly his destiny” (41). From 1928-1930, Beckett was a lecturer at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. These years also marked the beginning of a lifelong friendship with Thomas MacGreevey, who introduced him to the Irish writer James Joyce. This led to a relationship that greatly influenced Beckett’s life and also led to his first published work, an essay in support of Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*, “Dante...Bruno...Vico...Joyce,” in 1929.

Beckett abandoned academia for a bohemian lifestyle after lecturing at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. J.M. Coetzee tells us Beckett thought teaching was ultimately “the grotesque comedy of lecturing” (1). These years led Beckett across Europe and England, until he eventually chose Paris as his home.<sup>1</sup> Beckett’s wandering stemmed in part from the anguish he experienced after the death of his father. Coetzee reports:

...the mounting sweats and shudders had arrived in 1933, when after the death of his father his own health, physical and mental, deteriorated to the point where his family became concerned. He suffered from heart palpitations and had nocturnal

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<sup>1</sup>“He dropped into nothingness. ‘I lost the best,’ he has said, and he spent the next years not knowing what to do. Eighteen months later his father was dead of a heart attack. Sam Beckett spent two miserable years (1933-1935) in London and six months wandering in Germany before he settled in Paris in the fall of 1936. Paris has been his home ever since” (Kenner 42).

panic attacks so severe that his elder brother had to sleep in his bed to calm him. By day he kept to his room, lying with his face to the wall, refusing to speak, refusing to eat. (7)

Beckett's anguish stemmed from his perceived inability to separate himself from his mother's control. "Beckett's own way of putting it," Coetzee writes, "was that he had never been properly born" (7). He then began psychoanalysis with Wilfrid Bion, who helped Beckett to cope and recover.

Beckett's anxiety perhaps also stemmed not only from his father's death but also from World War II. Beckett's participation in the French Resistance (for which he was awarded the Croix de Guerre) forced him to flee Paris for Roussillon in 1942, narrowly avoiding the Gestapo. During his time in hiding, Beckett wrote *Watt*. He then returned to Ireland, where he found the possibility of a return to Paris through an exchange the Irish Red Cross, who was merging with the French Red Cross to support St. Lo in 1945, a city devastated by bombings. He again witnessed the devastation of the war and the ruin it left behind during this experience. The Irish and French provided medical relief to the Normans who had survived intense bombings. Beckett served as a storekeeper and interpreter, among other roles. During his service, he produced a radio broadcast entitled *The Capital of Ruins*.<sup>2</sup> Beckett's life does show distinct patterns, however difficult it is to classify a life. In his younger years, he was an intellectual and a man of letters at two prestigious universities: Trinity College and Ecole Normale Superieure. After this period, Beckett took to bohemian wandering. Beckett then participated in World War II and acutely ex-

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<sup>2</sup> In this broadcast, he states: "What was important was not our having penicillin when they had none, nor the unrewarding munificence of the French Ministry of Reconstruction (as it was then called), but the occasional glimpse obtained, by us in them and, who knows, by them in us (for they are an imaginative people), of that smile at the human conditions as little to be extinguished by bombs or to be broadened by the elixirs of Burroughs and Welcome, - the smile deriding, among other things, the having and the not having, the giving and the taking, sickness and health" (277).

perienced the barbarism and inhumanity it unleashed upon the world. These patterns are crucial to Beckett's writings and are influences on his tremendous output after World War II.

Philosophy also influenced Beckett's trajectory as a writer. A piece published shortly after his essay on Joyce is the poem *Whoroscope* (1930). Beckett's notes to the poem indicate his philosophical interests, and these notes assure us that the poem satirizes Descartes: "Rene Descartes, Seigneur du Perron, liked his omelette made of eggs hatched from eight to ten days; shorter or longer under the hen and the result, he says, is disgusting. He kept his own birthday to himself so that no astrologer could cast his nativity. The Shuttle of a ripening egg combs the warp of his days" (13). This poem also focuses on Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, and Galileo. We can see from Beckett's first published works that he was reading philosophy. His essay on Joyce focused, in part, on the philosophers Vico and Bruno, while his first poem references Descartes and the founders of modern science. In 1931, Beckett produced a formidable monograph on Proust, which drew heavily on Schopenhauer's pessimism.<sup>3</sup> Beckett's early writings thus demonstrate a pattern of philosophical emphases. His later philosophical interests were not limited to Schopenhauer and Descartes, however, as his letters and works contain references to Geulincx, Kant, and Berkeley, among other philosophers. While Beckett himself did not write philosophical investigations, his work continually references and explores such philosophical issues as existence, non-existence, identity, time, and God.

World War II also greatly influenced Beckett's trajectory as a writer. He called the immensely productive decade after World War II (most noticeably between 1946-1950) the "siege in the room." During this decade, Beckett produced some of his most important works: *Molloy*,

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<sup>3</sup> In a letter to Thomas MacGreevey in July 1930, Beckett writes: "I am reading Schopenhauer. Everyone laughs at that...but I am not reading philosophy, nor caring whether he is right or wrong or a good or worthless metaphysician. An intellectual justification of unhappiness - the greatest that has ever been attempted - is worth the examination of one who is interested in Leopardi & Proust rather than in Carducci & Barres" (32-33).

*Malone Dies*, *The Unnameable*, and *Waiting for Godot*. He also began writing in French in 1947, as each of these works was first released in French and later translated by Beckett into English. It is no stretch to note a correlation between the wandering protagonists of these works and his nomadic bohemian years. But these works above all explore the psychology of historical and social trauma after an unprecedentedly brutal war. Put differently, they searingly portray the human and societal wreckage left behind.<sup>4</sup> While initially confused by plays like *Waiting for Godot*, playgoers and readers became fascinated by the stark power with which Beckett was able to register this trauma.<sup>5</sup>

While Beckett's broadcast from Saint Lo contains moments of triumph and solidarity in the face of unprecedented destruction, Beckett's own work, especially the works produced during the "siege in the room," move towards pictures of alienation, destitution, and nihilistic despair. Beckett's dark vision of the human condition is a mirror in which society can examine and reflect upon the violence, barbarism, and inhumanity of World War II. Perhaps his ability to reflect this horror is what led him to later win the 1969 Nobel Prize in Literature, "for his writing, which - in new forms of the novel and drama - in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation."

Beckett's life offers emphases of focus for my analysis of his work, as I utilize a philosophical approach, explore the role of wandering, and meditate upon the historical trauma Beckett implicitly reflects of the twentieth century. These biographical remarks could begin an entire-

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<sup>4</sup> His Noble Prize banquet speech praises him for the following: "But these works are not about the war itself, about life at the front, or in the French resistance movement (in which Beckett took an active part), but about what happened afterwards, when peace came and the curtain was rent from the unholy of unholy to reveal the terrifying spectacle of the lengths to which man can go in inhuman degradation - whether ordered or driven by himself - and how much of such degradation man can survive."

<sup>5</sup> William Barrett tell us: "when a play *Waiting for Godot*, by an Irish disciple of Joyce's, Samuel Beckett- a play in which Nothingness circulates through every line from beginning to end - runs for more than sixteen months to packed houses in the capitals of Europe, we can only conclude that something is at work in the European mind against which its traditions cannot wholly guard it and which it will have to live through to the bitter end" (63).

ly different thesis on the ways in which Beckett weaves his own life into his work. They are laid out here instead to evoke certain patterns in Beckett's life that are helpful modes of entry into his work.

\* \* \*

Before turning to the themes of my own approach to *Molloy* and *Endgame*, let us briefly survey some critical approaches that others have taken in reading Beckett. He was initially read through multiple perspectives. Critics read him as either an existentialist writer, or a comic author, or an Irish writer. These perspectives are all different in their focus and emphasize different aspects of his work. Many critics have grappled with the nihilistic vision at the core of Beckett's vision, or, as Watt states: "nothingness / in words enclose" (205). These existential readings have been strongly given by Bataille and Blanchot, among others. These readings tend to focus on the anguish, despair, and the utter darkness at the core of Beckett's work. In a far different reading, Ruby Cohn is a prominent critic who has salvaged Beckett from strictly nihilistic despair. Cohn emphasizes the comedic aspect of his work as a means of finding relief from the nothingness existentialist critics have identified. In a radically different approach, Eoin O'Brien has carefully analyzed the role of Irish places and cultural features within Beckett's work in order to reclaim him as an Irish author. Beckett's criticism later took a unique blend of biography and historicist emphasis through the work of Hugh Kenner, James Knowlson and Anthony Cronin. From a different and more pessimistic historicist perspective, Theodor Adorno has found in Beckett's work a searing critique of modernity. Later approaches to Beckett have been rooted in postmodernism and post-structuralism. Beckett has been analyzed by postmodern critics through an emphasis on the self-referential nature of his work. Critics such as Marzieh Keshavarz have shown Beckett's representation of the act of creation itself, otherwise known as the 'meta' and self-reflexive as-



pect of literature. Anthony Uhlmann has traced Beckett's work to post-structural theorists like Deleuze, Foucault, Levinas and Derrida. Post-structuralist frames still seem to be prominent in Beckett criticism.

The latest phase of Beckettian criticism, an ecocritical perspective, has radically altered the conversation at hand through the work of Greg Garrard. This is decidedly against the grain of approaches to Beckett thus far, which Garrard openly addresses in his analysis of *Endgame*. To summarize, Garrard argues that *Endgame* can be read as a dramatic representation of life that anticipates global warming. He argues that Beckett's refusal to permit spectators a view of nature in the play is an accurate representation of global warming's un-presentability. Thus, Beckett's work bears the stamp of canonical literature in its ability to speak to different readers in different time periods on the issues facing their lives during their historical moment. I draw on pieces of each approach above in an attempt to show Beckett's implicit critique of existentialism and modernity and to move towards ecocritical readings of his work.

\* \* \*

My approach to Beckett focuses on philosophical and historicist frameworks for analyzing *Molloy* and *Endgame*. To quickly summarize, I argue that *Molloy* participates in a tradition of the absurd that begins with Nietzsche and runs through Sartre and Camus. Unknowability is a vehicle for expressing the absurd. "The absurd is born," Camus writes, "of [a] confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (515). *Molloy* probes this confrontation through its protagonist Molloy. The novel as a whole continually poses the question "who *is* Molloy?" Moran seeks to answer this on his quest, but as he continues seeking he instead encounters the meaninglessness of absurdity. His narrative seemingly promises some form of clarification of questions surrounding Molloy's identity. And yet our need to understand

Molloy is constantly thwarted by Beckett. We become drawn in, however, by the enigmatically beautiful style that Beckett employs within *Molloy*.

Molloy is a shadow of humanity, systematically falling out of selfhood; in other words, he is a man without a country, without a recognizable body, and without a stable and coherent mind. Because of *Molloy*'s stark portrayal of subjectivity's decomposition, Molloy himself growingly embodies the absurd as articulated by Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus. In other words, Molloy's fall from humanity transforms his body and mind into a state of meaninglessness and impenetrability that renders him absurd. The novel's strange symmetry arises as Moran's search for Molloy similarly causes Moran to drop out of humanity; he ultimately loses religion, family, morality, and society. Put differently, Moran's physical and mental being rapidly dissolve as his social identity evaporates. Moran thus becomes a strangely uncanny reflection of Molloy after his quest. The becoming-Molloy of Moran tracked through the second half of the novel represents an encounter with absurdity. Beckett uniquely contributes to a rich existentialist tradition of the absurd through quest narrative. However, the principle of decomposition *Molloy* embraces ultimately causes the inward and outward metamorphoses of Molloy and Moran to turn into portraits of ruined humanity.

For the existentialist tradition that I trace here, art is the saving power that allows one to regain dignity and humanity after experiencing the nausea that the absurd forces one to experience. Beckett's *Molloy* rejects artistic recovery at the level of character. Molloy and Moran are shipwrecked visages of humanity as their respective sections conclude. Beckett's protagonists, however, are writers and their narratives do offer the potential for recovery. Yet, neither recovers and they ultimately cannot reassert a dignified sense of their humanity. As we follow these two shadows, all hope becomes lost. Bataille, in his analysis of the novel, shares a similar sentiment:

“Abandon all hope, ye that enter... such could well be the epigraph for this absolutely striking book” (89). We must abandon all hope for Molloy and Moran’s recovered humanity as a result of their experience with the absurd; instead, we must embrace their ruptured subjectivity. Because of the lack of recovery at the level of character, Beckett effectively takes the existentialist project of absurdity and recovered authenticity to its end by highlighting the futility of a reestablished sense of selfhood. Put simply, this encounter does not lead to an authentic and dignified understanding of the self, but renders both protagonists as shadows of humanity.<sup>6</sup>

*Endgame* takes *Molloy*’s portrayal of inhumanity to its extreme. I argue that the aesthetic of the sublime, conceived by Lyotard and Hales, offers ways of seeing the internal and external wastelands presented in the drama. To briefly summarize, Lyotard argues for imaginative breakdown and un-presentability at the core of the sublime. Beckett’s portrayal of nature and humanity in *Endgame* ultimately defy presentation. Nature, in other words, is *never represented* on the stage. From his window, Clov reports on the status of nature as ‘corpsed.’ Lyotard’s sublime is thus apt for analyzing the internal and external waste of the drama. Furthermore, Hales’ articulation of the atomic sublime allows spectators to identify nuclear technology at the heart of *Endgame*’s wasteland. *Endgame* becomes a portrayal of the end game of life itself in the wake of nuclear activity, as both the characters and the setting are in a state of supreme decomposition. Hamm and Clov, however, embody broken humanity in a deeper sense than *Molloy*. They are entwined in a brutal master-slave relationship where both are inescapably bound to one another. Hamm’s parents, Nagg and Nell, are trapped in wastebaskets with sawdust as their only comfort. *Endgame*’s characters ultimately suffer and abuse one another to no end. Human nature and nature itself become effaced and unrecognizable. Put differently, nature in both these senses be-

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<sup>6</sup> A paradox arises in that Beckett the author, through the act of creation, enacts artistic recovery in the existentialist sense.

comes unrepresentable by Beckett. The setting's external waste is reflected within the characters themselves in the drama. The play, further, registers the fears and anxieties surrounding nuclear warfare during the 1950's.

Because of the drama's implicit portrayal of technology's destructive power, *Endgame* can also be read as a deeper critique of modernity. The external and internal ruination resulting from nuclear warfare highlights the dangers of blind faith in technological progress. The nuclear bomb, which led to further developments in nuclear technology, began as a direct result of World War II. The Manhattan Project's successful completion of the hydrogen bomb helped to assure Allied victory over Nazi forces. It also caused one of the most horrific and destructive acts by humanity against other human beings. Nagasaki and Hiroshima were razed, and those lucky to survive were plagued with radioactivity. Ironically, the technology behind these bombs later became marketed as a source of efficient and abundance energy for the world to use. During its production, however, nuclear technology was crafted simply for the means of destruction. In short, nuclear weaponry offered supreme safety through the promise of assured destruction of enemy forces, while in later uses its technology offered a liberation from nature with the promise of abundant energy. However, history has shown the disastrous result result of nuclear warfare and nuclear technology itself. In the latter, Chernobyl is a supreme indicator of the danger this technology imposes. Nuclear warfare, furthermore, still remains an issue at large in contemporary politics and in national security. The discussion surrounding nuclear technology can be analyzed through Horkheimer and Adorno's philosophical narrative of modernity. They argue that modernity's project of nature's mastery paradoxically leads to human domination and destruction. The logic of these claims leads us to infer that anthropocentrism can have dangerous consequences for both nature and man. While the enlightenment posited reason as the key to human

liberation, modernity's use of reason as a means for nature's mastery led to barbarism and repression. *Endgame* evokes the way in which nuclear technology has overstepped its bounds and is implicit in the barbaric reality of modernity. Put simply, the drama implies humanity's supreme enslavement and barbarism as a result of nature's mastery by rational agents. *Endgame* can ultimately be read as dramatic presentation of the danger, as Heidegger calls it, that technology poses for both humanity and nature: total evisceration. *Endgame* portrays the total domination of both nature and humanity, that which has become unrepresentable, and thus implicitly acts as a warning to modernity's trust in ideologies that perpetuate technological progress towards human liberation by representing the aftermath such a project can have. This allows *Endgame* to be read as a critique of modernity's ideological project of the rational mastery of nature through technology.

*Endgame's* critique of modernity parallels ecocriticism's environmental concerns. It does so by implicitly engaging in the shared concerns of Heidegger, Horkheimer, and Adorno. For example, Heidegger has been influential in ecocritical movements like deep ecology. He is generally embraced for his conception of dwelling, which is a call to sustain and protect the earth. Enframing, Heidegger's conception of modern technology, also exposes a deep concern for nature and for refocusing the social practice of technological advancement in a sustainable way. For these reasons, Heidegger's thought is a helpful framework for ecocriticism, with which it shares concerns. Adorno has also been influential in ecocriticism. In brief, Timothy Morton emphasizes Adorno's conception of non-identity developed in *Negative Dialectic* as a way of seeing nature as absolutely other and thus as a source of inherent value. Horkheimer and Adorno's diagnosis of modernity's destruction of nature further shares ecocriticism's concern for under-

standing the sources of our current ecological crises, and provides a persuasive response: enlightenment's emphasis on rational mastery and its anthropocentric roots.

Beckett's portrayals of inner and outer waste can thus be ecocritically analyzed as registering the dangers modernity poses on the fragile and malleable relationship humanity has to nature. *Endgame*, as Garrard argues, is indeed a drama that implicitly anticipates the twenty-first century's crisis of global warming. However, Beckett's *Molloy* and *Endgame* further portray the dangers modernity itself poses for humanity and nature, without fixating on a single cause like global warming. Instead, Beckett's work implicitly offers readers an artistic representation of the warnings Horkheimer, Adorno, and Heidegger express for thinking about nature's fragility in modernity. We can thus turn to Beckett as an author who ultimately anticipates our current ecological crises in the twenty-first century by providing modernity the opportunity for self-reflexivity through his art. His work does so by being implicitly invested in shared concerns between these three philosophers and the ecocritical movement. Through ecocritical readings of Beckett, we become aware of the potential for inhumanity and destruction behind modernity's promise of social liberation and advancement.

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It may seem counter-intuitive on a first approximation to place *Molloy* and *Endgame* together for analysis. The former is a novel, the latter a drama; the former belongs to anxieties and traumas associated with World War II, while the latter belongs to existential anxieties of the Cold War; the former is internally centered within single portraits of mind, while the latter explores multiple lives externally on the stage; the former carries lyrical evocations of nature among ruined subjectivity, while the latter highlights the ruination of man and nature. However, the two are similar in their focus on modernity's destructive capacity within our lives.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer diagnose the negative effects that rational mastery and technology have had on the modern world. “To dominate nature boundlessly, to turn the cosmos into an endless hunting ground,” they argue, “has been the dream of the millennia. It shaped the idea of man in a male society. It was the purpose of reason, on which man prided himself” (206). Western civilization emphasizes the rational mastery of nature as the means to social liberation from earthly restrictions. In order to actualize this domination, nature became stripped of all its animistic qualities: “enlightenment’s program was the disenchantment of the world” (Horkheimer and Adorno 1). Domination, in turn, was barbarically reflected within humanity, causing the enlightenment rhetoric of progress to “revert to regression” (Horkheimer and Adorno xviii). Put differently, as external domination becomes more forceful in modernity, humanity repressed the intuitive knowledge that we too are born from the earth and need it to sustain our own lives. Thus, we came to disregard our bodily and emotive being. Furthermore, all sense of value and meaning for human life also dissolved as modernity forcefully mastered nature. Put differently, the very things that make human life rich with meaning become flattened in modernity’s adoption of enlightenment principles. This leads to internal and external ruination. Self-alienation came as a result of modernity’s picture of subjectivity as strictly mind and rational mastery. To master nature and to become rational beings, effectively giving precedence to the mind, humanity had to repress and dominate its own corporeal being.

Paradoxically, the body falls apart and decays under enlightenment’s framework as mere matter in the same way nature is viewed as materiality; self and external objectification became the end of enlightenment’s rational mastery over nature.<sup>7</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer expose the

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<sup>7</sup> “The body cannot be turned back into the envelope of the soul. It remains a cadaver, no matter how trained and fit it may be. The transformation into dead matter, indicated by the affinity of *corpus* to corpse, was a part of the perennial process which

link between the domination of external nature and the domination and repression of inner nature. At the same time, domination shaped the social sphere, causing master-slave morality to become pervasive. “Human beings are so radically estranged from themselves and from nature,” they argue, “that they know only how to use and harm each other. Each is merely a factor, the subject or object of some praxis, something to be reckoned with or discounted” (Horkheimer and Adorno 211). There is thus a three-fold account of domination at the core of the narrative Adorno and Horkheimer see in the development of modernity. Put simply, as enlightenment ideology attempted to liberate humanity from what was perceived as the tyranny of nature through rational mastery, humanity paradoxically became enslaved. This led to obliterated relationships with ourselves, with other rational agents, and ultimately with nature. The motive behind mastery was liberation, and instead economic and technological gain forcefully rose. “The enslavement to nature of people today cannot be separated from social progress. The increase in economic productivity which creates the conditions for a more just world,” they argue, “also affords the technical apparatus and the social groups controlling it a disproportionate advantage over the rest of the population. The individual is entirely nullified in the face of economic powers. These powers are taking society’s domination over nature to unimagined heights” (Horkheimer and Adorno xvii).

Horkheimer and Adorno’s emphasis on domination maps itself onto the insulated *Molloy* and to the communal *Endgame*. The principle of decomposition implicitly provides a case study for Adorno and Horkheimer’s claims about subjectivity’s fragmentation in modernity. Moran highlights a degeneration into master-slave morality at the heart of *Molloy*’s portrayal of societal relations, as he continually tyrannizes Martha and his son, Jacques. By leaving the protagonists

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turned nature into stuff, material. The achievements of civilization are a product of sublimation, of the acquired love-hate for body and earth, from which domination has violently severed all human beings” (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 194).



(perhaps anti-heroes, as my analysis of *Molloy* suggests) as portraits of destitution, by refusing recovery from crisis in an almost anti-novelistic stance, Beckett's *Molloy* registers the brutal historical truth of the aftermath of modernity's symbiotic mastery of nature and humanity. As a result, he provides a reflection of nature's mastery onto humanity by portraying stark scenes of bodily decomposition, repression, and inter-personal barbarism. In later writings, Adorno clarifies this claim by stating: "The grimacing clowns, childish and bloody, into which Beckett's subject is decomposed, are that subject's historical truth; social realism is, by comparison, simply childish" (*Aesthetic Theory* 250).<sup>8</sup> *Molloy* portrays not only the calamitous effects of World War II, but also an early vision of the internal and inter-personal ruination that comes out of an unreflective adoption of enlightenment principles.

*Endgame* completes the vision of human domination of *Molloy*. The drama extends its portrayal of inhumanity to the representation of natural devastation. The starkest and most lucid depiction of a critique of modernity, set in motion within *Molloy*, is seen in *Endgame*'s representations of internal and external domination. Characters and nature are thus shown decomposing because of the principle of rational mastery at the core of enlightenment ideology. Nature has become 'corpsed,' Hamm and Clov are bound to one another, and Hamm's parents, Nagg and Nell, are entombed in a waste basket. Furthermore, the two "protagonists" of the play, Hamm and Clov, have lost all sense of dignity and have become inhumane. *Molloy* thus foreshadows the searing representation of domination in *Endgame*. Beckett's drama implicitly highlights the connection between inner and outer unravelling as a result of domination. Unravelling occurs not only in the fabric of nature and its complex organismal symbiosis, but also in the dissolution of

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<sup>8</sup> We are at the traditional debate on the nature of modernist literature between Adorno and Lukacs. While the debate is outside the scope of this direct analysis, it is imperative to note that my thesis contends with Adorno's position on the nature of historical representation in modernist literature, not as the "grand hotel abyss" but as a powerful representation of modern society.

value, of meaning, and of coherent selfhood. Put differently, the things that give human life texture and shape - our bodies, minds, values, and our sense of identity - dissolve as nature become mastered and exploited. *Endgame*'s depiction of disenchanting human nature and its lack of human qualities implicitly represents the aftermath of modernity's embrace of enlightenment principles. The drama's end game of life itself completes the historicist critique of modernity from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. However, Heidegger's "Question Concerning Technology" goes further by probing the *means* by which this domination became so forceful: the essence of technology as enframing. Put differently, Heidegger helps to concretize and explain *how* things became so ruined within *Endgame*, which simultaneously allows readers to have a complete critique of modernity.

My analysis finally shifts its focus towards ecocritical implications of Beckett's participation in the critique of modernity's emphasis on rational mastery by examining the fragmentation of subjectivity, society, and nature in these works. First-wave ecocriticism shares the same concerns with nature's domination as Horkheimer and Adorno. Their claims about modernity can be read as frameworks for analyzing the philosophical and ideological roots behind contemporary toxic environmental disasters, like global warming, which are the most dangerous crises facing the twenty-first century. For first-wave ecocriticism, positing an anthropocentric position over the world, by appealing to mind and rationality as a mode of superiority over nature, leads to environmental catastrophe. A human centered orientation leads to the devaluation of things which are non-human, allowing the latter to be exploited and damaged for human use. Anthropocentric world views tend to pave the ideological foundation for unjust treatment of all things not human. Put differently, because modernity views nature and the more-than-human world of lesser value than rational humanity, domination and exploitation abound. This is essentially the same predic-

ament that Adorno and Horkheimer emphasize behind modernity. Heidegger's enframing argues for a similar disposition to the natural world through technology, where both nature and humanity become standing-reserve.

Beckett's work ultimately engages with the philosophical systems first-wave ecocriticism identify as at the root of our modern ecological crises. It does so by fictively and dramatically representing the horrific results on nature that threaten to radically change the way humans live on our planet. Put differently, my analysis attempts to provide ecocriticism with a way to analyze works besides *Endgame* that revolve so heavily on the concept of nature and its ultimate un-presentability by connecting the dialogue between Adorno and Beckett with the philosophical foundations of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism can perhaps have a stronger dialogue with society by highlighting the 'human, all-too human' consequences enlightenment and modernity's technological developments have on each individual, as is shown in both *Molloy* and *Endgame*. We are not all Molloy's, but there are many Morans of an equal or lesser degree in our society. *Molloy* implicitly shows the human consequence of modernity's technological project, while *Endgame* evokes life in the aftermath of modernity in its external and internal registers of waste. Reading Beckett in this way can perhaps spark a more radical conversation with those not initially persuaded by ecocriticism's focus on nature qua nature.

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It is important here to clarify my claims through the statement of Beckett's cited as the epigraph to this introduction: "literary criticism is not book-keeping." While Beckett does fit the argument sketched above, there are many other ways to view Beckett's work on these exact same subjects. Part of the beauty of reading Beckett is that he always eludes interpretation, drawing readers in and then leaving them puzzled. In this way Beckett's work has the mark of canonical

literature. For an aesthetic project so intrigued with nihilism, subtraction, and the inefficacy of language, Beckett's work is rich in its inexhaustible insights into modernity and history. Because of this elusive quality, it would be a disservice to *Molloy* and to *Endgame* to state that my method is the *only* way of reading Beckett's work. Instead, this analysis, in a Heideggerian sense, is an exercise in the task of thinking.

The following analysis provides a way (hodos), not a method (methodos), for engaging with Beckett's troubling and beautiful work. Nonetheless, the way set forth here re-contextualizes an author who is sometimes misperceived as misanthropic and isolated as an author who had a keen sensitivity to the human condition at a time when its continuance seemed in limbo: the twentieth century. It is hoped that this analysis provides a theoretical framework for further ecocritical readings of Beckett that can be useful for thinking about the precariousness of existence in the ecological distress and social domination pressing readers in the twenty-first century.

## I. Crisis and Inhumanity: Existentialist Parody in *Molloy*

The enigmatic *Molloy* seems to defy classification, and yet is an ultimately rewarding text for those who persevere through its labyrinth of the lyrically dark interior and exterior world Beckett has created. As we persevere through *Molloy*, a principle of decomposition becomes apparent in both the characters and the narrative. The serial disintegration of Molloy and Moran, however, are more than simple unravellings; they exemplify an experience with the absurd. This essay will thus attempt to situate *Molloy* in the contextual framework of absurdity, from Nietzsche to Sartre and Camus. In *Molloy*, however, Beckett takes a different approach than these philosophers by exploring absurdity through the venue of quest narrative. Put differently, *Molloy* clearly recalls an experience with the absurdity of existence and the nauseating affect which follows, but frames the absurd as a journey that protagonists and readers must undergo rather than a philosophical analysis. In order to portray absurdity, Beckett shows the novel's protagonists, Molloy and Moran, undergoing social and bodily disintegration in their quests. Disintegration is not exclusive to these characters for Beckett. Rather, it is a principle that is crucial to all his work from *Murphy* through the trilogy of *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnameable*.

Molloy's disintegration, however, morphs him into an embodiment of absurdity. He gradually becomes a shadow and loses his humanity as he seeks his mother. In comparison, Moran's inward and outward disintegration causes him to begin to resemble the absurdity of Molloy. In other words, Moran comes to experience existential nausea as he seeks Molloy in Bally. Prior to this encounter, however, Moran's identity (social, bodily, psychic) must first dissolve. Moran's decomposition, at a first glance, is seemingly an attempt to strip away the false layers of selfhood in order to arrive at existentialist authenticity. *Molloy* as a whole, however, parodies any search for existentialist authenticity by having its protagonists disintegrate into por-

traits of inhumanity, thus highlighting the meaninglessness at the core of subjectivity. Put differently, stripping the subject bare in *Molloy* does not lead to an authentic understanding of the self as it does in the existentialist tradition. *Molloy* instead shows that authenticity is impossible, and instead replaces authenticity with the representation of subjectivity's ruination. Absurdity is thus lucidly portrayed in *Molloy* through its rigorous principle of decomposition.

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Where does Beckett's aesthetic project of decomposition begin? Perhaps Beckett's serial decomposition is in part a result of the oppression Beckett felt by Joyce's aesthetics. *Ulysses* is a text that highlights the omnipotent power of language's ability to create a universe with words. Indeed, Beckett referred to Joyce's project as an "apotheosis of the word" (*Letters* 519). James Knowlson, in his biography on Beckett entitled *Damned to Fame*, includes a short quotation from Beckett on Joyce that speaks to these speculative remarks. "I realized that Joyce had gone as far as one could," Beckett says, "in the direction of knowing more. I realized that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge, in taking away, in subtracting rather than adding" (319). Beckett's subtraction serially haunts his protagonists whose names begin with the letter "M," including Murphy, Mercier, Molloy, Moran, Malone, and Mahood; Watt, perhaps an upside down "M" protagonist, dissolves in an analogous manner. These texts thus compose an ecology of decay, of subtraction, of disintegration. Beckett realizes, as his later prose tells us, that this aesthetic project can never be fully completed. Instead, it must implicitly settle for failure as a form of success when attempting to articulate and give shape to nothingness. Failure's role in this project is lucidly embraced by Beckett in *Worstword Ho*. "Try again. Fail again. Fail better," the narrator of the work says (76).

While this is by no means an exhaustive take on decomposition in Beckettian aesthetics, a striking pattern begins to emerge. To trace this pattern, let us turn to some of Beckett's most important works in chronological order. *Murphy*, published in 1938, was Beckett's first articulation of reduction. In a Cartesian move, Murphy attempts to become a strictly 'thinking thing,' and becomes preoccupied with removing himself from his body. He does so in order to authentically exist through contemplation and a life of the mind: "For it was not until his body was appeased that he could come alive in his mind...and life in his mind gave him pleasure, such pleasure that pleasure was not the word" (2). Cartesian subjectivity and Schopenhauerean passive nihilism are parodied by Murphy's attempts to become a contemplative, disinterested subject. Instead of a freedom of the mind, Murphy's efforts lead him to failure and suicide. Thus, Beckett's aesthetic project from the beginning entertains quests for authenticity and willful resignation while also imploding them from the inside by showing their folly. Next in Beckett's chronology, *Watt*, written between 1942 and 1944 as Beckett hid from the Gestapo, is the beginning of Beckett's exploration of absurdity. Watt's poem at the end of the novel succinctly captures his aesthetic project of articulating the nothingness taken up by the existentialist tradition: "who may tell the tale / of the old man? / weigh absence in a scale? / mete want with a span? / the sum assess / of the world's woes? / nothingness / in words enclose?" (205). This is the first articulation of Beckett's attempt to capture nothingness in language, which would come to define his later work. The subtractive principle of bodily disintegration of *Murphy* is thus united with the telos of linguistically presenting nothingness in *Watt*. Furthermore, Murphy and Watt are both *seekers* who embark on quests for these two aesthetic goals. By portraying these protagonists as seekers, Beckett foreshadows the later development of quest's centrality to *Molloy*. *Mercier and Camier*, written in 1946 but published in 1970, calls meaning itself into question much in the same way

as *Watt*. Although Beckett was unhappy with the novel as a whole, it's clearly another version of absurdity within his journey into nothing. Mercier's overwhelming discussion and presentation of nothingness, established by the sheer repetition of the word in the novel, presents meaninglessness as the essence of existence. "Whence no doubt our blessed sense of nothing," Mercier says, "nothing to be done, nothing to be said" (67). We can see a clear logic connecting Beckett's novels through the dissolution of the body and the presentation of nothingness in lyrically powerful language. Both of these themes, and the role of the seeker, inform the plot of *Molloy*.

Serial disintegration as an aesthetic framework highlights Beckett's departure from Joyce's aesthetic project. Instead of an "apotheosis of the word" (519), we have a reduction of meaning, paired with a decomposition of the embodied subject, into nothingness. In other words, the bodily subtraction of *Murphy* ultimately synthesizes with an aesthetic focus on nothingness of *Mercier and Camier* and *Watt* into a picture of subjectivity's internal and external dissolution; in essence, a negative dialectic of destitution, rather than a Joycean celebration, emerges between inner and outer worlds. Beckett portrays dialectical disintegration through quest narrative in the trilogy. Mahood's famous last words of *The Unnameable* perhaps express the end of a serial quest of meaninglessness, silence, and the void: "...it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on" (414).

Now that we have situated *Molloy* in Beckett's overall development of serial disintegration and of quest narrative, we must briefly sketch out the modern philosophical concept of the absurd in order to philosophically situate my approach to the novel. Absurdity, as David Sherman says, is the realization of life's meaninglessness and the nothingness at its core:



The absurd is both an experience and a concept. As an exceedingly rough first approximation, we might say that it is a concept born of an experience, a deep visceral experience that life, with its joys and its sorrows, with its loves and its hates, with its spectacular acts of magnanimity and its despicable acts of pettiness, with its grand victories and crushing defeats - in other words, life itself - finally adds up to absolutely nothing. (21)

Notice the emphasis Sherman places on nothing at the center of absurdity, which forcefully ties Beckett's aesthetic project into this tradition. Beckett's desire in *Watt* to "nothingness / in words enclose" (205) is thus an attempt to express the absurd. Absurdity is a concept explored in the writings of Nietzsche, Sartre and Camus (there are, of course, other philosophers who have given shape and texture to absurdity as well but are outside the scope of this chapter). For the purposes of situating Beckett in relation to these philosophers, I will first briefly sketch out this tradition by beginning with Nietzsche's conception of the absurd in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Then I will highlight how Nietzsche's conceptual language and implicit linking of nausea and absurdity makes itself manifest in Sartre's *Nausea* and Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus*. It will be important at the outset of this outline to note that the logic of the absurd for each philosopher is roughly centered around an extraordinary encounter that leads to a newfound perception and a crisis of subjectivity. This crisis, for all three philosophers, is followed by a recovery of existential power brought about through art or creative expression.

Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, published in 1872, is a lyrical analysis of the role of tragedy in Greek drama and culture. Greek tragedy, for Nietzsche, is rooted in a tension between the gods Apollo and Dionysus. The former is the god of unity, the *principum individualis*, that provides order and light to the universe; the latter is the god who portends the world as utter flux

and chaos, who links all to the “mystical Oneness” (23) of the creative energy behind existence. Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* seeks to explore how Greek tragedy itself is born from the tension between these two forces. Nietzsche argues that tragedy is one artistic model that seeks to show the spectator the limits of the Apollonian self. Through tragedy, the self must come to identify with the reality of Dionysian flux. By embracing Dionysian flux, Nietzsche argues, tragedy portrays the non-rational foundations of creativity and of reality - the instinctual, wild, and seemingly amoral facets of existence; tragedy, in other words, provides spectators with a connection to the Dionysian energy of the world itself. Nietzsche thus prefers Dionysus over Apollo, and spends his essay celebrating tragedy’s disclosure of Dionysian reality. It is in his discussion of tragedy (specifically *Hamlet*) that the word absurdity is first used by Nietzsche:

What, both in the case of Hamlet and of Dionysian man, overbalances any motive leading to action, is not reflection but understanding, the apprehension of truth and its terror. Now no comfort any longer avails, desire reaches beyond the transcendental work, beyond the gods themselves, and existence, together with its gulling reflection in the gods and an immortal Beyond, is denied. The truth once seen, man is aware everywhere of the ghastly absurdity of existence, comprehends the symbolism of Ophelia’s fate and the wisdom of the wood sprite Silenus: nausea invades him. (51-52)

*The Birth of Tragedy* highlights Hamlet’s famous soliloquy of suicidal desire as the key to understanding absurdity itself. Hamlet, in Nietzsche’s reading, becomes a representation of Dionysian man: “both have looked deeply into the true nature of things, they have *understood* and are now loath to act” (51). Action becomes retarded and impossible for the Dionysian man in the realization that all action itself is ultimately *meaningless*. “They realize that no action of theirs

can work any change in the eternal condition of things,” Nietzsche writes, “and they regard the imputation as ludicrous or debasing that they should set right the time which is out of joint” (51). For Nietzsche, realizing nothingness as the essence of existence and the subsequent impossibility for meaningful action explains the logic behind Ophelia’s suicide. The Dionysian man thus becomes engulfed with nausea at the realization of universal meaninglessness and of the futile role of human existence within the larger flux of things. Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* lays out the beginning of the tradition of absurdity taken up later by Sartre and Camus, philosophers who develop Nietzsche’s ideas of the absurd in terms of meaninglessness, human futility, and the issue of suicide.

Sartre’s *Nausea*, published in 1938, traces the story of Roquentin, a resident of Bouville, as he gradually falls out of society and any familiar form of life. He is initially a historian, working on a biography of Marquis de Rollebon. This employment, however, begins to lose its meaning for him. Ultimately he abandons his job as he increasingly loses a connection to the world. Roquentin experiences a gradual dissolution of his orientation in the world and begins to drop out from society. His only real associate, the autodidact, is reviled by Roquentin because of the autodidact’s humanist disposition. Roquentin’s dissolving connection to the external world, the objects and furnishings that make up objective reality, is also exacerbated as the novel progresses. “The Nausea is not inside me: I feel it *out there*,” Roquentin says, “in the wall, in the suspenders, everywhere around me. It makes itself one with the cafe, I am the one who is within *it*” (19-20). Nausea in Roquentin’s logic is the essence of the universe itself; it invades all objective reality. By using this language, Sartre is implicitly characterizing Roquentin as an absurd man with a tragic vision like Hamlet’s. This becomes more forceful as the novel progresses. Roquentin’s familiarity with his bodily self begins to dissolve. The novel culminates as language itself

dissolves and becomes a source of nausea for Roquentin in the famous chestnut root scene. For Roquentin, nausea forces itself upon him as he views the chestnut root. In turn, this encounter allows him a “true look into the nature of things” (Nietzsche, 51) as absurd: “And without formulating anything clearly, I understood that I had found the key to Existence, the key to my Nauseas, to my own life. In fact, all that I could grasp beyond that return to this fundamental absurdity. Absurdity: another word; I struggle against words” (129). He later elaborates that meaninglessness and alienation are at the core of absurdity. “Absurd,” Roquentin says, “irreducible; nothing - not even a profound, secret upheaval of nature- could explain it” (129). Much as Nietzsche’s Dionysian man becomes flooded by nausea after coming to the realization of absurdity, so too is Roquentin overcome by nausea: “This moment was extraordinary. I was there, motionless and icy, plunged in a horrible ecstasy. But something fresh had just appeared in the very heart of this ecstasy; I understood the Nausea, I possessed it” (131). Roquentin’s experience is a literary representation of the philosophical conception of the absurd that Nietzsche expresses in *The Birth of Tragedy*. The title of Sartre’s novel, *Nausea*, further indicates its indebtedness to Nietzsche’s philosophical framework of the absurd.

In the form of an essay, Albert Camus’ *The Myth of Sisyphus*, published in 1942, deals directly with the absurd in a lucid account of the metaphysical problems it poses. Camus begins his philosophical investigation by posing suicide as a serious option in the wake of absurdity, confirming Nietzsche’s earlier reference to Ophelia’s fate. “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem,” Camus states, “and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy” (495). Camus thus posits absurdity as the condition of existence itself, and relates his own work to that of Nietzsche and Sartre. By making this comparison, he is allowing us to have a sense of absurdist tradition in these

three philosophers. Camus writes: “This discomfort in the face of man’s own inhumanity, this incalculable tumble before the image of what we are, this ‘nausea’, as a writer of today calls it, is also the absurd” (504). Camus conflates nausea with absurdity in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, but this quotation clearly recalls Sartre’s novel *Nausea*. In his essay, Camus is interested in exploring how one can live with the absurdity of existence in an authentic manner. He does so by advocating for a lucid recognition of the absurd as a model of authenticity. He thus presents Sisyphus, the Greek condemned to roll a boulder endlessly up a hill, as representative of our human condition. While Sisyphus’s task is ultimately absurd, Camus argues that Sisyphus’s recognition of his fate restores his dignity, so that he becomes a true model for living with the absurd. Put differently, Camus advocates for a lucid tension with the nauseating realization of life’s absurdity as a model for authentic living; he gestures towards this at the end of *The Myth of Sisyphus* by stating: “One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (593). Happiness in this framework arises from a consistent lucidity of humanity’s absurd condition. A tradition of the absurd emerges in these three philosophers.

However, the existentialist tradition, put in motion by Nietzsche and culminating in Sartre and Camus, does not merely express nausea as totalizing. Art is the saving power that allows recovery from the absurd. For Nietzsche, artistic creation is the way out of the absurd: “...art, that sorceress expert in healing, approaches him; only she can turn his fits of nausea into imaginations with which it is possible to live” (52). Sartre, a clear disciple of Nietzsche in *Nausea*, has Roquentin turn to art, more specifically jazz, as a means of recovery from the existential nausea induced by absurdity, as Roquentin states: “and at that very moment, on the other side of existence, in this other world when you can see in the distance, but without ever approaching it, a little melody to sing and dance: ‘You must be like me; you must suffer in rhythm’” (Sartre 175).

Roquentin also turns to writing itself as an act of overcoming the nausea of existence. As *Nausea* concludes, Roquentin discusses writing a book (presumably the book we have just finished) as a means of expressing and overcoming the absurd: “A story, for example, that could never happen,” he says, “an adventure. It would have to be beautiful and hard as steel and make people ashamed of their existence” (Sartre, 178). Sartre’s way of recovering from the nausea of absurdity is art, as is Nietzsche’s. Camus’ solution to the existential problem of nausea, briefly sketched above, is that of lucidity, or recognizing the absurdity of the world, while maintaining a rigorous and tensely authentic perception of it:

Living is keeping the absurd alive. Keeping it alive is, above all, contemplating it. Unlike Eurydice, the absurd dies only when we turn away from it. One of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt. It is a constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity. It is an insistence upon an impossible transparency. It challenges the world anew every second. Just as danger provided man the unique opportunity of seizing awareness, so metaphysical revolt extends awareness to the whole of his experience. It is that constant presence of man in his own eyes... That revolt is the certain of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it. (536)

Camus’ essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* itself seems to be an enactment of his philosophical position of lucidity, in that he unflinchingly looks into the absurd and keeps a tension with its implications as he analyzes the experience throughout the essay. Camus also discusses art as a mode of recovered dignity from the nausea of existential absurdity in his section “Absurd Creation” (568-577). Taken together, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus form a tradition that seeks to give articula-

tion to the absurd and to demarcate the possibilities of living authenticity with the meaninglessness at its core.

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Before analyzing Molloy and Moran respectively, let us first briefly recount the shape of *Molloy* as a whole. During the first half of the novel, we read a report composed by Molloy as he recalls searching for his mother. Molloy's journey entails many setbacks: he is arrested for resting obscenely upon his bicycle; he runs over Lousse's dog and is detained at her home for a seemingly absurd period of time; he becomes preoccupied with sucking stones, and abandons them; and he ends his narrative in a ditch after crawling through a forest. After his section ends, Molloy is somehow transported to his mother's bed, where he is now writing this story. His section is thus framed with the knowledge of Molloy's return to his mother's room. During the second half of the novel, Moran seeks Molloy. This quest is initiated by Youdi's command and is delivered by Gaber on a Sunday. Upon Moran's departure with his son, Jacques, he is a bourgeois man who abuses his patriarchal authority over Jacques and his servant, Martha. Moran's quest ultimately causes him to unravel. He loses all ties to society and family, and is abandoned by his son in the forest. Towards the end of this section, Gaber relays to Moran that Youdi has ordered him home. Upon his return, Moran is deserted by all and sits down to write at midnight. Because of their quests, both characters seem to resemble one another by the end of the novel. There is thus a strange symmetry involved in the structure of *Molloy* as a whole. Moran's inward disintegration renders him strikingly like Molloy, and yet Molloy's narrative comes first. It would seemingly provide a more conventional or familiar narrative shape if Beckett had Molloy's narrative come second, thereby making a linear portrait of disintegration from Moran to Molloy. Why give readers this strange structure? Hugh Kenner provides one possible answer:

For the eerie power of the book arises surely from the mysterious hold of Molloy, whom he has never seen, on Moran's imagination, and the mysterious psychic disintegration that is perhaps a consequence of this hold, or perhaps its accidental concomitant. It is as though preoccupations with Molloy has the power to make the familiar liaisons with familiar reality dissolve; as though Molloy is rather a myth than a character, with a myth's hold on its believers. (97)

The structure of the novel allows Molloy to "hold" Moran in that the former is the embodiment of absurdity that the latter must undergo as a result of his quest. The novel is thus about Molloy throughout the novel, and we are at pains to discern the elusive identity of Molloy himself. The strange symmetry of the novel places this focus at its fore. Let us now turn to Molloy's section to see how this claim unfolds.

Who is Molloy? This is the question that drives readers as we follow Molloy's quest for his mother. Molloy himself is at odds with his identity. At the onset of his narrative, we expect to learn who Molloy is through the retelling of his quest for his mother. This quest, however, leads into opaque darkness rather than a state of lucidity. Molloy seems, in other words, to become a shadow of humanity as he journeys forth. He is not even able to remember his name until nearly thirty pages into his narration. He seemingly has the epiphany of recalling his own identity after being arrested: "Molloy, I cried, my name is Molloy" (29). Later on, Molloy reports a sense of impossibility in regard to his identity, stating: "And even my sense of identity was wrapped in a namelessness often hard to penetrate" (41). Molloy's amnesia permeates his entire psychic being that renders his identity in flux. In turn, Molloy's metaphysical orientation goes into flux. He becomes a metaphysical tramp, as Hugh Kenner has phrased it, because he struggles to understand who he *is* and what his being-in-the-world entails. However, one definitive piece of Molloy's



identity conveyed to readers is that he is a *writer*. Another definitive characteristic of Molloy's identity is that he is a *seeker* on a quest for his mother. Because of this, Molloy recounts his journey for his mother after it has been completed. He does so as he lies in his mother's bed while writing the narrative readers are presented with, framing the narrative in the past. Molloy thus effectively relives the experience of his quest through the act of writing, and readers are able to relive the quest with him through the act of reading.

One possibility for understanding Molloy's identity is through his community of Bally. Broadly speaking, self-identity may be constructed through social roles and the identity that emerges from them. Individuals, in other words, may choose to define self identity based upon the society one is politically and ethically committed to. However, society proves insufficient for coming to an authentic understanding of Molloy because he is first and foremost a social exile. Molloy never claims a nationality. While he does hail from Bally, there is never any discussion of his friends or cohorts. Molloy ultimately seems to be alone throughout his quest. Perhaps Molloy's alienation from the social sphere of Bally leads him to muse upon being arrested that, "to apply the letter of the law to a creature like me is not an easy matter" (31). Molloy's exile from society may be the reason behind this statement because he has refused to be a part of social structures that make the basis of ethics and politics. Molloy, instead, is apolitical and asocial. Even the familial bonds Molloy shares with his mother seem to have dissolved during her lifetime. For example, Molloy says he used to obtain money from his deaf mother by putting "the idea of money into her head" (23), and he would crudely tap on her skull to communicate with her for monetary ends. He incoherently states later, however, that money isn't what he sought from his mother. Molloy contradicts himself as he states that it was "I who took the key from under the pillow, who took the money out of the drawer, who put the key back under the pillow.

But I didn't come for money" (24). Not only is this a stark portrayal of amorality and asocial behavior, it also points to the callousness with which Molloy treats familial bonds. Furthermore, society abhors treating a mother or father this way, and this highlights Molloy's removal from communal modes of self-identification. Molloy is thus alienated from society.

There is, however, some social interaction that happens between Molloy and those who collect the pages he writes. This interaction is seemingly one of the only modes of society Molloy participates in, as he reports: "He gives me money and takes away the pages. So much pages, so much money" (7). From one point of view, individuals come together as a society in order to sustain themselves via commerce and employment, and Molloy seemingly partakes in this system. And yet, Molloy's narrative never portrays scenes of interaction with those who 'employ' him. There is, furthermore, a compulsive quality to Molloy's employment that makes it seem not a true source of community. We need only recall Molloy's statement, "What I'd like now is to speak of the things that are left, say my good-byes, finish dying. They don't want that" (7), as evidence to this claim. Molloy's employment is thus something he must *undergo* as a result of commandment and is not a result of his will. In short, Molloy is isolated from all society, even that of his own family and employers. He is thus a stranger to all forms of identity that are rooted in communal cohesion; put differently, Molloy is ultimately a man without a country, a stark individual who seemingly stands outside the frameworks we use to organize our lives.

Molloy's social exile is similar to Roquentin's. Sartre, however, has Roquentin begin in a social position comparable to Moran at the beginning of *Nausea*. Molloy's exile, in the existentialist tradition, would allow him to reject imposing external sources of authority in order to authentically define a code of his own values and morals. Social exile is thus a step one takes in order to be a truly *free* individual. Put differently, the locus of decision for the shape of his life

has shrunk to Molloy himself through social exile. However, Molloy never comes to a coherent sense of his own subjectivity, but rather unravels into a portrait of inhumanity as his quest continues. The autodidact reviles Roquentin because of the former's humanist disposition, which exemplifies Roquentin's rejection of a societal orientation in the world (a view which Sartre would later amend in his essay *Existentialism is a Humanism*) in an analogous manner that Molloy rejects society. Furthermore, Roquentin gradually sheds a piece of his identity essential to being a member of society: his employment. Molloy and Roquentin are ultimately connected in their social exile, more specifically in their rejection of community and its values, morals, and employment. Both Molloy and Roquentin, in other words, are enacting extreme individualism in their seemingly self-imposed social alienation. Furthermore, both Molloy and Roquentin are also united in their predisposition towards *writing* as meaningful activity. Molloy's narrative is framed with the knowledge that he is writing as he goes; Roquentin's narrative ends with the promise of a text that has the end of making readers reenact his absurdist experience (presumably the narrative we have just finished reading). Structurally, *Molloy* and *Nausea* are connected by an emphasis on writing paired with a gradual loss of the social self. Within the existentialist tradition, Nietzsche's Dionysian man is also removed from society by choosing to individually grapple with the nausea that results from the absurdity of existence. In other words, the Dionysian man is looking to the self and not to community for orientation in his realization of the world's nauseating absurdity. Camus' absurd man as formulated in the *Myth of Sisyphus* also never turns towards communal solidarity, but rather focuses on individualism as the key to sustaining a lucid awareness of the absurd. Nietzsche's, Sartre's, and Camus' existentialist orientations all implicitly reject society and favor the individual as the true locus of decision for how to shape one's life. Molloy participates in this tradition through his portrayal of exile and individu-

ality, but Beckett's novel can be read as a parodic critique of the existentialist tradition. The critique stems from the portrayal of Molloy's unravelling as his quest unfolds.

Molloy's grotesque humanity is exemplified as his body and mind dissolve analogously to his social participation. Molloy is bedridden as he recounts his quest and ultimately lacks bodily agency. From the outset of the narrative, Molloy's body is continually described as fallible. As he journeys forth his body decomposes rapidly, which implies that Molloy's current state of paralysis is a direct result of the quest he has previously undergone. For example, early in the narrative we know that Molloy is "lame" (15), is "hobbling" (15) and relies on crutches for mobility. Time and again, Molloy reports on his "sick leg" (33), which subsequently renders his continually failing body as "extraordinary" (63). Throughout his quest, Molloy's legs fail him. We thus have an image of bodily impotence at its most extreme in Molloy's characterization, and his body undergoes a systematic principle of failure as he continues seeking. In the same vein, Molloy's mind dissolves into incoherence as his body falls apart. We have already seen Molloy's amnesia in regard to his identity, pointing to extreme psychic incoherence. From the outset of Molloy's retelling of his quest, he remains in a space of incoherence: "I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now. I don't know how I got there" (7). We know, however, that Molloy's quest ends in a ditch and that someone had to help him return to his mother's room. The narrative as a whole thus exemplifies Molloy's psychic incoherence. Molloy's language, the very medium of his expression, also comes into question within his narrative. Failure of language unites Molloy and Roquentin. Language dissolves upon Roquentin's experience with the chestnut root. Molloy's language begins to dissolve after he attempts to mathematically calculate his farts, and is explicitly connected to his foregone loss of identity:

And even my sense of identity was wrapped up in a namelessness often hard to penetrate, as we have just seen I think. And so on for all of the other things which made merry with my senses. Yes, even then, when already all was fading, waves and particles, there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingness names. I say that now, but after all what I do know now about then, now when the icy words hail down upon me, the icy meanings, and the world dies too, foully named. All I know is what the words know, and the dead things, and that makes a handsome little sum, with a beginning, a middle and an end as in the well-built phrase and the long sonata of the dead. (41)

Molloy is thus a portrait of an individual who is falling out of the world; he loses society, body, mind, and language in the span of 124 pages. He seemingly undergoes decomposition as a principle of his character and of his journey. He is, in other words, consistently being undone as his quest for his mother continues. His dissolving bodily and psychic faculties culminate at the end of the novel, as he gets lost on his quest for his mother. He finds himself perambulating through a dense forest, where he employs his Cartesian “system of going in a circle” (115) in an attempt to escape the forest. Molloy’s degeneration leads him to become nearly immobilized in the woods, and forces him to revert to crawling: “Christ, there’s crawling” (120). Molloy crawls into a ditch and ends his narrative, stating: “Molloy could stay, where he happened to be” (124). It would be a stretch to call Molloy a recognizable human at the beginning of his narrative, but as his section concludes readers are never offered a recovered and well-defined subject. Instead, readers are offered a picture of broken humanity at the end of his quest.

Molloy’s gradual drift into meaninglessness, his inability to recognize the world and his own self, and his subsequent failure of language lead him to the sort of nauseating absurdity de-

scribed by Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus. And yet, because Molloy never enters a realm of lucidity and instead continually unravels in his narrative, he *becomes* absurd. We have no real sense of who Molloy *is* as the narrative ends; he becomes somewhat meaningless. This is because recovery from the absurd is utterly unavailable for Molloy. In other words, Molloy experiences no mode of art that allows him to experience the release of jazz felt by Roquentin, nor does he emphasize art's saving power in the Nietzschean sense, and he ultimately experiences no moments of absurd lucidity as articulated by Camus. Furthermore, the narrative never fulfills the urge of the reader to comprehend Molloy's identity. Instead, it replies with more questions than answers. Thus, readers have no stronger notion of who Molloy *is* after his narration concludes. We, as readers, can only definitively identify Molloy's ruined humanity. In turn, Molloy's seemingly existentialist quest for authenticity ends in a portrait of metaphysical bankruptcy as he dissolves during his journey. His ruined subjectivity provides a stark parody of the existentialist search for an authentic self.

A paradox arises, however, in that the narrative reported by Molloy is of striking clarity and lyricism. While Molloy the subject dissolves, Molloy's object (the narrative) beautifully remains intact. It is here that Beckett the author perhaps has actualized recovery from the absurd through his art and the creation of *Molloy*. However, Molloy himself remains wrecked by the journey he is forced to undergo. There is a strong distinction between author and creation that must be made. This will be explored in detail at the end of this section.

Claiming that the narrative itself remains intact must be qualified by the formal choice Beckett has used in Molloy's narrative - namely, employing two paragraphs stretching for 124 pages. The text itself, by its lack of paragraph breaks, takes on a formlessness that approximates the absurd by giving a visual representation of the void. Looking at the pages of Molloy's narra-

tive is like staring at a black abyss, where the traditional modes of structure and meaning are eviscerated. The narrative matches Molloy's decomposition and dissolution into meaninglessness; put differently, form matches subject matter, as Beckett once said about Joyce: "Here form *is* content, content *is* form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read - or rather it is only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*" (*Disjecta* 53). Molloy's narrative depicts the absurd through its refusal to grant the grammatical and syntactical systems of meaning and orientation readers come to depend upon, such as paragraph breaks. Martin Esslin helps to expand these remarks on the absurdity of Beckett's work by focusing on his drama. His insights are equally applicable to *Molloy*, namely that form is indeed content. The work itself, for Esslin, is a stark representation of the absurd, much as Molloy and his narrative embody absurdity: "The Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing *about* the absurdity of the human condition; it merely *presents* it in being...this is the difference between the approach of the philosopher and that of the poet" (25). Molloy and his narrative are thus, to use Esslin's language, a presentation of, not an argument about, the absurd. Molloy and his narrative *embody* the meaninglessness at the core of the absurd, and readers are forced to undergo the nauseating affect such an experience involves us in through the act of reading. Much as Moran undergoes an experience with absurdity after beginning his quest for Molloy, readers are forced to undergo an encounter with absurdity as they follow Molloy. Thus, the power of Molloy's section is that, in some senses, it provides both Moran and the reader with the opportunity to relive an encounter with the absurd, as painstakingly analyzed in the philosophy of Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus. Put simply, we come to live with absurdity for 124 pages. The tradition of the absurd may have thus found its darkest expression in Beckett's characterization of Molloy and the formal choices of his narrative.

The second half of *Molloy* focuses on Jacques Moran. While Moran does dominate the second part of the novel (because, of course, it is his narrative), the main focus of Moran's section is his becoming of Molloy. Put differently, Moran's narrative records the process by which he undergoes a quest for Molloy and *becomes* a Molloy figure himself. In some senses, Moran's narrative perpetuates the question of identity raised in Molloy's narrative: who *is* Molloy and why does he set in motion Moran's cataclysmic unravelling? Moran himself is continually engaged with the question of Molloy's identity due to the nature of his seeking. Thus, while Moran's journey is an actual quest in space and time, it is also an internal journey that attempts to understand exactly who Molloy is. As the quest unfolds, the becoming-Molloy of Moran is forcefully disclosed. The main way in which Moran becomes Molloy is through the same sorts of stripping away seen in Molloy's story at the social, the bodily, and the psychic level.

Moran begins as a far more recognizable portrait of humanity than Molloy. While Moran does abuse his patriarchal authority, he is an 'everyman' of sorts. Moran's universal quality derives from the fact that he still engages with society at some level, and adopts norms and values that society reinforces. Let us paint a portrait, in a fashion, of Moran so that we can see how radical his transformation after encountering Molloy is. He is a bourgeois man with a son, also named Jacques, and a servant, Martha. He lives in a relatively well-kept home, where Martha cooks, Jacques collects stamps, and he tends a bee and hen farm as well as a flower garden. And yet, Moran is a tyrannical lord of his own home as he abuses his patriarchal authority, while he seems to avoid recognizing his tyrannical ways. He continually mistreats his son and is a monster to Martha, seemingly taking pleasure in causing pain for both of them. Moran thus demonstrates a compulsion to dominate. He nonetheless engages in society by having a profession, where he is employed as an agent. Moran works for Gaber and Youdi, and is charged by them to seek out



Molloy and to write a report on his findings. Moran's quest for Molloy begins with Youdi's orders: "You leave today, said Gaber. Today! I cried, but he's out of his mind! Your son goes with you, said Gaber" (129). Thus, Moran's quest for Molloy is imposed upon him by his profession. What is important to note here is that Moran's social identity remains intact at the beginning of his quest: he is employed, a father, and the head of his household. Journeying for Molloy is the catalyst behind Moran's social exile and comes to dissolve the very ties that define him as his quest begins.

The social stripping Moran undergoes begins shortly after he is charged by Gaber. Shortly after he begins seeking, Moran professes a distinct distaste for all life. "It's a strange thing," Moran says, "I don't like men and I don't like animals" (144). The misanthropy Moran expresses highlights his departure from the social realm as a place to make meaning and to orient the self. As we have already seen, however, Moran displays misanthropic tendencies in his role as head of his household. Perhaps Moran's utterance is then a repressed feeling, displayed in the dispensation of his paternal duty, coming to the fore. Regardless, Moran, in the span of twenty pages, begins to become socially exiled as he grows nauseated with society itself. Moran's social exile is heightened as he rejects religion. At the beginning of Moran's section, he is a devout churchgoer: "I who never missed mass, to have missed it on that Sunday of all Sundays!" (129). And yet, after Moran is charged by Gaber to find Molloy, he begins to display an irreligious disposition, stating: "As for God, he is beginning to disgust me" (105), and much later: "There are men and there are things, to hell with animals. And with God" (227). His disgust with God matches his disgust with humanity stated earlier, and he seemingly casts off all external loci of orientation and meaning. Society and religion, in other words, dissolve as meaningful entities for Moran the seeker as he journeys for Molloy. Even Moran's paternal role within his family dissolves after

his quest, as Jacques and Martha abandon him. All sense of society and community evaporates for him after seeking. The social stripping at work in his characterization is only set in motion by his search for Molloy. In his gradual social alienation, Moran begins to resemble Molloy at the beginning of his narrative. Readers, in turn, experience the transformation of everyman into seemingly no-man, or the portrayal of man without any sense of country. Moran's quest for Molloy thus results in his becoming socially exiled like Molloy. In turn, Moran's growing misanthropy and exile lead him to lose his humanity.

Moran's social exile is paired with a stark principle of bodily and psychic decomposition, which parallels Molloy's inhumane metamorphosis. However, Moran's dissolving body and mind become perhaps more striking in their representation because of the sheer amount of transformation they undergo. At the beginning of Moran's narrative, he admits to having poor teeth - "Born with bad teeth! As for me, I was down to my incisors, the nippers" (103) - but otherwise seems in good health. As Moran ventures into the Molloy country, leaving his home of Turdy for Bally, he gradually begins to experience extreme leg pains. These leg pains mirror the physical degeneration of Molloy, in that Molloy constantly uses crutches and eventually resorts to crawling through mud as his body fails him. Moran initially refers to his pain as a "bad dream" (138), and the beginning of this injury seems to be almost epiphanic in nature. Moran describes his pain by reporting: "The sensation could indeed well be compared to that of a blow, such as I fancy a horse's hoof might give. I waited anxiously for it to recur, motionless and hardly breathing...And sure enough the pain did recur a few minutes later, but not so bad as the first time, as the second rather" (138). This blow is only inflicted after Moran begins seeking. Thus, Moran's pain is an indicator to readers that pursuing Molloy in Bally necessarily results in his physical unravelling. It is only after Moran abandons seeking Molloy, at the command of Youdi, that

there is a pause in his pain: “My knee, allowance made for the dulling effects of habit, was neither more nor less painful than the first day. The disease, whatever it was, was dormant!” (227). Molloy is thus the catalyst behind Moran’s bodily decay and failure.

Coupled with Moran’s bodily disintegration is a growing psychic disorientation that again blurs Moran’s humanity. The knee scene above is paired with psychic incoherence. “And I went to sleep again wondering, by the way of lullaby,” Moran states, “whether it had been the same knee then as the one which had just excruciated me, or the other. And that is a thing I have never been able to determine” (139). He is unable to identify the exact knee afflicted and his understanding becomes muddled. Moran seems to gradually embrace incoherence within the writing of his narrative as well: “I shall not expound my reasoning. I could do so easily, so easily” (140). Rationality in both Moran’s mind and the narrative thus begins to dissolve after he begins seeking Molloy. Even Moran’s language begins to dissolve and becomes full of paradox. Because of this, Moran begins to experience communication breakdown as his quest continues. For example, when attempting to have his son buy a bicycle, Moran states that he was “trying to be clear” (141), but that his son “looked if anything stupefied” (141). Much in the same way as Molloy is unable to communicate with the police officer for obscenely resting on his bicycle, Moran gradually becomes unable to speak with his son. As the conversation continues, Moran conceives of himself in paradox: “He did not know I was ill. Besides I was not ill” (141). Consequently, as Moran and his son attempt to deliberate how best to retrieve a new bicycle, Moran thinks: “Stop trying to understand” (143). This is a stark contrast from the overly rational Moran whom we meet at the beginning of the narrative. Indeed, Moran’s psychic decomposition proves more drastic than Molloy’s because of the sheer amount of transformation Moran undergoes.

Moran connects his physical decomposition to a growing sense of de-familiarization of selfhood. Put differently, as Moran's body dissolves, he becomes increasingly unaware of who he *is*: "Physically speaking it seemed to me I was now becoming rapidly unrecognizable. And when I passed my hands over my face, in a characteristic and now even pardonable gesture, the face my hands felt was not my face any more, and the hands my face felt were my hands no longer" (233). This de-familiarization culminates as Moran's journey is terminated by orders from Youdi. His social inclusion, rationality, identity, communication, and overall conception of selfhood seem at an absolute breaking point due to the physical and psychic stripping set in motion by his search for Molloy. Moran describes his dissolving subjectivity as "the great inward metamorphoses" (224) he has undergone. His un-recognizability leads him to twice ask Gaber, "You recognize me?" (223-224), almost as if in shock at being identified. This shock is not surprising at this point. The inward metamorphoses Moran undergoes as a result of his search for Molloy portrays Moran in a similar state of absurdity: "He [Gaber] must have seen from my face that I possessed nothing of a luminous nature" (224). Moran is taken over by the darkness of Molloy within, causing Moran's humanity to dissolve. His inhumanity is later confirmed as Moran "let [out] a roar" (225) after being pushed to the ground by Gaber. The scene culminates in a nauseating rendition of Moran's insight into the ghastly absurdity of existence, recalled through an ironic citation of lines from the opening of Keats' "Endymion" by Gaber: "Gaber, he said, life is a thing of beauty, Gaber, and a joy for ever. He brought his face nearer mine. A joy for ever, he said, a thing of beauty, Moran, and a joy for ever. He smiled" (Beckett 226). Recall Keats' opening lines from "Endymion": "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever: / Its loveliness increases; it will never / pass into nothingness" (1-3). Moran's life, however, is ironically passing into nothingness and absurdity at the exact moment of Gaber's statement. The absurd thus seizes Moran.

And yet, Moran is seemingly lucid about the absurdity of existence. “Do you think he meant human life? I listened,” Moran says, “Perhaps he didn’t mean human life, I said. I opened my eyes. I was alone” (226). Gaber’s silence and disappearance horrifyingly answer Moran’s question. Life is *not* a thing of beauty and a joy forever. Read in the Keatsian context, Moran does not find “a flowery band” (Keats 7) that can act as “some shape of beauty [which] moves away the pall / from our dark spirits” (Keats 12-13). He instead finds the silent nothingness at the core of existence. Put differently, Moran cannot turn to nature for recovery as Keats did, because, as Nietzsche’s Dionysian man realized, absurdity is inescapable. Moran’s rejection of Romanticism is exemplified as he initially tears at the earth, calling it “literally uprooting” (226). Symbolically, Moran is rejecting Keats’ turn to nature as a form of recovery from the ‘pall’ of existence. Absurdity is, instead, an inescapable realization, as even a return to nature leaves Moran to remark that his hands “were soon empty” (226). After this realization, Moran returns home. While his return home is an order by Gaber, it also signals the *end* of his quest. Moran’s principle of subtraction has shown readers, and seemingly Moran himself, that life does indeed pass into nothingness and that beauty is irrelevant to an experience of the absurd; in other words, all becomes meaningless. He does not, however, use the word ‘nausea’ as the existentialist tradition has traditionally done. Perhaps it is the reader here who experiences the affective nausea of Moran’s realization. As *Molloy* end, Moran embraces the absurdity of existence, listening to its “voice” (241) to learn how “to know it better now, to understand what it wanted” (241). Moran tell us that “in the end I understood this language” (241), the language of the absurd, and that it “told [him] to write the report” (241).

The voice Moran comes to hear is the voice of Molloy within, the becoming-Molloy of Moran that his seeking leads him to. Maurice Blanchot succinctly captures this in his discussion

of the novel, as he states that the novel “requir[es] that Molloy be mirrored, doubled, that he become another, the detective Moran, who pursues Molloy without ever catching him and who in that pursuit sets out (he too) on the path of endless error” (95). Moran himself quite eloquently realizes his own doubling of Molloy, as he states:

Between the Molloy I stalked within me thus and the true Molloy, after whom I was so soon to be in full cry, over hill and dale, the resemblance cannot have been great. I was annexing perhaps already, without my knowing it, to my private Molloy, elements of the Molloy described by Gaber. The fact was there were three, no, four Molloys. He that inhabited me, my caricature of the same, Gaber’s and the man of flesh and blood somewhere awaiting me. (157)

The power that Molloy’s narrative carries is rooted in an encounter with the absurd. As Molloy gradually embodies absurdity in the first half of the novel, Moran gradually learns to listen to the Molloy within, and thus to the voice of absurdity itself. Moran’s becoming of Molloy culminates in the realization of life’s lack of beauty and its true potential for slipping into nothingness; both characters ultimately reflect absurdity within. Much like Roquentin, Moran turns to writing to convey his experience. He is not, however, going to produce a philosophical exploration of the absurd like Nietzsche and Camus. Instead, Moran records his own experience of his encounter with absurdity. His report will “give the void its colors” (Camus, 585). The power of Moran’s narrative, in turn, is that it forces faithful readers to undergo a principle of decomposition that will allow the absurd to be actively engaged with persistence through the text. Bataille, in his discussion of the novel, changes the affect of nausea to anxiety, but drives at this same point. “What *Molloy* reveals is not simply reality,” Bataille says, “but reality in its pure state: the most meagre and inevitable of realities, that fundamental reality continually soliciting us but from

which a certain terror always pulls us back, the reality which we refuse to face and into what we must ceaselessly struggle not to sink, know to us only in the elusive form of anguish” (86). Absurdity and nausea arises from a similar insight into the silence of the universe itself and humanity’s precarious position within that space. “As though the overwhelming figure,” argues Bataille, “of the first part had not sufficiently represented the silence of this world, the impotent search of the second seems to correspond to the need to deliver the universe wholly over to absence” (91).

Beckett’s work brings the tradition of authenticity to the end of the line in its representation of broken subjectivity. Molloy and Moran ultimately become inhuman and their subjectivity dissolves as a result of their seeking. There is again the paradox of the written text itself, and it is here that Beckett the author comes to the fore. While Molloy and Moran have no moment of recovery from the absurd in the form of lucid art or philosophy, Beckett has “put a stain upon the silence” (Lindey, 1), as he described his own writing, and is thus turning to the same means of absurd recovery *himself* through the creation of *Molloy*. As a by-product of Beckett’s enactment of the existentialist insistence on the saving power of artistic creation, readers can undergo and recover from the absurd by persisting through the novel. And yet, the fictive creations, Molloy and Moran, are left as supreme embodiments of broken humanity and represent an implosion, rather than a recovered power of dignity, of subjectivity. Molloy and Moran, in other words, sink into the void of absurdity. This creates a problem for *Molloy* as a whole; author and reader perhaps precariously recover, but the characters we have grown to identify with and become invested in implode and dissolve before our eyes.

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Why, in this novel published in 1947, is the human condition shown to be an unfathomable wreck? One way of reading the novel’s grim depiction of humanity is through a comedic lens

based on the anti-hero. Anthony Cronin traces the development of the anti-hero as a modern tradition including authors like Dostoevsky, Kafka, and Joyce, and argues that the “Beckett man” culminates this tradition. While other depictions of the anti-hero within this tradition hold onto morality and community, “the Beckett man,” Cronin states, “is a lone individual who regards others with fear, hatred, or contempt” (379). The Beckett man is thus devoid of all human characteristics: morals, education, love, ambition, and memory. The anti-heroic Beckett man *exaggerates* the unheroic qualities of his character for a comedic effect. Beckett’s characters do exhibit all the characteristics of Cronin’s framework: lack of societal orientation, lack of moral seriousness, amnesia, decrepitude, and lovelessness. Thus, both protagonists are undone by the quests they are forced to undergo. Molloy and Moran, in other words, fall apart as they encounter the absurd. Cronin’s reading liberates the inhumanity of *Molloy* from a nihilistic vision by emphasizing how comedic the depictions are. The Beckett man culminates the tradition of the modern anti-hero in his exaggerated decomposition and his rejection of “the brotherhood of man” (Cronin, 379).

The Beckett man’s grotesque folly allows us to make a deeper sense of our lived experience precisely because it is antiheroic. Put differently, *Molloy* provides a sobering portrait of the hero that is much closer to our daily lives. “One could argue,” Cronin writes, “that the Beckett man, in all his abysmal aspects, is ‘truer’ to humanity’s real lineaments than most of what has gone before” (383). Instead of a recovery from the absurd in *Molloy* through various expressions of creation, or romantic exultation over forces beyond our control, both protagonists can be read as a truer representation of our lived experience and daily lives. It is precisely because of the *absence* of unrealistic depictions of heroic triumph hardly occurring in every day life that causes



Cronin to champion the anti-hero. For Cronin, Beckett's characters provide solace to readers as a liberating representation of humanity within literature:

Deep in our collective soul is a continuous unease about the contrast between the traditional ecstasies, nobilities, and romantic passions of literature and what most of us actually feel, the state of mind in which most of us actually live most of the time. In its exposure of this gap Beckett's work has a profoundly cathartic effect. It may not be all there is to be said, but it is a needed addition to the sum total of what has been said. His work is a liberation from certain pretenses; and, partly because it is liberation, the experience of reading *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnameable* is a joyous and revivifying one. (384)

Cronin's account of the anti-hero seemingly accounts for the sheer inhumanity *Molloy* presents us with. It is important to reiterate that the role of the Beckett man is not merely parodic or destructive although it is indeed comic. Instead, the anti-hero is a mode of characterization that revivifies our experience with life itself by presenting heroes who make us laugh and question the foundations of literature; the reader's cathartic laughter involves a release from the pretenses literature has continually portrayed. Thus, life and literature are born anew through encountering the anti-heroic Beckett man.

A much darker way of reading *Molloy*'s portrayal of inhumanity than Cronin's comedic position is through the bleak assessment of modernity made by Horkheimer and Adorno. This reading strips all humor from the Beckett man by emphasizing the negativity of his decomposition. The Beckett man's broken humanity, under this framework, is a fictive register of the result of modernity's project of dominating nature. The two readings are connected by their emphasis on a truer depiction of our lives in literature. In the former, the anti-hero's deflated heroism is closer

to the way we live our lives; in the latter, subjectivity's fragmentation truthfully records the destructive effects of modernity on individuals. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, modernity's destructive capability is paradoxically set in motion by its promise of liberation through the domination of nature. For Horkheimer and Adorno, enlightenment ideology is centered on the three-fold domination of inner nature, other humans, and external nature. As enlightenment ideology emphasized liberation from the fear and enslavement through rational mastery over nature, it simultaneously brought about its own demise and enslaved both the natural and human world. "Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought," they write, "has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity" (1). Put simply, as nature was dominated, so too was humanity, and the resulting "triumphant calamity" of modern society became the pervasive domination of all life. Modernity actualizes domination by disenchanting nature and the human body. Disenchantment entails stripping all animistic and anthropomorphic qualities of nature and the body in order to view both as mere materiality. Once nature and the body effectively become "stuff," they are able to be exploited for any given aim. Put differently, disenchantment actualizes domination by allowing the matter of the world to be repurposed for human ends. On a deeper level, however, the values that help give shape and meaning to human lives are also eviscerated as nature becomes dominated. Life itself, in its corporeal and abstract manifestations, becomes disenchanted by modernity's emphasis on the rational mastery of nature.

*Molloy* highlights the first and second stages of domination explored in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, namely that, "human beings [have become] so radically estranged from themselves and from nature that they know only how to use and harm each other. Each is merely a factor, the subject or object of some praxis, something to be reckoned with or discounted" ( 211). Moran

abuses others through the dispensation of his patriarchal duty. Both Molloy and Moran, furthermore, become broken as their quests unfold. This represents the body's decay when viewed as mere materiality and are thus symbolic of the destructive effect nature's mastery has on humanity. By exemplifying the broken pieces of subjectivity in *Molloy*, Beckett is accurately rendering the flattening of all value and humanity, and is thus showing the dark ramifications of the modern project. Put differently, the inhumanity of *Molloy*'s protagonists records the horrific aftermath of modernity's project of rational mastery over nature. *Molloy* thus represents the catastrophic historical truth of modernity itself *after* nature has been mastered. Adorno carries this insight further than Horkheimer in later writings, and argues for Beckett's historical veracity in his *Aesthetic Theory*. "The grimacing clowns, childish and bloody," he writes, "into which Beckett's subject is decomposed, are that subject's historical truth" (250). Furthermore, the meaninglessness embodied by Molloy and Moran represent the flattening of human life and value that results from the mastery of nature. The disenchantment of life, in other words, is forcefully registered in *Molloy*. Beyond a critique of modernity's ideological blindness, Adorno's claims also mirror the atrocities of World War II Beckett experienced while writing *Molloy*. The novel's lack of existentialist recovery articulates a stark depiction of man's world-view during the war. Many, perhaps including Beckett, were left questioning the potential for humanity to restore its dignity after World War II's historical aftermath of sixty million dead, the death camps, and the hydrogen bombs dropped on Japan.

Modernity's adoption of enlightenment's emphasis on mastery leads to external and internal ruin. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the ruination of humanity results from humanity's drive to master nature. Thus, the novel implicitly records modernity's end game of nature's mastery. *Molloy*, however, does not represent nature's domination in a forceful manner. The novel

itself carries many lyrical invocations of nature almost as intermittent pauses between the horrific renditions of the (anti) heroes *Molloy* follows: Molloy and Moran. And yet, nature is consistently likened to the 'muck' and the 'mud,' which highlights the beginning of nature's decomposition within *Molloy*. There are also hints of nature's demise as Moran's narrative comes to a close. He tears at the earth after hearing Gaber's proclamation about life's beauty; when Moran returns home, the more-than-human world he cultivated is dead. Thus, the novel ends with a move towards natural devastation. In Beckett's later work, nature's waste becomes starkly apparent. For example, *Endgame* is a drama that portrays a veritable wasteland. The shift from internal to external ruination between *Molloy* and *Endgame* could signal an implicit shift in Beckett's concerns from the individual to the social as his career progressed. At a deeper level, however, *Endgame* also completes the critique of modernity set in motion by Adorno and Horkheimer. It does so by highlighting nature's domination and the subsequent vapidness of human life and value it actualizes. To explicate, *Endgame* is set in a wasteland, seemingly bereft of life outside the shelter. This implicitly expresses the catastrophic ruination of nature at the hands of the modern project; the mastery of nature leads to its bankruptcy. The players of *Endgame* contain little traits of recognizable humanity - they are physically and emotively crippled, causing them to treat one another with the upmost barbarity. The connection between internal and external vapidness within *Endgame* is a stark case study for Horkheimer and Adorno's diagnosis of the modern project.

It is no surprise that Beckett takes a critical stance towards the modern era. *Molloy* was produced directly after World War II, while *Endgame* was produced during the Cold War. Perhaps modernity, as rooted in enlightenment ideology, was partially to blame for the historical trauma Beckett was forced to undergo. By turning to *Endgame*, nature's destruction and inhu-

manity abounds and the fullness of Beckett's critique of modernity, through the purview of internal and external domination, becomes complete. Given this, pessimism is no longer a bourgeois fancy, as Lukacs charged, but is instead a powerful reaction to the horrors of the modern world.

## II. Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime and Ecology in *Endgame*

In this essay, I propose to examine Beckett's *Endgame* through the aesthetic lens of the sublime. By drawing on the aesthetic of the sublime in the conceptual frameworks of Kant, Lyotard, and Peter Hales, I argue that we are able to uncover the true dialectic of decay between the human and non-human world Beckett portrays. *Endgame*, in other words, presents audiences with a vision of inner and outer waste, and by extension the utter destitution of subject and object. Furthermore, I argue that the aesthetic of the sublime allows readers to unearth the atomic fallout evoked in *Endgame*, as well as the play's implicit cultural critique of technology and, more importantly, mechanistic science during the twentieth century.

I draw on Adorno and Heidegger to analyze the role of anthropocentrism and technology as forces in the domination of nature implied by the ruined landscape of *Endgame*. I then move towards ecocriticism to analyze climate change as explored by Greg Garrard, and argue that the sublimity of *Endgame* elaborates upon Garrard's reading of the drama. I argue that Beckett's work not only anticipates modern debates surrounding climate change, but also anticipates ecocriticism's main critique of the enlightenment's role in our current state of ecological crisis. Lastly, underlining the role of technology in global warming, as conceived by Heidegger, can add to ecocritical readings of Beckett's drama.

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To begin an analysis of the sublime within *Endgame*, it is first essential to outline the general presence (or lack thereof) of nature itself within the text. This primary move becomes necessary when discussing the sublime due to the sublime's primary association (at least within

Romanticism) with the natural world. Beckett makes no definitive statements about the external setting *Endgame* unfolds within. Instead, Beckett's setting alludes to the natural world via Clov's opening of the shelter's windows. Audiences are never granted access to Clov's view. Yet, at the outset audiences get a strange hint at the state of things outside the shelter as Clov bitterly laughs at the natural world (7-8). Clov not only laughs at the external world, but also laughs at Nagg and Nell entombed in their wastebaskets. Beckett, from the beginning of the play, is implicitly drawing parallels between the external and internal (human) world. Clov's laughter links the external and the internal situations of the drama, and audiences are left with a sense of apprehension and dread as they try to discern what is being laughed at. Clov, as we later find out, is laughing at the ruined remains of Hamm's (potential) parents and also at the ruined world outside, which may lead audience members to view Clov's laughter in two possible ways, as utter callousness or as cathartic defense mechanism.<sup>9</sup> Since audience members depend upon Clov's report to understand nature in this drama, this laughter takes on a sinister tone. Beyond this laughter, we are only told that there is "grey light" (7) diffused through the windows. Both Clov's laughter and the bleak imagery presented by Beckett cause audience members to become uneasy from the get go: what could be funny about grey-lit skies and human beings encased in wastebaskets? In essence, the audience is continually denied autonomy in their gaze. Spectators are always removed one step from the pressing ruination outside, creating an ill-defined threat hovering over all throughout the play. And yet, audience members are also utterly aware of the symbiotic decomposition and ruination between the outside world and the players trapped in the shelter. Audience members, in other words, are on an equal footing of ignorance as all of *Endgame*'s players, which will be-

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<sup>9</sup> Adorno, in his *Aesthetic Theory*, writes: "In accord with the tendency of modern art to make its own categories thematic through self-reflection, plays like *Godot* and *Endgame* - in the scene in which the protagonists decide to laugh - are more the tragic presentation of comedy's fate than they are comic; in the actors' forced laughter, the spectator's mirth vanishes" (340).

come important when thinking about the sublime later in this analysis. Put simply, Beckett is presenting a dim view to audiences of the natural and human world and is subtly connecting the two ruined sites and implying that they are symmetrically decaying - what seemingly happens without is reflected and projected within. There is never a direct presentation of the apocalypse outside the shelter.

This reflection leads Beckett to exclusively link the natural world to a hellish realm, a specter of death incarnate. Hamm states that nature is the “other hell” (33); Clov states the natural world has been reduced to “zero” (37, 39) and is subsequently “corpsed” (37); nature’s decomposition is later elaborated when Hamm states, “The whole place stinks of corpses,” and Clov responds, “The whole universe” (54); Clov later refers to the natural world as a “muck-heap” (83); and he hauntingly claims, “I say to myself that the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit” (89). Beckett’s continually repeated use of altogether grim adjectives in relation to nature allows the audience to discern that we are indeed in a wasteland bereft of life as we have traditionally known it. Nature has been corpsed, is zero, and thus is utterly negated for the inhabitants of *Endgame*. The players of *Endgame* are also corpsed, especially Nagg and Nell. Each player has some physical ailment and each player seems to be gradually decomposing analogously to outer nature. We have, then, a picture of utter negativity of both subject and object, of nature and humanity.

In turn, this negation leads to alienation from nature for all of the characters in the drama. Beckett signals this alienation not only through these aforementioned adjectives, but also through his stage directions for his players. Beckett refers to the natural world as the “without” (37-38). This subtle move crafts a binary, namely, the binary of the within and the without, and implies alienation between the actor and his/her external setting. Audience members are also alienated



from nature because it is never presented. Early in the play, Hamm and Clov are both aware of their status of alienation; the former states “nature has forgotten us,” and the latter replies, “there’s no more nature” (18). There is a divorce between subject and object in terms of access, but there is an utterly symbiotic identification between these two in terms of their ruination. This exchange highlights the dual move Beckett has made in relation to the external world within this framework: nature has both alienated (forgotten) the players and has consequently departed (is no more) from them, and yet nature seems to be *within* the players in that they too are representations of destruction. Nature’s negating presence is also highlighted in the context of paralyzed movement within the play. Beckett’s players are unable to leave the stoically decorated room in which they’re trapped. This lack of movement is perfectly captured in the figures of Nagg and Nell - both of whom are diplegic and are housed inside wastebaskets. Hamm also is diplegic, blind, and is restricted to his chair throughout the duration of the play. All players are restricted to the interior room, and some of these players are restricted to a *specific* space within the shelter itself.

As audience members, we are, in a sense, limited to this room with these players. We are not granted ironic superiority over *Endgame*’s players; we have no sense of what lies beyond the walls of this shelter, and, for the duration of the play, we are as rooted in the dimness of *Endgame*’s setting as any of Beckett’s players. The only moment of dramatic transcendence audience members and/or readers receive is when we physically put the play down or when we walk out of the theatre. There is, ultimately, no appeal to understanding - the ignorance of the drama is imposed upon the audience. Because of the allegedly ruined environment, Beckett’s *Endgame* seemingly alludes to natural desolation, where all is blackened, used up, and inhospitable. *Endgame* indirectly invokes scenes of nuclear fallout and also of natural disaster, which will be ex-

plored later in this essay. And yet, *Endgame* registers more than the natural disaster outside the shelter by focusing with such painfully acute detail on the ruination of the players within. Absolute negation of all life reigns supreme in Beckett's vision of the world as portrayed in *Endgame*. Humanism's celebration of subjectivity is humbled by the utter powerlessness of the humans inside. Both worlds within and without have been eviscerated, but the source of this symbiotic destruction remains obscure and in the realm of allusion.

Beckett, furthermore, expresses the death of the landscape and those who are within the shelter (both human and non-human) through its lack of fecundity and life-giving force. Put simply, nature's functions of growth and sustaining life are absolutely dead. Nothing can grow in this wasteland:

Hamm: Did your seeds come up?

Clov: No.

Hamm: Did you scratch round them to see if they had sprouted?

Clov: They haven't sprouted.

Hamm: Perhaps it's still too early.

Clov: If they were going to sprout they would have sprouted.

[violently]

They'll never sprout! (20).

In this dialogic back and forth, we learn that unsuccessful attempts have been made previously to cultivate the earth. This passage both informs us that the earth's soil has been depleted and is no longer able to provide sustenance, and also that these players have been entombed and stranded for a long period of time. Beyond plant life, the non-human has also been almost totally destroyed in the play's setting, as only a solitary flea (41) and rat (62) have managed to survive.

Interestingly, it is Clov who notices these non-human entities and it is Hamm who seems shocked at this prospect of life: “A flea! Are there still fleas?” (41) and “A rat! Are there still rats?” (62). Hamm’s reaction allows us to discern that life in this space has been predominately absent for an extended period of time - the wasteland has not produced discernible non-human life whatsoever, as demonstrated in Hamm’s shock. Instead of rejoicing at this prospect, the players set to exterminate these non-human entities (the rat, we are told, gets away). It seems no coincidence that the surviving creatures are considered to be vermin, and the implicit logic of fostering life and preserving the more-than-human world is rejected in a gut reaction to exterminate. Human life, as well as non-human life, seems restricted to this bare room.

It is no stretch to also claim that there is hardly any semblance of human life within the shelter itself. As mentioned already, each character suffers major physical afflictions, rendering the general freedom granted through the human body as utterly unavailable. In addition, familial bonds, subtly represented by Hamm’s relation to Nagg and Nell, have atrophied into master-slave morality where no appeals to birth and creation can rectify the scene.<sup>10</sup> Even the “friendship” between Hamm and Clov, if one could call it that, is tinged with master-slave sentiments. All characters are bound together through circumstance, and Hamm, perhaps the central figure of the play’s shelter, exploits others with a coldness that makes audience members shudder at the virtual lack of human sentiment. All discernible forms of social human life, in other words, are presented in utter negativity. Inhumanity pervades the characters and all appeals to a recognizable social cohesion are bankrupt: namely, family, friends, and (seemingly) work. *Endgame* ultimately dramatizes the death of human nature itself. The shelter feels more like a prison holding

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<sup>10</sup> Hugh Kenner, in his *Reader’s Guide to Samuel Beckett*, helps us to understand the master-slave dynamic in Beckett’s nominal choices for Hamm and Clov: “And Nagg and Nell: German *Nagel*, nail, and English nail? Perhaps. And the French for nail is *clou*, in which case ‘Hamm’ suggests ‘hammer.’” (121)

contemptible representations of humanity than victims of some extraordinary circumstance.

There is, in other words, a searing picture of the inhumanity of all players within this shelter. Beyond the lack of recognizable human social and bodily life, Beckett subtly alludes to the actual death of all humanity:

Hamm: That old doctor, he's dead naturally?

Clov: He wasn't old.

Hamm: But he's dead?

Clov: Naturally.

[pause]

You ask *me* that? (32)

There are many similar allusions to a deserted human earth throughout the play, and these point the audience to images of apocalyptic destruction. In short, beyond the confines of the players Beckett has sketched, all of life (environmental, vegetal, animal, and human) has been depleted, while the human life within the shelter is hardly recognizable. Beckett's *Endgame* is thus the end game of life itself.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Even if we are not entirely invested in the idea that *Endgame* is an allusion to nuclear fallout, other interpretations have centered the text on a similar premise of apocalyptic navigation. One such reading pulls *Endgame* out of the realm of the technologic and into a religious context by interpreting the play through the lens of the Old Testament. Recall the parable of Noah and his Ark, in which God floods the world to eradicate the wickedness of mankind. Noah is thus asked to retrieve two of each animal for safekeeping while the world is drowned out. *Endgame*'s only animals, as mentioned above, happen to be unpaired and verminous: a flea and a rat. *Endgame*'s apocalyptic atmosphere does ring with the dystopian feeling of life after the flood, namely, as bereft of life and of (nearly all) non-human entities. Stanley Cavell makes this interpretation clear: "It seems possible to me that this is what *Endgame* is about, that what it envisions is the cursed world of the Old Testament and that what is to be ended is that world, followed by the new message, glad tidings brought by a new dove of redemption, when we are ready to receive" (143). Without dwelling too much on Cavell's later interpretative framework for linking *Endgame* to this religious reading, it will simply suffice here to state that the players are never given a prayer of transcendence and that Cavell's reading also points to an end of life and a subsequent wasteland. No doves grace *Endgame*'s grey-lit shelter as a form of *deus ex machina*. Instead, only rats and fleas make appearances, which symbolically hints at the utter immanence (and thus rejection of transcendence) *Endgame* portrays. One need only examine the scene of failed prayer of the drama to grasp this rejection, where Beckett directly ascribes the action "abandoning his attitude" (63-64) for each player in prayer. Within *Endgame*, it seems that God has also abandoned the world. However, Cavell's reading is linked to ideas of apocalypse, and this draws parallels to the reading of nuclear fallout I propose.

However, *Endgame* doesn't posit waste and death of the world as eternal. Rather, Beckett has his players reflect on the way nature *was* through stories and memories. While nature seems inaccessible in the present, it is longed for both consciously in storytelling and unconsciously in dreams. Hamm, after dreaming, states: "I might make love. I'd go into the woods. My eyes would see...the sky, the earth. I'd run, run, they wouldn't catch me. [pause] Nature!" (24). This scene establishes nature as a solution and escape from the present situation Hamm finds himself in. Hamm is subtly parodying the Romantic ideal of nature as a source of transcendence and escape from the civilized world by highlighting both the drive to escape and the inability to do so. Beckett is also pointing his audience to the solace that can come from memory and from story as a way of coping with bodies and minds that are trapped in a ruined world. Returning to the past, even if only through the act of remembrance or dreaming, provides some of the only pieces of hope in this space of desolation. The exclamatory reference to nature in Hamm's words above implies a sense of longing, a longing for a past that is now inaccessible in the present and a form of nostalgia for home and familiarity. In short, Hamm through memory, longs for the sky, the earth, the woods, and ultimately for a reestablished connection with nature and, by extension, with himself. This reconnection is never granted. Hamm is instead planted in his chair and in the inhospitable landscape at hand, and only has recourse for solace from his nostalgia through the purview of storytelling and dreaming. Humans are only able to recollect, not actualize, their connection to the environment. In a similar fashion, Nell also longs for nature and can only experience a connection to it through storytelling.<sup>12</sup> Nell tells of a trip to Lake Como with depictions of nature as abstract, vague, and slightly disturbing. We learn that Nell's connection to the natural world carries with it the affect of happiness and the potential for restored well-being that is ulti-

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<sup>12</sup> Storytelling is at the heart of Beckett's trilogy and highlights a continued investment in the potential power (and limitations) of language as a means of expression and coping.

mately unavailable in the same mode as Hamm: “It was deep, deep. And you could see down to the bottom. So white. So clean” (29). She later repeats “you could see down to the bottom” (30), and “so white” (31). Nell’s last line of *Endgame* refers to Lake Como as “desert!” (31) Indeed, Beckett seems to be showing the longing Nell has to remember the natural splendor of Lake Como, but instead is unable to do so much as Hamm is unable to reconnect with nature as seen above. Nell’s likening of Lake Como to a desert could equally be applied to the landscape Beckett has crafted for the present players - all is deserted, no life of any kind seems to remain.<sup>13</sup> In short, through dreams and storytelling, Beckett shows us that a drastic shift in nature and society has occurred which has caused the wasteland of *Endgame* to become manifest. However, Beckett never gives us a definitive answer as to *what* caused such violent death and destruction.

We as audience members are only aware of the aftermath of this destructive force because no cause is established by Beckett. As we have seen repeatedly, audience members are left in an analogous dimness as *Endgame*’s players - no modes of transcendence or dramatic irony are offered as solutions; instead, ignorance abounds. This is important when thinking about the sublime, because the sublime, as will shortly be explored, implies a moment of transcendence over the crisis and chaos of natural ruin experienced. Beckett’s players, I later argue, have no transcendence of the crisis presented. Because Beckett has made *Endgame* so opaque, audience members are in a space of ignorance as to the cause of nature’s destruction, and can only posit educated guesses based upon historical contexts. Perhaps Hamm and Clov know what has actualized the wasteland outside the shelter, but this information is never relayed, again linking the external and internal worlds. The spectator, in turn, is left groping the dark, so to speak, throughout *Endgame* about the preceding events that led to the world’s devastation. In short, audience mem-

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<sup>13</sup> This idea of desertification is easily mapped onto Schopenhauer’s conception of the sublime, which is not addressed in this essay due to its metaphysical implications.

bers are never offered any hope of rational transcendence over the chaos and crisis presented, and instead all are planted in the shelter with perhaps a lesser understanding than the players. Audience members ultimately inhabit the mental space that the players do throughout the play. The collapse between audience and character allows us to see ourselves represented within the dramatic situation on stage. Beckett's audience, at the initial showing of *Endgame*, would have no doubt been aware of the nuclear threat that the Cold War imposed. By portraying these scenes of ruination, Beckett must have tapped into the contemporary anxiety of the 1950's surrounding the Cold War itself, as Hugh Kenner states: "the [H] Bomb was much on the mind of Europe in 1957 when this play was published" (121). *Endgame*'s historical context ultimately helped spectators to see themselves on the stage, beyond the mere ignorance for the audience that the play thrives on earlier discussed. Because of the subtle blurring between players and the audience, we see ourselves on the stage. *Endgame* can thus be analyzed through the framework of the sublime in order to disclose the dynamic interaction between the external wasteland and the internal devastation depicted.

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I would like to turn to notions of the sublime and their application to *Endgame* in order to understand the drama's implicit critique of modernity. Andrew Slade argues that Beckett's sublime is a testament to Beckett's experience of a war-torn world:

Beckett's sublime bears witness to this conjunction of contradictory forces. And it does so as an attempt to rethink the condition and the idea of the human that was bequeathed to him and to us at St. Lo. The sublime of the worst is a witnessing of the conditions of human life at St. Lo, to be sure, but more importantly it is a statement on the manner in which the condition of the human is to be thought

again. The worst is the sublime of the inhuman human in ruins which, according to Beckett, we have become. (185)

Thus, it becomes important to first understand the sublimity of Beckett's drama in order to come to the larger understanding of ruin Slade identifies as the function of the sublime in Beckett's work. Kant's dynamic sublime is perhaps one of the most famous aesthetic accounts, and is a fitting place to begin our analysis.

All the players in *Endgame* meet Kant's criteria of safe distance between the natural phenomena and the observer in an experience of the dynamic sublime by being situated safely in the shelter. Furthermore, the notion of powerlessness before nature, which Kant emphasizes in the dynamic sublime, proves far more fitting to the general atmosphere of Beckett's play. David Nye describes Kant's sublime as a three-step process:

The first stage is that of normal perception, of a person with no immediate expectation of seeing anything extraordinary...the second stage begins at the moment when the subject perceives a break in ordinary perception, and a gap opens up between the self and the object...in the third stage the subject recovers from the shock of the encounter and regains his equilibrium, creating a new relationship to the sublime object. (12-13)

In this third step, one's recovery entails rationality asserting itself in the face of the imagination's breakdown. There is no sense of recovery in *Endgame*, and instead there is only a sense of impending and controlling crisis for player and for spectator. Kant also describes the dynamic sublime as involving a restored sense of dignity while facing a crisis arising from nature, and, as seen earlier, those within the shelter have no kernel of either dignity or humanity; one need only think of the utter helplessness Hamm and Clov experience and also of Nagg and Nell's waste-



basket tomb. Both of these dramatic situations emphasize human powerlessness in the face of nature's wasted remainder for the players. Kant explains this helplessness by stating:

The irresistibility of [nature's] power certainly makes us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical powerlessness, but at the same time it reveals a capacity for judging ourselves as independent of nature and a superiority over nature...whereby the humanity in our person remains undemeaned even though the human being must submit to that dominion. (§28, 261–262)

The first half of this quotation rings true for *Endgame* in that the natural power of the 'desertified' (corpsed) landscape leads to a tremendous sense of powerlessness for all the characters. As mentioned above, the characters are so powerless that they are unable to leave the shelter Beckett places them in. The players also destroy any image of undemeaned dignity in their brutality towards one another, as the players are instead portraits of grotesque folly and demonstrate hatred for one another and for themselves. Dignity, in other words, evaporates as the curtain rises and is instead replaced by the horrific presentation of inhumanity. In this sense, *Endgame* is hyper-aware of the physical powerlessness the players are presented with in the face of a wasted natural environment. Audience members are also chained to this scene of inner ruin and are never given access to depiction of outer ruin.

Kant's account of an "undemeaned" disposition in the wake of such powerlessness may seem to resonate with both Hamm and Clov, but this illusion is quickly stripped away. Clov is stoic in the face of such a brutal natural landscape, and one cannot help but recall his laughter upon opening the blinds to the without as a testament to this ataraxy. However, there is always a glaring recognition of the vanity and anxiety behind stoic action for Beckett's players in *Endgame* as they consistently ask if it (the scene) is ended yet. The sheer repetition of this question

tears down the facade of any imaginative transcendence of the desolate situation these players are confronted with. The players are unable to obtain a reestablished sense of dignity and of an un-demeaned disposition. Instead all players and audience members/readers dwell without appeal in the un-presentability of the scene itself. In this application of the Kantian sublime to *Endgame*, we see that the dynamic sublime is somewhat sufficient in capturing the relationship between within and without, but Beckett's characters lack reaffirmed dignity after encountering the external forces being presented. There is a gradual move through the logic of the play towards a picture of absolute negation of all life and an implied impotence in the face of such ruin. Impotence in *Endgame* continually makes itself manifest by the problematic nature of rationality's negative limit, or the un-presentability of nature itself.

We must turn to different aesthetic accounts of the sublime to accurately capture the dialectic between the human and non-human taking place within *Endgame* to analyze the un-presentability of nature within the drama. Jean-Francois Lyotard's "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" proves to be more insightful than the Kantian aesthetic framework of the sublime precisely because it is so concerned with the issue of un-presentability, and, as will be sketched below, its championing of unrecovered subjectivity in the face of the unrepresentable. Lyotard is interested in the concept of the sublime that can shed light on late modernist and post-modernist art in general.<sup>14</sup> "Answering the Question" takes up Kantian aesthetic concerns regarding notions of unrepresentable phenomenon, and thus the second stage articulated by Nye, but abandons any notion of transcendence of the unrepresentable. As mentioned above, for Kant, the sublime entails a crisis (an encounter with that which supersedes the humanist subject, the 'un-presentable') and a recovery of subjectivity through rational or imaginative means. Lyotard is

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<sup>14</sup> While Lyotard is primarily interested in modernist painting, his analysis "Answering" explicitly discusses literature, i.e.: Joyce, as capable of being sublime.

only interested in the crisis phase of the sublime, and disregards any Kantian attempt to transcend crisis. Paired with our investigation into the failing humanist subjects in *Endgame*, Lyotard's account of the sublime seems to speak directly to the work Beckett is doing in his drama because of its reliance on un-presentability and privation. Lyotard states: "The sublime is a different sentiment. It takes place, on the contrary, when the imagination fails to present an object which might, if only in principle, come to match a concept. We have the Idea of the world (the totality of what is), but we do not have the capacity to show an example of it" (4). For Lyotard, Kant's sublime highlights our inability to represent a given conception of what the world may be, and therefore Kant's sublime gives the observer a sense of that which is totally unrepresentable. Slavoj Žižek call this the "negative limit" of the sublime.<sup>15</sup> Lyotard is interested, precisely, in Kant's "negative limit" as regards the sublime - that which remains in the field of representation but is not represented due to its un-presentability. Lyotard culminates his essay with the statement: "let us wage war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name" (6). Notice how Lyotard is drawing on Kant's notion of the failure of the imagination as a key component for the sublime itself. However, Lyotard does not bask in a rational affirmation over the unrepresentable object, but rather champions the encounter with the unrepresentable, Žižek's negative limit.

Lyotard's approach to the sublime is of value in trying to understand *Endgame*. Beckett's characters never transcend the object of contemplation: zeroed nature. Hamm and Clov report on the zeroed landscape but have no Kantian transcendence of the wasteland. In *Endgame*, nature itself has become that which is unrepresentable, that which is zero. Life itself, furthermore, becomes almost unrepresentable in the dissolving humanist subjects within the shelter. All of life, in

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<sup>15</sup> "Precisely when we determine the Thing as a transcendent surplus beyond what can be represented, we determine it on the basis of the field of representation, starting from it, within its horizon, as its negative limit" (Žižek 232).

other words, becomes eclipsed in *Endgame*. As mentioned above, Beckett never directly shows us the natural world when setting the scene of the drama itself, except for the grey sky. Instead, Clov relates information to the audience about the without. There is a feigned domination over the chaos and crisis presented by nature through the vehicle of storytelling and memory. However, as seen above, this is a *limited* power. Each successive attempt to mitigate the threat of the external world through language is ultimately nullified. As Adorno states about *Endgame*: “The violence of the unspeakable is mimicked by the timidity to mention it” (“Trying to Understand *Endgame*” 123). Thus, Lyotard’s notion of the postmodern sublime as a presentation of the unrepresentable is more accurately reflective of Beckett’s dialectic between the natural world and the human observer in *Endgame* for both players and audience members. Kant’s sublime poses an implicit trust in the rational agent’s capacity to supersede the crisis through reason and imagination. Lyotard’s sublime stays with the crisis, or a presentation of the unrepresentable, and ultimately posits an utter sense of immanence and fracturing of the humanist subject. In other words, the unrepresentable is apotheosized in Lyotard’s aesthetics, not the rational transcendence emphasized by Kant. Time and again, *Endgame* places its players and audience members face to face with that which is unrepresentable and never offers moments of transcendence over ruin. Beckett never presents nature in the duration of his drama (there is at least a lone tree presented in *Waiting for Godot*). We are in an unrepresentable world within *Endgame*. Audience members and players cannot articulate a transcendence of this destruction; we are rooted in it.

Why is the natural world unrepresentable within *Endgame*? Again, Lyotard can offer his readers some conceptual tools to begin building a response to this question. In his same essay “Answering,” Lyotard states that allusions are a tool that the artist can work with as a means to craft the end of the sublimely unrepresentable: “Allusion... is perhaps a form of expression indis-

pensable to the works which belong to an aesthetic of the sublime” (5). Allusion works to unveil Lyotard’s sublime through indirect reference, which can imply a level of impossible representation for the object which is being alluded to. Beckett, in *Endgame*, could very well be alluding to the hydrogen bombs dropped during World War II and to the possibility of an apocalyptic nuclear war, which was a constant threat of the Cold War era, when he alludes to the without through Clov’s reports. As critic Hugh Kenner states:

The text alludes to the room before us as ‘the shelter’, outside of which is death. Are we not to imagine a fallout shelter, perhaps, and the last hours of the last morsels of human life, after perhaps an H-Bomb explosion? The Bomb was much on the mind of Europe in 1957 when this play was published. (121)

Kenner’s point is in line with Lyotard’s notion of the sublime. Nuclear fallout is never explicitly stated but rather alluded to in *Endgame*. Scenes ravaged by such catastrophic warfare are historical trauma that ingrain themselves into the collective psyche of cultures, causing the audience to identify and perhaps see themselves represented on the stage itself. Horrific descriptions of scenes at Nagasaki and Hiroshima are painful memories that can be viewed, in some senses, as unrepresentable due to their traumatic import. In a similar fashion to Kenner, Adorno states, “In *Endgame*, a historical moment is revealed...After the Second War, everything is destroyed, even resurrected culture, without knowing it; humanity vegetates along, crawling, after events which even the survivors cannot really survive, on a pile of ruins which even renders futile self-reflection of one’s own battered state” (Adorno, 122). Adorno’s point resonates with the brutality of atomic warfare seen in Japan, or with the devastation of the Holocaust. More importantly, Adorno’s claim also allows us to understand why the Kantian sublime is insufficient for understanding *Endgame*: subjectivity is *futile* in the wake of such historical trauma. Therefore, Beck-

ett's players cannot transcend or defy the sublime object through their reason because they cannot even understand themselves; each player is "unable to release the spell of fragmented subjectivity; [the play] can only depict solipsism" (Adorno, 127). Again, natural ruin reflects itself as human ruin, and a dialectic of waste comes to the fore.

Lyotard's postmodern sublime allows us to have one possibility for comprehending the allusive nature of Clov's descriptions of the natural world, as well as the zeroed landscape Beckett has crafted: nuclear fallout. It is important here to remember that the adjectives and descriptions given by Clov to the landscape outside the shelter are those of a wasteland, where no life is or can grow. Peter Hales discusses the way in which the destruction created by nuclear fallout also radically resists human perception, and is thus almost entirely un-presentable: "No one could photograph the devastations of strontium-90 or describe with persuasive resolve the invisible clouds of radioactive fallout that circled the global landscape" (Hales 28). Nuclear fallout would seemingly explain the lack of life outside the shelter, as well as the inability for seedlings to grow, because the ground has become radioactive. One cannot help but think of sites like Chernobyl as a more contemporary lived example of the type of landscape Beckett has envisioned within *Endgame*. To restate, through Lyotard's sublime we are presented with nature's un-presentability, and Lyotard's key concept of allusion can be used to uncover that nuclear warfare and its fallout is one option for that which cannot be presented by Beckett. Putting this idea into the language of Robert J. Oppenheimer, thought of as "the father of the atomic bomb," Beckett's *Endgame* highlights the ways in which the atomic bomb has "become death, the destroyer of worlds." By extension, nature's ruination implies technology and humanity as the source of its demise.

Nuclear weaponry is also analyzed as representing the sublime, namely the atomic sublime, as propounded by Peter Hales. Hales helps to situate Lyotard's discussion of the sublime in a concrete historical context, and thus gives more shape and texture to the un-presentability of *Endgame* we have focused on thus far. Put differently, turning to the atomic sublime will shed more light on Lyotard's notion of the unrepresentable as made manifest in Beckett's drama, and will also help to raise the larger cultural critique of technology and mechanism at the heart of the drama by emphasizing the destructive and dominating possibilities such frameworks embrace. *Endgame* thus dramatizes and embodies on stage that which technological positivism hesitates to acknowledge, not the salvation of humanity but the potential for eschatological catastrophe. This is hauntingly put by psychoanalyst and art critic Lynn Gamwell: "this is not an abyss reached after a spiritual journey but a nonexistence - a void - produced by pagan science...the artists no longer shared ancient man's terror before unknown forces of nature because, after the bomb, the artists knew the forces" (270). Gamwell's sentiment is actualized through technology in *Endgame*.

Beckett's critique of the rhetoric of technology and blind optimism in mechanistic science in *Endgame* can be viewed through the aesthetic framework of the atomic sublime, as articulated by Hales. Hales draws on the historical use of deserts as a space for atomic testing, claiming, much in the same vein as Arthur Schopenhauer centuries before, that deserts are an inherently sublime space which are made more sublime through the atomic bomb. Hales states: "Atomic explosions were not only safe in this [the desert] allegedly worthless, uninhabited region; they served to make more stunning this hostile, already sublime landscape" (20). He connects atomic testing to tourism within the United States, and claims that atomic testing operated in an analo-

gous manner of spectacle and consumption as sublime natural spaces like Yosemite.<sup>16</sup> However, Hales is also viscerally aware of the uncanny underbelly this atomic spectacle holds: “it [atomic bomb] could only exist by destroying all that surrounded it” (20). Hales calls this aspect of the atomic sublime “gothic horror” (24), and states “the witness was victim and not spectator, and in which the dominant psychological state was not awe and pleasure, but helplessness and pain” (24). This aspect of the atomic sublime seems to encapsulate the dramatic scene of Beckett’s *Endgame* - where all players are utterly helpless and suffering from bodily and social degeneration and audience members are subjected to this apocalyptic and horrifying portrayal of humanity. Beckett’s world of the atomic sublime is one of pain and inescapability, much like the first two steps of Kant’s dynamic sublime. Hales draws on *Life* magazine’s depiction of Nagasaki to reinforce the gothic horror surrounding atomic technology, and includes this phrase from the magazine: “to a world building up its stock of atomic bombs, the people of the two cities [Nagasaki and Hiroshima] warn that the long-suppressed photographs, terrible as they are, still fall far short of depicting the horror which only those who lived under the blast can know” (24). *Endgame* falls short in depicting the natural devastation inculcated by such a blast much as history does, but it sublimely gives its audience members a sense of the horrors felt by the remaining humanity, as well as a taste of what a (nearly) lifeless planet would be like in the wake of nuclear bombs. We have a representation, here, of the enlightenment’s trust in technology and human reason as a means of mastery and liberation run amuck through *Endgame*’s sublimity, as Slade argues:

The idea of Man, then, is at the origin of Enlightenment as the final cause. It is the end and the aim of Enlightenment, and also its organizing principle. Enlighten-

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<sup>16</sup> David Nye also gives an in-depth portrayal of the atomic sublime in his book *American Technological Sublime*, not drawn on here to keep our focus sharp.



ment insistence on reason and its conception of man lie at the origin of Beckett's writing as impetus and hurdle. It is this idea of Man that Beckett's sublime seeks to demolish and reconfigure; it is an effort to remember what Enlightenment ideology repressed. (114)

Adorno's essay "Trying to Understand *Endgame*" provides a strong critical framework to analyze Slade's claim about Beckett's sublime, and again pulls us from strictly aesthetics to the critique Beckett's drama implicitly presents of enlightenment ideology. It is important here for our organizational purposes to clarify that the sublime has given us a mode of entry for engaging the critique of the enlightenment ideology of the mastery of nature. We will now focus on the diagnosis of domination and destruction at the core of technological positivism. Beckett's *Endgame* ultimately shows the horror such positivism can loose upon the world if not kept in check by reflection on the nature of progress and the potential limits of mastery. Adorno's critical framework discusses the catastrophic repercussions a techno-stance of this type can unleash.

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Adorno's reading of *Endgame* follows the lifelessness of the players within the shelter, and argues that meaning itself is stripped entirely from Beckett's project in the drama, likening the nihilism of *Endgame*'s vision to the dominating aspects of culture and history during the twentieth century. The lifelessness of *Endgame*, for Adorno, finds its strongest manifestation in the obliteration of subjectivity and communal ties. *Endgame*'s lifelessness, for Adorno, is the domination of nature. In other words, the domination we see occurring inside the shelter is a by-product and uncanny reflection of domination of nature. Domination is thus omnipresent. Ador-

no's reading allows us to understand the connection between *Endgame's* internal and external ruination as rooted in the subjugation of nature itself, as Adorno states: "Insecticide, which all along pointed toward the genocidal camps, becomes the final product of the domination of nature, which destroys itself. Only this content of life remains: that nothing be living. All existence is leveled to a life that is itself death, abstract domination" (145-146). In Adorno's view, the leveling of life is a key feature of enlightenment ideology, the end result of mastery over nature. As humanity asserted its rationality over nature as a mode of mastery, it developed technological apparatuses that allowed domination to become actualized. This will be taken up more fully later, but for the present moment it is important to note the connection Adorno is drawing between rational mastery of nature and the implied necessity of technology to do so. Domination, in this analysis, refers to the dominating effects that technology has brought upon nature and also to certain groups of humanity. Nuclear technology, and nuclear warfare, are examples of the technostance leading to utter ruin. Furthermore, domination also points readers towards the main facet of mechanistic ideology: a reductive anthropocentrism.

*Endgame*, Adorno argues, portrays a supreme example of mechanistic philosophy's treatment of nature as pure material, and, by extension, of mankind as pure manipulator. This leads to the ultimate end of nature as use-value for human beings, known as the anthropocentric point of view: "The hubris of idealism, the enthroning of man as creator in the center of creation, has entrenched itself in that 'bare interior' like a tyrant in his last days" (146). It is for this reason that "subjectivity itself is guilty" (Adorno, 147) in *Endgame* - the domination of nature has brought to fruition "that calamity which life has become" (147), rendering "the phantom of an anthropocentrically dominated world" (148). Adorno sees *Endgame* as a dramatic representation of anthropocentrism's domination of the natural world qua resource, and highlights the utter de-

struction such an ideological bent can loose upon the natural and human world, as he states:

“Hamm...is just as much the dependent of Fichte, who disdains the world as nothing more than the raw material and mere product...Absolute, the world becomes a hell; there is nothing else”

(149). For Adorno, the un-presentability of nature is a direct result of anthropocentric domination and is subsequently the true depiction of Beckett’s historical moment. The world becomes un-presentable, in other words, because of humanity’s domination of it - the sublimity of nature no longer rests in its grandeur but in its utter exhaustion by enlightenment’s ideological values.

Humanity itself becomes exhausted and dominated within the shelter. These insights are traced more fully in Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where they see an implicit connection between the domination of nature and mankind’s internal and inter-personal domination: “human beings become mere material, as the whole of nature has become material for society” (68). For Horkheimer and Adorno, humans and nature become mere *commodity* as both the external world and internal world become disenchanted and stripped of animistic qualities. Nature is disenchanted so as to enable rational mastery over it, while humanity, in turn, represses bodily and emotive instincts in favor of rational instrumental action. Put differently, human bodily nature becomes repressed as nature becomes dominated. In this framework, the body undergoes “the transformation into dead matter, indicated by the affinity of *corpus* to *corpse*, [as] a part of the perennial process which turned nature into stuff, material” (194). However, because nature’s domination entails laborers who must, in turn, dominate it, societal domination becomes the norm. Domination becomes the only recognizable feature of human nature, as Horkheimer and Adorno state: “human beings are so radically estranged from themselves and from nature that they know only how to use and harm each other. Each is merely a factor, the subject or object of some praxis, something to be reckoned with or discounted” (211). For Adorno and Hork-

heimer, this domination leads to a dissolution of all modes of value and meaning with which we fashion our human existence. Within *Endgame*, all three factors of domination make themselves manifest. Master-slave morality, as discussed above, seems to be the only recognizable social pattern demonstrated by *Endgame*'s players. All bodies are in a state of disrepair and decomposition. Nature itself becomes a wasteland. *Endgame* thus highlights the supreme negativity Horkheimer and Adorno identified with an unreflective enlightenment ideology, where humanity's attempts at liberation regressed into a state of barbarism and inhumanity. The darker side of anthropocentrism is shown in the drama.

However, it is important to clarify that anthropocentric domination of nature and of other humans does not appear magically, but requires tools and technology that allow its domination to become actualized. Heidegger's enframing as portrayed in his essay "Question Concerning Technology" is a useful tool to explain the ruination of *Endgame*'s inner and outer worlds, and provides the missing discussion of technology that must be addressed within a critique of the enlightenment framework. Domination of nature in *Endgame* is paired with the unrepresentable technology that such a philosophy depends upon for actualization. Put differently, Adorno and Horkheimer's negativity as rooted in the domination of nature needs the means to dominate nature itself. The connection between Adorno, Horkheimer, and Heidegger, then, is a discussion of nature's domination; Horkheimer and Adorno allow us to understand the implicit dialectic of domination between inner and outer worlds, while Heidegger allows us to have a penetrating look at technology's role in the former's diagnosis of totalizing domination. Earlier in this analysis, atomic weaponry was the main source of allusion and thus of sublimity in *Endgame*. However, following Adorno and Horkheimer's insights, the allusions to nature's domination can also be seen in machinery and technology used by mechanistic and anthropocentric world-views that

posit nature as mere commodity. Heidegger's framework proves to be a helpful conceptual tool for understanding the essence of technology and thus completes the critique of enlightenment ideology's anthropocentric rational mastery over both nature and also over all of humanity.

Enframing, in the Heideggerian sense, is the essence of modern technology as a setting upon nature to order nature's material as standing-reserve, or commodity, for human use. For Heidegger, enframing is at the heart of modern science and mechanistic philosophical projects, although the essence of technology is deceptively seen as merely applied science: "Because the essence of modern technology lies in enframing, modern technology must employ exact physical science. Through its so so doing the deceptive appearance arises that modern technology is applied physical science" (328). Instead, Heidegger relays enframing as the essence of technology. This is the same insight that Adorno and Horkheimer see, although from a historicist rather than phenomenological perspective, at the heart of enlightenment ideology. Heidegger, like Adorno and Horkheimer, posits the commodification and subsequent domination of *all* living things as a result of anthropocentric and mechanistic philosophies. "Hence physics...will never be able to renounce," Heidegger argues, "this one thing: that nature report itself in some way or other that is identifiable through calculation and that it remain order-able as a system of information" (328). This is the position Adorno and Horkheimer described as the disenchantment of nature for its subsequent rational mastery by humanity. Standing-reserve is that which is dominated. Enframing, for Heidegger, is the essence of modern technology: "Enframing is the gathering together which belongs to that setting-upon which challenges man and puts him in position to reveal the actual, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve" (329). While our analysis has made the connection between Adorno, Horkheimer, and Heidegger explicit, Heidegger takes issues of domination and commodification a step further by positing that *technology* actualizes, and is thus

a *means* to, the domination Adorno and Horkheimer posit at the core of enlightenment ideology. The danger of technology, furthermore, is that humanity itself becomes a standing-reserve for technology, that humans become subservient to and dominated by technology. However, Heidegger is not arguing for technological determinism, but instead argues that humanity is uniquely called to technological enframing. We are uniquely called in our position of ordering, and it is up to humanity to answer this call correctly. Enframing, in this sense, becomes a social practice. And yet, *Endgame* provides a dramatic representation of enframing's danger as actualized. This reading of the drama shows that humanity has failed to recognize their unique position within enframing. As a result, all has become wasted.

Within *Endgame*, the domination of nature has led enframing to utterly exhaust the resources of nature, and has, in turn, actualized the danger technology imposes. Enframing in *Endgame* renders all of nature and humanity as corpses, zeroed, and ultimately exhausted. Humanity, in other words, has become mere material in an analogous mode to nature. The disenchantment of the world has led to a portrayal of ruined humanity. *Endgame* implicitly represents a world in which enframing has exhausted all. Thus, pairing Adorno and Heidegger for a reading of *Endgame* allows us to understand the source of ruin in the drama, namely, modernity's project of liberation through its emphasis on rational mastery and technological enframing. In essence, while politically opposed to one another, Adorno and Horkheimer on the one hand, and Heidegger, on the other, provide a complete picture of domination that allows us to understand the wasteland within and without of *Endgame*.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The differences between these two schools of thought are profound and cannot be dealt with in their entirety in this chapter. In brief, Heidegger's involvement with the Nazi party and Adorno's self-exile to flee from the Nazi party is an obvious point of contention.

*Endgame*'s implicit critique of the enlightenment's philosophical foundation of anthropocentrism and mechanism is at the core of ecocritical philosophy. Greg Garrard establishes Beckett's *Endgame* as a "precursor to ecocriticism" (383) due to its anticipation of a contemporary problem of our culture's drive to dominate nature: climate change. Global warming, Garrard argues, "eludes both sensory apprehension and generic representation" (383). Lyotard's sublime is a fruitful tool for Garrard to establish an ecocritical reading of *Endgame*'s engagement with global warming. Through the sublime's use of allusion, the un-presentability of climate change begins to emerge. The sublime, however, is not the focus at this point in my analysis. Instead, Adorno, Horkheimer and Heidegger help to give some suggestions for the ways in which Beckett's drama is also a precursor for thinking about the causes of climate change: unrestrained technology and anthropocentrism. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, Beckett's *Endgame* posits a dramatic enactment of the philosophical positions first-wave ecocriticism analogously identifies as poisonous to environmental consciousness - namely, anthropocentrism and mechanism. We see the way in which this ideology runs the risk of running the planet into ruin and despondency and the way in which that waste is reflected within humanity in *Endgame*. Thus, *Endgame* can serve as a foundational drama that first-wave ecocritics can look to as a historical register of the danger technology imposes for nature. We can take this a step further, however, and state that *Endgame* also registers the implicit dialectic of human domination as a reflection of nature's devastation. *Endgame*, in other words, is a concrete dramatic portrayal of ideologies that result in the social and environmental ills first-wave ecocriticism implicitly identifies and critiques. The horror of *Endgame*'s vision might shock those not compelled by first-wave ecocritical approaches to take seriously the warnings posed against anthropocentrism and unbounded technology.

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In conclusion, Beckett's *Endgame* can be more clearly understood through the aesthetic framework of the sublime. However, multiple theories of the sublime are necessary to truly understand the dialectic between the human observer and the non-human landscape. *Endgame* highlights the supreme desertification that can follow the use of atomic technology itself. In turn, this desertification highlights Beckett's criticism of technology. More importantly, however, *Endgame*'s zeroed landscape and the subsequent atavism within the shelter itself highlights the critique of anthropocentrism and mechanism that result in nature's domination during the twentieth century. In a sense, *Endgame* dramatizes, and is implicitly a thought experiment of, a scene in which technology has escaped the utility and liberation humans had hoped to achieve and has instead brought about dramatic death and destruction. *Endgame*, then, serves as a haunting reminder of the uncanny underbelly of unrestrained technology, while also critiquing cultures that produces such technology and the ideologies that put blind faith in its use. Furthermore, *Endgame* serves as a haunting reminder of the telos anthropocentric setting-upon, in the Heideggerian sense, has for our planet: utter domination and subsequent ruination of within and without. Beckett is showing the "human, all too human" apocalypse that could potentially be brought forth through unchecked technology and through ideologies bent on the domination of nature. Beckett's dramatic game is to show his audience the end of life we have made possible through our Promethean disposition towards technology and our endless pursuit of the domination of nature. One must wonder if his plea is being heard.



### **Conclusion: Towards Ecology**

Before panning out into larger discussions and questions that arise from this analysis of Beckett, it will be helpful to recall the argument as a whole. My thesis has sought to trace a principle of internal and external decomposition in *Molloy* and *Endgame*. In the former, I traced decomposition internally as exemplified by Molloy and Moran. Molloy's and Moran's disintegration was initially analyzed through an existentialist framework as an encounter with the absurd and a movement towards authenticity. Beckett refocuses this encounter through quest narrative. Readers, however, are left with Molloy and Moran's broken subjectivity rather than an authentic self at the end of *Molloy*. I argue that existentialist readings are entertained by Beckett, as he clearly portrays an experience with the meaninglessness of absurdity, but that existentialist modes of recovery and authenticity are ultimately *parodied* by Molloy and Moran's degeneration into a condition of inhumanity. However, this parody does more than break down the existentialist notion of subjectivity and authenticity in the wake of absurdity by instead opening his works towards a critique of modernity.

*Molloy's* existentialist parody thus invites a historicist reading. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that enlightenment, perhaps most forcefully exemplified in modernity's stance towards technology and anthropocentric progress, has resulted in domination. This domination is three-fold: inner domination or repression, social domination, and the domination of nature itself. Each of these forms of domination are reflected in one another. In *Molloy*, we have the first two modes of domination (personal and social) starkly portrayed. Personal domination is seen as both protagonists degenerate into broken pieces of subjectivity. Social domination is registered through Moran's patriarchal mastery over his family. Natural domination is not readily apparent in *Molloy* because nature is lyrically presented. This begins to slip, however, as nature is refocused

as mud and muck, which is a memorable feature of the novel. As we turn to *Endgame*, the three-fold reality of domination finds its deepest and darkest expression. Beckett's communal shift in *Endgame* expands the ruin of the individual in *Molloy* to the waste of society. Drawing on Lyotard's focus on the sublime's un-presentability, I argue that the ruin evoked in *Endgame* is a result of modernity's Promethean disposition towards nature. Put differently, Lyotard's and Hale's different but converging conceptions of the sublime allow readers to make sense of the dialectic of ruin between the internal world and the external world.

From the sublime, I move towards a critique of modernity based upon enlightenment ideology and technology. To quickly summarize, modernity's emphasis on rational mastery led to domination over disenchanted nature and human bodies through technology. Mastery promised social liberation from external power, but paradoxically resulted in humanity's enslavement and nature's destruction. The disenchantment of nature, in other words, led to the disenchantment of humanity as purely instrumental, and resulted in barbarism. In Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of a modernity rooted in the domination of all life, technology becomes central as a means of actualizing domination. Put differently, technology provides the mechanism necessary for nature's mastery. Heideggerian enframing describes technology in this way - as a setting-upon both humanity and nature as standing-reserve, or as material for use. Technology is not deterministically viewed because humanity stands in a unique calling to enframing. Humanity thus stands in a unique and original position to technology and must be careful to correctly answer enframing's calling. Because of the waste and ruin, *Endgame*'s nihilistic vision at the core of *Endgame* can be read as expressing the "danger," as Heidegger calls it, of enframing. The danger of enframing is the total domination of self and of nature as standing-reserve. Beckett implicitly portrays a society that has failed to perceive its original call to enframing, so that humanity and nature become

used up and wasted. Because of its historical context, *Endgame* is furthermore a dramatic presentation of nuclear anxiety in the 1950's. *Endgame* implicitly critiques the modern project of liberation through mastery by ultimately representing the destruction that can be caused by blind faith in technology and an unreflective rhetoric of progress.

My thesis concludes by situating Beckett in ecocriticism by drawing a connection between ecocritical philosophy and a diagnosis of modernity's environmental impact. *Molloy* and *Endgame* are connected through their portrayals of waste. As a result, a sense of the human and more-than-human catastrophe seemingly sheltered by the rhetoric of liberation and societal progress emerges. First-wave ecocriticism is invested in showing the environmental dangers such ideologies can have on our world in the age of the anthropocene. Beckett's work, I argue, is fruitful for ecocritical readings in the same way Garrard articulates in his short piece on *Endgame*. Specifically, the drama is a precursor for thinking about ecocritical issues of global warming. Garrard argues that *Endgame* dramatically presents climate change's un-presentability through the obscure reports Clov gives to the audience. I agree with Garrard's analysis, but have attempted to take a step back in order to examine how Beckett implicitly engages with the philosophical and ideological foundations ecocriticism has identified as at least partially responsible for the ecological crises we face today. Beckett's nihilistic vision is not one which tears down merely for the sake of watching the world and meaning dissolve into nothingness, but is rather an acute register of historical trauma and also an implicit critique of modernity's destruction of nature and society through its blind faith in technological progress.

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However, much work remains for Beckett's contribution to ecocriticism. While ecocritical approaches to Beckett may seem counter-intuitive, and while modernist texts (generally) run

against the grain of ecocritical focus, the two can have a meaningful dialogue with one another. Because Beckett's work implicitly responds to philosophical orientations that anticipate ecocriticism, his work can speak to larger ecocritical concerns. For example, how might an ecocritical reading help to understand the barren landscape of *Waiting for Godot*? How might ecocritical approaches help to illuminate the minimalist reduction in *Worstword Ho*? How might an ecocritical reading of *Happy Days* help to analyze Winnie's natural entrapment? By drawing on the philosophical foundations outlined above to answer these questions, readings of Beckett can speak to our contemporary lives. In the same vein, a more focused approach to Adorno's engagement with Beckett's work could be useful to ecocritical understandings of his aesthetic project, dealing with texts like *Negative Dialectic* as a means of extending this discussion, as Timothy Morton has done more broadly. Furthermore, an analysis of Beckett's self-proclaimed literature of the "unword" and its aesthetic of failure could have interesting results for a new model, as Garrard points to, for rethinking nature writing. These points are raised in the hopes that this thesis will spark other ecocritics to approach Beckett's work as an implicit engagement with the modern ideologies that first-wave ecocritics find at work behind contemporary environmental predicaments.

As the introduction pointed out, my analysis is a way of thinking, not a strict method for approaching Beckett. The way I have presented Beckett's work moves beyond a strictly nihilistic and isolated vision so often ascribed to him, and instead registers his deep sympathy with historical trauma and modern crises facing humanity. During his time, these crises were rooted in World War I, World War II, and the Cold War. During our time, the way I have analyzed Beckett implicitly speaks to our own ecological crises and the subsequent human catastrophes that result from them. The redemptive feature of Beckett's seemingly nihilistic project is that it gives

us a sense of how badly things have become and allows us to *identify* crises in the hopes that they can be transcended. In this sense, Beckett's art acts as the self-reflexive medium which Horkheimer and Adorno require for enlightenment ideology to not become totalizing. Beckett's work, in other words, gives humanity a place to begin rebuilding and reconstructing the negative aspects of modern culture by identifying their cancerous foundations and their destructive results to our external and internal worlds. In order for more self-reflexivity, critics need to dig further into Beckett's work to draw insights for thinking about our environmental concerns and ways of living our lives. The task of thinking, therefore, rests with each of us.

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