

**Samuel Beckett:
Age, Impairment, and the Drama of Confinement**

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**Victoria Helen Swanson
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DEDICATION

For Sierra, whom I have adored at every age.

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ABSTRACT

The aging body is a universal feature of corporeal existence and, in every sense, aging alters physical and mental performance. Approaches to age and performance studies often focus upon the aging actor or the challenges faced by actors when they are cast in roles which require them to act the part of a much older character. Samuel Beckett's use of aged or aging characters has gone relatively unnoticed by scholars, especially in his dramatic works. This dissertation positions aging as vital to engaging with Beckett's drama. Aged figures appear across Beckett's career ranging from his earliest works to his latest. Beckett's drama imposes agedness upon characters in ways that confine or impair their bodies while allowing their minds, particularly memory, to transcend the limitations of their physical worlds. I examine the history of Beckett's staging of the body to reveal points of intersection between his use of age and his increasing interest in staging the interior registers of subjectivity. This study utilizes impairment and confinement as a binary through which to explore Beckett's depictions of the entropy and stasis that accompany the aging process, the decomposition that results from age, and Beckett's staged applications of prosthetic memory that correspond to the embodied subjectivity of age. The premise of my research is interdisciplinary in scope. I draw upon studies in gerontology, chemistry, and performance in order to situate age as integral to engagement with Samuel Beckett's works. In this way, my dissertation establishes the analysis of age as a relevant avenue for scholarship not only in Beckett studies but also as a point of intersection that links gerontology to the fields of drama, performance, and literary studies.

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INTRODUCTION

Samuel Beckett often portrays characters straddling the line between subjectivity and subjugation, and he often explores this relationship in terms of incapacitated and aged bodies. While Beckett's portrayals of disability are well documented, little scholarship exists on the significance of agedness in his works. The lack of scholarship that directly addresses the aging body in Beckett's dramatic milieu suggests that age operates as a mere prop, an afterthought, in his drama. However, the aged body is a vital component in the Beckettian cosmos. Aged or conspicuously aging figures appear across Beckett's dramas from his earliest works to his latest. Therefore, it is surprising that scholars have largely overlooked Beckett's attention to age and agedness. However, this failure to engage with Beckett's corpus as a study in age may be due to the fact that old age is an uncomfortable subject. The fields of cultural and social gerontology have made strides in calling attention to the western rejection of aging. Age is for the young to embrace and for the old to battle against, and this is evident in multiple areas of daily life. Youth is seen as fresh, vigorous, and vital, while aging is, to a large degree, considered an impediment. Such attitudes about aging have given way to the myriad ways that "active aging" is marketed for mass consumption. As such, agedness that is less-than-active is widely dismissed—being frail, impaired, and sedentary, perhaps to the point of invalidity, are states of aging that are relegated to the margins of social discourse. The diminishment that is common in advanced age is something understood to exist, but few wish to talk about it. As Kathleen Woodward argues in *Aging and Its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions*, psychology as a field—and she implicates Sigmund Freud in this—

has long resisted the study of agedness. Woodward contends, “What then of old age? Where is it located? I argue that Freud repressed the subject of aging in his construction of a powerful discourse of subjectivity and generational relations so firmly anchored in infancy and early childhood” (9). Given the history of modern psychology’s resistance to acknowledging the significance of old age as an avenue of psychoanalytic study, it is not difficult to imagine how scholars have overlooked the relevance of Samuel Beckett’s depictions of age and agedness—it is simply *because* old age is so often treated as an afterthought in social and cultural studies. Since agedness features prominently across Beckett’s *oeuvre*, failing to recognize his illustrations of agedness ignores a significant feature of his works.

Focusing on his dramatic works provides a genre-centered vantage point for exploring Beckett’s depictions of age. In doing so, this project seeks to expand discourse on the interpretation of Beckett’s theater and inspire deeper scholarly consideration of age in his prose fiction and poetry. I approach this study by arguing that the impairment, confinement, and entropy of Beckett’s old or aging characters is significant to his greater dramatic project. Age is constitutive to the evolution of Beckett’s theater. Beckett frames age as not just a condition or experience but as a process that signals the intensifying vulnerabilities of subjectivity. In his later theater, age is the catalyst for his interrogations of embodiment and consciousness. By situating the aged figure as integral to engagement with Samuel Beckett’s works, my dissertation establishes the analysis of aging as a relevant avenue for scholarship not only in Beckett studies but also as a point

of intersection that links gerontology to the fields of drama, performance, and literary studies.

Some scholars addressing the issue of age and performance focus on aging actors or the challenges faced by actors cast in roles that require them to play an older character. Other scholars approach age through the framework of disability studies. This makes sense insofar as the physical and mental dexterity of youth are typically not sustained in old age. However insufficient it is simply to equate aging with disability, there is some truth in suggesting that the longer a person lives, the more likely it becomes that he or she will experience some level of disability. In this study, I do not utilize disability studies or focus on the age of the performer. This decision is methodological and certainly not a dismissal of the great strides in disability and age research. Any discussion of dramatic literature must consider performance, and while the primary objective of this dissertation is a textual study—examining Beckett’s plays from a literary perspective—I do engage with his play texts as works of theater and as works in performance. That said, because my study focuses on the textual development of age in Beckett’s plays, I find it more appropriate to explore the diminishment of age as it is represented in his drama in terms of impairment, rather than disability. This is because while some of Beckett’s elderly characters may qualify as disabled, not all of his old characters are disabled. Conversely, *all* of Beckett’s depictions of age carry, at the very least, some suggestion of impairment.

Like the resistance to psychoanalytical analyses of agedness that Woodward identifies, there has also been resistance to the study of age as it relates to drama. In *Staging Age: The Performance of Age in Theatre, Dance, and Film*, co-editors Valerie

Barnes Lipscomb and Leni Marshall suggest that drama, performance, and theater scholars are hesitant to talk about age in performance because they assume that few would be interested in such research and that only the elderly would identify with studies on agedness and how it translates into performance: “During the past generations, much scholarship has questioned and perhaps transcended binaries of race, class, gender, ability, and other categories of identity: too often, age has been overlooked, omitted or ‘Othered’ with a vengeance, a marginalization that age studies scholars suggest is a manifestation of fears about aging” (3). Lipscomb and Marshall contend:

One cannot discuss the materiality of the aging body without engaging in the issues of power associated with it. With each performative iteration, a person’s age changes ever so slightly, and the performance must accommodate for the shift. Because the change happens so slowly, the repetition that is the hallmark of performativity seems more salient than the shift in the individual performance; however the constantly changing body cannot be dismissed. (2)

As Lipscomb and Marshall suggest, the aged body is a site of performance. While the subject of age has generally been neglected as a theatrical field of study, a number of important thinkers in philosophy and performance studies have recognized the important links between age and performance.

Simone de Beauvoir’s extensive study on age, *The Coming of Age* (1972), provides a foreground for any exploration of age and performance. *The Coming of Age* traces agedness through history and socio-cultural practices, and it considers how

agedness and the physical changes associated with growing older affects those who are entering old age. Beauvoir examines impairment in detail and notes that being seen in the world as *lacking* vigor creates a precarious state for the elderly which may place the individual at risk. To age is to become vulnerable. Beauvoir's attention to the details of aging includes several references to instances of aging in literary texts and drama, including Beckett's. Of Beckett's use of memory in old age, Beauvoir contends:

Beckett deals with it cruelly. The recollections come in no sequence, they are maimed, spoilt, and as it were foreign. It is as though nothing had ever really happened, and out of this emptiness there emerges the present, which is no more than a senile, aimless being. The most ludicrous aspect of it all is that throughout this wreckage there is a clinging to the myth which says that old age means learning, going forward, an advance. (212)

Age may be regarded as a cruel state in Beckett's dramas; however, his interpretations of aging are reflections of growing old in the real world—a world that during Beckett's lifetime was scarred by war and cruelty. This despair resonates in his portrayals of the elderly.

Beauvoir's engagement with age in Beckett's works is among the few scholarly or philosophical considerations. The scarce attempts at addressing age in Beckett's works may be explained by the lack of overall scholarship on age as it relates to the study of dramatic literature. Recent work by Patrice Pavis on age in theatre examines how age is approached in terms of performer/director. In "Aging in the Performing Arts" Pavis contends:

Theatre does not have this mechanical precision, but it sometimes demonstrates the effects of time on a character. What the novel can do with precision and subtle explanations, the theatre must perform mimetically and directly through the appearance of the actors. The difficulty is not so much to imitate old age mimetically through an actor who reconstructs it bit by bit, but it lies rather in showing the slow process of aging. If it is true that, according to Roland Barthes, old age 'did not reach the mythology of our societies' if it is constantly 'denied,' aging is even less the object of Western thinking. It constitutes a taboo which 'age studies' struggles to break. This taboo of aging impedes the creativity of actors and directors; it prevents authors and artists from approaching subjects which do not really correspond to the expected capacities of their age. (51)

Scholarship on age in theater studies tends to concern itself with aging performers or the question of how actors perform age. Pavis calls for breaking the taboo of age studies in drama in order to open the field of interpretations of the body in performance for directors, actors, authors, and artists. I would add that expanding research on age in textual studies, particularly studies of dramatic literature would broaden the field and enhance our engagement with the dramatic canon.

Seeing old age as crucial to Beckett studies may seem, at first glance, unintuitive. His writings are celebrated for their enormous contributions to avant-garde art and thought. Beckett's dramatic works are inventive and productions sometimes met

resistance. James Knowlson reports that the first productions of *Waiting for Godot* in Germany, Italy, and Holland were “controversial” (373), and that Roger Blin wrote Beckett to inform him that the Holland production was “violently attacked by the Roman Catholic press” to the degree that “the municipality of Arnhem” threatened during rehearsals that they “were on the point of banning the production saying it was a homosexual work” (698). The Holland production was able to continue, but a Madrid production met similar resistance and advertisements for the play “were not allowed in the press” and “no kind of publicity at all was permitted” (698). Beckett’s theater continued to draw attention for its radical staging of the body and his plays were sometimes criticized as too *au courant* despite the modernist moment in which he wrote. Beckett’s theater is, in many respects, too modern for modernism, and Beckett scholars have debated whether Beckett is the last modernist or the first postmodernist. Beckett’s works do nothing old. Yet at the same time, old is everywhere in Beckett’s corpus.

When aged characters exist in Beckett’s plays, they are always circumscribed to either restrained movement or total confinement; they are trapped, entombed, buried alive, crippled, blinded, or held captive. In turn, these constraints inform the apprehension and performativity of the aged body. Beckett often employs the use of props or other theatrical apparatuses to contain his characters. However, not all incidents of confinement in Beckett’s drama are achieved via props. In *Footfalls*, for example, May is bound to a circularity of movement that she neither escapes nor aspires to escape. Still, her continual need to “wheel” in perpetual movement presents in itself a form of stasis.

Beckett has her constrained—her physicality is limited, her body shows markers of aging, and her garments reflect decay.

While there can be confinement without apparent expressions of age or agedness in Beckett's theater, the inverse does not exist—Beckett does not include agedness as clear marker without including some variation of confinement. Michel Foucault's theories and research on the prison lends themselves to an examination of the apparatuses of confinement in Beckett's works. Foucault himself acknowledges that Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952) served as a catalyst from which he developed his own critical perspective:

I belong to that generation who, as students, had before their eyes, and were limited by, a horizon consisting of Marxism, phenomenology, and existentialism. Interesting and stimulating as these might be, naturally they produced in the students completely immersed in them a feeling of being stifled, and the urge to look elsewhere. I was like all other students of philosophy at that time, and for me the break was first Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. (Begam, 185)

Foucault's acknowledgment that Beckett's work influenced his own provides a relevant grounding in terms of outlining Beckett's attention to confining structures in his theater. Beckett's imagery of confinement and claustrophobia finds its theoretical counterpart in Foucault's theories of carcerality. Both Beckett and Foucault see a world of stasis that seems designed to create and control human desire. Although the sources for inspiration may differ between these two thinkers, it is evident—through Foucault's quotations of

Beckett in both the “The Order of Discourse” and “What is an Author?”—that Beckett’s work resonates with Foucault. Further, there are similarities between the methodologies that Beckett and Foucault employ in their conceptualizations of subjectivity. Both Beckett and Foucault recognize the constraints of subjectivity; they both call into question the personal and public functioning of the subject, the ways in which order impacts meaning and the reliability of subjectivity. The aged figure in Beckett’s works also exemplifies deterioration—the state of diminishment that overtakes, at some point, anything that has been born into the world. In a postmodernist nod to the limitations of modernism, Beckett’s theater repositions age in existential depictions. His aged figures present something that cannot be resolved—something that cannot work; therefore, they drop into cycles of continuation and repetition. They are restrained as a consequence of their aging existence, leaving them exposed to the impositions of authority. Rather than continually attempting to adhere to the modernist battle cry *make it new*, Beckett illustrates various states of deterioration. In his inversion of the *make it new* dictum, Beckett literally makes it *old*.

By positing age as a significant element in Beckett’s work, this dissertation asserts that his dramatic works explore the inescapability of decay, impairment, and confinement in ways that reappropriate the core dilemma of modernism—that of exhaustion. There are many examples of exhaustion in Beckett’s works; as Deleuze argues, Beckett “exhausts the possible” (3). I would add that Beckett illustrates his particular brand of exhaustion most often via the old body—impairing and confining it in ways that evince dehiscence, entropy, and stasis, while invoking decomposition. As such,

my study focuses on the ways in which confinement, memory, and impairment are utilized in Beckett's drama as expressions or consequences of agedness.

Beckett's interest in age, impairment, and the limitations of the body can be seen in his preoccupations with the Jungian concept of "birth astride the grave."¹ This image finds its way into many of Beckett's plays: it is mentioned in *Waiting for Godot* and by Mrs. Rooney, the elderly protagonist in *All That Fall*, and *A Piece of Monologue* opens with the play's solitary old man announcing "Birth was the death of him" (454). Beckett's fascination with aging toward death from birth informs the majority of his works. Given Beckett's historical moment, writing as a man impacted by two World Wars, his sensitivity to the human condition is not surprising, and his acknowledgement of that experience is echoed by many of his modernist and postmodernist contemporaries. Beckett attended Jung's lecture in 1935; Britain and France declared war on Germany in 1939. Therefore, it is not difficult to imagine why Jung's story resonated with Beckett and why Beckett continued to draw from it in his illustrations and interpret this as an example of birth astride of a grave. In the wake of the second World War—with estimates of over 60 million casualties—writers and artists living in or near Europe would be attuned to how precariously life teeters at the precipice of death, as Djuna Barnes puts it, "Man is born to die" (27). The old characters in Beckett's plays can be seen as balancing in that grey area between life and death, and this is reflected in the environments Beckett devises for them: grey worlds, contained spaces, impenetrable

¹ Beckett became fascinated with the idea of birth astride the grave while attending C.G. Jung's third Tavistock lecture (1935) and hearing an account of a girl Jung observed as never having been properly or fully born (Ackerley, 289-92).

voids.

As they confront age and the encroachment of death, Beckett's characters often appear split from a defined "self" and seem more like objects than entities. The fragment of body presented in the disenfranchised lips of *Not I* may be the most striking example of split self. Mouth speaks but refuses to acknowledge the possibility that she speaks of her "self" when she recalls an elderly woman succumbing to a catastrophic event that leaves a "godforsaken hole" (406). In this play and across many others, Beckett depicts a fragmentation of consciousness. Knowlson reports an exchange during a lunch meeting the first time Beckett met American composer Morton Feldman. Feldman brought up his vision for the musical scoring for *Film*, telling Beckett he wanted "something that just hovered" (557). As they continued to talk, Beckett articulated his own theory of self.

Knowlson writes:

Feldman then showed Beckett the score of some music that he had written on some lines from Beckett's script for *Film*. Showing keen interest in the score, Beckett said that there was only one theme in his life. Then he spelled out this theme.

"May I write it down?" [Asked Feldman]. (Beckett himself takes Feldman's music paper and writes down the theme...It reads "To and fro in shadow, from outer shadow to inner shadow. To and fro, between unattainable self and unattainable non-self.")... "It would need a bit of work, wouldn't it? Well, if I get any further ideas on it, I'll send them on to you."

At the end of the month, still in Berlin, Beckett mailed to Morton Feldman in Buffalo a card with a note: “Dear Morton Feldman. Verso the piece I promised. It was good meeting you. Best. Samuel Beckett.” On the back of the card was the handwritten text (Beckett never called it a poem) entitled “Neither,” beginning “to and fro in shadow / from inner to outer shadow / from impenetrable self to impenetrable unself / by way of neither.” [...]. (557)

What Beckett describes to Feldman is the core of how he renders the dichotomies of self as corporeal body and self as consciousness in his illustrations of old people. His plays are filled with examples of old people in the space of “Neither.” That is, Beckett portrays his elderly characters as embodying the space between inner shadow and outer shadow as they flicker between impenetrable self and impenetrable unself.

In his most radical examples of this split between body and consciousness, Beckett depicts the corporeal body in terms of fragments—a headspace, lips, a body half subsumed in earth. This fragmentation gestures toward an excising of the consciousness from the old diminished body. The old character is shown as impaired, confined, and weary of “revolving it all.”² In some cases, the split between self and “unself” is staged through images of intersubjective identification, such as the woman in *Rockaby* sitting in the chair of her dead mother or the mirror image of the Listener and Reader in *Ohio Impromptu*. The metaphysical detachment of the subjective self from the corporeal prison

² Spoken in *Footfalls* by the voice of May’s mother.

of the old body is a form of birth—an existential freedom—that allows consciousness to be expelled from the body, taking on a life beyond the confines of its physical origins. It is only through this rupture that the Beckettian figure may be born anew (renewing or echoing the embryonic self) while the physical body, or what remains of it, lingers astride the grave.

By making the cognitive release a consequence (or reward) of physical fragmentation, Beckett untethers thought and language from its subjective moorings and allows for the release of a stream of consciousness. Mouth is the very hole within which the embryonic self exists: the thing that is born astride the grave of fragmented physicality, the pent-up consciousness that is pushed out, blurted, birthed into the ether. Beckett complicates his illustrations of subjectivity in relation to the aged body by leaving out, or leaving absent, the manifold ramifications that such dispersal suggests for consciousness—opting always to go with the space of “Neither.” In *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama*, Stanton B. Garner, Jr. examines Beckett’s portrayals of subjectivity and finds ambiguous implications for the Beckettian body and consciousness:

Fragmented, dehumanized by shapeless cloaks and robes, spatially restricted, the Beckettian body is drawn toward invisibility and statuary immobility. Yet together these poles represent—like the idea of ending—one of the “not quite” points of Beckett’s world: that freedom from the body for which consciousness yearns but which it never attains. On the

threshold of the body's disappearance into nothingness or its reversion to pure matter, there are stirrings still. (37)

The stirrings that still remain are the trace of being, and the energy that remains may be viewed as a form of birth. Beckett illustrates dispersal of consciousness in the penultimate moment in *Catastrophe*. Protagonist's moment of escape occurs despite his physical subjugation. He gazes outward in a way that suggests that out is where he is propelling himself—his body is trapped upon the stage, but his mind is projected outward, cast toward a spectatorship of emptiness, toward the ultimate curtain call. He reappropriates his own subjectivity through his directed gaze, exemplifying the freedom inherent in projecting consciousness from the confines of a deteriorating physicality. Other such depictions throughout Beckett's works present the aged body as representative of the decrepitude and carcerality of the human condition. The release of subjectivity allows for the fragmentation that Beckett posits as the antithesis of externally wrought control; it is the space of freedom, of birth astride the grave. We see an example of this in the last play Beckett wrote before his death. Beckett jests at the end of *What Where* through the Voice of Bam, challenging the spectator: "Make sense who may" (504). In a form of split-consciousness, Voice of Bam is separate from the character Bam, who is presented on stage in bodied form. Bam appears old, with long grey hair. He has four mirror-image counterparts. A clue to Beckett's injection of his birth astride of a grave ethos in this play rests in the dialogue—after all four of Bam's mirror-image counterparts are tortured—given "the works"—and only Bam remains. The Voice of Bam reverberates from without: "Time passes. In the end I appear. Reappear" (504). Bam

reappears at this cue, presumably for his turn at getting “the works.” Of interest here is that Beckett writes “reappearance” as something happening “in the end” and follows this by the Voice of Bam announcing “Good. I am alone” (504) while his bodied self remains on stage. This hints at renewal as the split pair have reunified—reappearing in the end. The impenetrable “self” of Bam has gone “to and fro in shadow” throughout the entire play, split from the “unself” that is Voice of Bam, but in the end they reconverge, like atoms split to give birth to a new existence. Yet, the reunified Bam is alone as the counterparts could not be revived after their turns at being tortured. They were the last five, but now Bam is the last one and he is old. The reunification of the Bams can be viewed as a form of rebirth, but because Bam is the last, even this renewal signals his demise, and in this way Beckett tucks a thread of ‘birth astride of a grave’ almost imperceptibly into *What Where*.

The existence of Beckett’s characters is mediated through dichotomies of self and other. Their worlds consist of repetitions, habits, and rituals, and the inaction of these characters allows them to be subjectified and manipulated. Often, the agents that contain, restrict, or govern Beckett’s characters are unknown. Neither the characters nor the spectators are offered any explanation for the states under which the characters exist. I utilize the term *subjectivity* in the sense that Beckett presents subjectivity as a predicament of external influences upon self-consciousness, memory, and the ways in which his characters store and express their memory. Aged bodies are vulnerable in ways that influence and even restructure aspects of their subjectivity. Most often, subjectivity is defined through the inward turn—the interpretation of “self” as a reflection on the self-

conscious. However, in a Sartrean sense, subjectivity is also a volatile state of being that is influenced by ‘Others.’ Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* (1943) illustrates this by recounting the visual apprehension of an Other:

I am in a public park. Not far away there is a lawn and along the edge of that lawn there are benches. A man passes by those benches. I see this man; I apprehend him as an object and at the same time as a man. What does this signify? What do I mean that this object *is a man*? [...] We are dealing with a relation which is without *parts*, given at one stroke, inside of which there unfolds a spatiality which is not *my* spatiality; for instead of a grouping *toward me* of the objects, there is now an orientation *which flees from me*. (341-42)

Sartre casts the human gaze as a paralyzing, objectifying exchange. As the encounter he described suggests, Sartre sees the objectifying gaze of the ‘Other’ as *acting*. The gaze performs a role; it is active, malleable, and it is something that is always already internalized by the subject. In this way, the consciousness of the observer organizes, displaces, and objectifies the subject. The ways in which consciousness imposes itself upon the observed disrupts the sanctity of subjectivity. In strictly Sartrean terms, the observed retains an identity, but once viewed by an Other that identity is mediated, reflected, and imposed upon. The observed individual becomes an object that is interpreted by another. Once caught in the gaze of the Other, the observed becomes a subject whose consciousness and existence can *only* be apprehended and reappropriated with significations that are anticipated, however momentarily, by that Other.

Sartrean interpretations of the objectifying gaze notwithstanding, Garner reads Beckett's use of subjectivity through Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body, illustrating the performative consequences of alienation from self for Beckett's characters:

Beckett's drama explores the instability between a profound material inherence in the physical body and a corresponding alienation, and it dramatizes the subject's futile pursuit of any means for overcoming its own noncoincidence. The diminished figures of late Beckett (like Mouth), seemingly abstracted from the conditions of materiality and embodiment, continue to play out this fearful ambiguity of corporeal self-presence, the urgent flight from a subjectivity that represents the impossibility of its own identity. (31)

While Garner does not invoke agedness as inviting specific dilemmas in Beckett's depictions of subjectivity, the point of intersection between alienation of body from consciousness that he mentions—the ambiguities of self-presence juxtaposed against the impossibility of self-identity—relates to the ways in which agedness is performed in Beckett's works. The very nature of performativity requires a state wherein the spectator apprehends and reappropriates performance. That is, each spectator apprehends the performance differently, assigning meanings; therefore, performance is always reappropriated through individual interpretations. Assigning meanings for aged characters presents more complication in a general sense. What does it mean to perform oldness? For Beckett's aged characters, the complexities increase. Consider what it

means for the woman in *Rockaby* or the Listener/Reader dyad in *Ohio Impromptu* to perform oldness as an intersubjective state. How is oldness a state of engagement or performance for a consciousness that has been split from its subjective self as we see in *Not I*?

Simone de Beauvoir examines subjectivity as it relates to self-perception in old age. She finds that there are points of disconnect in the performance of perception of “self” when the “self” become old. She writes, “Old age is particularly difficult to assume because we have always regarded it as something alien, a foreign species: ‘Can I have become a different being while I still remain myself?’” (283). Beckett’s old characters demonstrate the complexities of perceivedness that Beauvoir mentions, but Beckett allows for individuals who do not exhibit wholly as “selves,” and this is particularly evident in the relationships between body-as-self and consciousness-as-self dichotomies that complicate the subjectivities of his elderly characters with ambiguous subject/object delineations.

Despite their lack of a coherent identity or selfhood, Beckett’s characters seem always aware of an observing Other. These characters endure the perils of both externally-wrought and internally-comported instances of subjectivity—moments in which this observing Other simultaneously defines and apprehends a character, leaving him/her powerless to thwart the subjectifying gaze. In Beckett’s dramatic works, this condition of subjectivity is amplified by the closed systems of the *mise en scene*. The very landscapes within which Beckett’s characters operate leave them vulnerable to surveillance, objectification, and even self-regulation. Examples from contemporary

studies on surveillance and identity confirm the complex nature of subjectivity. In *Surveillance and Identity: Discourse, Subjectivity and the State*, David Barnard-Wills finds that in the constitution of surveilled subjectivity, “Meanings are never fully complete and settled, and this creates a decentered subject—an identity which is nothing but those identities conferred by culture (through language and other systems of meaning) but an identity that is incomplete and lacking—because those structures themselves are incomplete” (128). Beckett presents subjectivity as a predicament of external influences upon self-consciousness. That is, subjectivity is not simply a performance of selfdom—it is a feature of existence that is modified by external sources and the performance of Others which results in willing, enthusiastic self-regulation.

Chapter One examines the history of Beckett’s staging of the body. I argue that Beckett’s preoccupations with subjectivity show a deepening interest in staging the interior registers of age. In order to demonstrate this, I survey the plays themselves and analyze the ways in which Beckett’s illustrations of age demonstrate preoccupations with embodiment. The purpose of this chapter, however, is not just to engage with Beckett’s illustrations of age across his dramatic works but to identify points of intersection between his textual depictions of age and the transformations in Beckett’s theatrical staging techniques, his experimentation with acoustic staging of the aged body through the use of radio, and his applications of innovations in the mediums in cinema and television.

As the first chapter reads age to examine developments in Beckett’s staging of the body, in Chapter Two I examine the ways in which Beckett reappropriates the processes

of age for use in his theater. In much of Beckett's theater, age is depicted as a condition of the corporeal body. Therefore, I look to Beckett's use of entropy and stasis to examine how the systems of the aging body evolve in Beckett's theater. Entropy is the method by which Beckett initiates the falling away of body that so marks his late theater. Entropy is what allows Beckett to stage the "reversion to pure matter" and the "stirrings still" that Garner identifies in his drama. Beckett's illustrations of "stirrings still" occupy that space of "Neither" he so eloquently described, between impenetrable self and impenetrable unself—the "Neither" is dictated by the conditions of entropy, as energy is neither created nor destroyed. As such, I contend that the reversion to pure matter is the nexus of the Beckettian figure's expulsion of consciousness. That which remains—the trace—vibrates still, stirring still, as the cognitive energy disperses into its space of equilibrium.

I explore the entropy of aged body in terms of its decomposition and relation to the stage image in Chapter Three. Here, I focus on Beckett's use of puppet-like characters, which he constrains to deeply regulated movements. The confined movements mirror the diminishment of the body and signals the inward turn. As such, the old characters begin to operate in interiorities. These closed spaces are the systems that frame the entropy of age as the body moves toward decomposition. I utilize *Come and Go*, *Footfalls*, and *Catastrophe* as examples of the ways in which Beckett illustrates decomposition of the aging body through its objectification and interiority and its exploration of how aging characters are seen by other characters and the audience. I relate the constrained or repetitive automatized movements in *Come and Go* and *Footfalls* and the marionette-like stillness of the Protagonist in *Catastrophe* to

subjectivity and demonstrate how these constructs inform our understanding of how Beckett employs age in his late theater.

In Chapter Four, I examine this untethering of self by tracing the ways in which Beckett illustrates memory as a form of dehiscence. Beckett invokes the term “dehiscence” several times throughout his career as writer to describe the dislocation of mind from body. This rendering of memory from the body allows for a preservation of the self—or the trace of the self—after entropy and decomposition have begun to ravage the body. I argue that Beckett employs dehiscence as the foundational principle in his renderings of age that include some form of prosthetic memory. I use the term “prosthetic memory” in reference to plays in which the memory of the aged figure is stored beyond the confines of the body or expressed through some external device. To demonstrate this, I examine *Krapp’s Last Tape*, *Not I*, and *Rockaby*. Krapp’s tape recorder may be the clearest example of Beckett’s invocation of a prosthetic device to maintain and re-deliver memories, while the woman in *Rockaby* listens to a recorded narrative, which Beckett indicates should be that of her own voice. The recording speaks of her mother’s passing and the woman’s reaction to that loss, which is to take up her mother’s place in the rocker. In *Not I* dehiscence is expressed through the disembodied Mouth’s interactions with a dark clad Auditor. I argue that Mouth’s refusal to acknowledge the first-person and thereby her rejection of her memories is an example of dehiscence.

While my reading of age in Beckett’s dramatic works is interdisciplinary in scope as it engages with non-literary fields such as gerontology and chemistry, the focus of this dissertation is to expand discourses and approaches in Beckett studies. There are few

relatively untapped avenues of study in the Beckett canon, and excellent scholarship has invested the field with a wealth of biographical, critical, and archival approaches to Beckett's works. However, age is the undiscovered country in Beckett studies. This dissertation seeks to call attention to a conversation that deserves more voices. Beckett wrote age into the majority of his works for a reason: his depictions of age, in other words, are not coincidences or afterthoughts. Age in Beckett's corpus is too pervasive to be viewed as anything less than a core preoccupation of his theater and a primary attribute of his works. Beckett's invocations of age are three-dimensional and live upon the stage. While he was genuinely interested in Marionette Theater, Beckett chose actors-in-the flesh to portray his most radically doll-like old characters. Perhaps this is because Beckett's project is always invested in the human condition and old humans are better interpreters for the metaphysicality of his theater. Without the aging body, Beckett's theater would not evolve into the radical presentments of fragmented subjectivity and disembodied consciousness of his later plays. As such, age is a condition of Beckett's dramatic works—it is the catastrophe that gives his theater its deepest resonance.

CHAPTER I Staging the Body: The Evolution of Age in Beckett's Dramatic Works

In “Does Beckett Studies Require a Subject? Mourning Ireland in the *Texts for Nothing*,” Seán Kennedy examines the tendency in Beckett studies to reject historicizing Beckett’s works. Kennedy questions how much is being overlooked when scholarship avoids reading Beckett through the lens of history or politics. He notes the inroads made by Eoin O’Brien’s book *The Beckett Country: Samuel Beckett’s Ireland*, but he wonders how the willingness of Beckett scholars to acknowledge the significance of Ireland while eschewing history or politics impacts the readings of memory and nostalgia in Beckett’s work. This brings Kennedy to consider “Why, having left Ireland, did Beckett return there in his writing with such regularity, and how can we marry this to Ackerly and Gontarski’s claim that Ireland “disappears” as a vital concern from the later works” (12). When he asks, “What do Beckett studies renounce if they renounce history/memory?” Kennedy arrives at a dilemma: “Does Beckett studies require a subject? And does that subject require a politics?” (25). Kennedy is not breaking entirely new ground in “making a case for a historicized reading of Beckett’s work” (25). However, Kennedy is calling attention to the gaps that result when entire areas of research go underrepresented or are met with resistance. While my study does not take up Kennedy’s challenge to read Beckett’s works through the lens of history, by conducting a reading that focuses on age in Beckett’s dramatic works, it does venture into an area of discourse on Beckett’s literary corpus that has received little attention by scholars. This is not to suggest that

there is palpable resistance to readings of age in Beckett's drama. While there have been a few readings of age in Beckett studies, they do not inspire the same skeptical reception Kennedy points to for readings of history and politics. That said, the lack of scholarship on the aged figure or aging subject in Samuel Beckett's works is conspicuous.

Like Kennedy, I invoke history, to a degree, in making my case for deeper scholarly attention to age in Beckett's works. However, my approach to acknowledging history in Beckett's drama is not meant in the same context as Kennedy's. In this chapter, I contend that the body as staged in Beckett's drama has its own history—physical and psychological—and that Beckett's staging of the body has its own historical development. In order to show the centrality of age to Beckett's thinking, I trace its textual development across his dramatic corpus. Beckett's fascination with old people is readily apparent in his theater. Beckett published thirty-two plays for stage, radio, or film in his lifetime and in twenty-three of these plays he specifies attributes of agedness or old age in his character descriptions or in the dialogue. However, it is not enough to identify age in Beckett's works for the sake of demonstrating the prominence of age in Beckett's corpus. The case for age in Beckett studies must arrive at an answer to any who ignore Beckett's engagement with age by responding with the dismissive challenge: *So what?*

Beckett's illustrations of age are there for a reason: his use of age is doing *something*, and there is intentionality in Beckett's focus upon the aged body. Failing to engage with his portrayals of age disregards a foundational component of his works, and it ignores a thread of discourse that appears throughout his corpus. Kennedy's call for scholars to acknowledge history and politics carries implications for expanding analysis

of Beckett's works from myriad disciplinary approaches. If, as Kennedy posits, Beckett studies requires a subject that acknowledges history, the evolution of how Beckett stages the body is worthy of its own historical consideration. The aged figure is the subject that Beckett returns to most frequently across his career. Therefore, expansive readings of age in Beckett's works are long overdue. As this chapter demonstrates, the old are omnipresent in Beckett's dramatic works, and elderly characters dominate his most radical experiments in staging the body.

I look to Beckett's theater to quantify why reading age in Beckett studies matters. *Eluthéria* was not published or produced while Beckett was alive, but if we count his depictions of age in that play as well, age is a dominant feature in twenty-four of his plays. This chapter reads age as fundamental to Beckett's staging of the body. In *Aging and its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions*, Kathleen Woodward refers to a "phenomenology of the lived body," which is, at its foundations, a phenomenology of "the old, dying body" (133). Beckett's drama, as a number of scholars have argued, is deeply aware of the theater as corporeal space—and in his theater this corporeal space is that of "the old, dying body." The old are presented in Beckett's theater in ways that convey the tensions and spaces of disconnect between the body and the consciousness.

Age is the locus from which Beckett portrays the futility of embodiment, which is always a space that resists control. The body is an uncertain space: while it is the vessel where conscious self dwells, the body remains the site of dissatisfaction, longing, denial, frustration, incomprehensible change, and the terror of loss. Beckett's staging of age

responds to the limitations of the body by framing corporeality in terms of absence. There is always something missing in Beckett's old people.

While his early theater explores such absence in terms of whole bodies enduring some level of diminishment, in Beckett's later theater the negations become more extensive. However, even in the "whole body like gone" of *Not I*, where consciousness is given primacy on the stage, the body is still represented, vibrant and aged, in the corporeal Mouth. In *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama*, Stanton B. Garner, Jr. discusses "the radical complications of corporeal self-presence that characterize Beckett's staging and the body" (29). With this in mind, any reading of the body as "lived" and "dying" in Beckett's works must also engage with the complications of reading the body as an object. As discussed in this project's Introduction, examples of age in Beckett's drama are always tied to impairment and confinement. I contend here, as I have in previous work on Beckett's use of confinement, that presenting the body in a confined state illustrates corporeal objectification. Here, I employ impairment and confinement of the aged body as a binary under which to explore the evolution in Beckett's use of age in his dramatic works. In Beckett's plays age can also be expressed as a transcendental state with streams of consciousness and ambiguous subjectivities. By way of displacing consciousness from the body, fragmenting the live body, and complicating embodied subjectivity with impairment and confinement, Beckett's depictions of age illustrate ontological interrogations of the human condition.

The correlations between age, impairment, and confinement in Beckett's theater are most clear when looking at the ways in which depictions of the body evolve across

his career as a dramatist. In the chapters that follow, this project explores different frameworks with which Beckett's drama stages age. I detail entropy as a process of age that is evident in Beckett's early theater and as a construct that informs his illustrations of age throughout his dramatic corpus. Once I establish entropy is an underlying element in Beckett's depictions of age, I examine its relationship to the decomposition of the aging body as it is staged in Beckett's later plays. Finally, I analyze Beckett's staging of old characters responding to the entropy and decomposition of age through examples of prosthetic memory. While this chapter takes these lenses from which to view age in Beckett's work into account, its primary focus is to trace the range of Beckett's representations of age throughout his career as a dramatist. The chapter is organized in subsections which group plays together in accordance to their methods, mediums, or tropes used in illustrating the body. The first section explores Beckett's implementation of the concept of birth astride of a grave in *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Happy Days*. The second section examines the use of denial by the aged characters in *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Not I*, and *A Piece of Monologue*. The third section analyzes the depictions of acoustic aging in the radio plays *All That Fall* and *Embers*. The fourth section takes up the use of ensemble in the radio plays *The Old Tune*, *Words and Music*, and *Cascando*. In the fifth section, I examine Beckett's turn to the medium of film for cinema and television and focus on how perceivedness is a preoccupation of the aged characters in *Film* and *Eh Joe*. The sixth section transitions to Beckett's late plays and the staging of consciousness in *Footfalls*, *That Time*, *Ghost Trio*, and *Nacht and Träume*. In the seventh section, I examine intersubjective longing in *Rockaby* and *Ohio Impromptu*. The final

section focuses on Beckett's late-stage theater, analyzing age in *Catastrophe* and *What Where*.

By conducting this survey of age across Beckett's entire dramatic corpus, this chapter seeks to identify how his preoccupations with the old body develop toward his increasing interest in staging the subjective registers of age and how these interests are advanced by his use of innovations such as cinema and television. In this way, this chapter demonstrates the degree to which age impacts the stylistic transformations in Beckett's staging of the body across his career. While these analytical briefs are in no way exhaustive, they provide context for viewing age in Beckett's drama. Because the list of works is extensive, I categorize plays in relation to their preoccupation with age.

The “Neither” regions: Astride of a grave in *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Happy Days*

Waiting for Godot

Chapter Two explores age in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* through a reading of stasis and entropy in the play. *Waiting for Godot* was written in French between 1948-1949 and published in 1952. Beckett's use of age in *Waiting for Godot* is subtle. While the play's dialogue suggests that Vladimir and Estragon are at least sixty years old, their age is also underscored by how the characters behave, react, and their mentions of pains and ailments. While I argue that the play posits age within a framework of stasis, that stasis is also indicative of each characters' position of confinement. For example, Lucky

is a veritable prisoner to Pozzo and while he may choose that position, he is treated as a slave. Pozzo complains that he is ready to sell Lucky at the fair despite his service of more than sixty years (26). Because Lucky's age is mentioned, it suggests that his position of confinement—whether it is self-imposed or not—is made vulnerable because of his aging. Estragon's painful feet and the interruptions to his sleep add to his overall entrapment: he is beaten if he sleeps, or he believes he is beaten. His pain and exhaustion make him appear old, diminishing. The impairment of Pozzo and Lucky is most evident when they reappear in the second act, at which point Pozzo claims he has become blind and Lucky is now mute. Pozzo explains that Lucky is "Dumb. He can't even moan" (81).

Vladimir and Estragon are unable to advance beyond the confines that are imposed by the act of waiting. The reappearance of Pozzo and Lucky in the second act suggests that they, in their own way, are trapped within the circumference of the desolate landscape, destined to pass through at intervals. That Godot never materializes casts the named figure as an anti-presence on the stage and leaves the play's characters and spectators all waiting for Godot. Woodward looks at old age in terms of its stages, but in contrast to the Freudian examples of how the psyche is informed by a series of events, she finds that

In old age, by contrast, *nothing dramatic happens* for a long period of time, although of course we will commonly speak of a person having aged suddenly or overnight. Old age is more like a postmodern drama of interminable postponement, as we find it in *Waiting for Godot* and other Beckettian fictions, than it is like a Greek tragedy [...]. Aging in old age is

for the most part an infinitesimally incremental process of the addition of time. (38)

Beckett's attention to the ambiguities in the passage of time in *Waiting for Godot* is supplemented by his use of age and amplified by his use of impairment and confinement. The physical decline of Pozzo and Lucky, the aching feet and weariness of Estragon, or the tree changing while the characters stagnate in their waiting is indicative of the "nothing dramatic happening" of age, as Woodward demonstrates. In this way, the waiting of the aged and impaired characters in *Waiting for Godot* stands in itself as a form of confinement. Beckett stages the old body within spaces of postponement again in *Endgame* and also in *Happy Days*. The old body in these plays must hover in the "waiting" of entropy and stasis—the impenetrable spaces between self and unself—in vacuums of "neither" from which they cannot escape even if they wish to go.

Endgame

Beckett wrote *Endgame* in French as *Fin de Partie* between 1953-1957. The first performance of the play was in French at the Royal Court Theatre, London. Beckett translated the play into English in 1957, and it was performed at the Cherry Lane Theater, New York in 1958. While Chapter Two details how the entropy consistent with age is expressed in *Endgame*, here I address age in *Endgame* in terms of its depictions of impaired and confined old people. Each of the characters in *Endgame* is physically impaired. The two most elderly figures, Nell and Nagg, are double-leg amputees who are stored in trash cans. Hamm—the play's central character—is old, blind, and confined to

a wheelchair. Clov is Hamm's ward and the attendant for the older, more impaired characters in their dwelling. While Clov is the youngest in the play, he is hampered by a limp and cannot bend enough to sit. Clov's movements, his demeanor, and his loss of hope all function in ways that age him. By keeping his characters impaired and confined in *Endgame*, Beckett interrogates what it means to grow old in an apocalyptic world. Here, the old body is staged as the "fallout" of humanity: the old body in *Endgame* waits to perish, neither part of the world outside the dwelling nor able to thrive inside its walls. The old in *Endgame* are the epicenter of "neither," as demonstrated by Hamm's position at center stage, where he presides over a game that is never his to win. He lives as neither mobile nor completely stationary with his impaired, blind body caught wheeling through days that he cannot navigate without Clov. His elderly parents dwell in the trashcan — nature has thrown them away. In "Trying to Understand *Endgame*," Theodor Adorno aligns the world of *Endgame* with The Second World War (244). He calls the elderly Nell and Nagg "emblems of the culture rebuilt after Auschwitz" (267). Whether Beckett intends the spectator to view the bleak world, impairment, and confinement of the old people in *Waiting for Godot* as informed by the Holocaust is debatable. However, what is evident is that he wants the spectator to recognize that they are seeing old people. This specularly of the aging body—placing the aged in containers, holding them in place, and constraining their movements with impairments juxtaposes the natural condition of growing old against a backdrop of despair.

The intentionality with which Beckett illustrates agedness invites commentary on the vulnerabilities of growing old in a world that leaves nothing for the aged. Aged and

aging characters in *Endgame* are presented in terms of existential ambiguity—they are alive but they are not really living. This is exemplified in Clov’s contention that he sees a young boy outside of the shelter where they *dwell*. Hamm comments, “If he exists he’ll die or he’ll come here” (149). However, if the boy does exist, he has successfully existed outside of the shelter; therefore, perhaps he *can* exist. Perhaps youth can be supported by the world of *Endgame* while old age cannot. A scenario where the boy finds the world survivable ‘without’ the shelter seems possible given Hamm’s uncertainty: “And if he doesn’t...” (149). Indeed, life beyond the quadrangle of old people in the shelter is mentioned throughout the play—a flea, a rat—but Nell appears to have died before the play’s end. Whether life can exist outside of the shelter does not matter to the four characters in *Endgame* inasmuch as “Nature has forgotten us” (99). If nature is the agent that causes aging but refuses to support the four aging away in the shelter, the apocalyptic ‘event’ of *Endgame* may, in fact, be the condition of growing old.

Happy Days

Happy Days, which was written in English, premiered at the Cherry Lane Theater, New York, September 17, 1961. The play opens with Winnie, a woman of “*about fifty*,” buried to her waist in a mound of earth. *Happy Days* invokes confinement, not just via the implanted status of protagonist Winnie but also by the sounding of bells that ring “*piercingly*” to indicate that she should wake or sleep. Because Winnie suffers the confinement of her physical body, she focuses on what she still has: “I have not lost my reason,” Winnie insists, adding, “Not yet. [*Pause.*] Not all. [*Pause.*] Some remains”

(302). That “some remains” suggests that Winnie feels herself slipping cognitively as she continues to slide deeper into her living grave of earth. However, what remains is also deteriorating. For example, Winnie frets over what parts of her are next to go:

blind next—[*takes off spectacles*]—ah well—[*lays down spectacles*]—seen enough—[*feels in bodice for handkerchief*]—I suppose—[*takes out folded handkerchief*]—by now—[*shakes out handkerchief*]—what are those wonderful lines—[*wipes one eye*]—woe woe is me —[*wipes the other*]—to see what I see—[*looks for spectacles*]—ah yes—[*takes up spectacles*]—wouldn’t miss it—[*starts polishing spectacles, breathing on lenses*]—or would I? (277)

Winnie’s question as to what she would miss carries two meanings. She ponders whether she would miss seeing in a general sense, but more directly, her contention is that she would not miss seeing the “holy light” (277) that beams so brightly above her.

Winnie’s day consists of rummaging through her shopping variety bag in order to maintain what is left of herself. She dabs on lipstick, checks her face in the mirror, and quips that she sees “no change” and experiences “no pain,” at least “hardly any” (276). While she goes about her day, the fact that she is aging is not lost on her: “Old things. [*Pause.*] Old eyes. [*Long pause.*] On, Winnie” (278). Everything is “running out” (278), including her supplies. The reduction in her tube of lipstick becomes a metaphor for the subsumation of Winnie’s life, where she has convinced herself that she “Mushn’t complain” and embraces her “fleeting joys” (278). The fear of loss plays out most succinctly for Winnie in her anxiety over something befalling Willie, her partner who

rarely speaks and refuses to smile at her (281). She tells him, “Would I had let you sleep on” (282) after waking him because she cannot stand being alone. S. E. Gontarski considers Winnie’s psychological need for Willie, who does not do much for her, in terms of the phenomenology espoused by Jean Paul Sartre, Hegel, C.G. Jung, W.B. Yeats, Edmund Husserl and Jacques Lacan that address “the need for the other, another, for validation” (69). A common thread between all of these thinkers is the concept that the validation of the self is informed by the objectification of the other. However, Gontarski defers to the play’s many revisions, taking into account the shifting valuations of the self/other dichotomy in the relationship between Winnie and Willie: “The pseudocouple and the theme of validation are more central to Beckett’s initial efforts with *Happy Days* than to the final version, but they are formative, and, even diminished they form an essential element of the play” (70). Perhaps Winnie’s fate—the fact that in her fifties she must age-in-place until the earth swallows her whole—decentralizes the Winnie/Willie relationship. Willie is in his sixties, but he is not buried. Together the couple frame the impenetrability of facing age individually while still existing as couple; each body ages in ways that the other cannot experience.

In the second act, Winnie is buried to her neck in the earth and Willie is not visible, but Winnie’s revolver sits before her on her mound of earth. Gontarski notes, “We are confronted with her physical deterioration” (89). Winnie questions her own physicality: “Does anything remain? [*Pause.*] Any remains? [*Pause.*] No?” (*HD* 306). Beckett leaves Winnie to endure the stasis that will, inevitably, swallow her up. While her entrapment aligns with confinement and stasis, her loss of function as she is drawn

deeper into the earth is also indicative of entropy. Despite Winnie's attempts to adapt to her confinement, much like Hamm in *Endgame*, she has no real control. The past is invoked in Winnie's closing words. Unable to choose between oblivion and a desire for reparation, she quips, "pray your old prayer, Winnie" (*HD* 297). Winnie's confinement is drastic. By burying her ever deeper, Beckett frames her as the middle-aged woman who is becoming increasingly invisible. Winnie is the embodiment of the impenetrable self and impenetrable unself. There are parts of her body that she cannot access; they have become spaces of unself within the impenetrable earth. Neither wholly visible nor is she completely invisible, she can be seen, but never fully. Even Willie seems to not always see her.

The terror for Winnie is not that she is aging but, rather, that she is disappearing as she ages. While Willie is the less robust in terms of personality of the "pseudocouple," it is Winnie whose viability is impaired by her subsumation into the earth. Willie is more dapper in appearance, despite his inadequacies, but Winnie is left to the grave. In *The Coming of Age* Simone de Beauvoir considers the differences in how men and women age in terms of fertility:

In women, the reproductive function is suddenly interrupted at a comparatively early age. The phenomenon is unique in the aging process, which in every other respect is a continuous development; and it takes place at about fifty with the menopause—the abrupt termination of the ovarian cycle and of menstruation. (26)

The only potential for fertility for Winnie, who Beckett specifies is over fifty, is through her ultimate decay. She and Willie are childless and Winnie's chances at procreation are over. As such, she is rendered defunct, useless, a post-menopausal woman left to endure the expiration of her fertility. Winnie can remember the promise of her wedding day—"The pink fizz" and "The flute glasses"—as she passes out of reproductive possibility and into her "Black night without end" (305). Her song near the play's end is one of love:

Though I say not
What I may not
Let you hear,
Yet the swaying
Dance is saying,
Love me dear! (307)

Despite her confinement, though, Winnie remains more robust than Willie in the end. The crushing weight of earth traps Winnie, but it does not silence her voice. For Willie, the state of having "old wits" renders him incapable of coherent speech or significant movement. The play ends with Winnie smiling at Willie as he peers back, having lifted himself up upon his hands and knees until "*Smile off. They look at each other. Long pause.*" (308). The "long pause" while a stage direction, may also be read as an allusion to menopause, the permanent cessation of reproductive viability for a woman, the ultimate physiological intersection between youthful vigor and the time when a woman is marked as having undergone the "change of life" that makes her old.

The stages of disowning: The old in denial: *Krapp's Last Tape, Not I, A Piece of Monologue*

Krapp's Last Tape

Written in English, *Krapp's Last Tape* was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on October 28, 1958. Chapter Four of this dissertation explores age as it relates to memory in *Krapp's Last Tape*. The play's title character utilizes his tape recorder to hear his own younger voice recounting snippets of his past. His "spools" of tape stand in for the Krapp that is no longer there. In terms of confinement, the tapes themselves contain Krapp to some degree as they hold the verbal accounts of Krapp in his youth. The use of taped narrative frames the staged figure of Krapp—now in his sixties—as aging and contemplative of his youth. Krapp's body is addled by age; his digestion is hampered by his continual ingestion of bananas, which constipate him. His confinement is self-inflicted by way of his recorded self, leaving the elderly Krapp a bystander to his own history, a captive audience in the prison of his own memories. The dualities between Krapp and his tapes create what Anthony Uhlmann refers to as "an anti-relationship" or a "disconnection of self from self" (52). While Krapp is presented to the spectator as the "living body" and "the old dying" living body, his existence as an aged "self" is complicated by his attention to the young Krapp who remains perpetually inscribed upon his tapes. The old body is accentuated as old Krapp defers to his younger self. In this way, Beckett stages Krapp's body in terms of denial. Krapp's ingestion of the

bananas that cause him intestinal grief indicate that he himself denies the primacy of the body—opting instead to eat what sickens him while replaying his old memories, thus re-engaging his younger self as his old body suffers.

Not I

Written in English, *Not I* premiered at the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center, New York, November 27, 1972 as part of a Samuel Beckett Festival. In Chapter Two, I read age in *Not I* through an examination of how memory operates in the play. A pair of disembodied lips hovering above the contained space of the stage, the character Mouth is the image of fragmentation. Mouth is the ultimate example in Beckett's theater of a denying subject. As an aged character, Mouth is a study in contradictions. While Mouth is corporeally alive on the stage, her body-as-living is ambiguous—both presence and non-presence. While Beckett offers no indication of Mouth's age in his stage directions, in her narration Mouth states that "she" is around seventy years old (406). The staging of Mouth's body is a study in redaction. The character speaks of an event that leaves her "whole body like gone" (411). In her narrative Mouth claims "She was being punished for her sins" (406). She speaks of "that notion of punishment" (407) in terms of losing faith "in a merciful...[*Brief laugh.*]...God" (407). Mouth grapples with the notion of punishment throughout the play. Her confinement is her old, impaired physical body. Mouth's refusal to acknowledge herself in the first-person causes the spectator to ponder whether Mouth's narrative communicates self or Other. By refusing to acknowledge herself in her narrative, Mouth seeks to reject the old woman of whom she speaks.

A Piece of Monologue

Beckett started writing *A Piece of Monologue* in English around 1977. After abandoning the script several times, he finished it in 1979 for a production at the Annex of La Mama, ETC in New York that December. The opening line in *A Piece of Monologue* announces its focus on the elderly Speaker's march toward decay: "Birth was the death of him. Again. Words are few. Dying too. Birth was the death of him [...]" (454). This echoes Beckett's fascination with birth astride of a grave—a preoccupation in his vision of the body that is mentioned in *Waiting for Godot* and in the radio play *All That Fall*. In *A Piece of Monologue*, the white-haired character appears quite old, and he speaks, like Mouth in *Not I*, through a stream-of-consciousness in the third person that denies his "self" in his narrative. He tells of a man that lived too long, to the point where he has outlived all of his family.

The play's narrative frames the old man in terms of denial. When he speaks of attending so many funerals, always in the third person, he uses the word "almost" to describe those he has buried: "So ghastly grinning on. From funeral to funeral. To now. Two and a half billion seconds. Hard to believe so few. From funeral to funeral. Funerals of...he all but said of loved ones. Thirty thousand nights (454). The arithmetic tells us that Speaker, who does not identify himself as the subject of his narrative, is about eighty-two years old. The old man speaks of forgetting the names of those he loved: "[He] Could once name them all" but that is no longer the case: "Not now. Forgotten" (454). By rejecting first person, Speaker can deny the "self" and thereby deny his losses,

which are now forgotten. The graves of which he speaks contain nameless “almost” loved ones.

Speaker also rejects the light of day. He wakes at nightfall and stares out his window “Into black vast. Nothing there. Nothing stirring. That he can see. Hear. Dwells as if unable to move again. Or no will left to move again” (455). While his stoic watch at the widow may be self-inflicted confinement, the old man’s refusal to abandon his post suggests that he has no other options. He holds his silent vigil “Night after night the same,” waiting for the mockery of the dawn: “Birth. Then slow fade up of a faint form. Out of the dark” (455).

The narrative traces Speaker through repetitions of watching at his window to the rise and fall of the sun and moon. His memories are conveyed as those of funerals for “which loved one” he cannot remember. At the play’s *dénouement* Speaker resolves to finally join his loved ones after enduring “Thirty thousand nights of ghosts beyond. Beyond that black beyond. Ghost light. Ghost nights. Ghost rooms. Ghost graves. Ghost...he all but said Ghost loved ones” (458). At the culmination of his life it becomes clear that that death has followed Speaker from his birth: “The dead and gone. The dying and the going. From the word go. The world begone. Such as the light going now. Beginning to go” (458). The crisis for Speaker is one of identity. Having lost all of his “others,” he has lost those who would see him. This lack of “others” leaves Speaker in a predicament of objectification. He can look outside his window, but there is no one to return his gaze. In *Theatre on Trial: Samuel Beckett’s later drama* Anna McMullan explores the vulnerabilities of self in *That Time* and *A Piece of Monologue*. She writes:

The plays present a contrast between repeated attempts to produce, frame and perceive a visual image or narrative of the subject's existence, or lack of existence, and the dissolution of all stable frames and representations in silence or the word-flow of utterance. (47)

Existence for the subject must be understood in terms of the advanced age of the body that Beckett stages. Speaker is not just an old man of eighty-two; he is also obsessed with the grave: he stands contemplating graves and looking out his window toward the graves of his “almost” loved ones: “Birth the death of him. That nevoid smile. Thirty thousand nights”(456). Speaker's reference to a nevoid smile—“nevus” is associated with lesions— suggests that the subject of his monologue has some form of degeneration, possibly growths, or disease in the area of his mouth. Beckett does not reveal whose birth was the death of Speaker. Was it Speaker's own birth? The birth of a lost loved one— perhaps a child? His mother's death—which may have been in childbirth? The ambiguities mount in terms of reading the ways in which Speaker might quantify this birth/death binary. However, his third-person account places the lived body—the body as old, decaying—in opposition to the body he describes in his narrative. Age marks both incantations, that of the live Speaker on stage and also his descriptions of “him” who he refuses to name as himself. The dualities in the presentation of age in *A Piece of Monologue* extend the binary of impairment and confinement from a corporeal, old body, to a space of displacement—much like Beckett's treatment of age in *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Not I*—where the aged character exists in a space of denial. In these plays, age and

loss are rejected by the corporeal presence on stage and inscribed upon a nebulous third person.

The Sound of Age: Broadcasting the old body in *All That Fall* and *Embers*

All That Fall

Beckett turns to the medium of radio for *All That Fall*, which was broadcast by BBC Third Programme, January 13, 1957. Beckett's attention to agedness in his characterization of Mrs. Rooney is difficult to miss. According to Beckett's character description of her, she is around seventy years old. Every nuance of Mrs. Rooney, from her shuffling feet to her labored breathing, aligns her agedness with impairment. This early example of an aged figure in Beckett's drama foregrounds his treatment of agedness in his later works, where age always carries with it some instance of impairment. Mrs. Rooney's physical limitations are punctuated by bouts of emotional frailty that become evident as bits of memory interfere, audibly, with her train of thought. While Beckett wrote this play specifically for radio performance, its relation to the illustration of the old man in *Krapp's Last Tape*, written just a year later, is significant. Much like Krapp's tapes, Mrs. Rooney's bursts of memory are verbalized and presented to the spectator in an audible-only format. In keeping with Beckett's depictions of Krapp, in Mrs. Rooney's case, these snippets of recollection are compartmentalized separate from the active moment or even the character's present intention. She is portrayed as physically aged,

declining, and the memories that she regurgitates, much like Krapp's recordings, are those of her youth.

In his character descriptions Beckett indicates that Mrs. Rooney is "*in her seventies*" and that her husband, Dan, is blind. Despite the limitations of how the medium of radio can convey physicality, *All That Fall* pays close attention to the aging body. This is demonstrated each time Mrs. Rooney mentions her own agedness. For example, she complains, "Oh I am just a hysterical old hag I know, destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and church-going and fat and rheumatism and childlessness," adding, "Love, that is all I asked, a little love, daily, twice daily, fifty years of twice daily love like a Paris horse-butcher's regular, what normal woman wants affection?" (159). Her dragging feet and verbal gesticulations that pronounce her aches, pains, and physical limitations are expressed through her lamentations about aging: "What's wrong with me, what's wrong with me, never tranquil, seething out of my dirty old pelt, out of my skull, oh to be in atoms, in atoms!" (163). In Mrs. Rooney, Beckett illustrates an acoustic expression of age. This non-visual presentment of age foregrounds many of Beckett's later illustrations of age. For example, while Mouth is visible in *Not I*, age is not; textually present in Mouth's dialogue, it is not something seen by the spectator.

Beckett's attention to Mrs. Rooney as an aged, impaired character takes on deeper resonance as her recollections, her "bygones," continue and degrade into moments of uncertainty or forgetfulness: "I estrange them all. They come towards me, uninvited, bygones bygones, full of kindness, anxious to help...[*the voice breaks*]...genuinely pleased...to see me again...looking so well...[*Handkerchief.*] A few simple words...from

my heart...and I am all alone...once more..." (168). She reveals that she suffers "with heart and kidney trouble" (174) and is alarmed that her husband's train home has been delayed and fears he has missed it: "The misery I have endured to get here and he isn't on it!" (175). After Dan arrives, Mrs. Rooney asks him why the train was delayed, but he does not provide an answer. As they begin walking home, he asks, "Have you ever wanted to kill a child?" (179). That Dan asks this question suggests a disdain for youth and draws attention to age in the narrative. Dan is befuddled by his age, and his uncertainty is mirrored by Mrs. Rooney: "The loss of my sight was a great fillip. If I could go deaf and dumb I think I might pant on to be a hundred. Or have I done so? [Pause]. Was I a hundred today? [Pause.] Am I a hundred, Maddy?" (180). Dan's distaste for youth is affirmed when he gripes, "And the brats, the happy little healthy little howling neighbour's brats" (181). The disconnect between agedness and youth is underscored when Mrs. Rooney mentions the never-properly-born child described by Carl Jung in the Tavistock lecture that would become so enmeshed in Beckett's depictions of age:

I might remember his telling us the story of a little girl, very strange and unhappy in her ways and how he treated her unsuccessfully over a period of years and was finally obliged to give up the case [...] The trouble with her was she had never really been born!" (184).

The play culminates with the revelation that Dan's train had been delayed because a child fell from the carriage and onto the tracks "under the wheels," which leaves the spectator to ponder whether Mr. Rooney's distaste for the young and his irritation at being so old

that he feels “a hundred” led him to murder the child or the child’s death was merely an accident. While confinement for the old and impaired Rooneys may seem inconsequential at first glance, the fact that Dan feels trapped and that Mrs. Rooney’s mobility is constrained underscores how aging impacts their lives.

Embers

Beckett returned to radio as the medium for *Embers*, which he wrote in English. The play was first broadcast by the BBC Third Programme June 24, 1959. At the opening of the radio play the protagonist, Henry, stands with his “boots on a shingle” near the sea, where he reports that he is joined by the ghost of his father: “Who is beside me now? [Pause.] An old man, blind and foolish. [Pause.] My father, back from the dead, to be with me. [Pause.] As if he hadn’t died. [Pause.] No, simply back from the dead, to be with me, in this strange place” (198). Henry describes the sounds around him, telling the ghost of his blind father, “That sound you hear is the sea” (198). Henry’s narration implies that he is a writer: “I usen’t to need anyone, just to myself, stories, there was a great one about an old fellow called Bolton, I never finished it, I never finished any of them, I never finished anything” (198). Like Dan Rooney in *All That Fall*, Henry expresses a dislike of children, particularly his own daughter Addie: “horrid little creature, wish to God we’d never had her” (201). Henry’s age is not given, but agedness is suggested when he imagines conversations—particularly when he imagines the voice of Ada, who seems to be his lost love, speaking to him: “You shouldn’t be sitting on the cold stones, they’re bad for your growths” (202). That Henry suffers from “growths”

implies that he is both aged and impaired to some degree. As a writer, Henry himself tells of writing old characters. He imagines Bolton “in his old red dressing-gown” standing so close to a hearth that he “might go on fire any minute like when he was a child” (199). Henry’s fictional devolution of an aged man back to childhood sets the tone for the “embers” of the play, which signify that the fire of life is burning away, diminishing, leaving just the embers of what was or what might have been. Bolton is “an old man in great trouble” (199).

Beckett does not clarify whether the voice Henry hears is a memory of Ada or a delusion. However, Henry clearly believes himself to be old: “I thought I might try to get as far as the water’s edge. [*Pause. With a sigh.*] And back. [*Pause.*] Stretch my old bones” (205). Ada asks Henry, “And why life?” and “Is there anyone about?,” to which he admits “Not a living soul” (206). This implies that Henry has outlived his people, that he has no relatives left living, no friends, not a soul. Around the time he was writing *Embers*, Beckett voiced his own sense of connection between loneliness and age.

Knowlson writes:

Arland Ussher suggested in a letter to Beckett that he thought one of the main problems in life was how to “convert loneliness (the worst of conditions) into aloneness (which is the best).” Beckett replied: “What you say about loneliness and aloneness is very good (and true for some). From the former I suffered much as a boy, but not much in the last 30 years, bending over me in my old dying-bed where I found me early and the last words unending.” This distinction seemed clear-cut enough when etched

in such resonant phrases, but, in reality, he found it harder to decide precisely where aloneness ended and loneliness began. (396)

Henry's aloneness is echoed in his need to write stories: "Father! [*Pause. Agitated.*]
Stories, stories, years and years of stories, till the need came on me, for someone, to be with me, anyone, a stranger to talk to, imagine he hears me" (200). Beckett's own sorrow at losing his father may be echoed in Henry's obsession with his father's ghost: "I was trying to be with my father [...] I was trying to get him to be with me" (207). As Knowlson indicates, the loss of his father had a profound impact on Beckett: "Devastated by the loss of his father, Beckett could find no words to express his grief: 'I can't write about him, I can only walk the fields and climb the ditches after him'" (167). Despite Kennedy's appeal that scholars read history as a subject in Beckett's corpus, I would urge caution at reading too much of the biographical Beckett into his depictions of old people in his writings. While Beckett's illustrations of old people may reflect his own history with the aged or his own losses, the staged presentments of age in Beckett's drama always exist as abstractions that contrast the natural state with the meta-physical, what Antonin Artaud refers to in *The Theater and its Double* as an "unhabitual ideal" (90). Artaud insists that "the theater must pursue by all its means a reassertion not only of all aspects of the objective and descriptive external world, but of the internal world, that is, of man considered metaphysically" (92). In some ways, Henry's return to the sea and the shingle stand as his attempt to follow his metaphysical father—the one he remembers as a physical presence but who only exists now in Henry's memories: "He doesn't answer me anymore" (207). Henry's distress at being unable to locate the ghost of his father is

palpable. His father's life is another story that Henry cannot finish. Whether Beckett intends the play to reflect his own biographical history of age or the loss of his own father is debatable. Perhaps he does, although we would be taking great license with Beckett's writings to make any such assumptions.

Near the play's end Henry's thoughts drift between those of his father and his depictions of Bolton—the “grand old figure in his red dressing gown” (200). Henry's final monologue dictates a scene with Bolton and his fictional counterpart Holloway—both old men in “great trouble” as their world disintegrates into embers:

Then he suddenly strikes a match, Bolton does, lights a candle, catches it up above his head, walks over and looks Holloway full in the eye. [*Pause.*] Not a word, just the look, the old blue eye, very glassy, lids worn thin, lashes gone, whole thing swimming, and the candle shaking over his head. [*Pause.*] Tears? [*Pause. Long laugh.*] Good God no! [*Pause.*] Not a word, just the look, the old blue eye, Holloway: “If you want a shot say so and let me get the hell out of here.” [*Pause.*] “We've had this before, Bolton, don't ask me to go through it again.” [*Pause.*] Bolton: “Please! [*Pause.*] Please! [*Pause.*] Please, Holloway!” [*Pause.*] Candle shaking and guttering all over the place, lower now, old arm tired takes it in the other hand holds it high again, that's it, that was always it, night, and the embers cold, and the glim shaking in your old fist, saying, Please! Please! [*Pause.*] Begging [...]. (210)

Here, the image of the aging men is presented as a performative duality: Henry is giving the spectator his illustrations of Bolton and Holloway. In essence, Henry performs himself as an old man at the same time that he performs age through his depictions of Bolton and Holloway. In addition, we must recall that *Embers* is a play for radio; therefore, in having Henry converse with ghosts of his father and Ada—the voices in his head—and speak his unfinished story of Bolton and Holloway—the narrative in his head—frames his own agedness in acoustic dimensions. The aged body is staged through sound and dialogue.

While his father's ghost and Ada are specters in Henry's thought, when he describes Holloway's old eyes and Bolton's old arms, Henry reconstitutes the aged body as his primary focus. The fictional, unfinished old men frame Henry's own predicament of age: his inability or resistance to departing from the strictures of his head-space (his stories) and his deep yearning for those he has lost as states of the body as well as the mind. In this way, *Embers* prompts its spectators to listen to the body in terms of its acoustic staging while abstracting from those sounds how the body appears in physical terms. That is, in *Embers* Beckett invokes age, but he does so in acoustic terms, which broadcast the aged body as physical presence—creating what Garner refers to as a “bodied space.”

Ensembles of Age: Accompanying old bodies in *The Old Tune*, *Words and Music*, and *Cascando*

The Old Tune: An Adaptation

The Old Tune is an adaptation of the radio play *La Manivelle*, by Robert Pinget. In *The Old Tune* two elderly men, old friends, become reacquainted after encountering one another in a Dublin park. Their dialogue foregrounds a backdrop of noises from the street while “*in the foreground a barre-organ playing an old tune. 20 seconds. The mechanism jams. Thumps on the box to set it off again. No result*” (260). That the play opens with the failure of the instrument sets the pace for the dialogue between Gorman and Cream. These characters are described in the stage directions as each having an “*old man’s cracked voice*” and ailments of age such as breathlessness, missing front teeth: “*whistling sibilants due to ill-fitting denture*” (260). Gorman is seventy-three and Cream is seventy-six (263). They have just encountered each other after a separation of many years and the dialogue between them might best be categorized as an exchange of news. Catching up with one another, they speak of wives, children, and deaths. Gorman and Cream volley years and memories back and forth in their dialogue. The silences and faltering tune that accompanies the dialogue stages the old body through audio representations of memory loss:

Gorman: Ah the young nowadays Mr. Cream very wrapped up they are the young nowadays, no thought for the old. When you think, when you think...[*Suddenly complete silence. 10 seconds. The tune resumes, falters,*

stops. Silence. The street noises resume.] Where were we? [*Pause.*] Ah

yes the forces, you went in in 1900, 1900, 1902, am I right?

Cream: 1903, 1903, and you in 1906 was it?

Gorman: 1906 yes at Chatham.

Cream: The Gunners?

Gorman: The Foot, the Foot.

Cream: But the Foot wasn't at Chatham don't you remember, there it was the Gunners, you must have been at Caterham, Caterham, the Foot.

(263-264)

The debate about whether Gorman was at Chatham ends when Cream no longer presses the point and their discussion turns to criticisms about scientific progress. The two lament the ills of their lost world: a Dublin that no longer exists after succumbing to the modern dilemmas posed by divorce, lost opportunities, wars, and technological advancements they do not trust, such as making strides to colonize the moon.

The old men both speak of the frustrations of age. Cream hands his cigarettes to Gorman because he cannot get them to come loose out of their tight package. Cream complains, "Ah what ails me all bloody thumbs. Can you pick it up" (263). He also struggles with memory: "do you think I don't know Harrison's Oak Lodge there on the corner of dammit I'll forget my own name next and the square it'll come back to me" (264). When Cream mentions that Gorman's wife is "handsome," Gorman corrects him: "Handsome, all right, but you know, age" (267). While Gorman does not mention that he has any impairments outright and praises God for his health (267), in his stage directions

Beckett specifies that the character be constantly short of breath: “*frequent pauses for breath even in the middle of a word*” (260). He bums a cigarette off of Cream but admits, “the wife doesn’t like me to be smoking” (263). This suggests that Gorman may have a respiratory issue. Gorman mentions that rheumatism is “in the blood” (265) before launching into a memory of his mother: “When I think of my poor old mother and couldn’t move a muscle. [*Roar of engine.*] Rheumatism they never found the remedy for it yet, atom rockets is all they care about [...]” (265). The constant roar of the car engines, coupled with Gorman’s halting speech, contributes to Cream’s inability to hear what is being said. He protests, “The bloody cars such a thing as a quiet chat I ask you” (272).

Cream decries the misfortunes of progress: “The wisdom of the ancients that’s the trouble they don’t give a rap or a snap for it any more, and the world going to rack and ruin, wouldn’t it be better to go back to the old maxims and not be gallivanting off killing one another in China over the moon, ah, when I think of my poor father” (269). The play’s use of agedness coincides with its focus on loss and its skepticism of progress. While *The Old Tune* does not exemplify Beckett’s attention to innovation in his plays, it does express the uncertainties of aging in the vortex of modernity. Much of the world is no longer recognizable to Gorman and Cream, and even their memories lead them to uncertainties about the places they have known so well. They cannot surmount these changes and do not fully understand them. As such, the agedness of Gorman and Cream signals diminishment in *The Old Tune*. The world is evolving, but Gorman and Cream are trapped in their pasts and the old ways in which they view the world. The roaring engines

of progress do not wait for the old to catch up. The play ends with Cream searching for his cigarettes, not recalling that he handed his pack to Gorman. Gorman issues the last line of the play: “When you think, when you think....” (272). Immediately following, the scene drops to silence for ten seconds before the sounds of the street and the din of the old tune continue. Beckett writes: “*Tune finally rises above them triumphant.*” (272). While the emphasis on the old tune as the play goes to curtain suggests that old things still have a voice in the new Dublin, the fact that Cream and Gorman are silenced indicates that their voices will not persevere amidst progress. Their time is encapsulated in a song, forever confined to history.

Words and Music

Words and Music was written in English and first broadcast by the BBC on December 7, 1962. The play presents agedness through the illustration of an ensemble that includes narrative and music. Age is implied in the name “Croak,” which belongs to the character who prompts “Words” to narrate the “theme tonight...love” (334). The play contains several laments of age, which are all instigated by Croak. In the first, Words questions the meaning of love: “What? [*Pause. Very rhetorical.*] Is love the word? [*Pause. Do.*] Is soul the word? [*Pause. Do.*] Do we mean love when we say love? [*Pause.Pause. Do.*] Soul when we say soul?” (335). The questions inspire gesticulations of anguish from Croak: “My balms! [*Pause.*] Age. [*Pause.*]” (335). Once the word “age” is announced by Croak, the theme shifts entirely to age:

Croak: Age! [*Pause.*]

Words: [*faltering*] Age is...age is when...old age I mean...if that is what my Lord means...is when...if you're a man...were man...huddled...nodding...the ingle...waiting— [*Violent thump of club.*]
 Croak: Bob. [*Pause.*] Age. [*Pause. Violent thump of club.*] Age!
 Music: *Rap of baton. Age music, soon interrupted by violent thump.*
 (335-336)

The script does not specify what “age music” might sound like, but the theme of age continues in fits and starts. Words, it seems, is at a loss for words to adequately describe what age is to a man.

The challenge of trying to describe age evolves into somewhat of a quest for Words, who continues to riff upon words that might adequately express the theme of age:

Words: [*trying to sing*] Age is when...to a man...
 Music: *Improvement of above.*
 Words: [*trying to sing this*] Age is when to a man...
 Music: *Suggestion for the following.*
 Words: [*trying to sing this*] Huddled o'er...the ingle...[*Pause. Violent thump. Trying to sing.*] Waiting for the hag to put the...pan in the bed.
 (336)

Age is communicated in terms of confinement by Words, who describes an old man as “huddled” and “waiting for the hag” to arrive with the bedpan. This suggestion of incontinence is followed by a description of the hag bringing “arrowroot” and “the toddy” (336), items meant to alleviate discomfort to the aged man.

Words manages to describe what being old is, and he completes the lament to age in the form of a song, which leaves Croak to dwell on the image of the hag coming forth through the ashes: “[*murmur*] The face. [*Pause.*] The face. [*Pause.*] The face. [*Pause.*] The face” (337). Words continues the description with images of pain, lineaments, a pale figure “ravished away”(339), all made evident in “the clarity of silver” (338). Croak groans and cries a woman’s name: “[*anguished*] Lily!” (338) and protests: “[*anguished*] No!” (339) before Words commences:

—the brows uncloud, the lips part and the eyes...[*pause*]...the brows
uncloud, the nostrils dilate, the lips part and the eyes...[*pause*]...a little
colour comes back into the cheeks and the eyes...[*reverently*]...open.
[*Pause.*] Then down a little way...[*Pause. Change to poetic tone. Low.*]
Then down a little way
Through the trash
To where...towards where...[....]
[....] All dark no begging
No giving no words
No sense no need [...]. (339)

Words seems to be describing death—perhaps of Lily, although the passing of a wordless face “Down a little way / To whence one glimpse / Of that wellhead” could also be a vision of birth (340). Croak speaks no more as Words calls to him and then to Music: “Again. [*Pause. Imploring.*] Again!” Music relents: “*As before or only very slightly varied*” (340), and the final sound in the play is a “deep sigh” from Words.

Words' final song may outline death after "old age" or some element of birth, or it may refer to Lily's death in childbirth. However, while *Words and Music* focuses attention on the body as a sight of aging, the play also ponders existential questions of being and how states of being are defined. Words is helped by Music to interpret "love" and "age" as states of being. While love and age are proffered up as themes, the frustrations that Words encounters in defining these themes reflects a metatheatrical interrogation about how these elements of being will be performed. Words struggles over the theme of age, while he described the earlier theme of love with greater ease. Determining what words will be used to perform the theme of age vexes Words. The trouble with the theme of age for Words is indicative of what Benjamin Bennett refers to in *All Theater is Revolutionary Theater* as "Thinking through the postulate of imitation" (167). Words is seeking the correct words to sing about what age is to a man; however, since Words can *only* be words, his rendition of age must be imitation—his words are always removed from what they are describing. Bennett finds that thinking through imitation "produces logical difficulties that lead to an understanding of the fundamental constructedness of the human self" (167). While Words is not parsing meanings of each of the words he utters, Beckett portrays the character as making textual choices in order to illustrate what age is to a man.

Cascando

Beckett expands upon the ensemble construction of *Words and Music* with *Cascando*, which he wrote in French in 1960-1963. The first broadcast aired on French

Culture, April 3, 1963, and the play was translated into English in 1963. The dialogue between Music, Opener, and Voice suggests a stream of consciousness that anticipates the structure of *Not I*. Once Opener announces “I open” (344) at the start of the play, Voice implores: “[*low, panting*—story...if you could finish it...you could rest...sleep...not before...” (344). Voice follows this with “...no more stories...no more words...” (344). Voice speaks of struggling to find the story that will allow him to sleep: “I’ve got it...Woburn...I resume...a long life...already” (344). The reference to “a long life” invokes age; however, whether Voice is referring to his own “long life” or that of Woburn is ambiguous.

Opener opens and closes in ways that suggest the workings of an eye: “I open both” (344). While this suggests that Opener is “seeing,” he himself goes unseen: “They say, That is not his life, he does not live on that. They don’t see me, they don’t see what my life is, they don’t see what I live on, and they say, That is not his life, he does not live on that. [*Pause.*] I have lived on it...till I am old. Old enough. Listen” (347). The play oscillates between Voice’s Woburn story, injections of Music, and Opener’s bouts of opening and closing to “Listen.” Voice depicts the body in the story of Woburn, describing him as an aged man who needs the aid of a walking stick as he travels across a bank alongside a “faint sea” (344). However, Woburn, a figure of “huge bulk,” falls face-first in the mud along the dunes, and as he struggles to raise himself back up, he recalls “vague memory...in his head...of a cave” (345). But as Voice and Music “follow” Woburn, they declare that the stories are “all false” (348). Opener adds to the

uncertainties: “They say, It’s in his head. No. I open” (345). Later Opener expands on this denial:

It’s my life, I live on that. [*Pause.*] Correct. [*Pause.*] What do I open?

They say, He opens nothing, he has nothing to open, it’s in his head. They don’t see me, they don’t see what I do, they don’t see what I have, and they say, He opens nothing, he has nothing to open, it’s in his head. I don’t protest any more. I don’t say any more, there is nothing in my head. I don’t answer any more. I open and close. (346)

Opener may represent a part of Woburn, although the relationship is ambiguous. Opener asks “is that mine too?” before resolving, “I open. [*Pause.*] I am afraid to open. But I must open. So I open” (349). Voice responds, “—come on... Woburn... arms spread... same old coat [...]” (349), which seems to align Opener with Woburn.

Opener’s admission that he is afraid to open and his repeated contention that he is not being seen aligns with Friedrich Nietzsche’s contention in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals* that “fear of the void” is “a basic trait of the human will” (231). He writes, “Our will requires an aim; it would sooner have the void for its purpose than be void of purpose” (231). Woburn’s memory of a cave reflects Plato’s cave allegory, but Beckett invests the prisoner with more complexity. Woburn is the aging artist, the writer chained to the terror of not finishing and, thereby, of not being seen. Opener may represent an eye, or he may be the book itself—the space of the story—trapped inside the head of the aging writer—literally, a book that “they don’t see” because “He [the aging writer] opens nothing, he has nothing to open, it’s all in his head” (346). *Cascando*’s

ensemble seems disparate until we consider Voice, Music, and Opener as constituent parts in the telling of Woburn's unfinished story. The play's original title "Calando"—diminishing in tone—mirrors the play's relationship to the diminishment of age. Woburn's story culminates in him pushing out to sea: "—faster...out...driving out...rearing...plunging...heading nowhere...for the island...then no more [...]" (349). The play ends with Voice and Music clamoring together: "Finish...no more stories...sleep...we're there [...] don't let go Woburn...he clings...come on...come on—" (351). Whether Woburn lets go is left unanswered in the play. However, he does what Opener seems to resist in that Woburn exerts his will and, in the Nietzschean sense, the old hulking Woburn "has the void for [his] purpose."

"The agony of perceivedness": The old eye in *Film* and the inescapable self in *Eh Joe*

Film

Film was written in English in 1963. His only screenplay, *Film* remains Beckett's most image-conscious work. The play is written for the medium of film, and Beckett indicates in his stage directions that the protagonist O (object) is contending with E (eye). In his stage directions, Beckett calls for much attention to "perceivedness," with the qualifier: "Until the end of film O is perceived by E from behind" (372). While the protagonist's age is not given, Beckett describes him as having "Scant hair or bald" in order to call attention to the "narrow band of black elastic encircling his head" (376).

Although the script does not specify that the protagonist should be “old,” Buster Keaton’s representation of the character establishes him as an old man. The protagonist is not the only old character in *Film*. Beckett installs an “*episode of a couple*” wherein O “*jostles an elderly couple of shabby genteel aspect, standing on sidewalk, peering together at a newspaper*” (373). O halts to observe this couple, and this results in a series of return gazes culminating in the old couple observing O with an expression that Beckett describes in his directions: “*As they both stare at E the expression gradually comes over their faces...and expression only to be described as corresponding to an agony of perceivedness*” (373). In the “*Stairs*” scene, O grasps the bannister “*body shaken from panting*” before “*A frail old woman appears on the bottom landing*” (374). Beckett instructs that the woman is: “*Absorbed by difficulty of descent*” (374).

The duality between O and the camera “E” keeps both confined to the cycle of objectification in the play. This is enhanced by the “*Unreal quality*” (374) that Beckett demands for the props and the setting. O’s flat is a place wherein he cannot escape the objectifying gaze; everything in his apartment seems to stare at him, including his dog, cat, goldfish, and parrot. O covers the mirror in his apartment, and he attempts to remove everything that stares at him: “*He tears print from the wall, tears it in four, throws down the pieces and grinds them underfoot*” (375). He looks through a package of photographs “*with trembling hands*” and “*touches with forefinger little girl’s face*” (376) before tearing the photograph into pieces and tossing it to the floor. He does the same with the rest of the photographs.

Film ends upon a scene of O sleeping: “*He sits, bowed forward, his head in his hands, gently rocking. Hold it as the rocking dies down*” (377). In *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image*, Anthony Uhlmann analyzes Beckett’s use of perception in *Film*:

As Beckett told Schneider: “The space in [the] picture is [a] function of two perceptions, both of which are diseased...[which] enable one to deform normal vision. Unity is the quality of this apprehension.” Rather than the perception of the self by self alone causing horror, then, it is this process taken to a limit, a limit at which a penetration through consciousness to being is possible, coming at, or bringing on, a moment near the end of life. (125)

The agony of perceivedness that Beckett depicts in *Film* are tied to age, and the subjective tension at the “moment near the end of life” is reflected in the sequencing of grey tones, which give the play a ghostly pallor. In “Beckett’s Shades of the Color Gray,” Enoch Brater states that the layering of grey “evokes interiority through its distinctively muted palette” (111). He adds, “And the sharp intrusion of silvery grays allows Beckett to thematize spatial memory, in specifically visual terms” (111). I would add that the obliteration of color necessitated by the black and white “graying” of *Film* also allows Beckett to thematize age in ways that underscore its relationship to the impairment/confinement binary.

Eh Joe

With *Eh Joe*, Beckett transitioned to the medium of television. The play, which was directed by Beckett himself, was broadcast in German as *He, Joe* on April 13, 1966, by Süddeutscher Rundfunk. Joe is described in the stage directions as aging: “*late fifties, grey hair, old dressing-gown, carpet slippers, in his room*” (392). He listens as a woman’s voice speaks. The voice speaks of Joe’s past, though not favorably. She asks about the condition of his heart: “Dry rotten at last...Eh Joe?” (392), which suggests that he may be in ill health. The voice does not relent: “But there was the one didn’t” (395) whom she describes as an inexperienced girl he abandoned: “She went young” (395). As Voice tells the story of the abandoned girl, her narrative implicates Joe in the girl’s suicide along the shore, dwelling on the image of the girl drowning with her face in the rocks: “Always pale....The pale eyes....the look they shed before....The way they opened after....Spirit made light....Wasn’t that your description, Joe?” (396). The voice taunts him to imagine the girl’s last moments. This presents as an existential bind for Joe: he cannot return to his youth to right his wrongs or undo the damage. Yet he relives these events, returning to a moment when he witnessed the death of youth, turning it over in his consciousness as his own body ages.

Eh Joe focuses on the head-space of its protagonist. The camera hones in on Joe’s face. Beckett instructs that he must remain “*Practically motionless throughout, eyes unblinking during paragraphs*” (392). In *Eh Joe* the protagonist is constrained by the voicing of his past in painful detail. However, despite the injections of the woman’s voice, Joe must wait in isolation. In “Beckett’s Television Plays and Kafka’s Late

Stories,” Hans H. Hiebel compares the images of lonely characters in Beckett’s television plays: “Man appears to be an isolated, ‘windowless’ monad (as Leibniz saw him). The protagonists of these ‘*Larghi desolati*’ show that love and loss are inevitable; the necessity to leave friends behind is connected with the necessity to age and die” (319). The connection between aging and dying appears to be the only resolution for Joe. While aging is a natural state, Beckett stages Joe’s body in metaphysical terms as the spectator’s view of Joe’s body is reduced to his head. As such, when viewed on a television Joe becomes a head in a box.

The voice suggests that Joe must relive the girl’s death and that he will only find respite from the voice in his own death: “Me whispering in at you in your head....things you can’t catch....On and off....Till you join us....Eh Joe? (394). That the voice indicates Joe must join them implies that she and the drowned girl are both dead. Joe’s internalized voice of “conscience” manifests as a self-evidencing state. The voice represents his backward turn and acknowledgement of a self he may no longer identify with; however, the voice will not allow Joe to look away from his past. The voice perceives him and plays upon his wish to go unnoticed: “Why don’t you put out that light?...There might be a louse watching you [....]” (392).

While *Eh Joe* is more about death than it is about age, Joe’s aging is not relegated to the background. Joe’s grey hair, his old robe and slippers, and the suggestion that he may have a heart condition portray him as old. The voice describes him as “Throttling the dead in his head” (393). Joe’s agony of perceivedness is that he sees himself and his past through the voice that he hears, the one that holds him accountable for the sins of his

youth. He is the target of the perspective that is directed at him, and anything he feels—guilt, regret—is generated from within his own perspective. While the voice is the only voice in the play, Joe’s interpolation of her confines him in a space where he remains condemned by his past. In calling attention to Joe’s history and his past wrongs, *Eh Joe* calls attention to the consequences of a life ill-spent. The voice running through Joe’s memory is all he has left in the “penny farthing hell” (393) of his mind—a hell from which he cannot look away.

Old Ghosts: Staging age in the space of consciousness in *Footfalls*, *That Time*, *Ghost Trio*, and *Nacht and Träume*

Footfalls

Because I cover *Footfalls* in detail in Chapter Three, I will not offer a detailed analysis here. *Footfalls*, which Beckett wrote in English, premiered with *That Time* at the Royal Court Theater, London, on May 20, 1976. *Footfalls* presents age-tattered, ghostly character May, who circles in seemingly endless, agonizing steps while talking to the voice of her old, impaired mother. May’s confinement is expressed through her pacing: the voice of her mother claims that May rarely ceases, even long enough to sleep, which she does while standing with her head against the wall. Her mother is sick and confined to bed; May is her caregiver. *Footfalls* presents advanced age as a crisis of physicality. May’s oldness is expressed through her pacing, which confines her solitary self to her desire for her mother. May diminishes, aging as she circles around the safe parameters of

her psychological womb-space “revolving it all” (428). Whether May internalizes her mother or whether the old woman is internalizing May remains ambiguous in the play. May and her mother’s voice both disappear from the stage: her mother’s voice is last heard in the play’s second movement, and May is no longer present on the stage at the play’s end. Both figures are staged as old characters “ghosting” between perspectives of self and other.

That Time

That Time was also written in English. While it debuted with *Footfalls*, Beckett started *That Time* a few years earlier—around 1974—completing the script in 1975. In the play, an old man referred to only as Listener contends with three voices that Beckett instructs should be “*his own coming to him from both sides and above*” (417). The play’s stage directions specify that Listener has an “*Old white face, long flaring white hair*” (417). The voices speak alternately of “the old scenes the old names” and of “old rails” and “rust” and “ruin” (418) that mark Listener’s journey through his past. In “World’s End: West Brompton, Turdy and Other Godforsaken Holes,” Keir Elam remarks that Listener’s position seems punitive:

In his [dramaticule] *That Time*, which figures a listening head punished by three alternating narratives of its miserable life story, keeping it, like the Unnamable, “sunk in your lifelong mess,” Beckett brings us back to London, which he allusively infernalizes with reference to the ferry that may go to and from Dublin or to and from another world. (176-177)

Listener is a captive audience to the triangulation of voices that tell of his spectacular wreckage of a life.

Listener's memories focus on age, with the voices recounting when he last returned to his hometown and the "ruin" where he "hid as a child" (418). The voices indicate that the journey home on "a grey day" where he "took the eleven to the end of the line" (417) was one of isolation for Listener; the ruin remained, but he arrived wanting of friends: "Foley was it Foley's Folly bit of a tower still standing all the rest rubble and nettles where did you sleep no friend all the homes gone" (418). The voices A, B, and C describe different stages of Listener's life and their juxtaposition intensifies the perception of age and decline in the play. Voice A recalls a time of companionship: "no she was with you then still with you then just the one night in any case off the ferry one morning and back on her the next" (418). Voice B focuses on Listener's difficulty accepting the loss of love that led to his present state of grief:

B: you loved each other just a murmur tears without fail till they dried up
altogether suddenly there in whatever thoughts you might be having
whatever scenes perhaps way back in childhood or in the womb worst of
all or that old Chinaman long before Christ was born with long white hair
never the same after that never quite the same [...]. (419)

Listener's three voices appear to be recalling a psychological break that left Listener "never the same after that." Voice C speaks of Listener's internalization of his misery: "crawling about year after year sunk in your lifelong mess muttering to yourself who else

you'll never be the same after this you were never the same after that or talking to yourself who else out loud imaginary conversations" (419).

Listener's spiral into "the void" (419) results in a cognitive rupture that fragments his identity. Listener's idea of love may be a delusion of his own making as he sheltered in an art gallery to escape the rain:

C: when you started not knowing who you were from Adam trying how that would work for a change not knowing who you were from Adam no notion who it was saying what you were saying whose skull you were clapped up in whose moan had you the way you were was that the time or another time there alone with the portraits of the dead black with dirt and antiquity and the dates on the frames in case you might get a century wrong not believing it could be you till they put you out in the rain at closing-time [...]. (420)

Voice C speaks of Listener as though he is a vagrant, sheltering in doorways, the rail station: "always slipping in somewhere when no one would be looking in off the street out of the cold and rain" (421), "places you hadn't to pay to get in like the Public Library that was another great thing free culture far from home or the Post Office that was another" (422).

Listener's break leaves him trapped in the stasis of his own shattered psychology. Presenting the inner strife of Listener does not come without staging challenges. The three voices in Listener's head represent the turn in avant-garde theater toward interpreting expressions of consciousness upon the stage. Beckett's interest in staging

outward expressions of the inner self developed across his career. This staging of consciousness reflects his attention to developments in the twentieth century in the treatment of psychological and nervous conditions. This results in what Les Essif identifies as “a new poetics of space for the text, one based on emptiness” from which dramatists drew to create “a new spatial language” (19). Essif positions the spatiality and poetic turn toward emptiness as a methodological transition in how dramatists, particularly Beckett, overcame the body-as-lived and body-as-object staging limitations. Through a poetics of emptiness dramatists found the locus for staging consciousness as its own morphology. In *Empty Figure on an Empty Stage: The Theater of Samuel Beckett and His Generation*, Essif traces the emergence of what he calls “the empty figure.” He writes: “Dramatists and directors like Beckett work from the complete emptiness of the stage toward a visual image that points to the idea of emptiness as the common denominator between the inside and the outside” (20). Characters such as Listener cannot be presented without consideration of both the aged corporeal body and the inner-self that is projected outward. Essif addresses this:

Placing this exploration of emptiness together with the focus on the functional, self-conscious role of the theatrical sign, and with the new interest in the body, we understand that the emptiness could have greater effect on our perception of the body. Empty theatrical space means a display of the human body as a human icon. It is not simply that the body stands out when surrounded by emptiness, but also that the quality of the emptiness begins to transfer to our perception of the body. (21)

Essif's conceptualization of how emptiness informs readings of the body carries applications for exploring age, which de Beauvoir describes in terms of "emptiness of all the pomp of this world" (202). In his impairment and decrepitude Listener's prison is the "void"—the empty space that leaves him "not knowing who [he is] from Adam."

The grief of Listener is that of a splintered psyche, a loss of self to the image of a love that he has lost or cannot attain. Near the end of the play the voices speak of Listener's final attempt to board the ferry—this time as an old man with "white hair pouring out down from under the hat" (424). He marches to the boat: "not a thought in your head only get back on board and away to hell out of it and never come back" (424). However, the spectator is left with Listener's journey unresolved: "or was that another time all that another time was there ever any other time but that time away to hell out of it all and never come back" (424). The final image of Listener leaves him not with a sound but with "the old breath" as he awakens to the void of his spent life: "when you opened your eyes from floor to ceiling nothing only dust" (424). The play culminates with a spot held on Listener as his face breaks into a toothless grin: even his mouth has been consigned to emptiness.

Ghost Trio

Beckett wrote the television play *Ghost Trio* in English. It was first broadcast by BBC2 on April 17, 1977. Like *Footfalls* and *That Time*, *Ghost Trio* stages the aged body in terms of internalization, loss, and the expression of consciousness. The play includes two characters, Female Voice (V) and Male Figure (F). While the play does not describe

V as old, it does include the appearance of a small boy in a corridor. The boy's inclusion in the play presents a contrast to the diminishment evident in the movements of the male figure. F gazes, clutches his cassette player, and "thinks he hears her" (438) to the accompaniment of "Largo of Beethoven's Fifth Piano Trio (*The Ghost*)" (442). Staging the body against a backdrop of music is a preoccupation evident in Beckett's radio plays. Here, the use of television takes up that focus on "scoring" age through musical accompaniment. Beckett revisits this type of staging in his television play *Nacht and Träume*.

Throughout *Ghost Trio*, age is also invoked in the greyness of the entire scene; the Voice describes this as "All grey. Shades of grey [*Pause.*] The colour grey if you wish, shades of the colour grey" (436). The desolation surrounding the male figure is captured at the start of the play as the camera pans to the floor and the voice speaks: "Dust. [*Pause.*] Having seen that specimen of the floor you have seen it all. Wall" (436). Simone de Beauvoir mentions an image of age that dates to the Middle Ages: "Old age is full of coughs and phlegm and filth, until the time it returns to dust and the ashes whence it was taken" (135). The ghost is the ethereal transcendental space of the unattainable Other, which is represented in the play through music. The phenomenological space of consciousness and the aged space of the body space coalesces in the diminished man, trapped in existential longing for the voice—the music—of she whom "he thinks he hears."

Nacht and Träume

Written in English, Beckett devised *Nacht and Träume* as a play for the medium of television. It was broadcast by Süddeutscher Rundfunk on May 19, 1983. *Nacht and Träume*, the title of which is derived from Franz Schubert's lied for piano, is a play about isolation. The night-dream relationship that Schubert interprets through music finds its theatrical counterpart in Beckett's mournful rendering of a Dreamer in soft repose. "Head bowed, grey hair, hands resting on table" (493), Dreamer does not appear to mourn a lost other; he dreams of contact, the touch of another. This sense of longing permeates his dreams. When sleeping, Dreamer is joined by his Dreamt Self and his Dreamt Hands, and while these are not ghosts, the desire for contact and touch haunts the solitary figure. The medium of film allows Beckett the freedom to develop a visually rich space of sub-consciousness for the portrayal of Dreamt Self. The interplay of the corporeal Dreamer with the sub-conscious Dreamt Self and ethereal Dreamt Hands represents an abstraction: While he does not move, the Dreamer is at once engaged with and divided from the Dreamt Self and Dreamt Hands.

This unity in isolation is made possible by the fluidity of the split images and the dissolves, which allow for alternating perspectives. While the images are dark, they are not bleak. That said, throughout *Nacht and Träume* Dreamer's Dreamt Self and Hands remain confined to his sub-consciousness—there is no conscious world and waking life in the play. The interactions between the Dreamt Self and Dreamt Hands illuminate vulnerabilities of the human condition. Dreamer appears aged and even his Dreamt Self exudes a pallor that suggests diminishment. The Dreamt Hands provide comforts to the

Dreamt Self—supplying him with a supportive touch, helping him sip from a chalice, and wiping his weary brow. All these interactions are in keeping with caring for someone who is ill or old. The final dream-sequence evolves into an embrace between Dreamer's Dreamt Self and the Dreamt Hands. No words are spoken in *Nacht and Träume*; only Schubert's song plays softly in the background. While *Nacht and Träume* contains a corporeal aged man, his presence is solitary. This is a stark contrast to the old man in the dream-space, who is served and treated with deference by the Dreamt Hands.

Intersubjective longing: Aging in place in *Rockaby* and *Ohio Impromptu*

Rockaby

Rockaby, which was written in English in 1980, premiered as part of a Beckett festival at the Center for Theatre Research at SUNY Buffalo on April 8, 1981. Because I offer a detailed analysis of *Rockaby* in Chapter Four, I will not analyze the play in any depth here. However, I will posit that age is presented in terms of loss in *Rockaby*. The play's solitary figure is a prematurely old woman who rocks in perpetual stasis while rapt in the memory of her dead mother. Her alienation from herself and all others frames her as confined: she is a prisoner of her own grief. The woman's deep longing for her lost other causes her to peer out of her window while rocking, seeking any gaze that might return her own. In Kathleen Woodward's study on aging, she questions the ways in which loss impacts those left behind:

When does separation constitute loss? When is anxiety replaced by grief? More important, perhaps, are these the proper questions to ask? Although we can speak of mourning the loss of an ideal, the loss of our youth, the loss of possibility in our lives, the loss of a part of our body, I want to reserve the term “mourning” here for the process of separation following the loss through death of someone we loved. (111)

In *Rockaby*, mourning constitutes a form of impairment for the woman in the rocker. She idles in the rocking chair, in place of her mother, and rejects life. The woman becomes a stand-in for her deceased mother, a representation of self through the supplementation that allows her to perform as her own *m/Other*. As the woman’s voiced-over narrative conveys, her eyes search for “another like herself” (463). By placing herself in the place of her mother, the woman is exhibiting phenomenological empathy, allowing herself to become an intersubjective stand-in for the corporeal loss of her *m/Other*.

Ohio Impromptu

Beckett wrote *Ohio Impromptu* at the request of S.E. Gontarski with the intention of having it featured at The Ohio State University’s symposium honoring Beckett’s seventy-fifth birthday. It was performed at Drake Union, Stadium 2 Theater on May 9, 1981. Like *Rockaby*’s rocking woman, *Ohio Impromptu* features a Listener who sits at a table in his flat overlooking the Isle of Swans. He grieves the loss of his love, “the dear face” (474). Listener is joined on stage by his mirror image counterpart, Reader. Reader is prompted by Listener’s knocks on the table where they sit in opposition to read from

the diary filled with memories of Listener's lost beloved. Beckett does not suggest in his stage directions that Listener and Reader see one another, and their ages are not specified. Beckett instructs that the Listener and Reader must be "*As alike in appearance as possible*" (474). The script contains the suggestion that the two are aged as both characters have "*Long white hair*" (473). The entries in the diary provide Listener with a ghostly trace of his dear one. The account tells of Listener's regret at moving from the home he had shared with the dear one:

Could he now turn back? Acknowledge his error and return to where they were so long alone together. Alone together so much shared. No. What he had done alone could not be undone. Nothing he had ever done alone could ever be undone. By him alone. (474)

Listener had abandoned the residence "In a last attempt to obtain relief" (474). However, as the volume from which Reader dictates states, "In his dreams he had been warned against this change. Seen the dear face and hear the unspoken words, stay where we were so long together, my shade will comfort you" (474). His move results in a return of "his old terror of night" (475) that he suffered as a child, which kept him awake until dawn.

In *Ohio Impromptu*, the textual delivery of the narrative through the act of reading displaces the aging subject in corporeal, objective and discursive terms. Anna McMullan addresses the "life story told by the text" in *Ohio Impromptu*:

While the scenic level suggests that Listener is both author and subject of the tale being read, the text presents the provenance of the "sad tale" as entirely "other" : as originating from an other being/non-being and an

other place or space where the very distinction between being and non-being, absence and presence, origin and end seems meaningless. The “shade” of the narrative crosses the boundaries between life and death and between identities (This is associated yet not identified with the “dear face” and becomes “as one” with the protagonist). Indeed, *Ohio Impromptu* seems to be founded on a dual desire: the desire for an “other” to relieve the isolation or “lack” of being and the desire to be done with selves and others, in the still, silent world beyond time and space. (121-122)

The ambiguity of the “Shade” is that it transcends identifications between textual representation of Listener and Reader. The Shade does not appear to be the “dear face.” As such, perhaps the Shade is constructed by Listener through the mirror-image which reflects Reader. The intersubjective turn is constituted in the subject/object binaries between the characters with each reading from the volume: “With never a word exchanged they grew to be as one” (475). As such, Listener is always deferring identity towards the mirror-image and the reading that allows him to re-engage with “the dear face” through his knocks.

Reader relates the story contained in the volume that tells of Listener’s “dear face” and the arrival of the Shade:

One night as he sat trembling head in hands from head to foot a man appeared to him and said, I have been sent by—and here he named the dear name—to comfort you. Then drawing a worn volume from the pocket

of his long black coat he sat and read till dawn. Then disappeared without a word. (475)

Whether the Shade is arriving to comfort Listener in life or sooth him as he journeys toward death is ambiguous. Most scholars read the Listener as mourning a lost lover: the “dear face” as a companion. However, by considering age we arrive at another possibility. What if the “dear face” that the Listener longs for is his own? He sits before a mirror-likeness of himself, pining for the “dear face” and hearing the tale of having “left the place” where he and the dear face were so long together. While the “dear face” could be a lover, I submit that it could also be the face of his lost youth. The place he left—the place his dreams warn him never to abandon—could easily be construed as a mirror. If we read Listener as desiring the Other that is his lost youth—his own “dear face” with the “dear voice”—this expands the possibilities for interpreting the play and its *dénouement*.

Toward the end of the play, the volume turns upon an exchange between the dear face and the Shade (who may or may not be the Reader) which leads the Shade to announce, “I shall not come again” (475). However, after the “sad tale” is told one last time, the volume claims that neither the Shade nor the Listener would leave one another: “What thoughts who knows. Thoughts, no, not thoughts. Profounds of mind. Buried in who knows what profounds of mind. Of mindlessness. Whither no light can reach. No sound. So sad on as though turned to stone. The sad tale last time told” (475). The play ends with the unification of the mirror-image as Listener and Reader look at each other with vacant expressions. However, they are sitting “whither no light can reach”(in the dark), “So sad on as though turned to stone” (in stillness) before the mirror-image.

Perhaps Listener sits before a mirror in the dark because he is unable to accept the loss of his own “dear face.” The unification may be between himself and the Shade that no longer reflects the image he wishes to see. If so, “profounds of mind” suggests that the Listener has internalized his sorrow as he rejects his own self-image, choosing to take in his own reflection “whither no light can reach.”

Ohio Impromptu invokes age in terms of diminishment. Whether we read Listener as longing for his own “dear face” or the face of a lover, the misprision of identity in the Reader/Listener dyad reflects a splintered self or selves. Reader and Listener are existential renderings of old men in mourning, but they are also hauntingly ethereal. There is an otherworldly quality in the figures. One reads of the other’s deep loss and the other listens on, painfully urging the account to continue by knocking upon the table where the pair are seated opposite one another. Perhaps Listener’s choice to leave the place he shared with the dear face, his “last attempt to obtain relief,” can be read as an act of agency rather than mourning. If he left his position before a mirror—the space where the Shade would comfort him—because he no longer recognized his own reflection, that can be read as an act of autonomy, a conscious split between the subjective self and the consciousness. The unification between himself and Reader also suggests that their “oneness” may be an act of liberation, even if that liberation culminates in their passing out of the narrative and out of existence.

“Make sense who may”: The catastrophe of age in *Catastrophe* and *What Where*

Catastrophe

Beckett wrote *Catastrophe* in French in 1982, dedicating it to the imprisoned playwright Vaclav Havel. It premiered at the Avignon Festival in July of the same year and was translated into English by Beckett for its American debut at the Harold Churman Theater, New York, on June 15, 1983. In the interest of avoiding unnecessary overlap; I defer my analysis of *Catastrophe* to my reading of it in Chapter Three. The play portrays the aging and impaired body as a trope that signifies confinement and surveillance through its central figure, the marionette-like, aged Protagonist. Protagonist's old, degenerated body indicates the phenomenological space between the conscious self and the body-as-lived. His body is manipulated and posed by the Director and his Assistant for display on a stage. Director and Assistant represent a failure of intersubjective empathy in that they see Protagonist only as an object. Protagonist's body is confined to the space of the stage—the nexus of performance, as determined by Others. However, at the play's end, in the moment of “catastrophe,” Protagonist raises his head and casts his gaze back upon the spectator. The old man, who appeared mannequin-esque throughout the play, engages in an insurrection, revealing himself as conscious enough to reclaim the scene. That Protagonist's conscious self flickers still beneath the façade of his old, diminished body is indicative of the “stirrings still” mentioned in this project's introduction. Protagonist exists within the space of “Neither” as Beckett termed the

subjective dilemma of existence. Protagonist balances between impenetrable self and impenetrable unself. The gaze he reflects back upon the spectator, “by way of neither,” decenters his body as the space of objectification through a reclamation of the gaze.

What Where

Beckett wrote *What Where* in French as *Quoi où* in 1983, translating it into English in advance of its premier with *Catastrophe* and *Ohio Impromptu* at New York’s Harold Clurman Theater on June 15, 1983. In the play, Voice of Bam states that “time has passed” and that the characters are the “last five” (498). The other four are Bam, Bem, Bim, and Bom. Whether Bam counts himself twice to arrive at the number five, whether he thinks of himself and his voice as two separate entities, remains ambiguous. That the characters are the last of however many there were before suggests some level of culling—are they dying out? The character descriptions consistent with growing old are evident in Beckett’s stage instructions wherein he directs that the characters “*be as alike as possible*” with the “same long grey gown” and the same “long grey hair” (496). The graying of the characters suggests that Beckett imagines them as aging subjects.

The first movement of the Bam, Bem, Bim, and Bom is choreographed by Voice of Bam, who instructs them to be silent: “I am alone. It is spring. Time passes. First without words. In the end Bom appears. Reappears” (498). Beckett choreographs the entrances and exits in a geometric pattern. The characters each enter, halt, pause, and exit. The Voice of Bam punctuates the action, stating “Good. I switch off” (499), followed by “I start again. We are the last five. It is spring. Time passes. I switch on”

(499). The light shines once more on Bam. Voice of Bam then begins once more “Now with words” and repeats “In the end Bom appears. Reappears” (499). Bam is always present as his counterparts repeat this entrance when prompted by Voice of Bam.

The announcements of changing seasons and time passing suggest that the characters exist in a world that changes, and their long grey hair marks them as aging in that world. However, that Beckett instructs the characters be “*as alike as possible*” (496) complicates their identities. The five could be part of the same psyche or they may be mirror-image counterparts. The answer as to why the characters are “the last five” becomes clear as each of Bam’s counterparts rotates into and out of the scene when cued by Voice of Bam:

BAM: Well?

BOM: [*Head bowed throughout.*] Nothing.

BAM: He didn’t say anything?

BOM: No.

BAM: You gave him the works?

BOM: Yes.

BAM: And he didn’t say anything?

BOM: No.

BAM: He wept?

BOM: Yes.

BAM: Screamed?

BOM: Yes.

BAM: Begged for Mercy?

BOM: Yes.

BAM: But didn't say anything?

BOM: No. (500)

This interaction continues with increasing violence. Bom reports that the interrogated subject passed out and could not be revived (500). Bam then turns the tables on Bom, accusing him of lying about the confession: "He said it to you. [*Pause.*] Confess he said it to you. [*Pause.*] You'll be given the works until you confess" (500). Voice of Bam praises, "Good. In the end Bim appears" (501). Bim enters and asks, "What must he confess?" to which Bam replies, "That he said it to you" (501). Each of Bam's counterparts enters as an interrogator, clarifies "what" the latest accused must confess, then reappears to deny that he succeeded in getting his counterpart to confess. All but Bam get accused, each becoming the next to be "given the works." Bem is the last who is cued to enter:

BEM: What must I confess?

BAM: That he said where to you.

BEM: Is that all?

BAM: And where.

BEM: Is that all?

BAM: Yes.

BEM: Then stop?

BAM: Yes. Come. (504)

Voice of Bam must now cue himself: “It is winter. Time passes. In the end I appear. Reappear” (504). Of course, the torture of getting “the works” may be a bit tongue-in-cheek by Beckett, who, given the play’s ending, may also intend this as an allusion to his own “works.”

At the play’s *dénouement* Bam reappears and Voice of Bam issues his last cue, but this one is a prompt directed at Beckett’s spectator: “I am alone. In the present as were I still. It is winter. Without journey. Time passes. That is all. Make sense who may. I switch off” (504). In the end, it is the audience that is “given the works” with the challenge to make sense of *What Where*. That the play gives the lines “It is winter. Without journey” followed by “Time passes” invites a reading of age. It is appropriate that Simone de Beauvoir turns to Beckett in her work on aging. She considers the example of old age in *Molloy* and arrives at the most singular truth about how Beckett frames old age: “Life is only the recollection we have of it; and recollection is nothing. This nothing takes up a space in time; time passes, although it goes nowhere; we are in perpetual movement, yet in this journey that has no goal we remain stationary” (213). Beckett invites interpretation with the statement “Make sense who may,” but he has already riddled out the answer and given us “the works”: his works. Beckett charts the course of human existence in *What Where* just as he has in every one of his age-focused plays. The use of age in Beckett’s theater responds to the human condition and the existential dilemma of living in bodies that grow old. There are those who read or see *What Where* and never “make sense” of the puzzle that Beckett invites them to solve.

However, reading age in Beckett's dramatic works lends perspective: I am alone. In the present, as I were, still. Age is the winter without journey as time passes. That is all.

CHAPTER II The Arrow of Time: Stasis, Entropy, and Aging in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*

In *Waiting for Godot* (1952) and *Endgame* (1957), the subject of age is a complicated matter. While age in drama usually boils down to questions about the ages of specific characters, the previous chapter demonstrates that Beckett's theater depictions of age cannot always be determined from his character descriptions. In plays by other dramatists, character ages are often given at the front of a play script to coincide with a list of characters, but in Beckett's plays it is not uncommon for the age of respective characters to be omitted from the character description (if there is one) that prefaces the play text. More often, the ages of his characters are revealed through the play's dialogue. In some cases, age may go unaddressed by Beckett entirely, allowing for directorial interpretation. Consequently, in figuring age in instances where Beckett's directions lack specificity on the matter of character ages, attention to scripted cues such as character attributes—particularly those aligned with impairment but also having to do with space, place, time, and movement—must not be overlooked. Although Beckett's attention to agedness may lack specificity, the way he utilizes age as an attribute of character is nuanced and integral to the worlds he builds. This chapter posits that Beckett depicts agedness through illustrations of entropy and stasis. Entropy is a term used in thermodynamics to describe the amount of energy that is no longer available in any given system. Loosely translated, this unavailable energy amounts to a level of disorder within a system. As entropy increases, disorder also increases. Entropy is a useful construct for

application to studies on aging systems, particularly the human body, as the body is a closed thermodynamic system in and of itself. As the body ages, its vitality diminishes because energy that was once available to the body becomes increasingly unavailable. The energy that is not available has not disappeared; rather, it has fallen into stasis or a state of non-use.

The disorder that accompanies entropy is the kind that identifies a break in how the system operates. In “Samuel Beckett’s “Lessness”: An Exercise in Decomposition,” J.M. Coetzee refers to an elderly character contained in a box in Beckett’s short prose piece “Lessness.” The old man’s grey body is so tightly contained that his hands are stuck at his sides and his legs are pressed firmly together. He is tightly confined in a coffin-like structure—his body is trapped in stasis. However, his consciousness—his “heart”—is beating, diminishing as it streams between “figments” of a little boy and an old man, both of which appear to be some version of himself. Coetzee writes, “the first half of “Lessness” represents figments of day and the second half features figments of night” (197). The “figments” and the movement between day and night operate as a system, and Coetzee breaks down the mathematical components of the system Beckett puts in play. These are marked by repetitions, beats that keep time in the system—all tied to the old man’s heartbeats. Entropy increases as the man falls deeper into the void of his stasis. In “Lessness” the old man’s body is a “scattered ruin” fallen out of working order. “In four split asunder,” he is “over backwards,” and his physicality is described in terms of decomposition: “Little body little block genitals overrun arse a single block grey crack overrun” (198). Beckett aligns stasis and entropy with the decomposition of the old body

in ways that allow him to express a metaphysical release of the elderly man's consciousness, sending it "all gone from mind" as the energy of the mind—the existential consciousness—disperses towards "endlessness" (201). I discuss Beckett's use of decomposition in his late theater in Chapter Three, but I mention it here as a reference point in order to demonstrate that all of Beckett's theatrical renderings of decomposition include depictions of an aged body in decline, a system falling out of working order, as the disordered old body moves toward entropy. The example in "Lessness" illustrates this breakdown by placing the bodily system into stasis to the degree that the non-use of that body resolves in a metaphysical expulsion of consciousness as the old man lies dying, his heart still beating in entropic decline as he wavers between the light of living and the dark "endlessness" that will free him from the prison of his body.

In terms of the human body, entropic disorder can be aligned with conditions such as physical or cognitive impairment. The disorder that is inherent in entropy can be viewed as compatible with structure because disorder in one element of a larger structure does not necessarily cause entropy throughout the entire structure. I submit that in Beckett's theater, when agedness or aging is apparent, entropy is also evident. Whenever Beckett invokes agedness in a play, he invests these states of oldness with some level of impairment. Moreover, the impairments endured by Beckett's old or aging characters are amplified through the stasis that marks their environments or their own momentum. Characters who qualify as aging but appear mobile enough to potentially leave their situation do not go. The characters who are the oldest are also the most infirm and are confined to contained spaces and repetition. In this way, Beckett depicts his old or aging

characters in ways that exhibit stasis while also demonstrating entropic disorder.

Considerations of science may seem out of sorts in a discussion of theater. In Beckett's works, however, referring to the science that governs energy—specifically entropy—as it relates to age is appropriate because Beckett's characterizations of old people are in keeping with fundamental truths about energy. In Beckett's plays age and impairment are always related to energy, to which Beckett's theater pays significant attention. For example, in the opening of *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon struggles with his boot:

“Estragon, sitting on a low mound, is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting. He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again. As before” (3). Estragon's inability to remove his boot and the level of energy that he exerts in trying to get it off while still failing at the attempt are symptomatic of the character's chronological age.

This age is not accounted for in the front matter character descriptions of the play text, but it is addressed in the dialogue when the ages of he and Vladimir are contemplated by Pozzo, who places Vladimir's age at around sixty or seventy years old (21). His guess is later confirmed when Estragon states that he and Vladimir have been travelling together for around fifty years (46). Even before these cues within the dialogue, Estragon's boot struggle allows the character's agedness to be expressed through his exertion of energy.

Similarly, *Endgame* opens with Clov, who is the youngest of the play's four characters, moving about the stage encumbered by a limp. At first glance the audience may not interpret Clov as chronologically old. Indeed, Beckett does not specify an age for Clov in the play's text. However, as the opening scene develops and Clov hobbles across the stage, his physicality takes on the bleakness of his environment. It is here, as the

opening scene unfolds, that Beckett endows Clov with the signs of premature agedness. Before he utters a word, Clov is in motion, but it is a motion that announces a departure from anything associated with being young. Clov's pace is steady but hampered by his limp as he totters his way between the shelter's left and right windows. He retreats for a ladder, returns, and proceeds to waver mechanically between the two windows. Beckett's stage directions for Clov's movements dictate the following:

He goes out, comes back immediately with a small step-ladder, carries it over and sets it down under window left, gets up on it, draws back curtain. He gets down, takes six steps (for example) towards window right, goes back for ladder, carries it over and sets it down under window right, gets up on it, draws back curtain. He gets down, takes three steps towards window left, goes back for ladder, carries it over and sets it down under window left, gets up on it, looks out of window. Brief laugh. He gets down, takes one step toward window right, goes back for ladder, carries it over and sets it down under window right, gets up on it, looks out of window. Brief laugh. He gets down, goes with ladder towards ashbins, halts, turns, carries back ladder and sets it down under window right. (92)

Clov's repeated forgetting of the ladder and retracing of his own steps and Estragon's struggle with his boot both illustrate states of entropy, the dispersal of energy at a less than optimal state. In the most basic terms, entropy is a state of disorder in the way energy is utilized, expressed, and focused within a system. For the purposes of exploring how stasis and entropy relates to portrayals of age in Beckett's theater, I treat his plays as

systems in and of themselves. Thermodynamics generally concerns the study of energy dispersal in closed systems. All of Beckett's plays operate as closed systems—they are worlds in and of themselves. These systems come to life in performance; however, even the play texts themselves reflect the singularity of space in which Beckett frames their worlds.

In the first scenes of *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, Estragon's boot, Clov's ladder, repetitive actions, failures, frustrations, and redirections are indicative of how Beckett foregrounds his depictions of age and aging in terms of entropy. In both plays much of what the characters do evokes a sense of age and entropic disorder. Consequently, the actions played out on stage function as the only markers of time which, given the repetitions alone, is depicted in terms of stasis. For instance, at the start of the *Endgame*, Clov removes the sheets that cover the ashbins and Hamm. When he finally lifts the lids on the trash containers that house Nell and Nagg, this action is followed by his own castigation of time: "[*fixed gaze, tonelessly*] Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. [*Pause.*] Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap. [*Pause.*] I can't be punished any more" (92). Clov's frustration suggests that this opening scene is not the first time he has contemplated the impossible heap that must be nearly finished. His position is one of stasis: he toils at the same heap, the same way, each day. Theodor Adorno has pointed to Beckett's attention to exhaustion, and reading Beckett's portrayals of age through the prism of exhaustion would be a sound approach to analyzing age in *Waiting for Godot* or *Endgame*. But while exhaustion is a prominent trope throughout much of Beckett's

theater, his depictions of entropy, stasis, and time are more fundamentally integral components within his illustrations of agedness. Therefore, this chapter concerns itself with age and aging in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* as it relates to entropic process. As a marker for the breakdown of how energy is expressed in a system, entropy is inextricably connected to time. That is, entropy increases within a given system as time passes. This is analogous with the human condition of aging wherein bodily systems become increasingly disordered through deterioration or failure in concordance with the passage of time. While there is no linear progression discernible as “time” in either *Waiting for Godot* or *Endgame*, there is entropy, and its dispersal of energy is evident as a trajectory that leads to exhaustion in both works. In “Disuse and Aging,” Walter Bortz writes, “Aging is describable as entropy, a gradual degradation of order, intrinsic to both cosmic and human realms. Furthermore, formulation of aging in thermodynamic terms provides access to the basic mechanisms that characterize the most common pathology of aging, frailty” (383). Because this chapter relates stasis in these plays to aging and entropy, I utilize entropy, according to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, as a state resulting from disorder within a system. I begin the following inquiry by introducing how I am conceptualizing the relationship between Beckett’s illustrations of age and the laws that mediate energy. This is followed by analyses of how Beckett’s applications of stasis, entropy and age operate in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*.

Time, Thermodynamics, and Beckett's Illustrations of Age

In "The Disintegrative Process in *Endgame*," Eric P. Levy finds "life itself" central to the dilemma of existence for the characters: "In this sense 'time is over': Moments for nothing, now as always, time was never and time is over, reckoning closed and story ended" (264). Instead of a cumulative succession effecting continuous transition from past to future, time here paradoxically perpetuates its own irrelevance: "'The end is in the beginning and yet you go on'" (264). Here, Levy quotes *Endgame*, but the reference can also apply to *Waiting for Godot*. In fact, Levy's remarks resonate with nearly all of Beckett's theatrical landscapes and characters, for these are spaces where time has no chronological grounding and existence within time does not follow a clear trajectory. As such, time and existence in Beckett's works are ambiguous. John Calder analyzes Beckett's meditations on time in his Proust essay:

Beckett's image of future time decanting itself into past time is one of time running backward; the future is in constant flow into the past, the opposite of our normal perception. What is it that flows forward then? It can only be our consciousness which we tend to confuse with time because it perceives it. As time and consciousness move in different directions they can be seen as a series of collisions, and that surely is the best way to describe the immediate present, the present moment: as the confrontation of time moving backward and consciousness moving

forward. Beckett never says this directly, but it is the logical conclusion to his philosophically poetic reasoning. (71)

But time cannot be decanted in separate measure from energy, for energy is the constant that facilitates our very perception of time. *Waiting for Godot* is rife with uncertainties about time. The characters themselves question time:

Estragon: You're sure it was this evening?

Vladimir: What?

Estragon: That we were to wait.

Vladimir: He said Saturday. [*Pause.*] I think. (9)

Estragon goes on to question the day itself: “[*very insidious*] But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? [*Pause.*] Or Monday? [*Pause.*] Or Friday?” (9).

Despite the stage directions that Beckett includes at the top of the second act— “*Next day. Same time. Same place*” (49)—without reading the script the spectator is left to ponder how much of time has elapsed between the first and second acts. In performance, these ambiguities of time call attention to unreliability in the ways that time itself is perceived and verified by the spectator. In a system governed by entropy, the crisis of time is enmeshed in how it is marked and measured.

Calder is correct in framing time in concordance with energy, expressing it in terms of “flowing” either backwards or forward. One universal scientific certainty is that energy is neither created nor destroyed. In science, this is defined by the Zeroth Law of

Thermodynamics,³ which dictates that the sum of energy into and out of a system must be zero. The subsequent First, Second, and Third Laws of Thermodynamics confirm the precepts of Zero Law. Thermodynamic Formalism is the very foundation of scientific interpretations and systems and the understanding of how things operate in the world, how energy exists in the world, how time finds expression through dispersal of energy within a system, and how entropy increases with time in any given system. For the purposes of this chapter and my analysis of Beckett's use of age, I confine my interpretation of thermodynamics to the Second Law because it focuses on entropy.

In order to grasp how entropy relates to Beckett's depictions of age, it is useful to understand that entropy is quantified in terms of potential states or microstates. That is, heightened entropy allows for more potential states of being or microstates within a system. Once a system reaches its maximum level of entropy, the dispersal of that energy within the system—in layman's terms, the maximum convergence of disorder within the system—reduces the overall entropy. With only a few limited potential states remaining within the system, its entropy will eventually decrease and produce a state of equilibrium. In applying such illustrations to the analysis of aging—particularly in Beckett's examples

³ The Zeroth Law of Thermodynamics is widely attributed to James Clerk Maxwell's *Theory of Heat* (1871) and specifically to the following statement: "We have defined heat as it exists in hot bodies, and we have seen that all heat is of the same kind" (16). Maxwell goes on to clarify that he is referring to thermodynamic understandings of heat: "When we speak of radiant heat we do not mean to imply the existence of a new kind of heat, but to consider radiating in its thermal aspect" (16). Maxwell's assertion is understood to mean, in simple terms, that energy (heat) is neither created nor destroyed as it remains constant, all heat being of the same measure or "kind" with the certainty that there is never the existence of a "new kind." That is, the thermal aspect or energy remains unalterable at all times in any given thermal system.

of the aged—I liken the arrival at entropy’s tipping point, with equilibrium being the transformative result for the energy that remains, as corresponding to stasis or death. I have argued in earlier projects that the only way Beckett’s confined characters might escape their subjectivity is through dispersal of the subject. For Beckett’s characters, that is, subjectivity is always tied to some level of constriction. As a result, the states of fragmentation that are portrayed in Beckett’s theater are the only evidence that a fully developed self ever existed. However, in Beckett’s theater fragmentation itself does not provide freedom from subjectivity or constraint. The only possible release from this confinement is for consciousness to disengage from whatever keeps it tethered to subjectivity. This dispersal of the subject requires the whole to fragment to such a degree that consciousness is liberated from the self. Therefore, dispersal of the subject is the only possible freedom from subjectivity for Beckett’s characters. Here, I add to that claim by considering the implications of aging on Beckett’s characters, the ways in which energy is tied to aging and time through an analysis of entropy and stasis. Once again, I find that dispersal of the subject is the ultimate release for Beckett’s aged characters, who always suffer some measure of impairment and always endure some level of confinement. When one reads agedness, impairment, and confinement through the lens of entropy, stasis, and time, it is evident that equilibrium for Beckett’s characters is the nexus of dispersal of the subject. Reading how age operates in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* in light of thermodynamics—specifically the Second Law and its attention to entropy—provides a context for looking at the ways that Beckett employs age across his entire dramatic corpus. As noted in the previous chapter, Beckett includes depictions of age in twenty

three of his plays. In each example, the elderly characters experience some level of impairment, each old figure is rendered through an illustration of confinement, and all are indicative of diminishment. Entropy is a process that can lend insight into what Beckett accomplishes through his depictions of old people. The states of entropy that Beckett writes into his aged characters in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* lay the foundation for his later depictions of age. His late plays are riddled with old people pressed toward states of increasing interiority—where the physicality of the aged body is expressed in increasingly metaphysical constructions of consciousness—the untethering of the self-as-body from the free flow of consciousness. In this, I argue that entropy is the common thread—the element of energy most consequential to age that Beckett works in ways that acknowledge the body while allowing it to fall away—pressing his characters toward an existential freedom. In order to understand the connection between Beckett’s depictions of aging, the workings of stasis, and the kind of disorder that signals entropy, it is necessary to acknowledge the ways in which these phenomena are governed by the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

In “Second Law of Thermodynamics Formalism Applied to Finite Duration through Cycles of Living Dissipative Systems,” Jorge Antonio Montemayor-Aldrete, et al. examine human aging through application of the Second Law of Thermodynamics: “From Schrödinger’s classic work published in 1944 it became clear that life, and not only the not-living systems like cyclic thermal machines, obeys the first and second laws of thermodynamics” (369). The explanation describes the dissipative process in terms of entropy, which it defines as “functional disorder” (372). Beckett creates both *Waiting for*

Godot and *Endgame* as systems in which repetition occurs but does not produce order. What remains is “functional disorder” for the characters. This does not mean that these worlds are “functional” in the positive sense of the word. The theatrical and narrative machinery Beckett puts in place—the “cyclic” mechanisms that mark pace and duration—ensures that nothing runs particularly smoothly. Rather, these worlds are “functional” in that they contain movement; they vibrate with life no matter how constrained that life is. In “Entropy Explains Aging, Genetic Determinism Explains Longevity, and Undefined Terminology Explains Misunderstanding Both,” Leonard Hayflick writes, “There is a huge body of knowledge supporting the belief that age changes are characterized by increasing entropy” (2351). He includes a description of how dispersal of energy is tied to entropy, stating, “Entropy is the tendency for concentrated energy to disperse when unhindered regardless of whether the system is open or closed” (2351). The universe itself is an open system that is constantly expanding. With a finite amount of energy in the system, and an ever-increasing volume (time being the mechanism that expands the volume), heat death of the universe is complete once all energy reaches utter stagnation. Once heat death is complete, the energy still exists, but it disperses and is no longer available within the system that has experienced “heat death.” That system’s work, in other words, can no longer be done. In this way, heat death of any system leaves only generated entropy dispersing into equilibrium as a trace of its original state. The remaining trace can be viewed as a record of the information of the state of energy as it once existed in the system, the trace being the energy’s last ghost. In a Beckettian configuration, this example would translate as the

loss of vitality that is evident in his aging and elderly characters. Entropy tells us that the only measure of relief for energy trapped in a system that is in a state of disorder is through the arrival at equilibrium. If we condense the idea of equilibrium into terms consistent with viewing the aging body as a system, the final breakdown of that system signals the dispersal of the subject.

Stasis

At the outset of this chapter, I connected agedness in Beckett's worlds to stasis as it relates to the kinds of disorder consistent with entropy. However, I am reading stasis in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* through the prism of thermodynamics; therefore, the way in which I utilize the term stasis requires some context. Beckett often provides examples of characters existing in states of repetition or circularities that amount to going nowhere. In these circumstances, his characters endure limitations that signify as stasis. In Beckett's theater, even when characters experience some variation in their environments or physical changes, they do so through the prism of stasis, and more often than not such changes happen in the context of agedness or aging. This is demonstrated, perhaps most clearly, in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*. In the second act of *Waiting for Godot*, the tree sprouts a few leaves and Lucky and Pozzo reappear, although this time Pozzo is blind and Lucky is mute. In *Endgame*, there is the suggestion that Nell and Nagg, the elderly double-leg amputees who are stored in ash cans, have respectively died or are nearly dead before the end of the play. Aging, even in Beckett's ambiguous worlds

and character depictions, carries with it one certainty: old age will culminate in the ultimate exhaustion of the body. That Beckett portrays the characters in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* as confined to their respective positions is another example of how he ties stasis to entropic imagery and aligns entropy to the aged or aging body.

The term *stasis* has a direct etymological link to the term *thermodynamics*. In *Chemical Thermodynamics: An Introduction*, Ernő Keszei explains:

The Greek word *θερμη* [therme] means hotness (heat), while another Greek word, *δυναμις* [dynamics] means the ability to act (power). Putting the two words together expresses the basic direction of this research. The branch of mechanics dealing with movements is also called dynamics, originating from the same Greek word. Based on this, some authors criticize the name thermo-dynamics [sic] and propose *thermostatics* instead, as the underlying Greek word (*στασις* [stasis] = state) refers more directly to equilibrium states. (1)

In other words, Keszei unpacks the term *thermodynamics* in order to demonstrate its relationship to the term *stasis*. While stasis means *state* in its purest definition, Keszei clarifies that stasis refers to inactive states of energy, or states of equilibrium. As such, where the term *stasis* is utilized in this chapter, it signifies a thermodynamic understanding of energy dispersal. Recall that entropy is the value of energy in a system that is not available for efficient operation of that system. Therefore, if there is zero entropy, the system is in perfect order. However, increases in entropy signal an onset of disorder for the system—disorder in the sense of function which is *not* to be confused

with chaos. Disorder in this sense refers to a diminished capacity for a system to accomplish its work; there is more entropy, which means there is less energy available for the system to function. As such, disorder is evident within the system. Disorder understood in this context provides an example of why entropy factors significantly in the aging process.

How Entropy Applies to Research on Aging

The relationship of age to notions of entropy is not a new concept. Although the modern models of how entropy operates have evolved due to scientific developments inherent in the study of thermodynamics, all considerations of entropy invoke principles and dynamics that can be found in earlier theories of the universe and aging. As such, examples of entropy as we understand the term are evident in the work and discourse of writers, artists, and thinkers from antiquity into the mid-twentieth century. Philosophers, for example, have long been aware of the relationship between disorder and aging—both of which science has now firmly related to entropy. In *The Republic*, Plato depicts a conversation between Socrates and the aged Cephalus that focuses on aging. While Plato did not use the term *entropy* to describe the agedness of his characters, their descriptions of aging suggest that Plato was aware of how aging results in social and physical disorder for the elderly. Cephalus is the father of Polymarcus, and in his narration of their meeting Socrates reports, “I thought him very much aged” (29). Cephalus tells Socrates that he wishes he would come to visit with him more often and cites his agedness as the reason

he himself has difficulty travelling and cannot get into the city to see Socrates. Socrates replies:

There is nothing which for my part I like better, Cephalus, than conversing with aged men; for I regard them as travelers who have gone on a journey which I too may have to go, and of whom I ought to enquire, whether the way is smooth and easy or rugged and difficult. And this is a question which I should like to ask you who have arrived at that time which the poets call the “threshold of old age”—Is life harder towards the end, or what report do you give of it? (30)

Here, Plato implies that those on the “threshold of old age” are travelers to whom younger men should look for an indication of what the state of aging may one day have in store for them. Cephalus’s own account of impairment, such as finding travel impossible due to increasing physical limitations, makes the disordered entropic state of his physicality—his bodily mechanisms—quite evident. Cephalus’s primary lament concerning his aged body has to do with impairment. His physicality is so altered from his youth that it now prevents him from going about as he wishes to places such as the city.

Cephalus answers Socrates with an adage: “Men of my age flock together; we are birds of a feather, as the old proverb says; and at our meetings the tale of my acquaintance commonly is—I cannot eat, I cannot drink; the pleasures of youth and love are fled away: there was a good time once, but now that is gone, and life is no longer life” (30). That Cephalus describes the aged as “birds of a feather” speaks to the camaraderie

his contemporaries in agedness find in participating in a grouping of others with similar experiences of the world. His account of the aged grouping together implies that the social circumference for the aged is limited by impairments associated with aging. Their range of travel—and, therefore, alternatives—is impacted by their agedness. This places age in correlation with entropy—the aged cannot eat or drink, there is no pleasure, life is no longer life—which communicates a tendency toward bodily disorder for the aged as, literally, parts of their body no longer function adequately.

In advanced age the body is comparable to a machine breaking down. While some repairs can be made or adjustments introduced to prolong the use of the machine, it will eventually succumb to disrepair that cannot be reversed or ameliorated. As the system breaks down—whether human or machine—entropy is increased, and stasis becomes unavoidable. From such a scenario there is no respite for agedness other than death.

Cephalus qualifies his statement:

But this is not my own experience, nor that of others whom I have known. How well I remember the aged poet Sophocles, when in answer to the questions, How does love suit with age, Sophocles,—are you still the man you were? Peace, he replied; most gladly I have escaped the thing of which you speak; I feel as if I had escaped from a mad and furious master. His words have often occurred in my mind since, and they seem as good to me now as at the time when he uttered them. For certainly old age has a great sense of calm and freedom; when the passions relax their hold, then,

as Sophocles says, we are freed from the grasp not of one mad master only, but of many. (31)

Cephalus's reflection on how old age affects sexual desire is similarly addressed in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* when the elderly Nagg complains, "If I could sleep 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" (104). Plato's exchange between Sophocles and Cephalus reveals that Cephalus is in the process of reviewing his own life and his experiences in the world. Cephalus describes life and aging in terms of a journey, one rife with burdens and deteriorating physical abilities leading to his present condition of relative stasis.

One way to consider Cephalus's journey through old age in relation to Beckett's work is to consider the ways in which Beckett communicates the entropy that his characters are experiencing through expressions of nostalgia. Beckett's inclusions of nostalgia demonstrate that the present state of existence for his characters is not how they have always lived and that the conditions the spectator sees playing out on stage represent a loss of vitality. The use of nostalgia calls attention to entropy and stasis for many of Beckett's characters. For example, as the elderly Krapp in *Krapp's Last Tape* replays moments from his past, particularly his youth, the winding down of his years and his increasing feebleness is made apparent. Forgetting that he has just dropped a banana peel and slipping on the skin is a physical manifestation of the entropy that marks his old age. However, it is in listening to his past and reacting to his tapes that Krapp reveals the entropy of having little energy left to spend on anything other than recalling his own lost potential. Similarly, when Winnie in *Happy Days* reminisces on her past, she does so in

ways that help her accept the entropy and stasis that results from being buried up to her waist and then her neck in earth. Much of her exaltation that she is living “another happy day” is tied to her struggle to adapt to her present condition. Her reflections center on the past and the time before she was trapped in her living grave. Her use of nostalgia punctuates the entropy and stasis of how she is experiencing her own aging. From the perspective of age studies, it is hard not to see her implanted state as a metaphor for how the aging woman begins to disappear from view in society as her reproductive years wane. As Winnie’s use of nostalgia describes her life before she became stuck in earth, it also underscores the entropy and stasis inherent in her current predicament. Moments of nostalgia are also present in the dialogue between Beckett’s two tramps in *Waiting for Godot* and between his impaired, elderly characters in *Endgame*. Vladimir and Estragon and Hamm, Clov, Nell and Nagg all speak of their past. In both plays there is significant story-telling by the characters, which suggests they had greater energy or more vigor at some earlier period. These tales describe happier times or, in Hamm’s case, moments when he suffered less. For the elderly, nostalgia can be viewed as a psychological compensation as their bodies succumb to entropy. The way that nostalgia cushions the blow of experiencing entropy may be linked to the way, as Cephalus demonstrates, the popular conception of aging is rife with misconceptions about how old age will be spent. Similarly, it is in the voice of young Krapp that we find the regrets of the elderly Krapp we see on stage. Krapp’s younger voice illustrates the great miscalculation of his youth: that he could put off cultivating his personal life in favor of pursuing his career, that he would have time later. James Knowlson in *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*

recalls that Beckett himself—not unlike Plato’s Cephalus—looked to old age as a time to reflect. However, as Knowlson illustrates, Beckett did not anticipate the drains upon his time and his creativity that would mark his final years. Beckett planned to devote more time to work as he aged, but he did not find respite in which to work as he desired.

“Following his seventieth birthday,” Knowlson writes:

Beckett decided to take the words of the Psalmist⁴ seriously. So he did everything he could, while continuing to live in a busy city, to create a seclusion in which he could write for the short time he thought remained. He had always believed that, in old age, things would be simplified and one would be free to concentrate on essentials; he associated old age with the idea of light, of illumination. And he often spoke of how writers like Goethe and Yeats had produced their best work when they were old men [...] Early in 1977, he wrote: “Attempts to get going on new work [are] fruitless” and “writing [is] in the doldrums”; “With me endless interruptions, endless mail, no possibility of work. Submerged. See no way out.” The cry was a familiar one. But the sense that time was rapidly running out made it more desperate than ever before. (567-568)

Knowlson does not suggest that Beckett embraced the idea of waxing nostalgic in old age; however, he does report that strains on Beckett’s time and energy took a toll on his

⁴ Knowlson prefaces his memory of Beckett’s words by quoting Psalm 90:10: “THE DAYS OF OUR YEARS [why caps?] are threescore and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (567).

emotional well-being: “He [Beckett] was often profoundly depressed” (568). During this time Beckett was also confronted with the realization that many of his oldest friends were dying—Greer van Velde, Mary Hutchinson, and Con Levenathal (568) all passed away in rather quick succession.

Knowlson states that Beckett constructed a series of brief poems entitled “Mirlitonnades” (1977-1978) in response to his distress. A few of these were born out of Beckett’s own nostalgic yearnings. Knowlson writes that “Some of these poems arose out of particular moments or incidents in his life” (568). Evidence that Beckett himself felt the despair of age and the entropy inherent in growing old is provided by Knowlson’s following assertion:

In March and April 1977, he thought of perhaps writing a play about the Fates: “Attempts to get going on something new in vain. Just a few rhymes in French. Wish I could do an Atropos all in black, with her scissors.” Instead, these thoughts inspired two of the Mirlitonnades. In the first, one of the Fates spins out life’s thread on her spindle; in the second, the “*noire soeur qui es aux enfers*” (“black sister who art in hell”), waits to cut it. (569)

In his younger days Beckett had envisioned old age as a time where he could be free, much like Sophocles, from the mad, furious master of distractions. In Beckett’s case, Knowlson reminds us such freedom proved elusive. As the thread of his own life was spinning toward its end, Beckett found himself taxed for time and energy. His weariness at having too many obligations and not enough time to write was heightened as Beckett

endured the demise of his friends and his own health issues. These concerns caused Beckett to reflect, much like his own characters, on memories of his past.

Beckett's brand of nostalgia, whether it be his own reminiscences or the nostalgia that is evident in his plays, is tempered by the bleak realities of entropy. This leaning may be a holdover from Beckett's own childhood when, according to Knowlson, Beckett formed the habit of taking stones away from the beach so that he could "[p]rotect them from the wearing away of the waves or the vagaries of the weather. He would lay them gently into the branches of the trees in the garden to keep them safe from harm" (46). Knowlson adds, "Later in life, he came to rationalize this concern as the manifestation of an early fascination with the mineral, with things dying and decaying, with petrification. He linked this interest with Sigmund Freud's view that human beings have a prebirth nostalgia to return to the mineral state" (46). Beckett was just forty-six years old when he wrote *Waiting for Godot* and fifty-one when he completed *Endgame*, so neither script bears evidence of any frustrations Beckett himself may have encountered during his own old age. That said, both plays frame his portrayals of aging through characters that remember the past with nostalgic longing for a time when they were filled with more energy. Beckett frames these moments of nostalgia by placing his characters in bleak surroundings. The histories that his characters recount seem distant—worn thin like the stones on the beach that Beckett observed in childhood—and their nostalgic musings arise as a manifestation of their loss of vitality and in response to the entropy they are experiencing as they age and decay.

Agedness and “The Life Review”

Beckett anticipated and looked forward to old age as a time of mindfulness and reflection. That he aligned his idea of what growing old meant for him with “illumination” implies that Beckett expected a period of introspection. Gerontologist Robert Butler examines the tendency of the aged to become reflective in “The Life Review”:

In 1961, I wrote a preliminary article, entitled “Recall and Retrospection,” in which I postulated that there existed a universal occurrence in older persons of an important inner experience. I called it life review [....] It became apparent that memories, reminiscence, and nostalgia all play a part in the process and that older people were engaged in the important psychological task of integrating the lives they had lived. Life reviews are extremely complex, nuanced, unguided, often inchoate and contradictory, and frequently filled with irony, comedy, and tragedy. (8)

Beckett provides an example of life review in *Krapp’s Last Tape*, with the elderly Krapp using his recorder and tapes to reflect upon his past. In *Endgame*, the elderly Nell compares the humor of unhappiness to old stories: “And, we laugh, we laugh, with a will, in the beginning. But it’s always the same thing. Yes, it’s like the funny story we have heard too often, we still find it funny, but we don’t laugh anymore” (104). The nostalgic impulses of life review can be a positive feature of memory for the elderly, but the

process of entering life review is necessitated as a reaction to the disordered state that precipitates increased physical entropy. By contrast, some among the elderly may view their condition of agedness from a negative standpoint and think of aging as nothing more than their lives running out of time. In either case, it is accurate to describe agedness as the body losing viability to the extent that it will eventually falter and fall into some state of decline or disorder. As time passes, the body's energy, its time of sustainability, simply runs out. One way that the elderly can press forward despite their entropic bodies is through expression, such as the life review.

In *The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett*, John Calder writes of Beckett's illustrations of time and recounts discussing old age with Beckett:

I had dinner with Beckett shortly before his seventieth birthday, and commenting on the coming watershed, he said; 'Seventy, that's old age! When you're old the only thing left is work. Work must be your company.' And that is what he entitled the book he was finishing at the time. (69)

Calder refers to Beckett's novel *Company* as "a collection of memories" wherein the narrator meditates on his memories through a series of voices (all versions of his own) that recall moments from his past. The example of life review in *Company* is less obvious than in *Krapp's Last Tape*, but it is nevertheless evident. Plato's illustrations of an aged Cephalus and Samuel Beckett's own expectations of old age suggest that both authors predicted that agedness would usher in a time of contemplation—which is the premise of Butler's description of life review. The act of contemplation in life review is

metaphysical, as it is the consciousness engaging in discourse with memory. In Beckett's theater, he often demonstrates this metaphysicality of contemplation through depictions of old characters "trapped in thought," in Enoch Brater's terms. As the play breakdown in chapter one demonstrates, Beckett's depictions of old "trapped in thought" people are increasingly common throughout his career, often with the contemplating old person in the advanced stages of entropy. For example, *Not I*, *A Piece of Monologue*, and *Ohio Impromptu* all combine age with depictions of contemplation and entropy. The ways in which Beckett has his old "trapped in thought" people exhibit consciousness and contemplation is illustrative of the winding down, the diminishment, the entropy that marks his theater.

Waiting for Godot

Taken at face value, the title of *Waiting for Godot* suggests the play's entry into the world of thermodynamics, for the very state of waiting in a world that is in motion is, in itself, entropic. If we take the literal French translation of the title *En Attendant Godot*, we arrive at "While" *Waiting for Godot* which further confirms the play's attention to energy. This is because the term *while* implies activity—something is happening. *While* is the modifier to that activity. In *Waiting for Godot* much is happening "while" waiting: the characters move about the stage, they speak, they endure pain or become frustrated. There are slapstick moments of comedy, there is thinking, the tree sprouts new leaves. I assert that much of what the characters are doing in their heightened state of entropy "while" waiting in their disordered world amounts to aging. The play opens with

Estragon's defeated acceptance of his fate: "[*giving up again.*] Nothing to be done" (3). The stage direction "*giving up again*" is an example of entropy because it suggests an effort, energy directed at a possibility of *something* to be done, but however fleeting that moment of effort, it is quickly abandoned. The line "Nothing to be done" is an example of stasis—Estragon is surrendering to the idea that any effort he might make is useless. As such, the play announces itself at its outset in entropic terms. The characters do not have the capacity to change their outcome, or, if they do have such ability, they do not know how to apply it to enact change. This is the basis of their disordered state: they cannot direct their energy in productive ways. They have resolved themselves to the idea that there is *nothing to be done*. Vladimir replies, "I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle. [*He broods, musing on the struggle. Turning to Estragon.*] So there you are again" (3), to which Estragon ponders, "Am I?" (3). The opening sequence broadcasts the state of disorder and uncertainty evident throughout the play. As the play unfolds, it becomes increasingly evident that all efforts lead to naught for the play's characters.

While entropy is always a state of increased disorder, for the aged this does not necessarily equate to an entirely negative state of being. Vladimir and Estragon mention physical maladies such as Estragon's pained feet or weak left lung and Vladimir's garlic remedy for his kidneys, but they do not seem miserable most of the time. Like Cephalus's account of old men flocking together, Didi and Gogo are very much birds of a feather, and they seem to find comfort in being together. In fact, the pair reject the thought of

being without one another to the point that they choose not to hang themselves from the tree, despite its potential to give them an erection, for fear that one of them might die while the other survives. Didi and Gogo have, by their own account, been together fifty years (46). As such, they have experienced aging together. Beckett establishes that the camaraderie between Didi and Gogo has developed across a span of time. The relationship between the pair is grounded in a shared history—one upon which they both reflect. While *Waiting for Godot* never answers the question of why the two are waiting, the use of nostalgia in the dialogue between Vladimir and Estragon provides some context for how long they have remained together:

Vladimir : When I think of it...all these years...but for me...where would you be...[*Decisively.*] You'd be nothing more than a little heap of bones at the present minute, no doubt about it.

Estragon: And what of it?

Vladimir: [*gloomily*] It's too much for one man. [*Pause. Cheerfully.*] On the other hand what's the good of losing heart now, that's what I say. We should have thought of it a million years ago, in the nineties.

Estragon: Ah stop blathering and help me off with this bloody thing.

Vladimir: Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were respectable in those days. Now it is too late. They wouldn't even let us up. [*Estragon tears at his boot.*] What are you doing? (4)

Vladimir's reference to "a million years ago" suggests that he and Estragon are now much older than they were when they were among the first visitors to the Eiffel Tower.

Vladimir's contention that he has taken care of Estragon "all these years" indicates that the two have never parted. Here, Beckett's use of nostalgia within the dialogue confirms that Didi and Gogo have remained compatriots across a span of years. Vladimir's invocation of the passing of a large quantity of time—"a million years"—verifies that he and Estragon have aged together. It also verifies that they have not always existed in stasis—they have not always waited—and their waiting is digressive. While they are active while waiting—that is, they are doing things and moving about—they are not *productive* while waiting. The non-productive waiting does not culminate in any kind of resolution, such as the arrival of Godot. As such, their waiting is an example of entropic disorder.

The condition of waiting illustrates the stasis that accumulates as entropy increases. Waiting, as a pursuit, produces nothing, and it is indicative of energy being directed in ways that achieve nothing. Indeed, Vivian Mercer famously summed up *Waiting for Godot* as a "theoretical impossibility" and "a play in which nothing happens, twice."⁵ The inertia evident throughout the play is emblematic of the decay, deterioration, and aging the characters endure *while* waiting for the elusive Godot. Estragon's nightly beatings at the hands of an ill-defined "they" suggest continual disorder for the character whose sleep is not just disturbed but violently withheld from him. Vladimir asks, "The same lot as usual?" to which Estragon replies, "The same? I don't know" (4). The "beating awake" is an event that Estragon has come to expect. The constancy of Estragon's beatings disrupts his sleep and leaves him weary. Estragon's state of

⁵ Vivian Mercer *The Irish Times*, 18 February 1956, p. 6.

exhaustion is increased whenever he tries to nod off, for even Vladimir will not let him rest. Estragon's protestation "I was asleep! [*Despairingly*] Why will you never let me sleep?" (20) invests the play with the tenor of systemic interruption—a repetitious effort to interfere with the part of the system that is sleeping (in this case, Estragon) and beat it awake. The disruptions of Estragon's sleep illustrate disorder in the world in which he dwells. That forces in the play align to keep the aged Estragon from sleeping demonstrates the play's attention to entropy and disorder. His disturbed sleep forces Estragon back into an active state; however, his energy is dissipating due to weariness, which is amplified by his age. He is weakened to the point that the simple act of removing his boot on his own requires immense effort; in fact, he gives up trying once he realizes he lacks the energy to free his foot from the shoe. Estragon's inability to train what remains of his energy on the task of boot removal is compounded by the disordered system that saps his stamina by preventing his sleep. Estragon lacks the energy to remove his boot, he does not have the strength to fight off his attackers, and even his companion Vladimir interferes with his rest, so Estragon simply gives up—there is *nothing to be done*. As such, Estragon assumes every facet of age, entropy, disorder, and stasis.

Estragon's example highlights the play's attention to the body. His struggles with his boot, the acquisition of sleep, and the abandonment of his efforts mark his aged body as vulnerable to entropic disorder and stasis. The sense that he, along with the other characters, is caught in cycles of systemic disorder is punctuated by references to the conditions of the pair's own bodies. Both claim to be suffering, Estragon with his feet and Vladimir with "the kidneys" (11) he treats with garlic. The certainty that both

characters exist within an entropic system is verified in Estragon's complaint—" [*coldly.*] There are times when I wonder if it wouldn't be better for us to part"—to which Vladimir reminds him of his position of stasis, "You wouldn't go far" (10). Disorder and entropic descriptions of spatial dissonance, then, are evident throughout the play. For instance, the characters struggle to recall where they were and when:

Estragon: What did we do yesterday?

Vladimir: What did we do yesterday?

Estragon: Yes.

Vladimir: Well... [*Angrily.*] Nothing is certain when you're about. (9)

The uncertainties expressed by Vladimir and Estragon, while linked to memory, also suggest that the cognitive function of remembering can suffer entropy. Time and space appear to dissolve into the ether for Didi and Gogo. They cannot go forward, they cannot turn back, and everything is ambiguous while they wait for Godot, including the landscape. They have no bearings, no physical or historical moorings from which to launch forward:

Estragon: You're sure it was this evening?

Vladimir: What?

Estragon: That we were to wait.

Vladimir: He said Saturday. [*Pause.*] I think.

Estragon: You think.

Vladimir: I must have made a note of it. [*He fumbles in his pockets, bursting with miscellaneous rubbish.*]

Estragon: [*very insidious.*] But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? [Pause.] Or Monday? [Pause.] Or Friday? (9)

Didi and Gogo are caught in a system that keeps them in a static holding pattern. However, this stasis contributes to their uncertainties. The forgetfulness of the characters is informed by their status as aging figures; the fact that their memories are not in working order demonstrates inconsistency in their cognitive faculties. The disorder here is expressed through the characters' inability to function adequately, to the point that even the measures that they take to resist their stasis fails. For example, Vladimir writes notes to help him remember, but he then cannot find the note he made to verify the date. Estragon tries to think back, to remember, but he is not even sure what day it is. Their holding pattern, their waiting, reflects a system of stasis wherein their existence and perceptions are marked by entropy.

While I assert that the characters operate in stasis and entropy, I do not mean to suggest that their encounters with their world are lacking in activity. Indeed, for a play where "nothing happens twice," there are many energetic moments in *Waiting for Godot*. The play contains several scenes that require some physical dexterity on the part of the actors. However, exertion in *Waiting for Godot* is always framed as a challenge to entropy. With resilience Didi and Gogo kill time, engage in their "cantors," and play games in order to distract themselves from entropy. But as the pauses and silences indicate, they are always brought back to their condition. At the end points of these activities, they sag like puppets and entertain despair. One example of this occurs early in the play when Vladimir and Estragon mull over what they should do while waiting for

Godot. Estragon suggests, “How about we hang ourselves?” (11). This suggestion gives way to the pair sparring over the idea:

Vladimir : From a bough? [*They go towards the tree.*] I wouldn’t trust it.

Estragon: We can always try.

Vladimir: Go ahead.

Estragon: After you.

Vladimir: No no, you first.

Estragon: Why me?

Vladimir: You’re lighter than I am.

Estragon: Just so!

Vladimir: I don’t understand. (11)

The exchange culminates in the two choosing not to risk anything on hanging. Hampered by their own fear of making the wrong choice, they opt to postpone the decision:

Vladimir: Let’s wait and see what he says.

Estragon: Who?

Vladimir: Godot.

Estragon: Good idea. (12)

The two tramps feel compelled to check with their keeper, as Godot is the literal keeper of their time as they stand about waiting:

Estragon: Where do we come in?

Vladimir: Come in?

Estragon: Take your time.

Vladimir: Come in? On our hands and knees.

Estragon: As bad as that?

Vladimir: Your Worship wishes to assert his prerogatives?

Estragon: We've no rights any more?

Vladimir: You'd make me laugh if it wasn't prohibited.

Estragon: We've lost our rights?

Vladimir: [*distinctly.*] We got rid of them. (13)

That Vladimir imagines them crawling on their hands and knees as they “come in” signals the state of devolution consistent with aging or agedness. The imagery can be read as a reversion back to a child-like modality or a continuation of degeneration, hobbled to one's knees in response to the entropy that causes things to fall apart and people to age.

Estragon returns to the idea of stagnation, asking, “We're not tied?” This leads Vladimir to ponder their predicament:

Vladimir: How do you mean tied?

Estragon: Down.

Vladimir: But to whom? By whom?

Estragon: To your man.

Vladimir: To Godot? Tied to Godot! What an idea! No question of it.

[*Pause.*] For the moment. (15)

The two tramps are consigned to waiting. If we read their description of being “bound” by their promise to wait for Godot as a statement of encumbered trajectory, rather than a

lament of confinement, the suggestion that they are “bound to wait” underscores their state of disorder because it demonstrates that the only direction they can move toward is one that leads to more entropy. In other words, Didi and Gogo exist in such disorder that they can do little other than acquiesce to stasis as they endure and *go on*, but they know not when, where, what for, or for how long. As such, they vibrate in entropic purgatory—their waiting—as the system that they exist within will not allow for any other option.

In *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study*, Hugh Kenner writes, “The second law of thermodynamics is the real theme of Lucky’s headlong oration, with its litany of labors ‘left unfinished for reasons unknown,’ its stream of elegiac phrases, ‘wastes and pines,’ ‘fades away,’ ‘the great cold the great dark,’ ‘fading, fading, fading,’ and its computation to the nearest decimal of the dead loss per head since the death of Bishop Berkley” (183). Indeed, Lucky’s speech, which issues forth in utter disorder, is the veritable definition of entropy. References to aging, decay, and mankind’s fruitless attempts to extend vitality are nestled within his ejaculation of nonsense. The “wastes and pines” that Kenner points to refer to the earlier phrase “that man in brief in spite of the strides of alimentation and defecation” (36). These occur “in spite of the strides of physical culture the practice of sport such as tennis football running cycling swimming” and despite “penicillin,” which directly suggests human vulnerability to disease by helping people survive illnesses that may have done them in earlier in life, allowing them the possibility of surviving long enough to grow old.

In Lucky’s speech mankind itself as “time will tell fades away” with “the skull fading fading fading and concurrently simultaneously” until finally “alas on the skull the

skull the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the labors abandoned left unfinished.” His speech culminates with “graver still abode of stones” (36-37). The “abode of stones” coupled with the word “graver” contains multiple suggestions of death, which occurs “in spite of the strides of physical culture.” For example, “the graver” may refer to the aged, who become graver with impairment and deterioration, or it may refer to the gravedigger at the cemetery, which is “the abode of stones.” If we, as Kenner suggests, read Lucky’s speech through the fundamentals of the Second Law, it is impossible to ignore the character’s references to age and decay, especially given the entropic delivery of his oration. Beckett structures Lucky’s speech in such a way that it maximizes the increasing disorder of his eruptions of thought.

Lucky’s mind is offered up as defective machine; although it can do what the operator (in this case, Pozzo) requires of it, it has deteriorated into such a state of entropy that it lacks coherence. Lucky’s age is not provided as a textual certainty, but in an earlier exchange Pozzo reflects on when he “took a knook”—the term “knook” likely refers to the actual whip he uses to urge Lucky along, but it could also refer to Lucky himself if the word “knook” is interpreted to mean “slave.” Pozzo then speaks of years:

That was nearly sixty years ago...*[he consults his watch.]*...yes, nearly sixty. *[Drawing himself up proudly.]* You wouldn’t think it to look at me, would you? Compared to him I look like a young man, no? *[Pause.]* Hat! *[Lucky puts down the basket and takes off his hat. His long white hair falls down about his face. He puts his hat under his arm and picks up the*

basket.] Now look. [Pozzo takes off his hat. He is completely bald. He puts on his hat again.] Did you see? (27)

If Pozzo took Lucky as his slave sixty years prior, then this is textual evidence that Pozzo is aged in excess of sixty years. This also suggests that Lucky is quite old—much older than sixty. In this way, Beckett establishes that both Pozzo and Lucky are old. However, by portraying the pair as diminishing in the second act, Beckett also frames the characters as experiencing increased entropy.

The arrival of a boy adds another layer to Beckett’s attention to age in *Waiting for Godot*. The boy is a polar opposite of all the other characters in the play. The boy’s appearance seems a stark contrast to the older men he encounters. His arrival is received oddly by Didi and Gogo. They interrogate the boy for affirmations, knowledge that seems to be perpetually out of reach for the pair. For example, Estragon asks the boy, “Do you know what time it is?” (42). Estragon has struggled to nail down time, and his question suggests that the child may have access to knowledge that eludes Didi and Gogo. Additionally, the boy carries a message that Mr. Godot will not arrive this day, but will come tomorrow instead. He is the only knowledge-base with information on Godot to which Didi and Gogo have access:

Boy: What am I to tell Mr. Godot, Sir?

Vladimir: Tell him...*[he hesitates.]* ...tell him you saw us. *[Pause.]* You did see us, didn’t you?

Boy: Yes, Sir. (45)

Vladimir's need to confirm that the boy has in fact seen him suggests a disconnect between how he and the child perceive one another. The boy is the diametric opposite of Didi and Gogo: the boy is a single figure, youthful, and he has access to Mr. Godot. Vladimir and Estragon are never apart (aside from sleeping), they are old, and they have no access to Godot. Further, the boy's appearance marks a disruption to the pair's system of waiting. The boy's denial of having come the day before calls attention to the uncertainties in how Vladimir and Estragon operate and underscores the entropy under which they exist.

While Beckett details in the script that the second act begins "Next day. Same time. Same place," he instructs that the previously bare tree now has "four or five leaves" (49). This alteration invests the play with ambiguity. Vladimir suggests that although only a day has passed, "Things have changed here since yesterday" (52). As the action unfolds it is unclear how much time, in chronological terms, has passed for the characters. Vladimir points to the tree as evidence that something has changed:

Vladimir: Look at the tree.

Estragon: It's never the same pus from one second to the next.

Vladimir: The tree, look at the tree. [*Estragon looks at the tree.*]

Estragon: Was it not there yesterday?

Vladimir: Yes of course it was there. Do you not remember? WE nearly hanged ourselves from it. But you wouldn't. Do you not remember?

Estragon: You dreamt it.

Vladimir: Is it possible you've forgotten already?

Estragon: That's the way I am. Either I forget immediately or I never forget.

Vladimir: And Pozzo and Lucky, have you forgotten them too?

Estragon: Pozzo and Lucky?

Vladimir: That was Lucky.

Estragon: I remember that, but when was it?

Vladimir: And his keeper, do you not remember him?

Estragon: He gave me a bone.

Vladimir: That was Pozzo.

Estragon: And all that was yesterday, you say?

Vladimir: Yes of course it was yesterday. (53)

Estragon's uncertainty confirms the vague sense of time throughout the second act, as even the characters themselves cannot account for time in a unified way. In *The Coming of Age* Simone de Beauvoir suggests that aging carries with it the tendency to lose focus on time:

There is more than one reason for the change in the evaluation of time that occurs between youth and age [...]. I am not speaking of a precise calculation, but rather of a spontaneous impression. And then young people's memories give them back the past year with a wealth of detail that spreads over an enormous extent [...]. When we are old, on the other

hand, few things make such an impression on us; the passing moment brings little new, and upon that little we do not dwell for long. (375)

Didi and Gogo lose focus on time because they are aged figures trapped in a cycle of stasis that brings “little new” as the moments pass. Because the question of time remains ambiguous throughout the play, the sense of disorder takes center stage in the dialogue and in the action of the characters. This attention to uncertainty within the play’s narrative is evident in performance as the spectator observes the incongruities in action, narrative, time, and space.

The sense of disorder is informed by the absence of a definite chronological progression and is heightened by the dilemma of where to locate time in *Waiting for Godot*. The only thing that is certain about time in the play is that it has passed. How much time, what season (the leaf suggests spring), and the very time of day remain uncertainties. While the tree’s new leaves invoke rebirth on some level, that bit of life is tempered and negated by Estragon’s response to the change. As Vladimir notices, “Everything oozes” and “It’s never the same puss from one second to the next” (53). Estragon addresses change through vocabulary that invokes deterioration and decay. The words “puss” and “ooze” imply that Estragon sees evidence of decay rather than a promise of rebirth. This moment evinces platitudes of change being an inevitable spiral into decay—the birth astride a grave to which Vladimir refers later in the act (83). This reference to puss and oozing suggests that age is something the tree itself cannot avoid. The leaves may be new, but the tree is not getting any younger. Rather, even the tree

itself is aging, subject to the deterioration and entropy that is unavoidable with the passing of time.

That passing time and change are central to entropy and aging is reaffirmed when the spectator encounters the deterioration that has befallen Lucky and Pozzo when they reappear in the second act. This time one is blind and the other is mute. According to Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld in *Beckett in the Theatre*, Beckett wanted the play to exhibit human decay and decline. In one example from their analysis of the Schiller-Theater production, McMillan and Fehsenfeld mention Beckett's attention to Lucky's dance: "It is noteworthy in this respect, that the dance itself is the first item of a three part-series of performances by Lucky which leads toward a conclusion that does not occur"; they add, "Lucky dances first and 'thinks afterwards' in what Pozzo confirms is 'the natural order'" (65). Lucky is depicted throughout the play in terms of incompleteness in that he seems the least fully-formed person among the quadrangle of himself, Pozzo, Estragon, and Vladimir. He waits in the service of Pozzo, just as his thought waits for the application of his "thinking cap" to be revealed.

Immediately after his episode of thinking, Lucky falls and requires the help of Vladimir, Estragon, and Pozzo to regain his feet (38). This casts Lucky in terms of tiredness and decrepitude. Further, the other characters describe Lucky in terms consistent with growing old. When Lucky and Pozzo first arrive, Estragon wonders, "What ails him?" Vladimir responds, "He looks tired," adding later, "Look at the slobber" (19). Lucky's physical appearance is disordered. Pozzo is concerned when Lucky refuses to gnaw on his spent bone: "I've never known him to refuse a bone before.

[*He look anxiously at Lucky.*] Nice business it'd be if he fell sick on me!" (21). Pozzo complains that he wants to rid himself of Lucky by selling him at the fair (26), and when he reminisces that Lucky's been in his service for "nearly sixty years" (27), Vladimir expresses disgust: "And now you turn him away? Such an old and faithful servant!" (27). Lucky's position as an aged servant is compounded by the suggestion that he is also weary and cowed by impairments—a situation that worsens for him in the second act when he arrives mute. While Lucky's physical disorders are examples of decline, his plight is complicated by the stasis of his position as Pozzo's slave. Although Lucky's comportment does not necessarily broadcast any distress on his part, his acceptance of the yoke of servitude and his nonplussed reactions to Pozzo's abusive treatment of him suggest that Lucky has endured these conditions long enough that he is desensitized to his ill-treatment.

The *mise en scène* also broadcasts the perils of entropy and stasis. All elements combine to underscore the sense that the characters are aging out of use and time in a world that is increasingly unfamiliar and defunct. Some scholars have aligned the blighted noir-scape of *Waiting for Godot* to entropy and waste in Europe in the wake of the World Wars. In *Casebook on Waiting for Godot* Ruby Cohn describes this by quoting Winston Churchill, who asks, "What is Europe now? It is a rubble-heap, a charnel house, a breeding ground of pestilence and hate." Cohn adds, "It is the atmosphere out of which *Godot* was born—the despair, hunger, and disease of postwar Europe—being defined by Winston Churchill" (114). If we take up Cohn's reading of Churchill's lament, Europe can be viewed as the "old man"—as indeed it was following the Second World War

where entire populations of young men died in battle, and legions of young people, some just children, died in Nazi internment camps; after the war, Europe was weary and markedly older. This agedness—punctuated by the empty spaces left by lost youth across postwar Europe—seems reflected in the depopulated landscape of the play. Beckett dresses the stage with nothing more than a scant tree along a country road, and *Waiting for Godot* opens with Estragon “sitting on a low mound” (3). Reading Cohn’s example of Churchill’s description of war-torn Europe in consort with the play’s landscape leaves the mound upon which Estragon sits open for interpretation—if we imagine that Estragon is sitting upon a forgotten grave, it invests his line “Nothing to be done” with an even greater suggestion of entropic decline.

At its essence, *Waiting for Godot* is a play that capitalizes on the materiality of its theatrical world. For a play in which “nothing happens twice” and where the stage treatment of the *mise en scène* is notably spare, *Godot* pays great attention to thingy-ness. The bits with props—shoes, carrots, ropes, Lucky’s hat—affirm the play’s attention to materiality. Cohn aligns this reliance on props with “inexhaustibility” within Beckett’s plays. When she mentions inexhaustibility, Cohn reflects on the ways that Beckett utilizes emptiness to draw attention to whatever is present in his theater:

If any dramatist has the right to speak of drama as an ado about nothing, it is Beckett. And he means what is *there*. The picture waits to be turned, the window asks to be looked out of. The tree is meant to be done. The empty landscape waits to be recognized. The boots to be worn. Beckett may say (as a café in Paris) “that cup, that table, those people—all the same.” And

yet which of the New Wave—hovering over images with the camera’s mind—can invest man-as-object with so much humanity? Why, tree, boot, bowler, and black radish seem more human than the people in other plays. (115-116)

According to Cohn’s interpretation, the ways in which Beckett utilizes objectification while retaining the humanity of the subject on stage denotes a type of inexhaustibility. That Beckett himself saw sameness between the things and the patrons at a café is evidence of how closely he associated humanity with materiality—the stuff of life that we use without much thought.

While Cohn identifies the Second Law of Thermodynamics in Beckett’s plays, she stops short of connecting Beckett’s depictions of age with energy. She writes, “Someone cries, another weeps—by the sorcery of form Beckett defies the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Energy is pumped back into the dead system by having it come back from the other side of the stage, crippled and much the worse for wear, crying pitifully for help, and then behaving like an Ancient Hero, wisdom come from suffering” (118). Cohn is correct in aligning Beckett’s work with the laws that govern energy. However, she is mistaken in thinking that Beckett *defies* the Second Law. For example, the play’s characters exit and re-enter the scene. However, they *never* leave the system; they are always present within the cosmos of *Waiting for Godot*. As such, Cohn’s claim that Beckett uses a “sorcery of form” that allows him to “defy” the Second Law is erroneous. At no time within the play does energy actually leave the system or return to the system; the system has not died, as Cohn posits. If we read age into Cohn’s

observation that Beckett's characters reappear more impaired in the second Act—"crippled and much worse for wear"—the significance of Beckett's use of entropy becomes evident. Energy is not pumped back into the Beckettian system; rather, it becomes more static and the entropy increases. When Beckett gives us an "Ancient hero," as Cohn states, he does so through illustrations of confinement: the characters cannot escape and their energy does not leave the system. Beckett's writings, where nothing ends definitively, reflect an understanding of the premise that energy cannot be created nor destroyed. As the last line of *The Unnamable* declares, there must be continuation: *I can't go on, I'll go on*. As such, energy cannot be restored in the sense of regeneration or being "pumped back into the dead system" as Cohn argues. However, Cohn's reading demonstrates why the field of Beckett Studies should pay closer attention to Beckett's use of elderly characters. Simply put, Beckett's interpretations of energy are all related through depictions of entropy, and he conveys this relationship through illustrations of age. By failing to consider age, Cohn's analysis misses an opportunity to analyze the trajectory of Beckett's use of energy. The diminishment she recognizes can only be interpreted as entropy. Beckett makes his characters old in order to demonstrate this connection between the corporeality of the body, the metaphysics of consciousness and the energy that presses both toward dissolution.

The aging and the disordered state in *Waiting for Godot* is the entropy that Cohn does not name as such but clearly recognizes. Beckett's invocation of age and aging through illustrations of stasis and entropy are indicative of the "birth astride of a grave"

invested in every nuance of *Waiting for Godot*. Immediately following her commentary on the Second Law, Cohn offers this passage from *Godot*:

Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's
abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day
he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we
were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not
enough for you? [*Calmer.*] They give birth astride of a grave, the light
gleams an instant, then it's night once more. [*He jerks on the rope.*] On!
(82)

Pozzo's words indicate that he is quite aware of his own aging and of Lucky's as well. The master and servant pair arrive in the second act much altered. While many of Lucky's impairments were already evident in the first act, the fact that he is now mute and Pozzo is blind places them both in the very throes of entropy, and as Pozzo acknowledges, their respective "disorders" are consistent with aging. That Beckett follows "then it's night once more" with "On!" demonstrates his attention to the workings of energy, in that the "night" of bodily death does not mean the death of energy, which goes on.

All of the characters in *Waiting for Godot* are closer to the grave than they are to birth, but the premise remains: they were born to age, born to decline, born to see their energies dissipate, and born to die. This process requires a forward momentum, and until the entropy is insurmountable, they will continue going on. However, in *Godot* the energy expressed does not result in a trajectory sufficient enough to get Didi and Gogo

out of their holding pattern. They remain in stasis. Vladimir cannot understand why he does not see beyond himself and why he cannot account for time:

Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now?

Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today?

That with Estragon my friend, at this place until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us?

Probably. But in all that what truth will there be? [*Estragon, having struggled with his boots in vain, is dozing off again. Vladimir looks at*

him.] He'll know nothing. He'll tell me about the blows he received and

I'll give him a carrot. [*Pause.*] Astride of a grave and a difficult birth.

Down in the hold, lingeringly, the gravedigger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. [*He listens.*] But habit is

a great deadener. [*He looks again at Estragon.*] At me too someone is

looking, of me too someone is saying, He is sleeping, he knows nothing,

let him sleep on. [*Pause.*] I can't go on! [*Pause.*] What have I said? (83)

Vladimir seems to sense his own entropy—that the very system in which they wait is the placeholder for growing old and that he himself by virtue of being human cannot go on indefinitely. He and Gogo are like cogs in a machine that keeps choking in fits and starts, and all they can do is continue to go on in their “time to grow old.” A boy arrives once more to announce that Mr. Godot will not be coming. When pressed by Vladimir, the boy admits that Godot himself does “nothing” (84). The boy also recalls Godot as having a

white beard, which implies that Godot is old. An old Godot raises the question of whether he, too, is subject to entropy.

Speculation that Beckett wrote *Godot*, the title character we never see, as a stand-in for God in the play seems confirmed when Vladimir responds to the boy's description of Godot with "Christ have mercy on us!" (84). That said, despite the play's references to the Bible such as the mention of the two thieves in the first act, reading *Waiting for Godot* as parable vastly misconstrues the wider project of the play. As its title announces, it is a play about waiting. Again, in the literal French translation it is a play about what happens *while* waiting. What happens while waiting in *Waiting for Godot* is that entropy increases in concordance with disorder. Things and people display the ravages of time: Pozzo goes blind, and Lucky becomes mute. Vladimir and Estragon wait, repeatedly. In the final scene Estragon professes, "I can't go on like this," to which Vladimir retorts, "That's what you think" (86). In a last display of entropy, Gogo fails to manage his trousers and does not realize he has dropped them until Vladimir tells him to put them back on. The machinery of their existence is broken, decaying, aging, but their energy will keep flowing until their entropy reaches its final tipping point. The play culminates with an entropic illustration. Vladimir asks, "Well? Shall we go?" Estragon replies, "Yes, let's go" but Beckett's stage direction indicates "*They do not move*" (87). The spectator is left with only one certainty about Didi and Gogo: the two aging tramps are—and are destined to remain—entrenched in stasis.

Endgame

In *Endgame* entropy is illustrated through the literal and figurative breakdown of a game. As Anthony Cronin notes in *Samuel Beckett the Last Modernist*, Beckett himself discussed his use of chess as a way of framing the idea of order in *Endgame*:

One must make a world of one's own in order to satisfy one's need to know, to understand, one's need for order [...] There for me, lies the value of the theater. One turns our small world with its own laws, conducts the action as if upon a chess board...yes, even a game of chess is too complex.
(558)

Unlike the characters in *Godot*, the characters in *Endgame*, with the exception of Clov, are markedly aged. The sense that the agedness that surrounds Clov influences his own identity is augmented by his attention to habit. Clov refuses or is unable to reject the decrepitude that invests whatever remains of his youth with little hope beyond that of an end: "It may end. [*Pause.*] All life long the same questions the same answers" (95).

While Clov's chronological age goes unmentioned in the script, his "place of being" as Alain Badiou would call it, is a place of being *old*. Everything about Clov denotes aging from his staggering gait to his vision:

Hamm: How are your eyes?

Clov: Bad.

Hamm: How are your legs?

Clov: Bad.

Hamm: But you can move.

Clov. Yes. (96-97)

While Clov is certainly younger than Hamm, Nell, and Nagg, his stilted movements alone make him appear like a old man as he navigates the repetition of a world where he “can’t be punished any more” (92). As Clov stares at the wall in his kitchen, he perceives the loss of energy and his fading youth:

Hamm: The wall! And what do you see on your wall? Mene, mene?

Naked bodies?

Clov: I see my light dying.

Hamm: Your light dying? Listen to that! Well, it can die just as well here, *your* light. Take a look at me and then come back and tell me what you think of *your* light. (100)

Hamm’s self-referential reflection on fading light is that his own light has all but been extinguished by his agedness and impairments. The sentiment that all light, all energy of youth and vigor has passed them by is compounded when Hamm asks Clov about seeds he has planted:

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! (100)

Clov's denial that his seeds will ever germinate may be interpreted in a number of ways, all of which are consistent with the idea that any chances Clov might have once had to experience youthful vigor have passed. If we imagine the seeds as nothing more than Clov's attempt to grow plants, the failure to germinate signals an entropic disorder within the system in which he dwells. If seeds cannot grow once planted, the system that would grow plants under normal circumstances has been rendered deficient.

Clov's inability to coax his seeds to germination can also be seen as a commentary on his own reproductive potential. If we consider such a reading, the question "Did your seeds come up?" takes on new valence and implies that Clov is impotent, unable to bear fruit—his seed will "never sprout!" (100). Under this interpretation, Clov's planting of seed where it cannot bear fruit becomes a metaphor not only for the cataclysmic loss of fertility but also for the passing of his youth. Like Sophocles who was relieved when the passions of youth no longer held sway over him, Clov seems resigned to the condition of infertility that thwarts his efforts to sow seed:

Hamm: [*anguished.*] What's happening, what's happening?

Clov: Something is taking its course. [*Pause.*]

Hamm: All right, be off. [*He leans back in his chair, remains motionless.*

Clov does not move, heaves a great groaning sigh. Hamm sits up.] I thought I told you to be off.

Clov: I'm trying. [*He goes to the door, halts.*] Ever since I was whelped.

[*Exit Clov.*]. (100-101)

His groaning sigh indicates that, although he tries, Clov never experiences the culmination of his efforts. The futility of all of Clov's efforts demonstrates that the only thing "taking its course" is inexorable decline. While Clov is not portrayed by Beckett as being old, the character's impaired vision, his limp, his impotence, and his own assertion that his light is dying signify that he is also no longer young. Despite being the most mobile character in *Endgame*, Clov is the connective tissue between stasis and entropy while he keeps the abode running in its barely functional state. Clov is the least old, yet he announces that he cannot be punished anymore and that his light is dying. His youth has not rendered him immune to the entropy of his environment, nor does his status as the youngest in the dwelling provide him any course of relief or reason to hope for better than the disorder under which he now operates. Whatever youth might remain, he has been reconfigured as an old man with poor vision, a bad leg, and impotence. Clov's response to the conditions under which he dwells is to combat disorder. When Hamm questions what he is doing Clov responds:

Clov: Putting things in order. [*He straightens up. Fervently.*] I am going to clear everything away! [*He starts picking up again.*]

Hamm: Order!

Clov: [*straightening up*] I love order. It's my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its place, under the last dust.

[*He starts picking up again.*]

Hamm: [*exasperated*] What in God's name do you think you are doing?

Clov: [*straightening up*] I'm doing my best to create a little order.

Hamm: Drop it! [*Clov drops the objects he has picked up.*]. (133)

As the Second Law dictates, especially in closed systems such as the one depicted in *Endgame*, order cannot arise from disorder, despite Clov's efforts at keeping order in the characters' shelter.

Regardless of Clov's gestures towards order or Hamm's attempts to control the system within which they dwell by barking orders, entropy prevails, breaking down the characters and the annihilatory space in which they exist. In *On Beckett* Badiou addresses "places of being" in terms of the closed spaces and environments in Beckett's plays:

The first localization is a closure: arranging a closed space, so that the set of features of the place of being may be enumerated and named with precision. The aim is that "what is seen" be coextensive with "what is said," under the sign of the closed. This is obviously the case for the room in which the characters in *Endgame* are confined; it also holds for the bedroom where Malone dies (or does not die), or for Mr. Knott's house in *Watt*. It is also true of the cylindrical arena of *The Lost Ones*. These are some instances of closure, of which many other examples could be given. In the text *Fizzle 5 [Closed Space]*, Beckett writes the following: "Closed place. All needed to be known for say is known"... This is exactly the set-up of fiction with regard to the question of the place of being [...]. (5)

According to Badiou, Beckett's closed spaces exist in a grey-blackness that is "uncontrasted" to the extent that "[l]ittle by little, Beckett's poetics will fuse the closed and the open into the grey black, making it impossible to know whether this grey black is

destined for movement or immobility”(6). Beckett constrains his characters in totality to the grey black, leaving them “superimposed at the place of being” (6). This is Clov’s fate. He is unable to reach escape velocity, even when he claims that he will leave. He and what little remains of his youth are inextricably bound to the grey black—the space of agedness, impairment, and decay—and as a result, the oldness that marks his “place of being” imprints itself upon him. Clov’s aged-by-proximity “youth” is indicative of entropy. What’s left of his youth is misaligned with his “place of being” and so much so that he himself malfunctions, as demonstrated by his limp. Clov seems to sense his own lost youth, as his confession “I see my light dying” suggests (100). He is the only resident of the closed system of *Endgame* who can actually work; however, his ability to function is interrupted by his bad legs, which do not allow him to sit, and by the intrusions of Hamm, whose redirections cause Clov to operate in halts and starts. As such, the system within which Clov is the only moving part is marked by a winding down of energy that seems insurmountable.

Endgame is modeled both in name and in comportment on a chess game. Appropriately, the game that comprises the play has a relationship to Thermodynamics. In “A New Physics Theory of Life,” Natalie Wolchover examines new findings by MIT physicist Jeremy England, who has developed a mathematical formula that breaks down the restructuring of atoms when exposed to external energy and exposed to heat. This combination of variables results in matter dissipating increasing amounts of energy, which is necessary for the creation of life. England’s research has bearings on theories relevant to gaming, such as probabilities, but the fundamentals of his results lie in

Thermodynamics. Wolchover writes, “At the heart of England’s idea is the second law of thermodynamics, also known as the law of increasing entropy or the “arrow of time” (3).

According to Wolchover, entropy “[i]ncreases as a simple matter of probability”:

Eventually, the system arrives as a state of maximum entropy called “thermodynamic equilibrium,” in which energy is uniformly distributed. As a cup of coffee and the room it sits in become the same temperature, for example. As long as the cup and the room are left alone, this process is irreversible. The coffee never spontaneously heats up again because the odds are overwhelmingly stacked against so much of the room’s energy randomly concentrating its atoms. (3)

Because of the closed system in which he exists, Clov is like the mug of coffee that takes on the temperature of its surroundings. Clov has taken on the attributes—in his case agedness and impairment—of all that surrounds him in his “place of being.” As Wolchover asserts, “Life [itself] does not violate the second law of thermodynamics” (4). What Beckett removes from the realm of probability for the characters in *Endgame* is youth itself, which is the thing that time always manages to quash. In Clov’s case, all odds, given the laws governing probabilities, are against his youth emerging from the agedness and decrepitude that marks his “place of being.” Again, like the coffee cup in Wolchover’s example, he remains at the temperature of the room. In Clov’s case, the temperature equates to varying degrees of *old*.

Clov’s counterparts are all older than he is, with Nell and Nagg, the elderly parents of Hamm, being the two oldest in the shelter. If we follow the age line, Hamm is

the middle ground. He is significantly older than Clov but not nearly as old as his parents. Within the game space of *Endgame*, Hamm is always at center. He imposes himself as the central figure by insisting that Clov, who is the only character who can move independently, place him in the physical center, literally center-stage:

Hamm: Am I right in the center?

Clov: I'll measure it.

Hamm: More or less! More or less! [...]

Am I more or less in the center?

Clov: I'd say so.

Hamm: You'd say so! Put me right in the center! (26-27)

However, Hamm's position is constrained to the center of what is a rather small universe, and he seems aware, perhaps more so than the other characters, of the agedness that marks his "place of being":

Hamm: [...] Old wall! Beyond is the ... other hell.

Closer! Closer! Up Against! (25-26)

While he describes his own walls as "old," Hamm appears simultaneously to reject and welcome their function of partitioning him from the rest of the world, or what remains of it: the "other hell" that he imagines beyond them.

Hamm also withholds the keys to the larder, thereby regulating how much and when all the others may eat. He threatens Clov, "I'll give you just enough to keep you from dying. You'll be hungry all the time" (95). Hamm's lording over the group's food ensures that Nell and Nagg, the play's two most elderly characters, remain the

most vulnerable. Clov repeatedly threatens to leave and presumably could as he is mobile enough to actually leave the shelter. Nell and Nagg try, and fail, to bridge the distance between their respective ash cans to reunify. Why the two are kept separated is never made clear, but any suggestion that his parents should have ever touched, let alone procreated, repulses Hamm, who calls his elderly father “Accursed progenitor!” when he rebukes the old man’s request for his “pap.” Hamm laments, “The old folks at home! No decency left! Guzzle, guzzle, that’s all they think of” (98). In “Trying to Understand *Endgame*,” Theodor Adorno considers the most aged characters in *Endgame*:

“Today old people are thrown in the trashcan” and it happens.

Endgame is the true gerontology. According to the measure of socially useful labor, which they can no longer perform, old people are superfluous and must be discarded [...] *Endgame* trains the viewer for a condition where everyone involved expects—upon lifting the lid from the nearest dumpster—to find his own parents [...] Beckett’s trashcans are the emblem of a culture restored after Auschwitz. Yet the sub-plot goes further than too far, to the old people’s demise. They are denied children’s fare, their pap, which is replaced by biscuit they— toothless—can no longer chew; and they suffocate, because the last man is too sensitive to grant life to the next-to-last ones. That is entwined with the main plot, because the old pair’s miserable end drives it forward to that exit of life whose possibility constitutes the

tension in the play. Hamlet is revised: croak, croak, that is the question.
(142-143)

Indeed, when Hamm asks Clov why he will not simply kill him, Clov responds, “I don’t know the combination to the cupboard” (97). The elderly are disposable, as demonstrated by the consignment to trash bins for Nell and Nagg, unless they still serve some function. Nagg’s commentary rebuking Hamm for waking him suggests that the elderly man understands that he has fallen out of usefulness in Hamm’s estimation:

I was asleep as happy as a king, and you woke me up to have me listen to you. It wasn’t indispensable, you didn’t really need to have me listen to you. Besides I didn’t listen to you. [*Pause.*] I hope the day will come when you’ll really need to have me listen to you, and need to hear my voice, any voice. [*Pause.*] Yes, I hope I’ll live till then, to hear you calling me like when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark, and I was your only hope. (132)

Hamm cannot stand, and Clov cannot sit, but together they can manage their dwelling and keep Nell and Nagg more or less alive in their cans. The system in which the characters live degrades to one where the rule of the day is “Every man his speciality [*sic.*]” (98), leaving Nell and Nagg at a great disadvantage. Due to their advanced ages and significant physical limitations, the pair have no specialty left between them. The two most elderly, impaired characters in the cosmos of *Endgame* are the ones most overtaken by entropy. They are the least useful to the system at large and are thus

bottled within their ash cans, containing them in such a way as to maintain some directive over them, some order in the face of their significant physical limitations. The pair are literally marked by disorder through the incapacities of their aged, weakened, and ailing bodies.

The entire quadrangle of characters in *Endgame* exists, then, in stasis. Under the constancy of the grayed world of the play, even Nature itself shares the conditions of entropy and stasis. Hamm claims, “Nature has forgotten us” (99), to which Clov replies, “There is no more nature” (99). Hamm recognizes Clov’s error, insisting “No more nature! You exaggerate,” to which Clov counters, “In the Vicinity.” Hamm corrects him by using aging as an example of nature: “But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!” (99). Clov’s acquiescent “Then she hasn’t forgotten us” (99) is correct. The decay of aging that Hamm points to as evidence of nature is a description of entropy. Even when the characters seek out nature itself, what they describe evokes agedness and deterioration. When Hamm asks Clov to look out the window with his telescope, Clov reports that the sun cannot be located:

Hamm: Is it night already then?

Clov: *[looking]* No.

Hamm: Then what is it?

Clov: *[looking]* Grey. *[Lowering the telescope, turning towards*

Hamm, louder.] Grey! *[Pause. Still louder.]* GRREY!

[Pause. He gets down, approaches Hamm from behind, whispers in his ear.]

Hamm: *[starting]* Grey! Did I hear you say grey? (114)

By presenting the characters as aging within a desolate grey-scape where nature only signifies as death, Beckett illustrates an affirmation of the birth astride of a grave paradox: “The end is in the beginning and yet you go on” (141).

In James and Elizabeth Knowlson’s anthology *Beckett Remembering Remembering Beckett*, actor Bud Thorpe recalls Beckett stepping into the role of Nell during an early rehearsal when Beckett was directing the San Quentin Group in *Endgame* at the Riverside Studios in London: “He put his head to the left shoulder, and sat there, and put his hands up, as though they were on the edge of the bin, and he said: ‘Nell is a whisper of life. Just a whisper of life [...] Sam lisped a little bit, so he had the little ‘y-e-t-h’. And he had this lilting whisper about him, just being on the brink of life and death” (210). Nell’s whisper of life is the only one that appears to end in the play:

Hamm: Go and see is she dead.

[Clov goes to the bins, raises the lid of Nell’s, stoops, to look into it.

Pause.]

Clov: Looks like it.

[He closes the lid, straightens up. Hamm raises his toque. Pause. He puts it on again.]

Hamm: *[With his hand on his toque.]* And Nagg?

[Clov raises lid of Nagg's bin, stoops, to look into it.

Pause.]

Clov: Doesn't look like it.

[He closes the lid, straightens up.]

Hamm: *[letting go his toque]* What's he doing?

[Clov raises lid of Nagg's bin, stoops, looks into it. Pause.]

Clov: He's crying.

[He closes lid, straightens up.]

Hamm: Then he's living. (136)

Later, after Clov reports that Nagg has stopped crying, Hamm comments, "Life goes on" (140). And life does appear to continue, even if it is only a whisper. The appearance of a boy outside of the shelter suggests the potential for existence beyond the dwelling. Clov describes the child as "A potential procreator," but Hamm scoffs, "If he exists he'll die there or he'll come here. And if he doesn't..." (149). Hamm's doubt that the boy exists speaks to his understanding of life, his apprehension of his 'place of being,' and his absolute certainty that death is never far removed from life: "Outside of here it's death." Of Beckett's own view of life, John Calder writes:

Beckett realized that life is a total accident, but whereas others considered themselves supremely lucky to be fathered by the fusion of one sperm in billions that found one egg in millions, Beckett felt the opposite. That tiny chance of life is a supreme disaster, because even if one is born into fortunate circumstances, lives in a period of peace in a

prosperous civilisation [sic], in a part of the world where such things are possible, one still has to face the lifelong certainty that one will die at the end. (13-14)

The temporary nature of life and the artificiality of time in the game space where he exists are ideas that Hamm mentions in the play's final scene: "Moments for nothing, now as always, time was never and time is over, reckoning closed and story ended" (153). By announcing the end of the game, the aged Hamm closes with an immutable truth that places his story within the matrix of time while keeping him in the purgatorial stasis of aging: "What? Neither gone nor dead?" (143). "Moments for nothing" denote the entropy of his present existence. He is old, he is impaired, his life is diminished, and yet he is not dead.

The world of *Endgame* is, as Clov describes it, "Corpsed" (113). Whereas death may seem to be *outside* the closed system of the shelter, within its walls the characters struggle to bide more time while nature continues to chip away at them. This is apparent in Clov's announcement that he has a flea:

Clov: [*anguished, scratching himself*] I have a flea!

Hamm: A flea! Are there still fleas?

Clov: On me there's one. [*Scratching.*] Unless it's a crablouse.

Hamm: [*very perturbed*] But humanity might start from there all over again! Catch him, for the love of God!

Clov: I'll go and get the powder. [*Exit Clov.*]

Hamm: A flea! This is awful! What a day! (115)

That Hamm panics over the potential for humanity to rise again from the leavings of a flea speaks to his overall rejection of nature as a positive force. Even when the pair jostle with the fantasy of travelling away from the shelter, Hamm finds nature too terrifying to contemplate:

Hamm: [*with ardour*] Let's go from here, the two of us! South! You can make a raft and the currents will carry us away, far away, to other...mammals!

Clov: God forbid!

Hamm: Alone, I'll embark alone! Get working on that raft immediately. Tomorrow I'll be gone for ever.

Clov: [*hastening towards door*] I'll start straight away.

Hamm: Wait! [*Clov halts.*] Will there be sharks, do you think?

Clov: Sharks? I don't know. If there are there will be. [*He goes towards door.*]

Wait! [*Clov halts.*] Is it not time for my pain-killer? (116)

Hamm realizes that there is no escape from the perils of nature. He has no choice but to endure whatever fate awaits him, and he expresses his frustration over this dilemma and the hardships of growing old to Clov:

One day you will be blind, like me. You'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever, like me. [*Pause.*] One day you'll say to yourself, I'm tired, I'll sit down, and you'll go and sit down. Then you'll say, I'm hungry, I'll get up and get something to eat. But

you won't get up. You'll say, I shouldn't have sat down, but since I have I'll sit on a little longer, then I'll get up and get something to eat. But you won't get up and you won't get anything to eat. [*Pause.*] You'll look at the wall a while, then you'll say, I'll close my eyes, perhaps have a little sleep, after that I'll feel better, and you'll close them. And when you open them again they'll be no wall anymore. [*Pause.*] Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of all the ages wouldn't fill it, and there you'll be like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe. [*Pause.*] Yes, one day you'll know what it is, you'll be like me, except that you won't have anyone with you, because you won't have had pity on anyone and because there won't be anyone left to have pity on. (117)

Hamm realizes that the energy that keeps them going is continuing to dissipate. Beckett offers the characters themselves as examples of nature as they breathe, change, and decay.

Entropy is evident as all that would signal that a system is working in an orderly manner falls away for the aging quadrangle in the shelter. They lose their bloom, teeth, hair, their vision, and their mobility. Clov corrects Hamm, telling him that he has forgotten one thing: "I can't sit down" to which Hamm responds, "[*impatiently*] Well you'll lie down then, what the hell! Or you'll come to a standstill, simply stop and standstill, the way you are now. One day you'll say, I'm tired, I'll

stop” (118). Hamm’s insistence that Clov will suffer the disorder of blindness, grow weary with use and age, and simply stop is yet another illustration of entropy.

Near the end of the play, Clov reflects on his own place among the aged and his own sense of spent youth:

How easy it is. They said to me, That’s friendship, yes, yes, no question, you’ve found it. They said to me, Here’s the place, stop, raise your head and look at all that beauty. That order! They said to me, come now, you’re not a brute beast, think upon these things and you’ll see how all becomes clear. And simple! They said to me, What skilled attention they get, all these dying of their wounds...I say to myself—sometimes, Clov, you must learn to suffer better than that if you want them to weary of punishing you—one day. I say to myself—sometimes, Clov, you must be there better than that if you want them to let you go—one day. But I feel too old, and too fat, to form new habits. Good, it’ll never end, I’ll never go. [*Pause.*] Then one day, suddenly, it ends, it changes, I don’t understand, it dies, or it’s me, I don’t understand, that either. I ask the words that remain—sleeping, waking, morning, evening. They have nothing to say. [*Pause.*] I open the door of the cell and go. I am so bowed I only see my feet, if I open my eyes, and between my legs a little trail of black dust. I say to myself that the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit. [*Pause.*] It’s easy going. [*Pause.*] When I fall I’ll weep for happiness. (151)

Clov understands his own aging. Although he claims to wish to leave, his departure seems unlikely, for even he claims that he feels too old to risk significant changes to his own habits. Additionally, his reference to order here signals Beckett's own attention to the loss and diminishment that is evident in *Endgame*. No matter his efforts, Clov can never achieve order. Clov's admission that he himself "feels too old," coupled with the fact that he exits during his final interaction with Hamm and does not return when called, implies that his own contribution to the system in which he operates—the shelter where he dwells and serves as caretaker to his elderly counterparts—has come to an end. This is not to say that Clov will leave the shelter, only that he is no longer operating as Hamm expects him to within the system. When Hamm cries out to Clov at the play's end and receives no reply, he counters that emptiness with "No? Good" before reaching for his handkerchief, and in the play's final line he issues a self-referential "You...remain" (154). There is nothing left for Hamm but to face the inevitability of his life's natural course and the breakdown of the system wherein he dwells. In the play's *dénouement*, Hamm covers his face with his handkerchief and remains motionless at the center of the stage. In this final scene, through his depictions of how the characters in *Endgame* apprehend nature and their place within it, Beckett combines images of stasis and entropy. By linking those images to descriptions of aging and impairment, Beckett reveals a connection between how the closed system of *Endgame* operates and the deterioration that is unavoidable as time passes and his characters age.

While Beckett never uses the term “thermodynamics,” in *Waiting for Godot* and in *Endgame* he appears to have understood that time is nothing more than a man-made construction used for measuring energy and its rate of dispersal—the time it takes to fall into entropy and reach equilibrium, the time it takes to grow old, fall out of use, and die. Both plays exemplify that which is always true of energy: *The end is in the beginning and yet you go on*. An entropic system can continue on without the life of any individual element in it. Hamm and Clov will both die, and the entropic system will continue on without them.

CHAPTER III Decomposition and the Image: Aging Automatons and Old Marionettes in Samuel Beckett's *Come and Go*, *Footfalls*, and *Catastrophe*

Much of Beckett's drama articulates a mournful preoccupation with the internalization and re-embodiment of a lost self or a lost other. In his late drama, Beckett's old people become the very embodiment of loss. Given that these depictions carry, in all ways, the diminishment of entropy, in Beckett's late plays the stasis and deterioration of age become increasingly anatomized through short plays that cycle toward expressions of interiority. In some ways, these characters appear to have already departed from living—not that they are dead, but (in Ruby Cohn's term), they are “ghosting” through their worlds. It is in these aged figures that Beckett articulates the futility of the human condition, framing the agony of living in tableau-like examples of decomposition, and often in accordance with precise dimensions that are given in his stage directions. The example of “Lessness” in the previous chapter represents decomposition of the body toward the release of existential consciousness. *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* present impaired and confined old people in stasis as their bodies diminish into entropy. In his late plays, Beckett continues the trajectory of his earlier illustrations of entropy by staging decomposition of the old character as a feature of subjectivity. In this chapter, I explore the ways that Beckett utilizes precise staging and movement of his old or aging characters in ways that cast them as “figments” of humanity; decomposed through age and entropy, they appear more doll-like than human.

Beckett frames these “figments” as images that are, in themselves, interiorities. I argue that within these interiorities, the subjectivity of the character becomes uncertain through the decomposition of age. This is expressed through doll-like renderings of the body: these subjects seem hollowed, almost emptied of a “self,” moving as though they are human automatons or marionettes. In this way, Beckett utilizes marionette-like movements to reflect the entropy that presses the aging character ever inward—toward consciousness and away from the objectification of the corporeal body. To demonstrate this, I read age and its relationship to decomposition through *Come and Go*, *Footfalls*, and *Catastrophe*.

In some of these plays, Beckett restricts the movements of aged characters through mathematically precise blocking measurements defined in the script or through external manipulation by another character on stage. Characters who are delimited by such precise movements seem more automaton than human. While the term “automaton” may suggest dehumanization, this is not always the variant of automaton we find in Beckett’s theater. Beckett may use mechanized props as he does in *Rockaby* with its self-rocking chair, but his characters retain their humanness. This project’s Introduction touched briefly upon Beckett’s decision to use live actors rather than marionettes in his late theater and this is despite his interest in using puppets in the theater. There is a correlation between Beckett’s choice to use live actors and his use of decomposition and entropy as the catalysts that signal metaphysical release for his aged characters. Recall that entropy is what occurs when a thermal system, such as the human body, breaks down. Using live actors to play doll-like old characters seems more conducive to

portraying the vulnerabilities of the bodily system. The automaton or über-marionette in Beckett's works is human because the human actor is a better candidate for expressing metaphysical decomposition and entropy than a puppet. Where an actual marionette would invest the scene with artificiality, Beckett's human automatons demonstrate the organic nature of growing old—aging is a phenomenon of nature. It is this human quality that allows the decomposition present in these plays to signal the inward turn—the “ghosting” into consciousness.

The automaton in Beckett's drama is a doll-like combination of marionette and mortal. Rigidity in staging is common across Beckett's theater, and not all of his characters give the impression of automatism. But when mathematically conscribed or tightly restricted movement is combined with depictions of age in Beckett's late plays, the effect is one that synthesizes the aging human with the movements of an automaton. In this sense, *Come and Go* presents the most obvious example with its three female characters that enter and exit and hold hands in triangular fashion. In *Footfalls* May is the only visible character, pacing in precise circumference on stage, almost as if she were contained as a picture within a frame. The image of May is one of diminishment, but the voice of her aged mother contracts her small world all the more. *Catastrophe* features a mannequin-esque elderly protagonist who is manipulated by a theater director and his assistant. In many of Beckett's works, the theatrical image constructs a spatial frame from which the living body emerges as a subject for consideration. The visual field is complex in Beckett's stage images; much like living sculptures, these images defy passive objectification. For the purposes of this chapter, I restrict my reading of how

Beckett employs his use of the image to the ways these constructions frame decomposition and the vulnerabilities of his aged characters. The image in Beckett's late theater is not a passive construction. In *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama*, Stanton B. Garner Jr. contends that Beckett's use of the image positions the spectator as an active participant, rather than a passive observer. He writes:

In the end, though, the locus of Beckett's theater of the image remains the audience, that individual/collective "third body" (along with the character and actor) of the stage's intercorporeal field. For Beckett stages his spectator as deliberately as he does his characters, consciously manipulating the experiential orientations of audience to stage. Beckett foregrounds his spectator not as the disembodied *eye/I* of a theatrical voyeurism, but as a body situated with its own positionality and material presence. (81)

By situating the spectator as an active participant, Beckett positions the audience as culpable in its interrogations of the theatrical image. Therefore, where the image and the spectator are mentioned in this chapter, it is to call attention to the position of the audience in relation to Beckett's representations of age.

In *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, Kelly Oliver analyzes observation as a process that requires vigilance. She argues that the act of witnessing is an impossibility: "Why is it necessary to bear witness to the impossibility of witnessing? Or, we could ask, why is it necessary to recognize the impossibility of recognizing otherness?" (88). The examples of age in Beckett's late plays suggest that it is impossible to observe the elderly

without seeing them through the lens of decomposition, whereby their vigor is perceived as diminished, their bodies as decaying and succumbing to the ravages of time. Perhaps this skeptical approach to how the old are observed in his plays is derived from Beckett's fascination with the idea of birth astride of a grave: one is born already aging toward death, already disappearing from view. Therefore, he frames the machinations of age as an image, a picture rendered as a study in decomposition that challenges the spectator to interrogate, as Oliver puts it, "the impossibility of recognizing otherness." By rendering his aged characters in *Come and Go*, *Footfalls*, and *Catastrophe* through images of isolation and movements that suggest a level of automatism, Beckett calls attention to the otherness and the objectification of the aged body. In this, Beckett implicates the spectator—inviting them to look and confront the tableau of human decay he has framed in exact measurements, to contemplate the inevitability of decomposition.

Beckett refers to decomposition multiple times in his Trilogy. In *Molloy*, the title character is an old man who has become impaired to the point that he cannot move about unassisted. Sitting alone in his dead mother's room, unsure of how he got there,— he reflects on his life:

But it is only since I have ceased to live that I think of these things and other things. It is in the tranquility of decomposition that I remember the long confused emotion which was my life, and that I judge it, as it is said that God will judge me, and with no less impertinence. To decompose is to live too, I know, I know, don't torment me, but one sometimes forgets" (21).

Molloy's decomposition is deeply tied to his position of stasis. He is old, but he is also unable to leave his dead mother's room. His age adds to his body's state of disorder, and as he diminishes further into entropy, he turns inward to contemplate his life. He views his present decomposition as a state of tranquility. Molloy's statement gestures towards the idea that entropy followed to the point of death, the ultimate decomposition of the body, allows the consciousness an existential freedom. His statement "To decompose is to live too" demonstrates an attention to the continuation of energy beyond the body—a lived state in decomposition—the space in which the self-as-energy goes on.

Molloy's occupation as a writer makes his use of the term *decomposition* particularly appropriate, as he composes and de-composes his narrative, the one he dictates about his life and ones he has written, which he hands off to a man in exchange for money (3). S.E. Gontarski calls attention to Beckett's use of decomposition as it relates to writing in *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*. He writes, "But in the process of composition, decomposition plays a crucial role that is generally downplayed by authors and scholars alike. Acts of decomposition can range from the selection of reading notes to forms of discarding, cutting, deleting, omitting, crossing out and revising in the act of writing" (307). Indeed, Molloy's musings on decomposition allow for multiple interpretations; he may be referring to his writing, his written or inscribed self, the loss of that inscribed idea of selfness, or even the void he now fills by taking the place of his lost mother (his lost Other) by languishing into his own old age upon her bed. In all these potential readings of *decomposition*, the common factor remains his references to age. Early in the novel he speaks of his mother: "We

were so old, she and I, she had had me so young, that we were like a couple of old cronies, sexless, unrelated, with the same memories, the same rancours, the same expectations” (13). *Malone Dies* invokes decomposition as the aged Malone rambles about the use of his stick, which he laments having lost. His stick might have helped him rise up out of his bed—“Perhaps even got myself back into it, when tired of rolling and dragging myself about the floor or on the stairs. That would have introduced a little variety into my decomposition” (247). Finally, *The Unnamable* injects decomposition into the void itself—the disembodied headspace of an ancient figure reflecting upon himself through a stream of consciousness: “As for the screams of pain and wafts of decomposition, assuming I was capable of noticing them, they would have seemed to me quite in the natural order of things, such as I had come to know it” (316). While Beckett invokes elements of the “image” throughout the trilogy, he does so in ways that call attention to his use of “decomposition” as a phenomenon of aging. Mahood’s head-in-a-jar narrative portrays decomposition as a split between consciousness and physicality (326-374). The old man’s narrative separates the idea of self from the self-as-body: “I knew it, on a rock, lashed to a rock, in the midst of silence, its great swell rears towards me, I’m streaming with it, it’s an image, those are words, it’s a body, it’s not I” (403). In *The Unnamable* the old man, mediated through a living head-in-the-jar that is displayed in full view of passersby and thus decomposed, rejects identifying his “self” with his body: “it’s a body, it’s not I.” The “unnamable” element is the aged person with a body caught in entropy to the point that it decomposes and it becomes ‘Other’ even to the self. This image of the old person as a decomposed subject foregrounds many of Beckett’s

later illustrations of decomposition and age.

Come and Go

While Beckett writes illustration of old people throughout his career, in his earlier works his old characters are presented through narratives that give them more space through which to reflect their agedness. In *Come and Go* age is an existential condition, as it is in many of Beckett's plays. The play's three female characters have "*Ages undeterminable*" in accordance with Beckett's stage directions (384). However, they are mired in a past to which they cannot return but try to re-enact. To accomplish this sense of terminal "returning," Beckett uses a kind of mathematical scoring in his stage directions. While this serves to move the characters along, it also causes the three women to move as though they are automatons. Beckett uses similar staging techniques in other plays. Winnie in *Happy Days* and the urn-ensconced characters in *Play*, for example, all have a marionette-like quality, an effect amplified by Beckett's use of lighting and restricted movement. Likewise, Beckett uses lighting in *Come and Go* and restricts the movements of the characters in ways that make the women Flo, Vi, and Ru appear almost doll-like. The stage direction calls for them to be seated with Flo on the right, Vi in the center, and Ru at the left (385). Beckett also specifies that the women should look physically symmetrical apart from the drab colors of their dull full-length coats. Their appearance, along with their dialogue, implies that youth has faded for these women. Their postures stiff, they sit side by side and face forward on a backless, ill-defined bench, illuminated by soft lights while the rest of the stage is kept as dark as possible,

making it difficult for the audience to make out much detail about the characters other than similarity. Their faces are concealed by the shadow of their respective wide-brimmed hats, which obscures any guess at their ages. The use of shadow, in essence, serves to decompose the image of the women. While the shadow does not age them, it does obscure their features. Their bodies are covered from head to toe in garments, and their faces are made impenetrable by the use of shadow. As such, the women exist as impressions; the spectator can see them, but there is always the sense of never having the complete picture. The minimal use of light and the muted colors of the drab outfits have a graying effect. The overall image in *Come and Go* is reminiscent of a photographic negative, as the image is very real and recognizable, but the details are obscured. In this sense, the image of the women is rendered through decomposition.

Despite their indeterminate ages, it is not hard to imagine *Come and Go* through the prism of age, as Beckett himself did in his own casting choices for the play. In “The Aged Voice in Beckett,” Ruth Pe Palileo examines how age is interpreted in productions of *Come and Go*: “When Beckett directed *Come and Go* in Berlin in 1978, he cast three women in their sixties” (136). Pe Palileo also takes into consideration the ageless quality for the characters that Beckett intends in his stage directions, and she acknowledges that there have been many successful productions of the play that cast women in their twenties (136). Pe Palileo locates evidence of age in Beckett’s instructions as to how the women speak: formal, measured, toneless. When performed according to Beckett’s precise guidelines, she suggests, this delivery generates an aged vocal effect: “I suggest that, in certain cases, Beckett is guiding actors to attain the desired character voice

through physical restraint so that, in performance, the voice of the performer is perceived as aged” (134). Like Pe Palileo, I would caution against assuming that Beckett intends for the women in *Come and Go* to be chronologically old or played by older women. In the play, age is demonstrated in the longing the women share to return to the unity they shared in childhood. Age is invoked in their collective desire for the lost other—for the childhood self and her childhood friends, a state of being that they can remember but they can no longer attain.

In *Theatre on Trial: Samuel Beckett’s Later Drama*, Anna McMullen examines the pattern of dialogue in *Come and Go*. The play, she finds, “draws on rather traditional associations of fragile, unfulfilled elderly maidens” (86). There is nothing in the play to suggest that Flo, Ru, and Vi are elderly maidens, but there is evidence they are unfulfilled. The women’s impulse to re-enact the unity of childhood demonstrates a present lack. That is, their wish to do things as they once did—together as they once did—suggests a need to supplement their present with elements of their past:

Flo: What do you think of Vi?

Ru: I see little change [*Flo moves to centre seat, whispers in Ru’s ear.*

Appalled.] Oh! [*They look at each other. Flo puts her finger to her lips.*]

Does she not realize?

Flo: God grant not [*Enter Vi, Flo and Ru turn back front, resume pose. Vi sits right. Silence.*] Just sit together as we used to, in the playground at Miss Wade’s.

Ru: On the log. (385)

The trio's urge to re-present the old days by acting out behavior from their childhood—as if they could return to their youth and recapture the way they held hands on the playground at school—marks the undercurrent of age.

As their nostalgia for the past demonstrates, age in *Come and Go* is an existential dilemma for the women. They cannot return to the past, they can only re-enact it, and through each attempt to reframe their lost childhood selves, their unity suffers another blow: two have gossiped about the third, and when she returns, the secret they have shared about her weakens their connection:

Vi: How do you think Ru is looking?

Flo: One sees little in this light. [*Vi moves to centre seat, whispers in Flo's ear. Appalled.*] Oh! [*They look at each other. Vi puts her finger to her lips.*] Does she not know?

Vi: Please God not. [*Enter Ru. Vi and Flo turn back front, resume pose. Ru sits right. Silence.*] May we not speak of the old days? [*Silence.*] Of what came after? [*Silence.*] Shall we hold hands in the old way?" (386)

We are never told in the dialogue what is wrong with the woman in question; the spectator is left to wonder, enticed to look more closely—in this light—when the image reunifies upon the absent woman's return. Their hands clasp once more, but the damage is done. There is an appalling secret between them.

Just as the women cannot return to childhood, the scandalous secret cannot be unsaid once it has been whispered. With each turn at gossip and each secret kept the women have wronged one another. Of the women in the play, Beckett writes, "They are

‘condemned,’ all three” (Knowlson, 473). The secrets the three whisper come in three movements, all of which are choreographed to precision. The strictures that Beckett places upon the movement of the women, right down to the way they interlace their hands and sit bolt-upright, resonates as uncanny, almost mechanized. The buttoned-up prim demeanor of the women falls away in the “appalled” exaltations of “Oh!,” which are followed by incantations of prayer. The weight of the gossip hangs between them, unacknowledged. The unity expressed by the hand holding is artificial, a thing they act out—as much a game of pretending as their re-enactment of how they were in childhood. Decomposition in *Come and Go* lies in their aging relationship and the loss of innocence that results in disunity after each woman succumbs to the impulse to gossip. The image of the three women re-enacting an impulse from their childhood in whatever state of youth they have arrived at makes the three a living timepiece. They move with precision, like colorfully painted birds dancing in and out of a clock. But in *Come and Go* the women dance backward, trying to recapture lost time and lost selves, and this is suggested in the fact that when each woman exits, she also returns. Beyond the play’s title, perhaps Beckett’s nod to T.S. Eliot rests in the women’s desire to turn back time, which hints at Prufrock’s futile hope: “In a minute there is time / For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse” (47-48). While Beckett’s treatment of age in *Come and Go* is less pronounced than it is in many of his other works, he appropriates similar forms of mechanized movement within a dynamic of change and loss in later plays that address age more directly.

Footfalls

Beckett's female-centered late dramas are heavily reliant upon restrictive movements. The mouth in *Not I* hovers above the stage in one position, and the actress who plays Mouth endures stricture in order to perform the role. While the character Mouth hangs in the darkness much like a puppet, her speech and vocalizations in the midst of her pacing invests her with a vibrancy that seems the antithesis of automatism. Simply by virtue of what she is and despite her bodily isolation, Mouth presents as more anatomical than artificial. Contrastingly, *Footfalls* and, later, *Rockaby* offer clear instances of marionette-like movement, one through concisely numbered steps and the other through mechanized rocking. While both *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* situate aging women against prescribed movements that seem mechanized, for the purposes of this chapter, I will restrict my analysis to *Footfalls* as it better represents Beckett's attention to mathematically precise movement. The only visible character in *Footfalls* is May. Everything about May appears aged, from her tattered garments to her movements as she paces the floor for a prescribed number of steps (nine in the revisions; however, originally, Beckett intended seven⁶). As in *Come and Go*, Beckett includes a diagram in *Footfall*'s script that specifies which foot the actress playing May should use to lead her pacing "starting at the right foot (R), from right (R), to left (L), with left foot (l), from left

⁶ *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett* indicates that "Early publications are often incomplete. Faber, eager to make *Footfalls* available on opening night, set its first edition from a typescript not fully tested on the stage. SB made fundamental changes in both the British and the German productions (1976), increasing May's steps from seven to nine. No English text, save that of the *Theatrical Notebooks* (IV), is consistent in this revision" (202).

(l) to right (R)” (427). Although there is a single act, the play is divided into four segments that refocus the play’s interior conflict. In *Footfalls* delineating, is not clear. Each section provides a new perspective on May’s pacing, on the relationship between her and her mother, and on the question of which being is absent and which “soul” is being subsumed within the desiring other. The alternating vantage points place May in conversations with her mother in the first section, while in the second movement the voice of May’s mother addresses the spectator. The third section of the play introduces a narrative that May appears to be reading and introduces a “semblance” called Amy, which is an anagram of May’s name. Following the narrative section, May’s is the only point of view remaining, and she seems to have internalized her mother. This internalization culminates with the disappearance of May herself at the play’s *dénouement*.

While the sections compound the uncertainties regarding the presence of May’s mother, a character that is represented only by a voice, the inclusion of the sections also give the presence of May an unreal quality. The sense that something about May is automatized is punctuated by the thrums of the bells that reverberate at intervals like an echo of some internal mechanism. The bells, which mark the transition between movements, weaken with each subsequent ring, thus signaling the diminishment of increased entropy as the body diminishes. All of this combines to invest the *mise-en-scène* with an air of artificiality: May’s movements seem impossibly agonizing. This not-quite human sense of May is also established by the light sound of her footfalls, which she needs to hear. While these sounds are not that of machinery, they do signal the

rhythms and workings of the closed space May circles around. Beckett contrasts the unreal elements of May's movements against his depiction of her as suffering, her excruciating need to "revolve it all" and a deep longing for her mother.

Part of the reason I read May's repetitive movements as consistent with an automatic quality is that the character does not seem to think about her steps, which she makes with exactitude, pausing only at the briefest intervals. In addition, her mother speaks of May's footfalls as deliberate pacing, to the degree that she knows the count of her daughter's numbered steps by heart: "One two three four five six seven wheel one two three four five six seven wheel" (428). May's revolutions within the specific range of her paces, combined with ringing chimes and their subsequent echoes, gives her the countenance of a doll turning around the space of a faulty music box—an automaton that has lost whatever shine it "may" have once reflected. May's humanity is communicated in the way that she waits for her mother to need her, pausing to ask whether her mother requires her attention: "Do you want me to inject you again? (428). May's offer to help comes "too soon," and she counters by rattling off other ways she could be of use:

Straighten your Pillows? [*Pause.*] Change your drawsheet?

[*Pause.*] Pass you the bedpan? [*Pause.*] The warmin-pan?

[*Pause.*] Dress your sores? [*Pause.*] Sponge you down?

[*Pause.*] Moisten your poor lips? [*Pause.*] Pray with you?

[*Pause.*] For you? [*Pause.*] Again. [*Pause.*] (428)

Her offers are met with her mother's dismissal: "Yes, but it is too soon" (428). May's search for something to do seems rote, like the steps she takes as she circles the floor.

May's questions call attention to the play's focus on age, revealing that her mother is not just elderly but also impaired to the degree that she is bedridden and perhaps near death. There are multiple ways in which to read May's "Would you like me to inject you again?" and all lead to questions: What is being injected? Is the mother being "injected" into the narrative wheeling around in May's head as she paces? Beckett writes May's mother into the script, yet writes her off of the stage in physical form. This casts the mother as a negative presence—not negative in the sense of being untoward but in the sense of being consigned to the position of present-while-absent on the stage. S.E. Gontarski references a memory that Billie Whitelaw related about Beckett's notes to her on the play. In *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts*, Gontarski details Whitelaw's recollection of Beckett's summary:

Roughly it's in three parts, first the daughter talking to a sick mother, then the mother talking to *the daughter who is not really there*. Then the daughter talking about a memory of another mother and daughter, and she's just telling of her memories of the mother and daughter. (162)

Gontarski adds, "Rather than a reversal of the iconography of dismemberment, *Footfalls* is its culmination, an absent presence or a present absence" (162). Reading age into this discussion adds to the analysis, as taking the old age of the Voice into account paints the transition from dismemberment as an image of entropy and decomposition.

Much like the characters in *Come and Go*, the voice of May's mother comes into dialogue with May and then leaves through a series of pauses. However, unlike the three women in *Come and Go*, the voice of May's mother lets the spectator in on some of

May's secrets. For example, the dialogue between May and the voice of her mother reveals that May is unsure of her own age:

M: What age am I now?

V: And I? [*Pause. No Louder.*] And I?

M: Ninety.

V: So much?

M: Eighty-nine, ninety.

V: I had you late. [*Pause.*] In life. [*Pause.*] Forgive me again. [*Pause. No louder.*] Forgive me again.

M: What age am I now?

V: In your forties.

M: So little?

V: I'm afraid so. (428)

May's response "So little?" suggests that she feels much older than she is; a state reflected in her movement and the battered gown that trails beyond her feet. May's mother apologizes—twice—for giving birth to her late in life. The old woman may be apologizing for being already old when May reached her prime, so old that her daughter had to care for her rather than live her own life; however, it is possible that the line indicates that May's mother is sorry to have had her at all.

Either reading of the mother's apology aligns with Beckett's own preoccupations with giving birth astride of a grave, and both suggest that May's very birth was tainted by the diminishment of age and the certainty of death. The elements of automatism woven

into May's movements imply that she might rotate in her small stretch of floor forever. The voice of the old woman calls out: "Will you never have done? [*Pause.*] Will you never have done...revolving it all?" (428); May pauses and answers by questioning: "It?," to which her mother replies: "It all. [*Pause.*] In your poor mind. [*Pause.*] It all. [*Pause.*] It all" (429). May resumes her pacing, but the movement fades out to Beckett's stage directions: "*All in darkness. Steps cease*" (429). This exchange suggests that May's pacing is prompted by her internalization of whatever "It all" might encompass. If so, May's body has cycled around because of some disorder of her "poor mind"—the space where she revolves "It all," decomposing as she ages. The entropy of May's "revolving" is reflected in Beckett's decision to have her pacing cease at the end of this exchange, casting her once again as a human automaton—her machinery seizing up in stasis. The second movement opens upon May standing still, and the voice of her mother addresses the audience, claiming, "I walk here now," which she corrects: "Rather, I come and stand" (429). This complicates the issue of determining whether the figure we see on stage is May's internalization of her mother. Perhaps May's mother has constructed May's existence altogether—set May as a recurring dream to be replayed in her "deep sleep" (427). Beckett himself has left this open to interpretation. As Enoch Brater reports in his work on Beckett's minimalism:

In the preproduction version of the script, published in a separate volume by Faber, V (Voice) candidly admits, "My voice is in her mind." Beckett omitted this in revision, thereby understating a crucial plotline of the dramatic situation and widening its complexity. (53)

Beckett's production note marks a departure from his summary for the play in production as Whitelaw remembered it in which where he indicated that the Voice is speaking to a daughter who is not there.

While Beckett altered the script in revision, rendering ambiguous the question of which character is internalizing and which is a "figment" in the other's mind, a reading of age that interprets the Voice—May's mother—as thinking May into existence invests the play with a much different set of metaphysical intonations. If May is a "figment" in her old mother's mind, then the figure of May that the audience sees on stage reflects the image that her mother has created. If so, then May's existence is the bridge that connects the aged woman's decomposing body and her increased entropy to an inward turn of consciousness. In *The Coming of Age* Simone de Beauvoir examines how memory and its impairments can impact how the elderly create images:

The images that we can call upon are far from possessing the richness of their original object. An image is the seeing of an absent object by means of an organic and affective analogon. As Sartre says, there is "a kind of essential poverty" in it [...] An image does not necessarily obey the principal of identity, it produces the object in its general and not specific aspect; and it appears in an unreal space and time. (365)

May circulates within her frame of pacing in what appears to be an unreal space and time. Therefore, the idea that her "image" is one that the elderly woman has created in response to her own physical or cognitive decomposition is not outside the scope of possible interpretations of *Footfalls*.

In the play's second movement, May's mother addresses the spectator, explaining that May does not realize she is being seen: "I walk here now. [*Pause.*] Rather I come and stand. [*Pause.*] At nightfall. [*Pause.*] She fancies she is alone. [*Pause.*] See how still she stands, how stark, with her face to the wall. [*Pause.*] How outwardly unmoved [*Pause.*] " (429). Entreating the spectator to look at the image of May once more, the voice adds, "Watch how feat she wheels" (429). Although the voice is announcing herself as an observer, by addressing the spectator she implicates the audience as watchers as well. The objectification of May extends into questions about her very presence: "Where is she, it may be asked. [*Pause.*] Why, in the old home, the same where she—[*Pause.*] The same where she began" (429). The meaning of "old home" is ambiguous. It may be read literally as an old, aging house. However, another possibility is that the mother is referring to an old-age home. If we take up this reading of "old home" as a place of convalescence, it suggests that the voice of the mother could, in fact, be dreaming of May. The voice asks, "But this, this, when did this begin?" (429), and then launches into a third-person account of a conversation with May: "I say the floor here, now bare, this strip of floor was once carpeted, a deep pile. Till one night, while still little more than a child, she called her mother and said, Mother, this is not enough" (429). That the voice does not acknowledge itself as May's mother implies that the voice has constructed the image of May—that May is not her daughter in a real, biological sense, but a figment, a doll spinning around in the old woman's imagination, a creation of consciousness as she ages toward death.

Whether we read May as internalizing her mother or her mother as creating the image of May, Beckett inscribes the desire to replace the lost or absent other upon May's body. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler examines the idea of the "soul-prison" of the body⁷: "The figure of the interior soul understood as 'within' the body is signified through its inscription *on* the body, even though its primary mode of signification is through its very absence, its potent invisibility" (172). Beckett frames the image of May and the mother who never materializes on stage through absence, albeit an absence that remains present in the narrative. The entropy is evident in that the old woman is part of the system in which May "revolves," but her energy on stage presents in incomplete form: the spectator gets the woman's voice and nothing more. However, in the play's first movement, hers is the presence that halts May's pacing; the pauses in May's steps interrupt her revolutions. Not unlike a machine halting and restarting as it ambles toward systemic failure, May's stops and starts are in response to the entropy of her mother's declining body. In this way, May's pacing combines with the absence of her mother's aged, impaired body in ways that illustrate entropy and decomposition.

In the play's third section May offers a "Sequel" (430). The movement opens with May saying "Sequel" twice before continuing. It is as if May is reading a prompt or a story. That May is recounting some story she has read or written is suggested in the script

⁷ Butler attributes this concept to Michel Foucault: "In Foucault's terms, the soul is not imprisoned by or within the body, as some Christian imagery would suggest, but 'the soul is the prison of the body'" (172).

where she restricts her narration to the third-person, refers to her mother as Mrs. Winter, revises her own name with the anagram “Amy,” and refers to “the reader”:

M: Old Mrs. Winter, whom the reader will remember, old Mrs. Winter,
one late autumn Sunday evening, on sitting down to supper with her
daughter after worship, after a few half-hearted mouthfuls laid down her
knife and fork and bowed her head. What is it, Mother, said the daughter
[...] Mrs. W. did not at once reply. But finally, raising her head and fixing
Amy—the daughter’s given name, as the reader will remember— . (431)

In the *Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*, Ackerley and Gontarski quote Beckett as stating, “One can suppose that she has written down everything which she invented up to this, that she will one day find a reader for her story—therefore the address to the reader” (201). The introduction of the Old Mrs. Winter/Amy narrative presents another age-centric split in the mother/daughter framework. Mrs. Winter is “old,” and Amy is described as “scarcely a girl anymore: “she is “dreadfully un—[....]” (431). It is easy to overlook the fact that Beckett carries his use of age into the narrative that May reads. That said, I assert that he invokes age in the depictions of Mrs. Winter and Amy with intention. If May is a figment of her mother’s mind, then May’s reading of the narrative is also a creation of the old woman’s mind. The ambiguities of presence are mirrored in the story, for it calls subjectivity into question. The story adds a layer of fiction to the ambiguous relationship expressed in the dialogue between May and her mother, a space wherein the mother/daughter relationship is entirely made up. As such, the story itself represents the internalization and creation of relationships within the consciousness. In

May's telling of the story, she addresses a reader, but if May and, by extension, the story exist only as figments in the mind of her mother, the story will never find a reader outside of consciousness. Therefore, a reading of age that posits the Voice as the source of internalization opens to interpretation Beckett's assertion that May addresses the reader out of conviction that the story "will one day find a reader." If May is a figment reading the story in her mother's mind, she and the story will decompose as the mother falls into entropy and decomposition. Questions of subjectivity are brought about in the story itself through the question of presence. Mrs. Winter inquires into what Amy has witnessed: "she murmured, fixing Amy full in the eye she murmured, Amy did you observe anything...strange at Evensong?" (431). However, Amy claims that she was not there. Mrs. Winter insists that she heard Amy respond with an "Amen" at the service: "How could you have responded if you were not there?" (431). She argues: "I heard you distinctly" (431). Amy's denial of presence calls Mrs. Winter's memory into question. The split between Amy and Mrs. Winter culminates in their disagreement over presence. In this way, the Sequel renders Amy's presence through Mrs. Winter's memory of her, and it leaves the accuracy of that memory contested.

Throughout the "Sequel," the narrative of "Amy" is one that contains a "semblance" (430). As May gives the story, she describes movements carried forth by the semblance: "Some nights she would halt, as one frozen by some shudder of the mind, and stand stark still till she could move again. But many also were the nights when she paced without pause, up and down, up and down, before vanishing the way she came. [*Pause.*] No sound. [*Pause.*]" (430). The image of the semblance is one of a character wavering

between stasis and motion: she is frozen, stock still, unable to move, and once she is able to move once more, she does so without pause. The semblance is characterized as an automaton—a doll-like thing that May’s refers to as “it.” May invites the spectator to look at the semblance, addressing the lighting in a way that reflects the photo-negative effect of the lighting scheme in *Come and Go*:

The Semblance. [*Pause. Resumes pacing. After two lengths halts facing front at R. Pause.*] The Semblance. Faint, though by no means invisible, in a certain light. [*Pause.*] Given the right light. [*Pause.*] Grey rather than white, a pale shade of grey. [*Pause.*] Tattered. [*Pause.*] A tangle of tatters. [*Pause.*] Watch it pass— [*pause*— watch her pass [...]. (430)

Whether the semblance is a placeholder for May within the narrative she is reciting cannot be known. However, the fact that Beckett includes the semblance as an “it” places the humanity of the semblance in question. The multiple triangulations within the framework of *Footfalls* place May/her mother/the semblance within a configuration that includes the semblance/Amy/Old Mrs. Winter and prompts the spectator to “watch” and take in the image.

The importance of the role of spectator in *Footfalls* is underscored by the *dénouement* of the play’s fourth segment The play that places so much emphasis on decomposition of the aged—the unwriting of May through the revision of her name to Amy, the unmaking of May’s mother by her presence in the script but her absence upon the stage, the steps and pauses that Beckett orchestrates to mathematic precision—culminates in the erasure of May. The lights fade to darkness following May’s “sequel,”

while the figure on stage takes a final step: “[*Pause.*] Chime even a little fainter still. *Pause for echoes. Fade up to even a little less still on strip. No trace of May. Hold ten seconds. Fade out. Curtain.*” (432). If May is only a figment in her mother’s consciousness, perhaps this redaction of May signals the old woman’s final entropic gasp. If the woman has died, May’s “release” from the stage image is due to the utter decomposition of her mother’s corporeal body. In this respect, the dispersal of her mother’s energy into the void would catapult her consciousness and the child that lives in her consciousness into “endlessness,” as Beckett characterizes this state in “Lessness.”

That *Footfalls* ends with the stage direction “*No trace of May*” erases her from the text and the stage, suggesting rather implicitly that she does not exist and, perhaps, never did. In *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett*, James Knowlson and John Pilling contemplate May’s existence: “We realize, perhaps only *after* the play has ended, that we may have been watching a ghost telling a tale of a ghost (herself), who fails to be observed by someone else (her fictional *alter ego*) because she in turn was not really there” (227). Whether or not May exists remains ambiguous. Beckett’s multiple revisions of the play recasts the voice as either internalizing May or the voice as an entity that exists only in May’s mind. However, the questions over May’s existence have no bearing upon the play’s meditation on age. The unreal attributes of May are tempered by illustrations of entropy; everything about her figure is consistent with diminishment. May’s revolutions within the closed space of her existence are indicative of the winding down, the falling away that is evident in many of Beckett’s staged representations of age. For example, her pacing slows and the chimes that mark

her transitions become increasingly faint. May's disappearance at the end of the play signals the emptying that is a consistent feature in Beckett's depictions of age. Nell and Nagg disappear from sight toward the culmination of *Endgame*, and it appears that Nell has died. The rocking woman in *Rockaby* who has taken up her dead mother's space in the chair issues a final "Fuck life" at the play's end, thereby rejecting the world of the living in favor of her space among the dead. May's mother is old by description, and she is hampered by illness and confined to bed. The Mouth in *Not I* hovers in the void, nothing left, "Whole body like gone." These meditations on age find their counterpart in *Footfalls*. At the start of *Footfalls*, May's mother is the absent presence, given only in voice. However, she disappears well in advance of May; her voice is silenced by the end of the second movement, and she is not heard again. The decomposition of age in *Footfalls* is related to the split between self and consciousness, and it is expressed through interiority. In the play's third movement, the Sequel represents the consciousness flickering its final story—the "semblance" of self expressing a fiction of the lived-world and an existential longing that the corporeal body cannot resolve—leaving the consciousness to revolve "It all" until the finality "*All in darkness*" (431).

Catastrophe

Unlike *Come and Go* and *Footfalls*, Beckett's *Catastrophe* is set in a readily identifiable location: a theatre. As such, the play-within-a-play form situates the audience as participants, a collective of gazers that join in the observation of the figure who stands upon a platform at center stage and is identified in the text only as "Protagonist."

Catastrophe casts Protagonist as an actor, but one who is nameless, a seeming prisoner of the theater. Protagonist's body serves as the central site upon which a theatre Director expresses his artistic vision with the aid of Assistant, who manipulates, poses, and disrobes Protagonist at Director's command. Throughout the play Director and Assistant discuss Protagonist as if he were an object. The dehumanizing of Protagonist marks him as a site of objectification. The more Protagonist's humanity is displaced through the intrusions upon his person, the more puppet-like the actor, whom the director and assistant refer to only as "him," becomes.

The Director and Assistant treat Protagonist as a stage prop rather than a human being. While in his stage directions Beckett instructs that for (P) "*Age and physique [are] unimportant*"(485), Protagonist's description in the script indicates that Beckett envisioned him as an aged figure:

D: How's the skull?

A: Moulting. A few tufts.

D: Colour?

A: Ash. (486)

That the skull is "moulting" with only a few ash-colored tufts indicates that Protagonist is old. As the discussion between Director and Assistant continues, there is further textual evidence that Protagonist is impaired in some way that appears tied to agedness:

D: How are they? [*A at a loss. Irritably.*] The hands, how are the hands?

A: You've seen them.

D: I forget.

A: Crippled. Fibrous degeneration.

D: Clawlike?

A: If you like.

D: Two claws?

A: Unless he clenches his fists. (486)

Protagonist seems paralytic, stricken, unwell, and the descriptions of his body invite the spectator to look closer—to see the impairments for themselves. The pedestal he stands upon at center stage is similar to the kind used to display sculptures in museums, adding to the objectness of his presentation. Any hint that Protagonist may be aware of his objectification is concealed behind his blank expression; he does not speak, leaving the spectator to ponder the degree to which he may be aware of his circumstances.

Director's complaint that he cannot see Protagonist's toes from the first row prompts Assistant to make a note to "Raise pedestal" (487) and make Protagonist entirely visible. But the distance between Protagonist and the rest of the theater situates him as an object that is not accessible to the spectator. In other words, the elevation of Protagonist above the stage floor separates him not only from the stage but also from the rest of the theater, including his observers. Only his pedestal and the touch of Assistant breach the physical distance between Protagonist and everything else. Protagonist is placed on display, posed like a mannequin in a window or a doll on a stand, consigned to balance in stasis as he is manipulated and observed. That Protagonist is also described as old and impaired adds complexity to the play's title. Whether the figure on display is meant by the director to represent aging is unknowable; however, the fact that Protagonist is old

enough to have “crippled” hands suggests that agedness is what the director is making ready for scrutiny. If that is the case, agedness itself is the catastrophe that the spectator will observe.

Very little of Protagonist’s body is visible at the start of the play: he is draped in a gown from neck to toes to “have him all black” (486) and wears a hat “To help hide the face” (486). As the play continues, more of Protagonist’s body is bared and made vulnerable to the point that he begins to shiver (487). This disrobing of the old man is ordered by Director and facilitated by Assistant. In *Beckett and Decay*, Kathryn White states, “As the protagonist’s gown and hat are removed, we witness the metaphorical paring of the work, as everything that is deemed superfluous is discarded” (128). This revision in how the character is dressed gives his objectification a sinister bent. After Assistant mentions that the actor is shivering, Director dismisses the old man’s discomfort: “Bless his heart” (487). That this dismissal fails to regard the condition of the actor as significant is reflected in the Assistant’s suggestion, “[*timidly*] What about a little...a little...gag?” (487). Her hesitation in asking this question suggests that she is aware that gagging Protagonist may be received as unacceptable. Director rejects the idea, not because it would place Protagonist under duress but because the suggestion lacks subtlety: “For God’s sake! This craze for explication! Every i dotted to death! Little gag! For God’s sake!” (487). Revealing Protagonist in his agedness and vulnerability is acceptable because stripping him down catalyzes the image as one that is invested in objectification. The addition of a gag, however, would lend too much “explication” to the image that the director wants Protagonist to reflect. By divesting the

protagonist of his clothes and making his crippled hands and the balding gray of his hair visible, Beckett frames the image of Protagonist as a grotesque disconnect between the young and able-bodied and the elderly. Protagonist's state of impairment is compounded by the crippling effect of the power through which he is objectified and manipulated.

Protagonist yields in silence as his body is objectified to dehumanizing effect. His treatment presents him as more mannequin than man, as an automaton whose sole purpose is to serve the theater. In *On the Art of the Theater*, Edward Gordon Craig declared that "[The über-marionette's] ideal will not be the flesh and blood, but rather the body in trance" (Craig, 84-85). In Craig's vision for the theater, large marionettes take the place of actors, whom he sees as beholden to their own nature and bodies in ways that prevent them from being the ideal medium for drama:

It is no good to push it aside and protest that the actor is not the medium for another's thoughts [...] Even if the actor were to present none but the ideas which he himself should compose, his nature would still be in servitude; his body would have to become the slave of his mind; and that [...] is what a healthy body utterly refuses to do. (Craig 60-61)

Protagonist represents the unhealthy body. His body is the old, impaired site of decomposition, which is the very thing that, according to Craig's reasoning, that prevents him from becoming the automaton.

Beckett dedicated the play to Vaclav Havel, the Czech writer and leader who led the Velvet Revolution and eventually gained the presidency of his country. Havel suffered repeated incarcerations as a political dissident and was a man whose political

rivals would try to use as an example to deter rebellion. While *Catastrophe* is not outwardly political, the fact that Havel refused to become a puppet and succumb to his opposition finds a counterpart in Protagonist. While Beckett depicts Protagonist as puppet-like, the silent character achieves, due to his impaired body—the thing Craig suggests is impossible of a healthy body in his critique on the limitations of actors. Scholars have established that Beckett was fascinated by the concept of using marionettes in the theater. James Knowlson and John Pilling, for example, mention Beckett’s use of Kleist’s essay “On the Marionette Theatre”:

One of the parts of the essay which particularly impressed Beckett concerns the advent of self-consciousness and its effects on the natural charm of man. [...] This discovery of self represents, of course, a Fall. Self-consciousness separates man from the world, even from his own Self since, essentially, the very consciousness of self means that he is perceiving himself as Other. (Knowlson/Pilling 278-79)

Whether or not the Protagonist recognizes or is conscious of his identity in *Catastrophe* remains ambiguous; however, his final gesture suggests that at the very least he is aware of his reception as Other by his observers. At the *dénouement* of *Catastrophe*, Protagonist lifts his head. Beckett’s stage directions indicate that in this moment, Protagonist “fixes the audience.” This insurrection lends weight to the argument that the Protagonist is self-conscious, at least to the extent that he is conscious of a self that is being perceived as Other. Up to this point, he is without an identity beyond that of being elderly in “type.” His consciousness is suspect until he disrupts the system by looking back at the audience.

This inversion, his revolt, seems a small one, but we must recall what Beckett's Protagonist represents; therefore, his revolt is the revolt of the actor. That Beckett gives this fictional actor license to revolt against *direction* while on stage is further evidence of the play's attention to the image—that of the actor doing as directed—and the decomposition of that image. The protagonist's final movement, and his attempt to project his gaze back upon his observers, serves as an example of an actor going off-book; he is *creating* outside of the script.

Catastrophe is unique among Beckett's late plays because it depicts the physical manipulation of an aged figure for the entertainment of the gazing spectator. While many of Beckett's meditations on age present old characters through depictions of unreality, the discomfort of the image of the objectified subject in *Catastrophe* might prove too unbearable without the undercurrent of artificiality. That the play portrays happenings in a theater lends to its overall quality of meta-reality. The purpose of contrasting the stage image with an über-marionette in *Catastrophe* is, as Garner states, to animate "the body turned art" (85). In his analysis of Beckett's construction of the image in his late plays and the implications of framing the theater as "living pictures," Garner writes:

For until drama abandons the human presence altogether—and thereby relinquishes the names "drama" and "theater"—it will remain dialectically bound to the imagistic and the physiological, the inert and the living. If the body is always image, always available to patterning in the stage as visual field, it is also always itself—speaking, moving, spatializing, *living*

in its self-oriented field and thereby subverting formal definition. The picture ages; the statue comes to life. (85)

In *Catastrophe*, the Protagonist represents both the picture that ages and the statue that comes to life. Protagonist's agedness and objectification give Beckett the ideal opportunity to devise his own version of Marionette Theater. Making the Protagonist doll-like challenges the spectator to consider his objectification in terms of un-reality while keeping the actor playing Protagonist cemented in the world of "the physiological." The spectator cannot *unsee* Protagonist as aged, but the audience can suspend disbelief enough to view the objectification and manipulation of the character as an artificiality. This attitude is alluded to by Beckett's injection of canned laughter and applause at the end of the play.

Examples of worlds and characters that require the spectator to suspend disbelief by a wide margin can be found across Beckett's theatrical career. By calling attention to the strange actions of the characters, the use of precisely scored movements decentralizes agedness in *Come and Go* and *Footfalls*. While age may not be the first thing the spectator notices about these plays, age is relevant to the frictions and core dilemmas in each. While *Come and Go*, *Footfalls*, and *Catastrophe* all contain aging or aged characters, the illustrations of age are presented through a focused attention to the image. The movements or patterning that exists within these image-pieces maneuver the human as an automaton. As such, in these plays decomposition becomes a trope that signifies the diminishment of aging and the devolution of the aging subject. *Come and Go* culminates in an image of women re-enacting a practice of their childhood, the impulse to gossip and

the secrets they keep cast a pallor upon their performance of unification. The spectator is left to ponder how long the trio will remain hand-in-hand. In the play, decomposition is expressed in the aging friendship and the falling away of unrecoverable youth. The unity they present as the stage fades to black is a fiction, doomed to be undone. In *Footfalls* May and the Voice undergo decomposition via illustrations of old age that include increasing entropy and uncertain subjectivities. The suggestion of alternating vantage points in the play's three movements expresses the splitting of self and consciousness as the body decomposes through age. However, it is in *Catastrophe* that Beckett presents the nexus of all his prior illustrations of age by depicting a character that is aged, impaired, silent, does not or cannot move, and is treated as puppet. Protagonist contains the measure of every bleak image of aging that exists in Beckett's milieu; the "catastrophe" is his subhuman treatment, the affliction of being made an object and the degree to which he is presented for display. Protagonist echoes the head-in-a-jar of *The Unnamable*, the stuck-in-place ash-can dwelling old couple "bottled" in *Endgame*, the passivity of Krapp perched at his desk while listening to his tapes, the terror of Winnie's grace while encapsulated in earth in *Happy Days*; Protagonist encapsulates the impossible conditions and mournful repose of so many of Beckett's aged characters. That Beckett finished *Catastrophe* well into his own old age seems appropriate given how many of his prior illustrations of age are represented in the play's protagonist. Yet, while he exists in full-bodied theatrical form, Protagonist is given as perhaps more marionette than man. The gaze he "fixes" back upon the spectator is Protagonist's moment of projecting the decomposition of his body outward in a return gaze to the spectator who

would objectify him. Protagonist's rejection of objectification revises the dictates of the theater: he erases himself as the observed actor by making himself a spectator.

The decomposition of age is present in many of Beckett's works; however, it is in his late plays for the stage—particularly *Come and Go*, *Footfalls*, and *Catastrophe* that Beckett begins to engage decomposition through depictions of objectification, entropy, and precisely conveyed movements. Beckett's meditations on age in these plays demonstrate his increasing tendency in his later plays to express entropy and decomposition through interiorities. In this way, Beckett's late theater frames the aged body as the catalyst that signals a turn toward existential consciousness.

**CHAPTER IV “The continuity bitched to hell”: Dehiscence—Memory,
Age, and Prosthetic Abstraction in Samuel Beckett *Krapp’s Last Tape*,
Not I, and *Rockaby***

Samuel Beckett’s use of aging underscores the cognitive, spatial, and corporeal conditions that are endured by his characters. This is not to say that all examples of impairment in Beckett’s work are tied to agedness. As mentioned in the Introduction, impairment may exist without agedness in Beckett’s theater, and characters that are not significantly aged might limp or demonstrate other physical limitations. However, where Beckett’s use of agedness is concerned, the inverse does not exist—*all* instances of agedness in Beckett’s drama include some level of impairment, whether they stem from physical or cognitive vulnerability, such as diminished memory. Beckett’s attention to impairment as something that correlates to how the aged body is perceived is indicative of larger social interpretations of agedness and aging. While Sally Chivers does not focus on Beckett, her book *The Silvering Screen: Old Age and Disability in Cinema* contrasts portrayals of age against a backdrop of disability: “I am turning to film to suggest that, in the public imagination, disability exists separately from old age, but old age does not ever escape the stigma and restraints imposed upon disability” (8). I turn to this quote because Chivers’s observation that old age “does not ever escape the stigma and restraints imposed on disability” lends itself to an analysis of Samuel Beckett’s works, where, it bears repeating, *all* instances of agedness include varying degrees of impairment. Although Chivers’s study focuses on film, her claim can be applied to the performance of

age in theatrical drama. The diminishment that accompanies old age is more pronounced in theatrical performance—a direct result of the theatrical standard whereby younger actors often play old people—often with pronounced impairments such as limps, the use of canes, stooped posture, and weakened voice to amplify the “aged” effect. In film, by contrast, the medium’s close-up intimacy often requires the casting of appropriately aged actors to play correspondingly aged characters. Hence, agedness as portrayed through the medium of film can be more accurate and less exaggerated than it is in theatricalized representations. Although, I do not treat agedness in drama, especially in Samuel Beckett’s works, in terms of disability, I call attention to a commonality—that agedness in drama is nearly always conveyed through portrayals of impairment. In *Aging and Its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions*, Kathleen Woodward questions the performance of age: “In thinking about old age, we must think about the increasing biological vulnerability of the body. To what extent must we think about old age as a ‘stage’?” (20). In dramatic texts and performance, agedness becomes a “type,” particularly when aged character are portrayed by young actors. Taking up Woodward’s question, then, requires consideration of how the aged body is itself a stage in drama, complete with props and setting—via make-up, costume, and the actor’s physicality.

Woodward’s contention that age is a performative stage provides a jumping off point for engaging with Beckett’s invocation of the term *dehiscence*, which he characterizes in performative terms. Dehiscence is useful in describing memory in the entropic space of age. In the texts collected in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, Samuel Beckett makes multiple references to dehiscence. In his

essay on Sean O'Casey, Beckett refers to "dramatic dehiscence" as a phenomenon whereby "mind and world come asunder in irreparable dissociation.... This impulse of material to escape and be consummate in its own knockabout is admirably expressed [in O'Casey's *Windfalls*] where the entire set comes to pieces and the chief character, in a final spasm of dislocation, leaves the scene by chimney" (82). The "spasm of dislocation," as it operates across Beckett's theater, is prompted by entropy and decomposition of the aging body. This "spasm of dislocation" signals a performative cue for the character that prefaces the exit. In the excerpt from *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, the character Belacqua uses the term *dehiscence*:

I think of his [Ludwig von Beethoven's] earlier compositions where into the body of the musical statement he incorporates a punctuation of dehiscence, flottements, the coherence gone to pieces, the continuity bitched to hell because the units of continuity have abdicated their unity, they have gone multiple, they fall apart, the notes fly about, a blizzard of electrons; and then the vespertine compositions eaten away with terrible silence, a music one and indivisible only at the cost of as bloody a labour as any known to man (and woman? from the French horn) and pitted with dire strums of silence, in which has been engulfed the hysteria that he used to let speak up, pipe up, for itself. (50)

Descriptions of breaking apart and the rupture of continuity appear throughout Beckett's works. In Beckett's version of aging, the individual evolves into a state of corporeal or cognitive rupture expressed through dehiscence of the mind and the body. For his aged

characters, the impairments that accompany agedness or aging often extend beyond physical or mental limitations. Given his depictions of agedness, this chapter acknowledges instances wherein Beckett treats the aging body as a stage, as something performed and performing, and he imbues his illustrations of agedness as a dehiscent state replete with vulnerability, rupture, and impairment.

Just as every age is a life stage, the aged dramatic character becomes a stage on which distinct performative choices are made. Aging is routinely cast as an internal plight for Beckett's characters; however, in many cases, Beckett frames his aging characters as requiring external sources to store, prompt, or express memory. For instance, *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), *Not I* (1972), and *Rockaby* (1981) all employ methods of archive to facilitate external storage of memory. Additionally, narration in these plays is supplemented by off-stage or un-staged voices—voices that are present but never anchored by a physical embodiment on the stage—or prompts to express or otherwise communicate memory to the spectator. The externalized voice or communicator of memory results in a kind of mimetic doubling that divests the staged character of self-expression. While Beckett may stipulate the origins of unstaged voices, he often leaves the source of a voice ambiguous. For example, while the voice of May's mother is present on the stage in *Footfalls*, the old woman is not staged bodily—May is the only figure the spectator sees. Whether her mother's voice emanates from off-stage, just out of view, or whether the spectator should think that May is imagining her mother's voice is unclear. Adding to the perplexity, after May inquires, "Were you asleep?" her mother responds, "Deep asleep. [*Pause.*] I heard you in my deep sleep. There is no sleep so deep

I would not hear you there” (427). As I suggested in this dissertation’s first chapter, the mother’s response suggests a possibility that she is dreaming May—imagining her existence—rendering a vision of May that repeats in a loop of perpetual inertia. Beckett leaves the mimetic effect, the origin of doubling between the staged character of May and the unstaged voice of her mother unaccounted for in the play’s text and open to interpretation. This is not the case in *Rockaby*, wherein Beckett specifies in his stage directions that the voice that is broadcast as a woman rocks in a chair in view of the spectator is the recorded voice of the seated woman. That said, both of these plays leave the sources of these voices ambiguous in performance, for unless the spectators have read *Rockaby*, they cannot know that Beckett intends for the unstaged voice be that of the woman in the rocking chair. In *Krapp’s Last Tape*, in turn, the retrieval of memory is facilitated by use of an external, mechanized apparatus. The aged and feeble Krapp relies upon a tape recorder from which he can replay, rewind, and skip over his memories. Krapp’s archive of memory can only be accessed via this device, which serves a prosthetic function—giving Krapp a recorded extension of himself. Krapp relies upon his recording device and tapes so heavily that they resonate as vital to him. He uses these technologies as extensions of his own thoughts in ways that might best be described as prosthetic.⁸

⁸ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *prosthesis* as “a. The replacement of defective or absent parts of the body by artificial substitutes; b. an artificial replacement for a part of the body.” The definition for *prosthetic*: is as follows: “a. an artificial body part or feature worn as theatrical make-up or for special effects.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2014. Web. 21 August 2014.

Beckett's use of prosthetic extensions to supplement his characters' bodies is well documented. In *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body: The Organs and Senses in Modernism*, Yoshiki Tajiri defines Beckett's use of bodily extension as prosthetic: "Meaning far more than a simple artificial organ, the term prosthesis is useful for addressing the general cultural situation in which the distinction between the body and technology (and by extension, inside and outside, self and other) is blurred or abolished. In such an environment, even the idea of self-identity becomes unsettled by the permeation of technologies" (2). Krapp uses the technology of tapes and recorder to navigate his past; he does not verbalize his memories, though he does react to them. His tapes simultaneously mediate his archive of memory for himself and the spectator. Krapp's interactions with his taped memory thus have a doubling effect, serving as a mirror through which he views a past self and, in so doing, reflects that self outward for the consumption of the spectator. In this way, Beckett initiates a sequence in which both Krapp and the audience perform the role of spectator. Woodward theorizes that there is a "mirror stage" of old age: "As in the mirror stage of infancy, in the mirror stage of old age the subject identifies with an image and in so doing is transformed." She adds, "But the point is that the subject resists this identification rather than embraces it because what is whole is felt to reside *within* the subject and the image in the mirror is understood as uncannily prefiguring the disintegration and nursling dependence of advanced age" (110). In *Krapp's Last Tape* the sixty-nine-year-old Krapp reflects on his younger self while simultaneously experiencing that expression of mirroring through his present view of himself. Beckett layers the transformative effect of Krapp's mirror—the memory he

returns to on tape—with instances of counteraction wherein Krapp listens, questions, and resists as he listens.

In *Not I* and *Rockaby*, by contrast, fragments of memory are expressed as the characters interact with an external entity. The setting of *Not I* contains a pair of disembodied lips known only as Mouth. The play's Auditor, a shrouded figure draped entirely in black, implores Mouth by gesturing silently as she spews out her dialogue. In "Matters of Memory in *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Not I*," Jeanette R. Malkin points to the contrast between Beckett's use of memory between the two plays. Malkin asserts that Beckett's methods of invoking memory resonate differently because of the ways memory is mediated:

I will claim that Beckett's ever-moving fragment of body, Mouth, recalling a being which slips away and disperses even as it is being evoked, reflects an ontologically different notion of memory and self than does the static memory-machine (the tape-recorder) we find in dialogue with Krapp. Inversely, we might say that this changed perspective governed Beckett's reformed strategy [in *Not I*] for imagining and theatricalizing memory. (25)

Malkin points to Bergson's concepts of memory—habit memory and spontaneous or "pure" memory—in defining Krapp's strategy of memory storage and retrieval as "memory in a box" (26) while placing it in counterpoint to what she refers to as Mouth's "pure memory" (34). Malkin's observations contrast Beckett's depictions of memory in his earlier work with that of his later plays, and while her analysis does not specify age

and its relation to memory, she does equate Beckett's conceptions of memory and self" "[H]inting, even strongly suggesting, some minimal self which survives through time—and thus justifying the material metaphor of a memory 'box'" (37). Although she acknowledges Mouth's lack of a self, Malkin describes *Not I* as "a flow of aporias, each opening onto interiority (within Mouth, within the actor, within the viewer" (37) that implies that Mouth's expulsion of memory is, in itself, a loss. Henri Bergson states in *Matter and Memory* that "The brain contributes to the recall of the useful recollection, but still more to the provisional banishment of all the others. We cannot see how memory could settle within matter; but we do clearly understand how—according to the profound saying of a contemporary philosopher—materiality begets oblivion" (232).⁹ Mouth's regurgitation of memory is an emptying *into* something, or, as Malkin puts it, into an interiority. Malkin's contention is riddled with prosthetic implications. Once expelled, Mouth's memories land somewhere. If we are to imagine, as Malkin suggests, that Mouth's memories are received by interiorities such as the actor or the spectator, which are *not* Mouth and, thereby, not I, then it is not too far a stretch to imagine that the actor and the spectator become prosthetic sites upon which Mouth's memories are inscribed and abstracted. As such the actor and the spectator become the prosthetic locations—the material or the materiality that begets Mouth's oblivion. The resultant duality between the site of the memory flow (the mouth) and the prosthetic space into which the memory is being expelled (the spectator) is indicative of Beckett's usage and application of the

⁹ Bergson refers to Félix Ravaisson's *La Philosophie en France au xix siècle*, 3rd edition, pg. 176.

term *dehiscence*, which he emphasizes as a falling away, dislocation, a breaking apart, and an “impulse of material to escape.”

This dehiscent expulsion of memory beyond the materiality of the body is likewise seen in *Krapp's Last Tape*, wherein Krapp locates at least some of his memories via the external housing of his tapes. The tapes are where the aged Krapp goes to visit his past. In *The Coming of Age*, Simone de Beauvoir finds access to memory imperiled by agedness and claims that memory is not something that can be readily located; it is malleable, subject to inconsistency. She writes:

A friend said to me, “I find very old people touching because of the long past they have behind them.” Unfortunately, this is just what they do not have. The past is not a peaceful landscape lying there behind me, a country in which I can stroll whenever I please, and which will gradually show me all its secret hills and dales. As I was moving forward, so it was crumbling. Most of the wreckage that can still be seen is colourless, distorted, frozen: its meaning escapes me. Here and there, I see occasional pieces whose melancholy beauty enchants me. They do not suffice to populate this emptiness that Chateaubriand calls “the desert of the past.”

(365)

Krapp's tapes represent an attempt to retain his crumbling past; however, that past is already lost. The meaning that the younger Krapp assigned to his thoughts while recording his memory is forever out of reach for the aged Krapp, who can only listen and assign new meanings, colored by his experience of the present, to those recollections

because they are no longer his own. They reside eternally with the Krapp of the past, the Krapp that the character we see on stage can never access again. In this way, Beckett aligns Krapp's tapes and his attempts at recall with dehiscence as Krapp's memories and his past selves can never resolve in the present Krapp; they have come apart, their continuity is forever decomposed, and even the tapes do not allow Krapp to inject his present self into 'the desert' of his past.

The sole character in *Rockaby* is a woman who sits in a rocking chair, an action that exaggerates her prematurely aged appearance. She sits in silence as an offstage narration, which seems to be a recording of her own voice, plays and replays in the background. The character herself, however, refrains from speaking except to say "again" in order to prompt another replaying of the recorded narrative. Within these plays consciousness itself resonates as an absence. Beckett frames memory for the characters in *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Not I*, and *Rockaby* as vulnerable and subject to external manipulation. Because they demonstrate memory's frailty, these plays depict memory itself as subject to decay and age. Agedness is, in itself, a space of dehiscence. According to Beauvoir, age brings with it misalignment between the past and present, the body and the memory, and the very idea of the self: "The old person is turned towards the past; he has no hold on the future and he is harassed by care. He perpetually revives the same memories; he talks to himself about the same anxieties; the weakening of his memory and his inability to make new acquisitions condemn him to stagnation" (481). Beauvoir's observation is applicable to a reading of Beckett's illustrations of agedness and its influence on memory. His aged characters, particularly in *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Not I*, and

Rockaby, are indeed turned toward the past; they revive the same memories in repetition, they amble repeatedly over anxieties, and they do not demonstrate any capacity to make new acquisitions. If, as Beauvoir and these plays suggest, memory *can* age or be subject to the decay associated with the aging corporeal body, then in Beckett's depictions of age, consciousness must also be vulnerable to similar adulteration. Therefore, my analysis of *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Not I*, and *Rockaby* seeks to identify ways in which Beckett illustrates aged memory and consciousness in terms of dehiscence, framing them as subject to disjuncture through prosthetic storage, abstraction, and external manipulation.

Krapp's Last Tape

Throughout *The Coming of Age* Beauvoir takes up the issue of age and memory:

A man whose project it is to get on, to advance, takes off from his past; he defines his former I as the I that he is no longer and he dissociates himself from it. For some, on the contrary, their project implies the refusal of time and an intimate solidarity with the past. This applies to most old people: they refuse time because they do not wish to decline; they define their former I as that which they still are—they assert their solidarity with their youth. (362)

Within Beckett's dramatic corpus, vulnerabilities of age and memory are most evident in *Krapp's Last Tape*. Krapp, the sole figure on stage, is described in stage directions as "*A wearish old man. Very near-sighted (but unspectacled). Hard of hearing. Cracked voice.*"

Distinctive intonation. Laborious walk” (221). Beckett’s description of Krapp as aged is illustrated by the character’s need to store his memories upon an external device. Krapp’s tapes and his recorder serve as supplements to his own capacity for memory storage and retrieval, and Krapp compulsively revisits the “I” of his youth. The taped voice of thirty-nine-year-old Krapp ponders, “The grain, now what I wonder do I mean by that, I mean...[*hesitates*]...I suppose I mean those things worth having when all the dust—when all *my* dust has settled. I close my eyes and try and imagine them” (224). Krapp’s investment in “the grain”—the bit of recollection accessed through imagination and repetition—is his reaction to aging and the settling of the “dust” of his life. In “Self-objectification and Preservation in Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape*,” Jon Erickson posits that “*Krapp’s Last Tape* is predicated upon an illusion, that of true self-knowledge. Its focus on repetition is that of an addiction to self-consciousness, and addiction to the illusion of self-possession” (183). I would argue that Krapp’s self-conscious turn is deeply influenced by his preoccupation with the passing of time, memory, his life—all of which coalesce, for Krapp, in his recognition at the age of thirty-nine-years-old that he is edging ever closer to the “dust” of his life. Erickson argues, “Through this habit Krapp continually attempts to give birth to himself” (186). However, his self-conscious attempts at re-imagining himself through his recorded memories are doomed to superficiality. Try as he might, the reels of tape can never supplement the real, they cannot reinvest Krapp’s present moment with anything tangible, and they cannot transport Krapp back to his youth nor propel him forward into his old age. Erickson notes, “The tapes begin as a supplement to Krapp’s life but in their very superfluity replace that life itself. Krapp

wants the ground to swallow the figure and his reel-to-reel to become real, too real. But these fetishes cannot overcome as a unity Krapp's multiplicity of selves; he has as many bananas as reels of tape, that is, former selves" (187). While he attempts to re-present the I of his youth by listening to his tapes, Krapp can do little more than imagine the dust—the grain, the memory—of that part of his life and himself that has passed out of existence.

Throughout the play, the “wearish” aged Krapp looks to his recorded tapes in order to move through his memory, just as an amputee might rely upon a prosthetic limb to travel about the world. In this way, Beckett presents Krapp's recorder and tapes as prosthetic devices; they are extensions of Krapp himself insofar as they supplement his own capacity for recollection and his access to his memories. In *Trapped in Thought: A Study of the Beckettian Mentality*, Eric P. Levy considers Krapp's relationship with his recorder: “Krapp wants to become one with the machine—to merge, that is, with reiterated memory—so that the effort of living is replaced by surrender to regret” (192). Indeed, Krapp enthusiastically interacts with his machine, with his recorded memory, as a prosthetic extension of his corporeal world. He takes pains to match the reels of tape, which contain the stored recollections of himself in younger days, with the entries in his ledger. He refers to the spools in terms of personification: “Box three. Spool five...five...five...ah! the little rascal!” (222). That Krapp assigns personality traits to the devices upon which he stores his memories implies that, at least on some level, the stored memories are independent of him—that for him they exist beyond his own notions of self. The tapes house the remnants of the younger self that the aged Krapp now sees as

Other. For Krapp, the lines between self and other are undefined, blurred by time; in Beckettian terms, this confusion resonates with dehiscence. The schism between self and Other is made complicated by Krapp's reliance on his prosthetic tapes, and Beckett depicts the old man's ability to locate memories of his youth without the aid of his ledger as dubious, at best.

The first recorded memory that Krapp replays expresses the murky relationship between his present *self* and the externalized, prosthetically stored memory he is accessing. The tape features Krapp's voice at the age of thirty-nine. The voice proclaims, "With all this darkness around me I feel less alone. [Pause] In a way. [Pause] I love to get up and move about in it, then back here to [*hesitates*]...me. [Pause] Krapp" (223). This suggests that, even at thirty-nine years of age, Krapp considered his recordings as a way to locate his self, that recording the tapes reassured him that he could find a way back to himself. However, the act of storing his memories does not bring Krapp any nearer to them; rather, by storing them remotely, upon a device outside the body, Krapp participates in the dehiscing of his memory from his physical body. This separation of memory from its physical moorings within the body signals a boundary that divides the body from the conscious self, which is represented by the "me" that Krapp refers to here. Beckett further contrasts the relationship between the body and the self by having the recorded voice of Krapp speak of having just listened to a series of memories from "an old year" in which he accessed "passages at random" from perhaps ten or twelve years earlier (223). Krapp's stored, recorded memories supplement his own ability to recall and they indicate his interest in interrogating the ways in which his recorded younger self

defined his world. His deferral to the tapes is evidence of a self-conscious interrogation of thought, a surveilling of the self through the aesthetic distance afforded by the prosthetic site of retrieval. This is exemplified in a moment wherein Krapp pauses his tape and ponders the word “viduity” after his recorded voice invokes the term while recounting the autumn of his mother’s death:

back on the year that is gone, with what I hope is perhaps a glint of the old eye to come, there is of course the house on the canal where mother lay a-dying, in the late autumn, after her long viduity [*Krapp gives a start.*] and the—[*Krapp switches off, raises his head, stares blankly before him. His lips move in the syllables of “viduity.” No sound. He gets up, goes backstage into darkness, comes back with an enormous dictionary, lays it on table, sits down and looks up the word.*]. State—or condition—of being—or remaining—a widow—or widower. [*Looks up. Puzzled*] Being—or remaining?...[*Pause. He peers again at dictionary. Reading*] “Deep weeds of viduity.”...Also of an animal, especially a bird...the vidua or weaver-bird...Black plumage of male [*He looks up. With relish.*] The vidua-bird! [*Pause. He closes dictionary, switches on, resumes listening pose.*]. (225)

That the recorded Krapp hopes to see a hint of “the old eye to come” suggests that, even in his thirties, Krapp recognized himself as aging. This is confirmed in the recordings, as Krapp ponders whether he will take up the habit of his neighbor “Old Miss McGlome” who sings, at the same hour each evening, “[s]ongs of her girlhood, she says. Hard to

think of her as a girl. Wonderful woman though. Connaught, I fancy. [Pause.] Shall I sing when I am her age, if ever I am? No. [Pause.]” (224). Miss McGlome locates her past and revisits her youth through song, but this is not an option for Krapp, who has no songs, for he did not sing as a child (224). Instead, Krapp relies upon his recorded archive of memories to enhance his dexterity in navigating his past, and those memories he has stored on tape provide cues for him to reflect on them in the present. The way in which his recorded self uses a word is interesting to the aged man as he listens and reflects back upon the memories contained on the tape. Whether or not Krapp can tap into these memories without the prosthetic assistance of the recording is unknowable, but his interactions with his tapes, and his need to look up a word that he had used correctly in his younger days, suggest that in his advanced age his own ability to recall has been diminished. Erickson finds evidence of Krapp’s failing memory in his use of ritual and habit: “The value of repetition is that it sustains the living actions of performance, thoroughly reinscribing the present movement and sounds upon the memory of the subject who is fearful of the tendency to forget—the most dematerializing force of all” (190).

While Beckett does provide cues suggesting that Krapp is trying to remember things on his own, whenever he does so his effort is stymied by forgetting. His faltering memory is evident in the opening scene. He relishes eating the first banana, and after doing so, he drops the peel onto the floor. Moments later he begins pacing the floor and, in a moment that suggests he has forgotten that he dropped the banana peel, “*He treads on skin, slips, nearly falls, recovers himself, stoops and peers at skin and finally pushes it,*

still stooping, with his foot over edge of stage into pit” (222). In *Matter and Memory*, Henri Bergson addresses memory retention and the significance of words: “Sometimes it is the whole set of memories that disappears, the faculty of mental hearing being purely and simply abolished; sometimes there is a general weakening of the function; but it is usually the function which is diminished and not the number of recollections” (149). Krapp’s grasping for the right word is indicative, like the incident with the banana peel illustrates, of the weakening in memory that Bergson details. While the number of his recollections is not diminished, his ability to access the fullness of his memories seems to require prompting from the tapes. Bergson continues, “It seems as if the patient had no longer strength to grasp his acoustic memories,¹⁰ as if he turned round about the verbal image without being able to hit upon it. To enable him to recover a word is often enough to put him on the track of it, by giving him the first syllable, or even by merely encouraging him. An emotion may produce the same effect” (149). Bergson is referring to a hypothesis on memory that equates cerebral lesions found in brains with “word deafness” (146) that compromises acoustic memory. Bergson’s observations of patients with word deafness resulting in loss of acoustic memory resonate with Beckett’s depictions of Krapp’s compulsive preservation of his own memories. Krapp’s obsession with his recordings exemplifies his own efforts to recover and preserve his “acoustic memory.” Furthermore, when he encounters the word *viduity* in what is literally his

¹⁰ Acoustic memory refers to a form of encoding of memory of auditory impulses. Henri Bergson utilizes this term in a psychological sense, wherein short-term memory and past memory is linked with a present object, such as the auditory image (that which is spoken or heard) (160). Auditory memory, therefore, refers to the memory of words or sound images.

preserved auditory memory, he reacts as though prompted to recover something that he has lost. His reabsorption of the word after he has looked it up in the dictionary is tempered by a nostalgic response while he considers the word in relation to his mother. By revealing Krapp's uncertainty about his past usage of a word, Beckett reveals that Krapp's auditory memory is compromised. As such, this suggests that Krapp has become reliant upon the technology of the recorder—on his prosthetic memory—to fully access his past.

Indeed, in all cases when the taped memory is played, the Krapp we see on stage can and does interfere with the voiced accounts from his past. He stops the tape, or pauses, or rewinds. By transcribing Krapp's memory onto tape, Beckett calls attention to Krapp's aging, past and present, as a stage in the theatrical sense of the word; Krapp's attention to his memory and its preservation is, in other words, a performative practice. The process of recollection always carries with it some level of selection, archival searching, and censorship. As a cognitive function, memory is not fixed in time; rather, it is transportive, always in motion, always performing. Levy suggests that Krapp uses the tapes as a form of escape: "By fixating exclusively on past moments, Krapp reduces the present to the site of remembrance and thus fortifies his life against change" (186). Levy's interpretation of remembrance suggests that recall is compromised and something is lost, hence the need for a replay of memory, a reiteration that is literally a rememory. As such, remembrance combines recall and memory as a performative singularity. Remembrance requires performative decisions on Krapp's part. Krapp determines which memories to replay, just as he decided which ones to record in the first place. However,

Krapp cannot control the impulse to look back; he must play his tapes. Jon Erickson finds:

Krapp's Last Tape can be read allegorically, depicting our own obsessions with preserving the present, with the retention of "history" in its "original form" ("organic voice" in this case). It can be read as a continual recycling of self and continual consumption of self, a repetitive reification of personality that is the replacement for an external soul. It also demonstrates the internalization of formerly external processes of surveillance and control by authorities. In a Foucauldian sense, it is a kind of "technology of the self" that, rather than resisting social technologies that create the self, simply recapitulates them in private. (189)

The process of recollection is, for Krapp, tied to his active pursuit of recapturing his "self" by replaying his memories. The tapes represent multiplicities of Krapp, each recorded upon the tapes. For each articulation, Krapp had to make a conscious effort to record himself; as such, voicing his account and recording it demonstrates a performative choice. Krapp chooses to transcribe his memories, depositing them upon his recording device for future reference, not recognizing the multiple of selves he documents.

However, externalizing memory is precarious because accessing what has been stored requires additional layers of performance. For instance, the very act of listening to the tapes demands performance from Krapp himself. He must retrieve his tapes, position his body to prepare to listen—he "switches on, gets into his listening pose." The methodical repetitiveness with which he accesses his tapes implies that should his body

deteriorate, Krapp may find himself no longer able to perform the steps that are necessary to access his prosthetic memory. Additionally, Krapp relies heavily upon his devices in order to replay his memories—the tapes and the recorder must perform. Of course, he has no certainty of this happening. His tapes or his recorder could fail. Likewise, Krapp's ledger must be accurate, and he must be coherent enough to locate and play his recordings. Should any hindrance disrupt these points of access, Krapp's ability to use his prosthetic memory—memory already made dehiscent via its location outside the body—would be compromised. In *Beckett, Technology, and the Body*, Ulrika Maude considers the ways that the technology of the tape emphasizes Krapp's agedness: "When Krapp's younger voice is heard on tape, it is a '*Strong voice, rather pompous*,' achingly different from the broken, at times raucous voice of the decrepit man on stage. The play of continuity, discontinuity and loss is acted out in the voices, distinctly other while irreducibly connected" (20). Maude identifies the very dehiscence that Beckett illustrates by severing the Krapp of the present from the auditory rememory—the trace of his younger self: "the continuity is bitched to hell." The moment that Krapp spools his first tape and listens to his younger voice, the potential for loss has already been established. He has already lost that portion of his self. That self has already become an inaccessible Other. The reliability of Krapp's recorded self is also suspect because the memories that he recorded are only those he chose to preserve on tape. Whatever memories exist for Krapp beyond those he recorded and replays go unacknowledged. Krapp's effort at listening to his memories is itself a study in manipulation because he has the ability to self-edit. Krapp can rewind, fast forward, and skip over memories altogether should he

wish. The tape recorder gives Krapp a tool by which to control the flow of his memories. Krapp can govern the speed at which they are replayed, and he can decide how often to listen. Therefore, while Krapp is actively replaying his memories, he revisits only selective bits—those moments he chooses, nothing more. By emphasizing the aged Krapp editing the taped accounts of his younger selves, Beckett invests the performance of remembrance with dehiscence in that the continuity, like Krapp's aged body, is always breaking down.

In *Krapp's Last Tape* time manifests itself, in dehiscent form, as a duality. Eric Levy asserts that Krapp's interaction with time is interrupted through the act of recording: "The hidden motive of the tape-recording ritual," Levy contends, "is to detach Krapp from implication in the continuity of his own life, by reducing it to a series of disposable and fixed memories whose relation to the present Krapp, as he moves through time, can always be repudiated" (187). Krapp reveals his earlier thoughts through snippets of playback, inviting the past into his present; however, he can redact elements of the past that he is accessing. Krapp needs only to fast forward or rewind to skip across any part of his past that he deems unpleasant or unworthy of remembrance. Maude addresses the uncertainties of Krapp's tapes in these words: "The play's temporal sedimentation is brought about by the manipulation of the tapes. The noises on stage mark the present tense, while the different dimensions of the past are conjured up by the recorded voice" (63). The use of technology gives the past a foothold in the present. Of this doubling, Maude contends, "The distinction between the present Krapp and the past one collapses, yet it is also made more acute by the sense of loss that accompanies

Krapp's recollections. The doubling of the body that the voice effects, in other words, far from freeing Krapp from the constraints of embodiment, serves only to make his predicament more severe" (19). The aged man and the trace of his younger self exist simultaneously, though they can never converge, while the Krapp of the present is engaged in the act of listening. In *Beckett and Decay*, Katherine White draws particular attention to Krapp's replaying of his "farewell to love" memory, "The poignancy of this passage is indeed evident and, as Krapp continues to play it, we recognize his inability to progress beyond the past. As he records the tape for his current birthday, he recognizes that age has robbed him of life" (26-27). While age has rendered Krapp unable to recapture his lost youth, his retreat from life while he was younger suggests that he rejected youth while he had it; in other words, he abandoned the life he might have enjoyed while he was still in his prime, opting to replace youthful vigor with the facsimile echoes of his recordings. The act of remembrance—which for Krapp seems an attempt at commemorating a lost self and a re-engagement with moments, choices, and regret—includes, always, the potential for erasure and increased dehiscence, not progress. As White reasons,

The aspirations and resolutions he once possessed serve to reinforce the futility of his current existence, as no longer does he aspire to anything, bitter perhaps in his acknowledgement that old age has robbed him of youth. Krapp does not show signs of coming to terms with old age, as he chooses to continually revert to the past, unable and unwilling to live in the present. (26)

In the course of the play, neither the recorded Krapp of the past nor the Krapp of the present moves forward. The play ends with Krapp reactionless and his recorded self proclaiming, “Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness, but I wouldn’t want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn’t want them back” (230). The juxtaposition of figure and voice indicates that Krapp understands the past as something that he has lost, a place to which he cannot return, even if he desired to go back. For Krapp the prosthetic memory houses the othered self, the past he revisits in fits and starts of fast forwards, pauses, and rewinds; however, each spool of tape signifies the reality of loss as well as the potential for retrieval.

Not I

Beckett’s most fragmented characters—those with indeterminate or diminished physicality—and those ghosting through repetitive existences, such as May in *Footfalls*, the rocking woman in *Rockaby*, and the mirror-image of a bereaved man in *Ohio* *Impromptu* might best be described as remnants of consciousness rather than fully actualized people who are conscious of their existence, surroundings, or predicaments. Within Beckett’s theater, no play expresses fragmentation as directly as *Not I*. The play’s protagonist is reduced to nothing beyond an otherwise disembodied mouth that hovers high above an otherwise blackened stage. Mouth exists more as a remnant of consciousness than an entity. Her isolation from the rest of her body and her position above the stage well removed from the spectator cast Mouth as the ultimate Other. Gazed upon while unable to gaze back, Mouth illustrates the Beckettian predicament of

subjectivity. Her existence is one of objectification: she is a mouth, not a wholly realized body. Mouth's awareness of a self is not indicated, and her consciousness, if there is any, exists as little more than an externalized trace of being. In presenting Mouth in a state of deterioration or fragmentation, Beckett constructs her subjectivity as vulnerable to external manipulations.

While Mouth is decidedly female, there are no other defining characteristics other than her voice. She speaks bits of memory at the silent behest of the black-clad Auditor. Her regurgitations of narrative lack any linear form. As she discharges recollections, they come through in snippets, bits and pieces of a self no longer whole. Like her body, Mouth's memories are, in every sense, dismembered. This is true, in a way, for Krapp as well. By putting his recordings on individual tapes, he fragments the continuity he seeks. Like the partitioning of Krapp into separate recordings, the breaking apart of Mouth from her body and her narrative from coherence is indicative of Beckettian dehiscence. Although Beckett offers no description as to Mouth's age in his stage directions, the play's text implies that, prior to being reduced to a mouth, she was, in fact, aged. For example, Mouth hints at the last moments of her former self, suggesting she has reached the age of seventy before suffering the calamity that leaves her in her present state: "...no love of any kind....at any subsequent stage... so typical affair... nothing of any note till coming up to sixty when—...what?...seventy?...good God!" (406). Mouth speaks only in the third person, never acknowledging that the "She" of her recollections is her current self. By omitting herself from her recollections, Mouth refuses her subjectivity, and in so doing, she relinquishes control over her narrative. Auditor observes at a distance and

signals compassion for Mouth's verbal account through a series of gestures. Beckett's emphasis on the internalization of authority and the potential externalization of subjectivity in Mouth's case demonstrates that the aged subject can experience a dehiscence that ruptures autonomy, notions of self, and the structures governing physical being, consciousness, and memory. In Mouth Beckett demonstrates how the organizing consciousness or the consciousness of the observer displaces and objectifies the subject; by refusing the first person, by insisting she is "not I," Mouth sets herself up as an observer, which literally displaces and objectifies her-*self*. Likewise, the spectator is implicated in its apprehension of Mouth's subjective self while the Auditor stands as the vacant presence, observing and imploring. When Beckett omitted this figure from the television production of *Not I*, the spectators in front of the screen replaced the black-clad figure, leaving only Mouth and themselves to apprehend and ponder the dehiscent self spilling out of whatever remains of the old woman referred to in Mouth's narrative. In this way, Beckett's depictions of subjectivity extend into subjectification. That the woman in Mouth's narration is old underscores her vulnerability. Agedness projects as a time when frailty and impairment may lead to rupture, which leaves the subjective self unshielded against manipulation and unable to defend itself against loss. As elsewhere in Beckett's drama, agedness is a state wherein the self may be displaced as the body is rendered obsolete. In the example of Mouth in *Not I*, agedness renders the body as something other, and memory becomes inaccessible or uncontrollable, foreign yet familiar. In every meaningful way, Mouth's aged self is unrecognizable to her—a thing *not I*.

Mouth's refusal to acknowledge first person in her account implies that she rejects her memories: to a great measure her idea of self is compromised, and this rendering of herself as *not* that which she is remembering suggests a form of self-dehiscence as she actively displaces her "self" within her own memory. Mouth's dispersal of memory then indicates that recollections can come from dehiscent outflow, an enigmatic space that is not necessarily tied to physicality. As a consequence, memory itself takes on prosthetic characteristics; it exists beyond the self. Mouth is a hole as well as the whole that issues her torrent of words. Consciousness is something that she expresses, but it is also something she expels, birthed through the gateway of teeth, saliva, and lips. Mouth's labor in producing her avalanche of words is quite apparent. At the same time, the blackness we see at Mouth's center blends with the blackness of the space surrounding her, so the words also seem to be coming from somewhere else. Multiple illustrations connecting age and birth to dehiscent rupture exist in the singularity that is Mouth.

The "stream" or flow of Mouth's oration is acknowledged by the gestures of the cloaked Auditor positioned "downstage audience left" (406). That Beckett designates the robed figure as Mouth's "Auditor" implies that it is there specifically to listen to Mouth's account. The Auditor, who is raised four feet above the stage, hovers as an uncanny harbinger of Mouth's purgatorial confinement. Auditor remains silent and largely motionless, raising on four occasions "arms from sides and their falling back, in a gesture of helpless compassion" (406). Beckett specifies that Mouth be positioned eight feet above the stage. The resultant spatial division between Auditor, Mouth, and the spectator amplifies her solitude. She is untethered from herself and everything around her.

Throughout her monologue Mouth seems to respond to unheard inquiries: "...in a godfor—... what?... girl...yes...tiny little girl..." (405). Most often, critics suggest that these interruptions are responses to some interrogation on the part of the Auditor. In *The Absent Voice: Narrative Comprehension in the Theater*, Stanton B. Garner, Jr. takes up the ambiguity of Auditor's influence on Mouth and argues that the Mouth/Auditor relationship resists specification:

Mouth's monologue contains repeated references to the act of listening, but these revolve largely around "her" own perception of the "stream of words." External figures who listen within these narrative fragments do so with suspicion, abhorrence, or neglect, not "helpless compassion." There is, in other words, no narrative link to explicate the presence of this strangely hooded figure, and although critics have offered various explanations concerning this figure's relationship to the Mouth and its monologue (audience surrogate, prompter/censor, confessor), the play itself leaves the relationship unspecified. (160)

Whether Mouth is responding to the Auditor, then, remains unclear. Beckett implies nothing beyond the performative nature of her disjointed narrative: she is compelled to speak, unleashing a flood of words without any indication that she has the ability to slow the stream of her account. Mouth insists she "couldn't pause for a second" (410). Mouth desperately tries to avoid the perils of self-perception while unable to stem the flow of her words, "...something begging the brain... begging the mouth to stop... pause a moment...if only for a moment... and no response...as if it hadn't heard..." (410).

Further, Mouth refers to “the mouth” as “it,” indicating that she does not recognize herself as the mouth. Garner addresses Mouth’s refusal to self-identify, explaining, “The uncertainty resulting from Mouth’s narrative, and its structural disjunctions, is heightened by the speaker’s insistent disowning. For the refusal to admit the first person into the narrative sphere has consequences, not only for Mouth’s self-confrontation, but for the audience’s own engagement with the theatrical present” (159). The dehiscence between Mouth, her memories, and her “self” has the potential, in other words, to disrupt continuity in ways that implicate the spectator. The spectator’s engagement with Mouth within the theatrical present thus serves a prosthetic function that amplifies Mouth’s dehiscence, especially if we consider the audience as the external material interceptor of Mouth’s auditory memory. However, this is not to suggest that the audience necessarily identifies with Mouth as a thing that remembers. Beckett foregrounds Mouth’s dehiscence by keeping the aged figure of the woman in Croker’s Acres unrealized on stage: she remains “not I” and is conspicuously left undescribed as Mouth refuses to acknowledge her own identity. Mouth offers the spectator no confirmation of her identity beyond the disembodied lips, teeth, tongue, and godforsaken hole presented on stage. In this way, Mouth remains utterly desolate to herself and to the spectators receiving her memories, even as there is a connection, however ambiguous, between Mouth and the disavowed life of which she speaks.

The rupture for Mouth between her physicality and her memory surpasses the bleakness of her fragmentation, as she is unable to locate the lost “She” or achieve self-restoration. By refusing the first person, Mouth denies ownership of her memories,

rendering the past that she is recounting defunct. Mouth's memory, therefore, can be qualified only by an external force as she herself refuses to re-claim her past. As such, Mouth relinquishes any claim to her own subjectivity, deflecting it outward toward whatever is prompting her to speak and wherever her memory lands, thus amplifying the dehiscence between Mouth and whatever of her own agency remains. Regardless of the origin of Mouth's impulse to speak, Beckett frames her as responding to something interrogatory. Mouth responds to unheard questions from an unseen source—which could be coming from her own inner promptings—the eye/I of self-consciousness. Perhaps this source is Auditor, though if not, given the suggestion that she is responding to questions, some sort of arbiter appears to be vetting her story forcing her to reflect and entreating her to confess. In essence, Mouth seems to respond to some beckoning—suggesting that, by answering, she is yielding to an authoritative power structure as it directs her flow of memory.

Despite the alive and urgent disembodied mouth, it is impossible to disregard the lack produced by the non-present rest of her. That emptiness is underscored as Mouth's memory issues forth like something that has fallen out of coherence, her words bursting from her with rapid-fire dexterity but without context or the grounding of body language. Although Beckett writes Mouth's age or "her" age as seventy years old in the script, playing the part of Mouth requires physical strength and a measure of bodily dexterity that may make it difficult to cast an elderly actress in the role. In a *New York Times* interview with Roslyn Sulcas in September 2014, Lisa Dwan shared her enthusiasm for and reservations about playing Mouth in *Not I*:

“I had no idea what I was taking on, how rarely performed this [*Not I* was,” said Ms. Dwan, eating pasta a few hours before a performance here [The Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM)]. “Many people have tried to do it and given up; the text is almost unlearnable, the physical stress is unbearable, the mental stress even worse. I meditate three times a day, I run, I am seeing a chiropractor, I have a hernia from pushing the sound out, my digestive system is affected. It has really taken its toll, but the rewards of speaking that gorgeous text are very great.” (Sulcas)

Dwan’s experience of playing Mouth offers insight into the embodied-ness of a character that is so disembodied. Dwan is thirty-seven-years-old, yet playing Mouth has taken a physical toll on her body. For a play that is missing so much physicality, *Not I* is—in every sense—about the body and its relationship to memory, even for the actress playing the role of Mouth. The outflow of Mouth’s narrative is interrupted by moments of emptiness, those brief instances of pauses before the sound is once again, in Dwan’s terms, “pushed out.” Dwan’s interview closes with this reflection: “It actually gets harder. You are doing the lines, you are in his genius, you hear your own chattering monkey mind. You have to bring everything you are and could possibly be to it, but it is so expansive. I am a continent of voices. How massive is that?” (Sulcas). The avalanche of words in *Not I* likewise issues forth like a continent of voices: the voice of the present Mouth we see on stage; the voice of the unclaimed “she,” and the gestures of the silent Auditor. The gestures of Auditor are much like an incoherent language in itself, perhaps a stand-in for all that is missing of Mouth’s body; or the inner voice in terror over an

irresolvable existence. As Billie Whitelaw described it in the 1990 BBC documentary *A Wake for Sam*, “When I first read it [*Not I*] at home, I just burst in to tears, because I recognized the inner scream. Perhaps that’s not what it is, I don’t know, but for me, that’s what I recognized, an inner scream, in there, and no escaping it” (AWFS, BBC). Mouth’s speech is depicted here as more performative than informative; her “inner scream” communicates pieces of “her” life—a birth, rape, abandonment, a court trial wherein she is accused and deemed guilty. She responds to unknown prompts and silent questioning with pauses that she follows with questions of her own: “...what? ...had been?...yes...something that would tell how it had been...how she had lived...” (411). In effect, Mouth offers all that remains of “her”—her mouth—to serve as a prosthetic extension of her subjective self, the thing that would tell how “she” had lived. Jacques Derrida refers to *trace* as the “arche-phenomenon of memory,” which he describes as the “enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside” (70). Mouth is the remnant of an aged, fragmented corporeal body. As such, the mouth becomes the space of dehiscence, the repository from which memory escapes, the site of extraction, from which the trace is disgorged from an inside, which is literally the mouth, to an outside—the spectator.

That Mouth cannot find meaning in her words appears to be related to her claim of being “speechless all her days...practically speechless...even to herself... never out loud” until a “steady stream...mad stuff... half the vowels wrong” (412). In *All Theater is Revolutionary Theater*, Benjamin Bennett suggests that within Beckettian narration “our sense of a whole human self as the agent of expression is regularly thwarted;

expression thus seems *fragmented*” (Bennett, 164). In applying Bennett’s assertion to Mouth, it may be argued that Beckett frames her refusal to relinquish third-person as a response to her inability to “sense [a] whole human self as the agent of expression.” In so doing, she enhances her fragmented status. The Auditor, that figure who listens and is positioned as spectator along with the audience, offers a prosthetic solution to Mouth’s lack of ears—it can hear her as she speaks of a past that she can only articulate in fragments. Eric P. Levy considers the auditory witness in terms of the absence that is woven throughout Beckett’s works: “the auditory witness is simply the original subject at one remove from his or her own thought or verbalization thereof. That is, one’s subjective awareness is rendered in polar terms: autonomous interiority (represented by the originary voice) and its sustaining witness (represented by the auditor)” (Levy 53). The sightless Mouth will not risk being caught by so much as an inward gaze, but she cannot avoid presenting her auditory memory, speaking of her past and the absent self that she cannot recover. In tracing the mimesis of absence in Beckett’s works, Levy asserts, “For the project of the annihilating witness is to rid inwardness of disturbing content” (56). Mouth’s diatribe reveals an unspoken trauma, experienced by “her” one evening at Croker’s Acres that left her unable to move, yielding to a morning sun beneath which she could do nothing but “sink face down in the grass...nothing but the larks...so on... grabbing at the straw...straining to hear...the odd word...make some sense of it...whole body like gone...just the mouth...” (411). Here, Mouth demonstrates that the object is also the subject—the “she” face down in the grass yet unable to escape. While Mouth’s trauma, whatever it is that led to her present state, may not be a function of age,

the fact that Beckett suggests that she is seventy years—“nothing of any note till coming up to sixty when--...what?...seventy?...good God!” (406)—places agedness at the nexus of Mouth’s state of being. Mouth’s refusal to surrender third-person places her in the position of annihilating witness because rather than risk entrapment she rejects the self that is being observed. The Auditor may, as Beckett indicates, gesture in “helpless compassion” for the simple reason that it can do nothing beyond listening as Mouth spills the memories of an unpleasant life and the final indignities for an old woman who falls stricken, to a catastrophic degree, in a field in Croker’s Acres. However, Paul Lawley reads the Auditor as doing more. In “Counterpoint, Absence and the Medium in Beckett’s *Not I*,” he contends that “The Auditor insists upon the ‘lying,’ for the whole monologue, insofar as it is a denial: ‘Not I’ is a lie, a refusal to acknowledge the fragmentary nature of the self” (412). Throughout the narration Beckett places Mouth’s identity under erasure. I submit that it is no coincidence that the all-but-erased woman that Mouth speaks of is an aged figure, and my contention is supported by Beckett’s own reflections on writing an aged female figure into *Not I*. In *Beyond Minimalism: Beckett’s Late Style in the Theater*, Enoch Brater quotes Beckett’s description of his inspiration for the old woman in *Not I*: “I knew that woman in Ireland...I knew who she was—not ‘she’ specifically, on a single woman, but there were many old crones, stumbling down the lanes, in the ditches, beside the hedgerows. Ireland is full of them. And I heard ‘her’ saying what I wrote in *Not I*. I actually heard it” (24). Brater goes on to give Beckett’s earlier interpretations of Mouth:

In the “Kilcool” manuscript Beckett gives, moreover, a description of the stage to accommodate the image of a speaking head: “Old woman’s face, 4 ft. above stage level. Slightly off centre, lit by strong steady light. Body not visible. Stage in darkness. Nothing visible but face. Gray hair drawn slightly back from forehead. Shrill... voice, bad enunciation. (24)

Clearly, the aged status of Mouth was something that Beckett himself emphasized. While age is, then, vital to the play’s narrative structure, perhaps most disarming for theatergoers is how much Beckett erases, cancels out, or takes this out of play from the narration itself. Beckett provides Mouth and, thereby, the audience with only “her” fragmented narration: “...but no... spared that... the mouth alone... so far...ha!... so far...then thinking...oh long after...sudden flash... it can’t go on... all this...all that...” (409). All contextualization is left out, erased. Mouth spews nothing but the trace fragments of her dehiscent narrative. The audience is left with “tentativeness and uncertainty” by what Beckett leaves out or effectually erases from Mouth’s narrative but equally so by the trace of self that Mouth retains. This, in effect, frames the disembodied mouth as a prosthetic mechanism for delivering or, in Mouth’s case, spewing, memory. It is in this way, I would argue, that Mouth functions much like Krapp’s tape player, as Beckett depicts her as the space within which memory is stored and replayed. Mouth herself hints at being a prosthetic stand-in for the mind, “...the brain...flickering away like mad...quick grab and on...nothing there...on somewhere else...try somewhere else” (412). The mind, with nothing left to grab onto, seeks somewhere else to store its contents—in this case, the mouth. However, once memory is thrust outside the confines

of the mind, it begins to unravel. Mouth's fragmented replaying of "her" memory demonstrates that the memory is unreliable, perhaps degraded, decaying, aging, despite its liberation from the mind.

Rockaby

Unlike *Not I*, Beckett's *Rockaby* features a non-fragmented aging character. The play centers on a woman (W) who sits in a rocking chair and is described in the stage directions as "prematurely old" (462), suggesting that she appears older than her chronological years. While this is the only indicator of the character's age in the script, when Beckett directed Billie Whitelaw in *Rockaby*, Whitelaw underwent significant wig and makeup "aging" to satisfy Beckett's vision for the character. Whitelaw's transformation under Beckett's direction is evidence that Beckett imagined the premature aging of the woman to be an actual aging, a deterioration advancing quicker than what might be expected for the woman's chronological age. My attention to actual age here is not meant to suggest that age in Beckett must always result from chronology. Rather, in Beckett's cosmos, age is a condition that can overtake one or manifest itself at earlier life-stages. Krapp's rejection of life while he was in the vigor of his youth, investing in the memories that he will reflect upon one day with his "old eye," exemplifies the manifestation of age in an earlier life-stage. In *Endgame* Clov is younger than Hamm, but in many ways he's just as old, looking back at a life that's over and contemplating its end. Beckett's specification that *Rockaby*'s W exhibits premature agedness further illustrates the variations on age and aging in Beckett's theater. While she rocks, the

woman listens to a recording of her own voice (V) that provides a fragmented account of her past. Although *Rockaby* utilizes a recorded voice, Beckett's employment of this device is much different from his use of recording technology in the male-centered *Krapp's Last Tape*. The type of recollection that Krapp obsesses over, though recorded, facilitates a visual kind of listening. Krapp reacts to his recorded past, and the spectator is invited to "listen" visually through his movement and expressions. Rather than using the act of listening as a part of the visual matrix in *Rockaby*, here the recorded utterances that accompany the rocking of W represent as a self-reflexive extension of the aged female. In "Light, Sound, Movement, and Action in Beckett's *Rockaby*," Enoch Brater writes:

In *Rockaby* Beckett therefore uses recorded sound to achieve a very spectacular stage effect. In this short play the special sound of a recorded voice becomes the true voice of feeling, the voice of lyric poetry. Yet its eerie tone, modulated but always metallic, is never entirely human. It is only the conflict between what we hear and what we see, the interplay between the "live" voice and its recorded counterpart, that makes the poetry not only lyrical, but dramatic. In *Rockaby* the woman seated on stage slowly becomes the image created by her own inner voice in a Yeatsian extravaganza in which man, in this case woman, is literally nothing until she is unified with her own image. (348)

Instead of providing mere recollection, as with Krapp, the recorded voice in *Rockaby* stands as a supplement to W herself, not just to her past, and this auditory doppelganger allows Beckett to portray the woman's self as Other.

In *Rockaby*, the image of W is constantly modulated through the movement of the rocking chair and the subsequent de-centering effect of light as the woman's face passes in and out of the spot. W prompts the recorded voice to begin by imploring "More," which cues the start of the off-stage narration. The recording reveals that W is utterly alone. She sits before her window rocking, "all eyes /all sides," looking "for another/another creature like herself" (463). Although, in accordance with Beckett's stage directions, her eyes are "increasingly closed" and are "closed for good halfway through" (461), the desire to actualize the self by gazing at an Other remains irresolvable for W. In a turn that harkens back to Mouth, W's recorded voice refers to herself in the third-person. She cannot find another face to look upon as all the blinds are shut; therefore, she has only the recorded voice to keep her company: "in the end came / close of a long day / when she said to herself / whom else / time she stopped / *time she stopped*" (462). The echoed utterance of "*time she stopped*" resonates as self-reflexive doubling. The phrase "to herself" mirrors this doubling, the inward turn, wherein the self stands in for the inaccessible other. She is, in every way, "her own other" (469). In "Not I in *Rockaby*," Daniel Davy reads the W/V relationship as a form of surrender of self: "[W's] "subjectivity" comes to final rest and resignation only as that "other" status" (14). Beckett frames the doubling of the woman as a dehiscence of self which is amplified by the aged-likeness that she projects; she is the stand-in for her mother, sitting, as it were, literally beside her 'self' in mourning for the lost other. This doubling is echoed throughout *Rockaby*, as demonstrated by the lines "gone in like herself / gone back in" (465). That she has "gone in" implies that, at some point, she was out. The memory the voice relates

of the death of W's mother confirms that W's gaze was apprehended by an "other" (her mother) at some non-descript time before the present.

W, we learn, seems to feel the absence of her mother as a lack, at least in terms of the desiring gaze. Because she cannot replace the lost mother through another's external gaze, her gaze goes "back in." She then re-apprehends herself through the recording of her own voice, which serves as a supplement, audibly distancing her "self" through an echo that displaces the voice from the body in a method similar to ventriloquism. Indeed, this displacement makes W appear mannequin-like. The stage direction calls for just such constructions: "*Together: echo of "time she stopped," coming to rest of rock, faint fade of light*" (464). Although the origin of the unstaged voice is unclear in performance, in his stage directions, Beckett stipulates that the recorded voice is the woman's own, implying that W's gaze must turn inward, regardless of how ambiguous her relationship to self may seem in performance. Consequently, her increasingly closed eyes signify that her gaze has relinquished external possibility—the chance of a return glance—and deepened W's inward turn. She sees herself only through her own voice. As such, her expression of memory becomes reliant upon the prosthetic other, the supplement to herself, that is supplied through her recorded voice.

The monotony of W's seemingly effortless rocking while largely in shadow takes on a ghostly resonance—adding to the sense that she is prematurely aged. Equally haunting is that she seeks for a face "behind the pane / famished eyes / like hers / to see / be seen" (466). W's eyes are hungry for apprehension by other eyes. Sigmund Freud's "The Uncanny" examines what he refers to as the "theme" of the double. Freud positions

doubling as a mechanism of protection, a way to insulate oneself from damage to the ego upon encountering death. According to Ulrika Maude, the dislocation associated with doubling in Beckett's plays indicates a cognitive disjuncture or an interruption in the ways the characters view themselves: "Critics have proposed a number of ways of approaching this dissociation or doubling in Beckett's drama, suggesting, for instance, that the dissociated voices stage the inner monologue of the self-reflexive mind" (115). By placing herself in her dead mother's rocker, W claims the space of the desired other, of the ego's double. Adding to the uncanny aspect of the self-powered rocker, the voice recalls W's mother as having drawn attention from unnamed others because she was mad, "off her head they said / gone off her head / but harmless / no harm in her" (468). We never learn who "they" are, only that they noticed her aging mother's cognitive deterioration. The account of the death of W's mother cements the mother's position as "off" her rocker. This is exemplified in the play's last lines: "fuck life / stop her eyes / rock her off / rock her off" (470). W's voice invokes life as something unsavory, perhaps abandoned, and this, coupled with "stop her eyes," insinuates that the "her" to which the voice is referring is W's mother.

Beckett specifies that W's costume should consist of a black, glittery, high-necked evening gown and an extravagantly trimmed headpiece. Her sequins sparkle as she rocks back and forth (462). Despite the glimmer of the sequins, W's aged finery is strikingly similar to funerary garb. The image of a woman who has consciously donned clothing that makes her appear older than her years and that is appropriate for the grave resonates as uncanny when set against the rocker's history as the site of death. The

solitude of the chair evokes the finality of a coffin into which W's mother "went down / in the end went down" (468). The coffin-like aspect of the rocker is reinforced in the play's fourth movement, as the phrase "time she stopped" is no longer echoed. This denotes, at the very least, the possibility that W may be recalling the "time she stopped," meaning the time that her mother stopped. While W's voice recalls her mother's death and burial, it hints at her re-placement of her lost mother with herself. Once her mother has died, W sets herself as the supplement to her mother's presence by seating herself within the rocker. She becomes old, taking age upon herself: "time she went down / down the steep stair / time she went right down / was her own other / own other living soul" (469), with "she" being understood as her mother and "her" referring to W.

Whether W's voice is recalling her "self" or her mother is secondary to the fact that W is remembering through re-enactment. Her re-enactment of her mother's rocking while listening to the recorded account of her past marks her not just as a woman who is remembering but as one who is externalizing that memory so that it may be re-presented over and over again. Her continual requests for "More" are nevertheless ambiguous. The spectator cannot know to whom she is calling, but her plea denotes her reliance upon her prosthetically accessed "other" self, the self that gives the account, speaks the memory, and communicates the past. Seated in her mother's chair, W replaces and acts *for* the absent other that is her lost mother, the returned gaze whose eyes have been "stopped" W's recorded voice serves as the keeper and trace of memory as well as her othered self.

While Beckett utilizes different techniques to depict memory in *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Not I*, and *Rockaby*, in each play he renders memory as dehiscent, subject to

external manipulation, vulnerable—a feature of being that can be externalized. Memory is compromised as the corporeal body deteriorates and prosthetically-stored memory is rendered unreliable. Beckett offers no certainty that the memories Krapp stores on his tapes or that *Rockaby*'s W relies upon as a supplement to her maternal other will remain accessible. In *Not I*, the fragmentary Mouth spews her memories in response to her lack of autonomy and her corporeal dehiscence. Among these plays, each contains some variant of prosthetic extension that receives memory, stores memory, or facilitates access to or re-access to memory—which is, in every sense, remembrance. By aligning aged memory with external storage and manipulation, particularly in *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett exposes a vulnerability that reaches beyond the decay of a corporeal body. In *Not I*, the archive of memory is broken, thrusting Mouth's memories out and away from whatever remains of her physical body—sending it into the keeping of the spectator. In *Rockaby*, W's memories replay as she calls for “more,” leaving the space from where she accesses her memory ambiguous. Whether or not she is tapping into an internal repository of memory is unknowable, but the fact that she cries out for more of the voiced “other” that is never seen on stage suggests that she is relying on an external device for access to the narration the spectator hears. *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Not I*, and *Rockaby* unhouse the archive of memory from its physical moorings within the body, leaving it open to adulteration, corruption, and a level of entropy and the decomposition of decay that is consistent with aging. Beckett depicts memory in ways that announce the possibility of prosthetic storage, abstraction, and access beyond the self. However, in doing so, Beckett implies that memory cannot exist as insulated once outside of the self; this alienation

renders the memory and the self disunited; dehiscence is irresolvable. Whether it is archived or externally accessed, memory for Beckett's aged and aging characters is rife with ambiguities and exposes the points of rupture and vulnerability for the subject.

CONCLUSION

“First the body”

The above quote is taken from Beckett’s prose fiction piece *Worstword Ho*, which he began writing at the age of seventy-five. Beckett’s interest in the body—particularly the old body—never wavered in his lifetime. The body, either despite or, perhaps, because of its fundamental complexities, its unreliability, and its vulnerabilities, retained its primacy in Beckett’s writings throughout his career. *Worstword Ho*, consequently, contains one of the most misinterpreted lines in Beckett’s entire literary corpus: “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better” (89). The “Fail better” dictum has found resonance, like other things Beckettian, within popular culture. It has been appropriated in corporate ephemera as a call to action, schools have used it to inspire students, and a quick Google search reveals scores of images displaying the “Fail better” ethos by way of body art, such as tattoos. I mention this here because, while seeing Beckett’s words galvanize so many is heartening, the reappropriations of “Fail better” illustrate an amusing misapprehension. When the quotation is broadened, it reads “All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better” (89). *Worstword Ho* is a meditation on age and the futility of embodiment. The body degrades to “Old and yet old” decomposing into “Nothing but ooze nothing and yet” (115). Yet, it carries on—failing—and getting better at failing until the height of entropy “At bounds of boundless void. Whence no farther. Best worse no farther. Nohow less. Nohow worse. Nohow naught. Nohow on” (116). That masses have latched onto

“Fail better” for motivational purposes, blissfully unaware of its intended application is ironic to a Beckettian degree. However, it also demonstrates performative revision whenever “All of old. Nothing else ever” is omitted. While the misreading of the quote is understandable, each time “Fail better” is taken out of context, its reference to old age is redacted. The negation is subtle, but it changes the meaning of Beckett’s words.

Although the interpretative license taken by corporations and those eager to wear a slice of Beckettian wisdom is inconsequential on its face, I offer the example of “Fail better” to illustrate a point: When age is overlooked in our readings of Beckett’s works, we miss a vital component of his artistic vision. While the pervasiveness with which Beckett invokes age in his staging of the body should itself warrant attention, there are additional reasons for considering this subject. Age is a central construct in the development of Beckett’s theatrical interpretations of the body. The landscapes of age in Beckett’s drama articulate core tensions between the corporeal and the metaphysical. Age is the space from which Beckett demonstrates the ways in which bodies are always at odds with consciousness. As this dissertation has established, Beckett frames age as both a condition and an experience. By positing age as a natural phenomena, Beckett transforms the body, recasting familiar embodiment through the entropic space of age. Doing so allows his staging of the body to evolve in ways that reflect his deepening interest in the interior registers of human existence. In this way, Beckett’s use of the aged body advances his formalistic innovations in ways that resist naturalistic conventions.

As Beckett’s interest in staging subjectivity intensifies, his late theater expresses the inevitability of age as a literal dilemma that presses consciousness to resist its

metaphysical boundaries. As his staging of the aged subject becomes more radical, the gap in consciousness is literalized through the visual image, which transforms the aged body into an icon. This transitional convention whereby the old body is staged as a marker of consciousness allows Beckett to stage the consciousness as a feature of being that can transcend its corporeal moorings. Therefore, age is how the body begins to fall away in Beckett's drama. These meditations on the aged body and its tenuous relationship to consciousness are intensified in Beckett's late theater, where consciousness gains primacy over the body and is depicted as a staged presence in its own right.

As Beckett explores innovations in cinema and television, he retains the aged body as the subject through which to realize his interrogations of subjectivity in terms of perceivedness and need. The medium of film in both cinema and television gives Beckett new freedom from which to decant the mind/body dialectic. By exploring new mediums for his drama, Beckett's already resourceful staging of the body takes on cinematic dimension. As such, Beckett presses the boundaries of embodiment in ways that go beyond presentations of recalcitrant old bodies with tacit connections to consciousness. From the late 1960's until the end of his career as a dramatist, Beckett minimizes the frame from which he explores the relationship between body and consciousness. This marks the dawning of his interest in writing "dramaticules"—short run-time but full-length plays. In some respects, the advent of the dramaticule mirrors Beckett's preoccupations with age, especially with the concept of birth astride of a grave that has so marked his drama. Beckett's dramaticules are themselves born this way: with running

times as brief as twenty-five seconds for *Breath*, his dramaticules go to curtain nearly as soon as they are born.

Beckett's attention to the aged body across his dramatic corpus tells its own story. From a biographical standpoint, Beckett's own life inspired his preoccupation with age. His history of great familial losses due to age and disease could easily be read in consort with the impact of living through two World Wars and the fact that Beckett himself lived until he was eighty-three. While I could speculate over how these experiences may have shaped Beckett's use of age, making assumptions about why he turns to age does not identify how age operates in Beckett's theater. Simply put, age is the main ingredient in Beckett's recipe for dramatizing subjectivity. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I borrowed from Seán Kennedy to pose this question: What does Beckett studies renounce in failing to read age in Beckett's theater? What's at stake is much more than recognizing a dialectic feature or trope. By analyzing Beckett's use of age, we can better understand the evolution of how he depicts the body. Reading age in Beckett's theater provides insight into the ways in which his drama frames absence and disconnections in relation to the embodied experience of aging. Looking at age as more than a background image in Beckett's drama reveals the story of his theater and the process by which age embodies the void, but always with the understanding of impermanence, even in Beckett's spaces of "endlessness." In every genre of writing, Beckett teases out form by pressing against conventions. It is no different in his staging of the aged body. Age is the nexus of non-relation in Beckett's renderings of mind and body.

Beckett places the aged body on stage in twenty-three of his thirty-two plays because he wants his spectator to witness its corporeal negation: to recognize the limitations of embodiment and to see the futility of being born into bodies that are doomed to fail. In Beckett's theater, the aged body exemplifies the shifts between impenetrable self and impenetrable unself. As I have argued in this dissertation, the intentionality with which Beckett invokes age is identifiable in his staging of the body. Beckett employs the aged body as a condition and an experience—and these depictions always include some measure of impairment and confinement. Beckett underscores the inevitability of age through illustrations of entropy and stasis. The decomposition that accompanies age acknowledges the corporeality of the subject while resisting naturalism. This resistance prompts the forays into prosthetic memory and the expulsion of consciousness evident in Beckett's late theater. The implications of this study are relevant beyond the field of Beckett studies. By exploring the use of age in Beckett's dramatic works, I hope this study has identified points of intersection from which to view gerontological studies as applicable to studies of theater and performance. Interrogating the ways in which the aged body is represented in dramatic literature and staged in the theater lends insight into the embodied performativity of the human condition. Beckett's drama concerns itself with age as a method of responding to vulnerabilities consistent with dwelling in "bodied spaces." As such, Beckett's staging of the old body should be understood as framing the inconstancy of corporeal subjectivity. Age gives Beckett a platform upon which to stage his preoccupations with the subjective self as the old body carries one certainty—it will "Fail Better."

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VITA

Victoria Swanson was born and raised in New York and developed a love of theater at a young age. While she enjoyed acting in stage productions, Victoria diverged from theater training to pursue other goals, such as writing and editing. After working successfully in the private sector for over ten years as a copywriter and technical writer Victoria endeavored to pursue a degree in English, graduating *summa cum laude* from Florida Atlantic University in 2007. She entered graduate study that same year at the University of Tennessee—Knoxville. While at Tennessee, Victoria has been awarded several honors. She was granted a *Richard Beale Davis Editorial Assistantship* in 2008, graduating with her Master of Arts in English in 2009. She also entered Tennessee's doctoral program in English in 2009. In 2012 Victoria was awarded a *Keith P. Taylor Grant* for summer travel to Stratford and London to further her studies in drama; later that same year she was also the recipient of the *Percy Adams Editorial Assistantship*, which granted support while she worked as an Editorial Assistant on the second edition of *The Norton Anthology of Drama*. In her final year of doctoral studies, Victoria was awarded a Graduate Research Fellowship at The University of Tennessee Humanities Center, which provided support as she completed her dissertation. While her area of focus is modern and postmodern drama with a concentration in Irish and Anglophone literature, Victoria specializes in Samuel Beckett studies. Her research interests are multidisciplinary and include age studies, performance studies, critical theory, and theories of the body. In 2015 she begins a post-doctoral appointment at The University of Tennessee—Knoxville.