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Introduction

Samuel Beckett and the Afterlife

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The life of afterlife.

BECKETT, *Mercier and Camier*

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The afterlife is never far from the thoughts of Beckett's people, even if only in the form of a caustic retort that mocks false consolation. Beckett rejected any religious motivation to his work and scorned established religion, drolly prophesying the day when the dogs and pigs of Ireland would cross themselves in the manner of popular piety (Driver 221). He lived down his own sacramental instruction in a letter to Thomas McGreevy by referring to himself as "a dirty low-church P" (2009, 134) and extending the label to his original fictional surrogate, the "dirty low-down Low Church Protestant highbrow" of *More Pricks Than Kicks* (4:210). Belacqua Shua and his offspring scoff not just at God-botherers or the pious elect but at the Almighty himself and the alleged "benevolence of the First Cause" (4:96). The reversal of the relation between this life and the next, effected in recurring jokes and wordplay, turns on what it is we have come to accept as life. "Do you believe in the life to come?" asks Clov in *Endgame*. "Mine was always that" quips Hamm (3:126). Beckett's dead souls relate to the present as if they were waiting for the end of days, "eyes fixed on earth as on a chessboard," inventing plans "for the next day, for the day after, creating time to come," says Moran (2:120). If they "feel the end at hand" they feel "the beginning likewise," says the unnamable, making the end

of the “hurdy gurdy” or “the blither” impossible (2:391–393). With time on hand, time which does not pass put piles up—“your time, others’ time, the time of the ancient dead and the dead yet unborn” (2:383)—Moran ponders the nature of divine boredom. On his journey home, waylaid by “fiends in human shape and the phantoms of the dead,” he diverts himself with “questions of a theological nature” concerning the afterlife: “What if the mass for the dead were read over the living?” Positive theology is a poor map for the negative geography traversed by Beckett’s unfortunate travellers. But while the odds given on salvation are long—according to “the algebraic theology of Craig,” at any rate—there is time enough to calculate them (2:161).

The inability of Beckett’s people to hold it together amidst debility and deprivation gives up another sense of the afterlife: the life that does not live. In this sense, Beckett was writing about the afterlife all along. The dramatic inertia and wasteland setting of *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* had raised the suspicion that its events unfolded on the lower steps of Purgatory. The model of the Beckett hero had already been unearthed in Dante’s Ante-Purgatory. In his indifference to the purgation and remission of sins, the seated Belacqua in canto 4 of Dante’s *Purgatorio* cuts a strangely modern figure. His re-emergence in 1930s Dublin as the would-be hero of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* met with the indifference of publishers until Beckett looted his draft for a more accessible collection of stories. When it emerged, *More Pricks than Kicks*, in the opinion of its editor Charles Prentice, needed another story to fatten the collection and Beckett duly obliged. Killed off in a previous story, Belacqua’s resurrection in “Echo’s Bones” was too much for Prentice—too uneven and obscure, that is, rather than “too terribly persuasive” (in Nixon, 114), as he told the young author to soften the blow—and the story was buried. Belacqua’s fantastic voyage to the land of the dead and postmortem adventures with Lord Gall recalls Lucian’s dialogues of the dead and the Menippean satire; indeed, the learned wit packed into every sentence of “Echo’s Bones” required annotations that outrun the story by several pages (and even these may not be enough, as Mark Nixon hints in a foreword to the Faber edition). While “The rags of Latin flogged into us at school” may “in afterlife [] stand us well,” the “buckled discourse” of “Echo’s Bones” shows a creator yet to find a form to receive the afterlife of learning (2014, 27, 44). With the theme of atonement alive and kicking on the first page Beckett had, however, the yoke to join his dead souls to the life of the living. Though “the dead die hard,” as “trespassers on the beyond they must take the place as they find it, the shafts and manholes back in the muck.” Despite a “lifeless condition” on earth, which now looks “a great deal deader than before his formal departure,” the settling of earthly debts with an afterlife term seems the only way to make sense of “the tedious process of extinction”

(2014, 2–3). In the end, a submarine of the dead arrives to despatch Belacqua to hell, though we leave him as we found him: on the fence.

Beckett's afterlife is less a place than it is the space of writing, a paradoxical zone in which one advances "like an army in retreat," as Molloy says after strapping Lousse's dead dog to his bike saddle, speaking of his own life as both "over" and as "a joke which still goes on," when in truth "it is neither, and what is the tense for that?" (2:30–31). Belacqua's neutrality in the afterlife—or rather the idle existence it reflects in *Pricks*—maps this negative space in interstitial terms. His aimless motion about Dublin in "Ding Dong" charts the paradox of the "moving pause," the mere thought of which provokes anxiety "alone sufficient to give him away as inept ape of his own shadow" (4:100). His fictional successors expatiate on their own ineptitude and infirmities at still greater length, as if their goal were the immobile condition of Buridan's ass that Belacqua mimes against Tommy Moore's plinth. Beckett's afterlife refers to the tedious process of extinction by way of the tedious process of representing "this pure blank movement" without goal, "this 'gress' or 'gression'" without end or culmination (4:101). It suggests a purgatory more Joycean than Dantean, following their contrasting definitions in his 1929 essay "Dante ... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce." The "absolute progression and guaranteed consummation" of Dante's purgatory is replaced in Joyce's with "flux—progression or retrogression" and only "apparent consummation." If all movement in Dante is "unidirectional, and a step forward represents a net advance," in Joyce it is "non-directional" or "multi-directional, and a step forward is, by definition, a step back" (4:509). The figure of redemption, considered as a cog in the machinery of allegory, is blocked. Consequently, "On this earth that is purgatory" virtue and vice must be "purged down to spirits of rebelliousness," and all "prize and penalty" replaced by a mere "series of stimulants to enable the kitten to catch its tail" (4:510). Beckett's Joyce essay is not the master key to his works and their various uses of Dante, but it does indicate the critique of allegory stitched into them. The stitching was meant to show, as Belacqua's first life in *Dream* makes clear.¹ As the shafts and manholes of the afterlife gradually dissolve, the dim figure of the writer comes into view.

The exuberant style of the juvenilia sparsens as the task of conceiving "the life of afterlife"—to cite the closing chapter summary of *Mercier and Camier*—steepens. Following Belacqua's progeny on their crooked ways and mud crawls poses mounting obstacles to Beckett's readers, too; indeed, the path forged in

1 Daniela Caselli's description of *Dream* could be extended to the works that follow it: "*Dream* is a purgatorial enterprise in that it strives to deny any progression while remaining a literary work, and therefore obliged to proceed" (53).

his middle period through the paradoxes of anti-mimetic art leaves the reader in the lurch. Increasingly, reading Beckett, from the exhaustive lists and series of *Watt* through to the bitter ends of *The Unnamable* and *How It Is*, assumes the dimension of a purgatorial quest. Christopher Ricks described it somewhat sceptically as a do-it-yourself Tantalus-kit: “He requires you to seek and not to find—it is another of the frustrations which he puts upon his reader, frustrations some of which have a point” (in Graver 288). For Anna Teekell, the frustrations are particularly evident when reading *Watt* and extend to “the critical industry’s attempt to make sense of this problem novel in the Beckett canon” (248). Even with the allusions to purgatory in *Watt*’s service on different floors of Mr Knott’s house, the novel’s language games and search for—or purgation of—meaning make more sense against the experience of Irish isolation and neutrality in World War II (and Beckett’s isolation in Roussillon) than they do as philosophical allegory. With an eye on the torments of the neutrals in Canto 3 of the *Inferno*, Teekell discusses *Watt* alongside the purgatorial representation of wartime Ireland in contemporary works such as Flann O’Brien’s *The Third Policeman*, with the difference that the purgatorial quest for enlightenment in *Watt* fails in “a purgatory with no chance of purgation” (256).²

The scheme of purgatory without purgation identified in the Joyce essay captures the predicament of Beckett’s postwar narrators. Dante’s central figure of the circle, borrowed from Augustine’s account of the circle of sin or false understanding, returns in the structure of Beckett’s plots and their exhaustion of the journey motif. In *Mercier and Camier*, the figure of the circle marks out the precincts of the *tedium vitae* or “life of afterlife” (1:479). In their mistimed rendezvous and circular arguments about going their separate ways, the unfortunate travellers cut a path somewhere between hope and despair, in a sort of hope against hope that is just “enough to tempt you joking apart to have another go, another go at getting up, dressing up (paramount), ingesting, excreting, undressing up, dossing down, and all the other things too tedious to enumerate, in the long run too tedious, requiring to be done and suffered.” With “No danger of losing interest, under these conditions,” cultivating memory enough to take a “stroll in your crypt” is advisable. Beckett’s irony extends further than the satiric reversal or deflation or even purgation of meaning, as it is tied to creature-feeling. The absolute dependence on creatureliness is foregrounded, especially its disabling features; but the body in pain also counters

2 For Teekell, the idea of purgatory without purgation, which contains a critique of wartime discourse spanning Allied propaganda about society purified by war to the empty promise of unity and plenty in the Irish Free State, was one “waiting to be marshalled into the literature of the time” (255).

the doubt and confusion of the Beckettian subject. Warnings against striking the redemptive note (or exciting the allegorical impulse) abound in each case, bringing the “Pretty beyond!” thudding to earth: “You think you have done with it all and then one fine day, bang! full in the eye. Or in the arse, or in the balls, or in the cunt, no lack of targets, above all below the waist. And they talk of stiff being bored!” (1:467).

A ban on allegory and symbol—most memorably in *Watt*’s last line—holds Beckett’s purgatory in place like an invisible mass (1:379). To render the issueless predicament of existence after the manner of great painters (to lift a line from his tribute to Jack B. Yeats) meant capturing it in an unstable light (1984, 97). In this regard, Dante’s theology of purgation and redemption finds a surprising reflection in Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer’s doctrine of suffering and reproach of optimism exercised the young Beckett—fittingly enough—as he contemplated an academic career. The German pessimist’s metaphysical view of life as *pensum* to be worked off found its way into his 1931 Proust monograph (4:554). The *pensum* thereafter exerts a special hold on Beckett’s narrators by promising to explain their pains.³ In *The World as Will and Idea* (§ 59), Schopenhauer completes a panorama of human suffering with the suggestion that Dante got “the material for his hell” from “this actual world of ours” but furnished his heaven with the *pia fraus* handed down by the Church. The eschatological structure of medieval Christianity may have collapsed, but Dante’s epic themes of destiny and salvation live a fragmentary afterlife in literary modernism. Far from rejecting the idea of salvation, Schopenhauer’s philosophy charts a path towards the annihilation of the desiring will in absolute nothingness, and Beckett’s characters, from Murphy to Hamm, yearn for what Schopenhauer called “the blissful repose of nothingness” (1974, 299; Pothast 93). They may be falling to bits, as he told Israel Shenker (148), but the trail of their disintegration is full of ontological and ethical significance. Indeed, if we are to trust Beckett’s remarks to Tom Driver (220), then the dramatic possibilities of Augustinian theology are at the heart of his art.

The reversal, parody, or travesty of the separations implied by the terms life, death and afterlife provide diverse starting points for fresh inquiry into

3 Molloy refers to “the remnants of a pensum” (2:27), Malone (and the voice in *Not I*) to “the idea of punishment” (2:233), and the unnameable to “a pensum to discharge” given at birth “as a punishment for having been born perhaps” (2:304). The *pensum* refers not just to a task but to slave pay, the flax meted out to female slaves to work off the day’s labour. Schopenhauer’s advice “to regard this world as a place of penance and hence a penal colony” (*Parerga and Paralipomena* §156) is echoed in the image of the “enormous prison” at the end of *The Unnamable* “vast enough for a whole people” (2:402).

Beckett's texts. It might even turn out that the last of these terms is the easier to define. The difficulties of telling the story of one's life cannot be solved in Beckett's universe, as the narrator of *The Calmative* reminds us when asked to tell his. The problem, even the ability to grasp it as a problem, originates in the term *life*, of "what life could well be said to be a kind." The narrator's response is silence, though ours is voiced by the interlocutor, at least initially; for we all know what life is, don't we? "Come now, everyone knows that" (4:270). In coming to grips with the problem, the papers collected here traverse recent and persistent concerns in Beckett criticism, from posthumanism to philosophical theology, the visual arts to literary influence, the anthropology of deep time to our evaluative dependence of future generations. The ground for these diverse inquiries is Beckett's paramount concern for the shape of the idea, as Chris Ackerley's account of how deep that concern runs serves to remind us. Ackerley ("The Mathematics of Salvation") shows how Beckett's overriding concern for shape regulated his uses of mathematics and theology, not to mention the comic absurdity and pathos arising from their combination. Beckett's memorable allusion to Augustine's commentary on the gospel story of the two thieves (and the chances of salvation it implied) provides a sobering text for critics who would overleap the work's alterity. Christianity was to Beckett more than just a convenient mythology, however; it was "an *agon*, an eternal and implacable adversary, chosen and cherished (like the Bible or works of Dante, Descartes, Geulincx and Thomas à Kempis) *because* it was both beloved and absurd." The odds on salvation seem even enough in the Pascalian wager rehearsed in *Godot*, but they lengthen when passed—on Moran's invitation—through the algebraic theology of Scottish mathematician and Newton associate John Craig. In mathematics and calculus, Beckett found images of the vestigial existence of the self with which to exhaust the mimetic structures of fiction. Bishop Berkeley's rebuke of Newton's calculus provided the formulation for the diminution of consciousness in the late plays (e.g. "... but the clouds ..." and "Nacht und Träume") or the spectral images that haunt it (the boys of *Waiting for Godot* and *Ghost Trio*): the ghost of departed quantities. In the spirit of Beckett's learned wit (or loutish learning), Ackerley concludes with a coda to the salvation equation pondered by Moran in the form of a *pensum* no Beckett enthusiast will want to pass up.

The papers in this volume explore only some of the haunts and modes of Beckett's afterlife and textual afterlives. A number of groupings are possible, including the one offered by Russell Smith ("Dead Enough to Bury"). For Smith, the afterlife in Beckett resolves into three categories: the afterlife of the body (food for worms); the personal or spiritual afterlife (metaphor or image); and the material afterlife, including the artefacts created by the deceased and car-

ried on by succeeding generations. Smith's focus is firmly on the first, what Molloy calls "the life of the dead" and the processual ontology it might be said to imply (2:23). In the trilogy, the afterlife is a mode by which to probe the boundaries between concepts of the living and dead, as in Molloy's darkly comic proviso Smith takes as his title. Noting the "unsavoury relish" with which the decomposition of loved ones is witnessed in the trilogy, Smith explains the burial devoutly wished by the Beckettian narrator in terms of a promised interruption to the life cycle. If burial is the crucial ritual passage to the afterlife in human culture, for the Beckettian narrator it holds out the added attraction of arresting time and placing one outside the cycle of life. The experiments Beckett conducts on his characters in the trilogy explore the line between biotic and abiotic forms of life, in fictional words that become gradually less biotic; indeed, "the world of *The Unnamable* resembles nothing so much as a laboratory petri dish, its characters artificially separated from their biotic environment and subjected to experiments designed to test their fundamental metabolic processes." The experiment takes two forms: a sterile world infected with life; and an attempt to create artificial life that never gets going. The second experiment continues in *Texts for Nothing*, where the narrative voice (who "was, they say in Purgatory, in Hell too") still holds hopes of telling "a little story, with creatures coming and going on a habitable earth crammed with the dead," even if it is trapped in "this infinite here" and can do naught but persist uncertainly with the lifeless, "viewless" form of words or the "intervals" between them (4:315–316). In an apostrophe, the voice calls down an avalanche of "wordshit" to "bury me": "let there be no more talk of any creature, nor of a world to leave, nor of a world to reach, in order to have done, with the world, with words, with misery, misery" (4:325). If the end of misery is salvation enough, then "God grant I'm buriable" (4:325). As Mark Nixon put it, the narrative act in Beckett is increasingly modelled on an act of burial, with the goal—as Beckett wrote Kay Boyle—of "writing myself into the ground" (qtd. in Nixon 27). For Smith, the life of art and literature is not just abiotic but antibiotic: fiction, like an act of burial, acts as a prophylactic against the forces of life, "an afterlife in refuge from the processual ontologies of living things." But there's a rub: "the bodies of the dead continue to live." The airless, abiotic worlds of *The Unnamable* begin to resemble "the calm that precedes life," with "little bubbles bursting all around" that recalls the origins of life in the *primaeva* soup: "it's like slime, paradise" (2:358).

Even in the afterlife, Beckett's creatures find themselves back in the muck, exposed to the assaults of incarnate life. In "Echo's Bones," Belacqua is unable to imagine his "exuviae" in an urn and rediscovers in his resurrected body "all the old aches and pains of me soul junk" (2014, 4, 5). Similarly, in the twilight

worlds of the later work, with the afterlife refined into a *hauntology* where “nothing is ever here and now” (4:314) and “the voices have no life in them” (4:305), in the dying voice of *Texts*, the body is still felt in its alien, dogged persistence. One moment the voice is “frantic with corporeality” under the eyes of male nurses, the next ghouls “grovel round me gloating on the corpse” (4:313) in an abode where “There is no flesh anywhere, nor any way to die” (4:305). The dislocation of voice from body partly explains the twilight setting, lending a strange reality to these glimpses of the outer reaches of consciousness. This afterlife of subjectivity, which sees the narrator of *How It Is* speak from “under-earth where I am inconceivable” (4:435), is reimagined in the late trilogy *Nohow On* as “spectres of identity” that “provide an audience for the theatre of memory,” as Mark Byron (“Worsening Shades”) has it. If the layering of images from multiple discourses in these late texts summons the obscure workings of deep time, to create slippages between human and nonhuman states, then they also inscribe “a self-conscious envoi to Beckett’s lifetime of writing” that carries “an acute awareness of their inheritances from literary history.” As examples of late style, Beckett reimagines the themes and topoi of his earlier work in ways that both inter autobiographical materials gathered on walking trips in the Wicklow countryside and replenish the stocks of language. Just as shades haunt the narrator on the revenant earth of *Company*, “so the shades of hill-sides and Neolithic cromleches inhabit narrative space.” In the richly geological and archaeological outlook of *Nohow On*, deep time and the narrative present intersect “in the intimacies of the earth as a locus for life and afterlife.” The stratigraphy Byron deftly lays bare in these texts reveals the “networks of meaning” Beckett “interred beneath the surface of language.” While words like *rift*, *vast*, *void*, and *grot* seem vague at first, they approximate an archaic language when considered in the geological vocabulary of deep time. Byron speculates on the possibility of a return to linguistic roots enacted by *Worstward Ho* that narrates “an origin story of the evolution of language in which it enjoys a peculiarly rich afterlife.” Indeed, *Worstward Ho* might even be read as an “ironic variation on divine creation—‘In the beginning was the Word’—and collapse into a final singularity.”

Like Byron, Jane Goodall (“in the middle of nowhere”) pursues a line of inquiry that begins in Smith’s second afterlife mode—imagery and metaphor—in an account of Beckett’s appreciation of the figures absorbed into the Irish landscape paintings of Jack B. Yeats. The affinity between the two artists was grounded in a shared propensity “for creating modes of symbolism that draw on mythological and religious traditions while swerving away from them.” Observing that Beckett’s afterlife goes well beyond Dantesque scenography, Goodall then identifies the hypothetical mode as the means by which

Beckett could “loosen up the range of language and free the lines of speculation from traditional notions of an afterlife.” In part, this meant “accepting the full and enduring burden of incarnation, and with it the entanglement of the embodied being with the life of the mind.”⁴ Recalling Beckett’s struggle with the existence of mortal life rather than the existence of the afterlife, Goodall relates the evocations of a post-mortal state in the trilogies “as a continuum from the pre-natal state he claimed to recall.” For all the ridicule of Christian piety excited by the hymning Lady Pedal in *Malone Dies*, Beckett’s use of the hypothetical mode in the trilogy keeps returning to speculation about the possibility of post-mortem life: “Driven to articulate the enduring consequences of having been born,” Beckett “is perpetually entangled in the hypotheses about the life to come.” Thrown into a life after birth will mean “becoming, at some stage, a presence in the landscape that may continue as an apparition for who knows how long after death.” The Beckettian figure midway on the road recalls Dante, but Goodall reminds us that the cultural topography of Beckett’s existentialist trope is “founded in a material reality with deep strata of ancestral lore and cultural memory,” in a kind of seeing, shown in Yeats’ paintings, in which “shades of the past blend with those still making their living in the physical world.”

Transposing Dantean formulations into Beckettian experience misreads it, usually by overlooking the defining difference between them; for the torments of uncertainty and ignorance that define Beckettian experience have no precedent in Dante (Bryden 154). Dante’s purgatory offers more assurance than life on earth, as Belacqua implies in *Dream* (113). And yet, the irony of Beckett’s realism lies in its rumoured foundations in another world. The techniques of displacement that evoke the Algerian War in the desert topography of works like *Happy Days* or *Act without Words I* are part of the same “unnatural narratology” behind the illusion of a transcendental location of events in *Play*, with M, W₁ and W₂ up to their necks in urns, caught in an endless temporal loop and forced to confess their role in a love triangle as punishment (Alber 454). Recent criticism has extended the war memory preserved in major works like *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, and *How It Is* (and minor ones like *Rough for Radio II* and *Rough for Theatre II*) from World War Two to the Algerian War of Independence and the experience of states of exception that spanned them (Morin 2019). The scenes of torture, incarceration, interrogation, and summary execu-

4 In a previous article in this journal, Goodall described Beckett’s ghost plays as “secular dramas of incarnation, in which the torments of the word made flesh are enacted as voices that take possession and threaten to cross the threshold of death into an internal limbo of consciousness” (2017, 179).

tion at the centre of Beckett's texts are not simply metaphors for a tyrannical God or abstract nihilism. Excavation of the concealed political dimension of Beckett's texts continues to bring the injustice of historical crimes remembered in them to light (Morin 2017; McNaughton). In "The Afterlife of Empire," Anthony Cordingley shows how the techniques of displacement and obfuscation in *How It Is*, which evoked the politics of empire during the Algerian crisis, also inter materials from the colonial history of Ireland.

Beckett's aesthetic program is usually explained as an experimental bid to capture the "mess" and "confusion" of experience—as he told Tom Driver (218)—with a relentless focus on the subject's ungraspable relation to the world. Anthony Uhlmann (2006) has shed much light on the influence of Arnold Geulincx's theological metaphysics on Beckett's poetics of nonrelation and the stance of learned ignorance adopted by his various narrators. In his contribution to this volume, Uhlmann identifies the overlapping of temporalities in Beckett's final texts according to a speculative reconstruction of a Spinozan line of thought that stretches back to Beckett's crucial discovery of Geulincx at Trinity College in the mid 1930s. In view of the fact that Spinoza's influence on Beckett remains inconclusive—not to mention at odds with the influence of Geulincx Uhlmann has done much to document—the argument proceeds analogically. In a 1936 letter to McGreevy, Beckett justified the long hours spent transcribing the Latin treatises of Geulincx's *Ethica* with reference to a Spinozan coinage. Geulincx's system was worth the trouble because it was illuminated by the conviction that "the *sub specie aeternitatis* vision" is "the only excuse for remaining alive" (2009, 319). Beckett went on to develop his own conception of the standpoint of the eternal, initially in the quasi-Spinozan description of the workings of involuntary memory in his Proust monograph and then in his own works. For Spinoza, the conventional idea of the afterlife confuses eternity with duration, blocking the *sub specie aeternitatis*. For Beckett, Proust discloses a sense of eternity by overlaying the ordinary experience of duration with the idealised state of involuntary memory. In "Ceiling" and "Stirrings Still," Beckett approaches "the feeling of the eternal" or "ideal real" by overwriting the bodily experience of duration with idealised memories.

The recent interpretation of *Watt* as a traumatic text, mutely gesturing to the unspeakable crimes of World War Two, is foreshadowed in Theodor Adorno. For Adorno, the hidden subject of Beckett's obscure dramas and unreadable novels is the collapse of bourgeois culture that culminates in Auschwitz. His canonic interpretation of *Endgame* is taken up in complementary ways by Paul Sheehan and Christopher Conti, who explore the political character of Beckett's art from the third afterlife mode identified by Smith: the material

afterlife. In his account of the digital afterlife modelled on the archive, Sheehan uncovers the tropes of SF fiction and the suppressed religious longings behind the posthumanist quest for technogenetic salvation. In recent times, the extinction narrative of Cold War SF fiction has been succeeded by the narrative of civilizational collapse, often by filmmakers and novelists with a modernist bent who take Beckett as their precursor. Adorno's critical theory divided the modernist artwork from popular cultural forms like SF fiction. While his concerns about the deadening formulas of consumer culture have returned in current anxieties about the ubiquity of screen culture, the tension required to keep modernism and mass culture apart in Adorno's analysis cannot be sustained. The "great divide" was inherited by Beckett Studies, but the growing acceptability of comparisons between Beckett and SF fiction suggests it is not so great anymore. Conti makes a similar point with regard to the tropes of horror fiction that have come to define the task of thought in the Anthropocene era. Adorno's inkling that philosophy's ability to think the world was threatened by the catastrophes facing humanity explains his regard for Beckett, even if the cataclysm could only be thought in one of the mechanised tropes of mass entertainment, the SF disaster film. Indeed, Adorno drew on the tropes of popular entertainment to define the task of a critical philosophy that, in the era of universal reification, begins not in wonder but in horror. Conti would recover Adorno's aesthetic politics from its modernist shell by reading *Endgame* in relation to our evaluative dependence on future generations revealed in Samuel Scheffler's afterlife conjecture. Adorno's account of "the shudder" and recent accounts of Anthropocene horror are reflected in the structure of the Beckett work mentioned above: purgatory without purgation. Adorno's jest about *Endgame*'s phenomenological "bracketing" of the world—explained with admirable clarity in Sheehan's description of his exhumation of Beckett's dramaturgical corpse—was spoken in truth. The prospect of a world without us conjured in *Endgame* concentrates hope for the human habitation of the planet—of an afterlife on earth—on a collective subject to come.

Lastly, the afterlife of sexuality is explored in Cecily Niumeitolu's account of Beckett's erotics of nonrelation ("Sexuality after Life") and in Nathalie Camerlynck's study of Raymond Federman ("Dying with Beckett"). When it comes to writing after Beckett, Federman is in a category all of his own, writing not simply *after* but *on*, *about* and *with* Beckett. Federman's use of Beckett as a master narrative to author his own fiction is enacted by recreating the masochistic relation narrated in Beckett's texts. By joining the complex issue of literary influence to an account of homoeroticism, Camerlynck reveals the mechanics of Federman's intertextual poetics in a queering of his literary ancestors. Deifying

his literary hero while identifying with the lowly creatures of this God, Federman fashioned an identity from an impossible poetics, a kind of plagiarism that enables the writing of identity. Beckett's creatures, rather than Beckett himself, helped Federman face his own traumatic experience and tell his Holocaust story.

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