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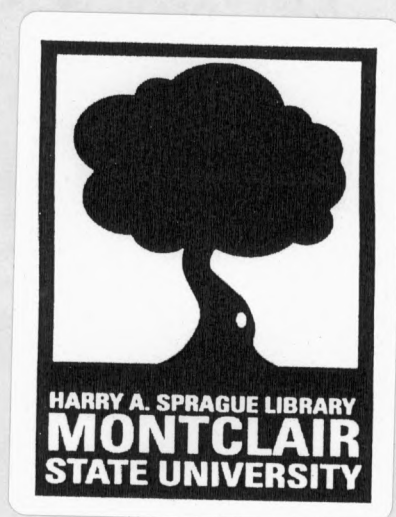
Work, Alienation, and Humor : A Marxist Reading of Samuel Beckett's "Murphy" and "Waiting for Godot"

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Abstract

In this thesis, I look at Beckett's *Murphy* and *Waiting for Godot* through a Marxist lens and argue that these texts can be read as a critique of modern alienation under capitalism. Through his narrator and characters, Beckett critiques and satirizes alienation and searches for alternatives to it in comedy and creative playfulness. Also, I argue that in these works writing itself emerges as non-alienated labor through which the creator, the central characters, and the readers/spectators can resist modern alienation. The first chapter examines *Murphy* in the light of Marx's theory of the alienation of labor, the writings of Erich Fromm and others who have expanded on Marx's theory, and some relevant theories about humor and play, including the ideas of George Santayana. The second chapter uses Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque and Gadamer's theory of spectator participation in the play of drama to complicate the seemingly universal "existential" concerns of the text and highlight the liberatory potential embedded within the text and in the space between it and its spectators/ readers. The conclusion explores how Beckett's concern with alienation under modern capitalism ties in with his conflicted relationship with the craft of writing.

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Work, Alienation, and Humor: A Marxist Reading of Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* and *Waiting for Godot*

by

Catherine Keeran

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

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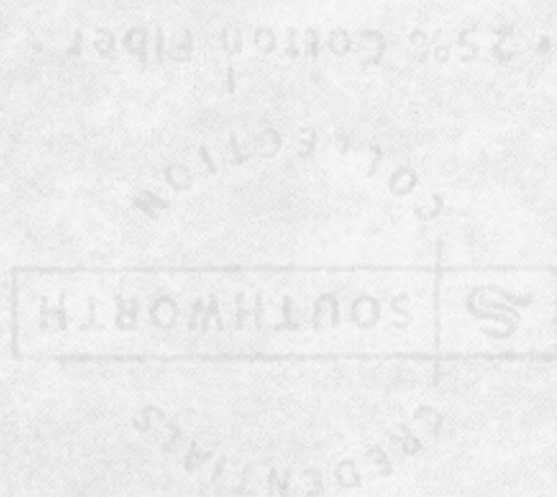
Thanks to my thesis sponsor, Dr. Jonathan Greenberg, for introducing me to Beckett and fostering my interest in modern literature throughout the graduate courses I took with him, *The Modern Novel*, *Modernism and Laughter*, and *The Irish Literary Revival*. His enthusiasm ignited my interest in exploring the comedic aspects of Beckett, his feedback on my work in those classes helped determine the focus of my thesis, and his advice assisted me in overcoming daunting roadblocks along the way. His insightful comments on the thesis itself were also encouraging and helpful. Furthermore, his recent article, "Nathanael West and the Mystery of Feeling," served as a twofold inspiration. Not only did it serve as a model of excellent writing to which I could aspire, but also its focus inspired my conclusion's inquiry into Beckett and modernism's complicated relationship with the aesthetics of sentimentality.

Thanks to my father whose support, advice, and assistance over the years has made me the writer and thinker I am today. He has shared my appreciation of Beckett and has given me immeasurable help throughout my academic career and over the course of my thesis. I would like to thank both of my parents for passing on to me their interest in Marx. My parents' commitment to politics and fervor for intellectual discussion sparked my own, and though this may sound a bit sentimental, their values and lives continue to inspire me to live a more meaningful life.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: From Pain to Champagne: Alienating Work and Creative Play in <i>Murphy</i>	10
Chapter 2: Recreation as Relaxation: Carnavalesque Play in <i>Waiting for Godot</i>	39
Conclusion	56
Works Cited	62



Introduction

The idea that Samuel Beckett's work has Marxist significance is not a popular one among his biographers, critics, and other devotees. When I mentioned the subject of my thesis to an actor who has studied, performed, and attended many productions of Beckett's work, before I had the chance to delve into the argument, he blurted out, "I don't buy it." Though not everyone is so forthcoming, I imagine that this reaction would not be uncommon among Beckett's followers. Beckett's intellectual pursuits, his reflections on his work, and indeed many aspects of his oeuvre itself contribute to the belief that his writings function at a level more profound than politics¹ and that his fiction and drama deal with deeper or more fundamental problems of human existence, namely the pointlessness of life in the face of a certain death and the futility of searching for meaning in such a world. Despite the evidence to support this view, however, this belief and the idea that Beckett's work resonates with socio-political significance are not mutually exclusive. Though critics have traditionally viewed Beckett as a minimalist and a pessimist through such theoretical lenses as existentialism and deconstruction, over the course of this thesis, I look at Beckett's *Murphy* and *Waiting for Godot* through a Marxist lens and argue that these texts can be read as a critique of modern alienation under capitalism. These texts critique and satirize alienation and search for alternatives to it in comedy and creative playfulness. Also, I argue that in these works writing itself emerges as non-alienated labor through which the creator, the central characters, and the readers/spectators can resist modern alienation.

¹ H. Porter Abbott, Peter Boxall, Jon Erickson, James Harding, Lidan Lin, Tyrus Miller, and Geoff Wade offer political readings of Beckett's work that challenge this assumption in different ways.

In the most extensive biography of Beckett, *Damned to Fame*, James Knowlson explores Beckett's literary and philosophical studies, which reflect a greater interest in such ahistorical philosophers as Descartes, Kant, and Schopenhauer than in social and material theorists. In a telling statement of his philosophical leanings, Beckett says that Schopenhauer's philosophy contains "an intellectual justification of unhappiness – the greatest that has ever been attempted" (Knowlson 122). Yet, even though Beckett was fascinated by these philosophies, Tim Parks points out that he "satirized every form of metaphysics and renounced any mental comfort that might subtract him from the exhausting experience of being alone with his conviction that the world was without meaning and expression futile" (23). In what is often cited as an explanation for his movement toward an increasingly minimalist style, Beckett writes, "more and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it" (*D* 171). To some Marxist critics, like Georg Lukács, this tendency seems conservative in its superficial concern with style and its refusal to search for social causes or solutions to the problems of human existence. Indeed, Beckett's work could be described as being at the opposite end of the spectrum from social realism, but I would argue that whether or not Beckett and his critics have been aware of it, his works deal with seemingly apolitical, personal crises of existence as they occur and are exacerbated under modern capitalism. Because people's lived experiences are not played out in a socio-political vacuum, the conditions created by capitalist society complicate seemingly universal concerns, an idea central to both *Murphy* and *Waiting for Godot*.

I have chosen these texts in particular because they reflect a similar political concern in two genres, fiction and drama, and at two disparate stages of Beckett's

writing. On one hand, *Murphy* reflects the style of an early Beckett who, having recently worked with Joyce on translating *Work in Progress* (later published as *Finnegans Wake*), imbues his fiction with a Joycean ornateness and invents a fully developed material, albeit absurd, world. On the other hand, *Waiting for Godot* reflects the style of a later Beckett who, having permanently settled in Paris, writes in French and implements a new kind of writing that he had envisioned as early as 1937 in a letter to Axel Kaun as a “literature of the unword,” that is, one that attempts to get at a reality underneath language (*D* 173).

While living in London from 1934-36, Beckett wrote *Murphy*, and it was his first published novel.² Lidan Lin points out that after leaving his position as a lecturer at Trinity College, Beckett became financially dependent on his parents, with whom his relationship became quite strained as they pushed him to attain a job and he resisted (259-60). Similarly, John Pilling notes, “Beckett was experiencing even more personal distress during the writing of *Murphy* than at most other points in a life far from the bourgeois norms of contentment; yet it would be impossible to guess as much from a novel so full of knockabout humour” (34). Pilling speculates that writing the novel was a “therapeutic activity” for Beckett during a time of professional and economic instability. Knowlson draws similar conclusions about how Beckett’s work helped to mitigate his depression. Though Beckett began seeing a therapist and, in a letter to his friend Thomas MacGreevy, described feeling “beyond description worthless, sordid and incapacitated” (qtd in Knowlson 191), he found relief and even joy in his intellectual work and aesthetic

² Beckett wrote his first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, in 1932, but he could not find an interested publisher at the time. He revised it into a series of short stories and published it under the title *More Pricks Than Kicks* in 1934. *Dream* was only published posthumously in 1992.

appreciation: "New words excited his interest; books fascinated him; he was gripped by philosophical ideas and inspired by music and art....He felt his solitude, sometimes very acutely. But it was a solitude that he also cultivated, obscurely aware that something was happening within him" (Knowlson 191). As Knowlson and Pilling's observations suggest, Beckett's work on *Murphy* functioned as a creative outlet, an inherently rewarding activity for him during a time of financial crisis and personal distress. Though this biographical information is not crucial to my reading of *Murphy*, it serves as a relevant backdrop for the novel's creation, for the crises that Beckett was undergoing at the time of writing *Murphy* and the relief that his artistic appreciation and work provided him make their way into the text and are indeed central to the characters, storyline, and narrative structure. The parallels between Beckett's life and *Murphy* underline the idea that the very artistic creation of the novel offers an escape from the alienation under modern capitalism.

By the time Beckett wrote *Waiting for Godot* in 1948-49, his life and writing had in some ways changed dramatically. He had been living in Paris since 1937 and had survived the persecutions of the Vichy regime of World War II as a sometimes sympathetic and sometimes active member of the Resistance. Knowlson notes that Beckett's work in the Resistance and in the Irish Red Cross after the war "distanc[ed] him from the arrogant, closed-in young man of the 1930s" so that "he was almost forced to step outside himself, not only in order to sympathize with others but to help them" (317-18). Paradoxically, it was in the aftermath of this political and social awakening that Beckett would have an artistic revelation that would influence his work to

draw henceforward on his own inner world for his subjects; outside reality

would be refracted through the filter of his own imagination; inner desires and needs would be allowed a much greater freedom of expression; rational contradictions would be allowed in; and the imagination would be allowed to create alternative worlds to those of conventional reality. (319)

The artistic vision that Beckett had outlined in his German letter to Axel Kaun returned to him in a dramatic experience at his mother's home during a visit directly following the war, which critics often relate to Krapp's revelation in *Krapp's Last Tape*, and of which Beckett has said, in opposition to Joyce who "had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one's material.... I realized that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away" (qtd. in Knowlson 319). Against the rational desire to shed light on the world and try to learn as much as possible, Beckett would pursue "darkness" that "extend[s] to a whole zone of being that includes folly and failure, impotence and ignorance" (Knowlson 319). Writing in French helped Beckett pursue this vision because more than English, French allowed him to avoid literary allusions and "what he called 'Anglo-Irish exuberance and automatisms,'" and "by adopting another language, he gained a greater simplicity and objectivity" (324). Thus, with dramatic life experiences, a different artistic approach, and a new home and language, Beckett entered a fresh stage of his writing career.

Despite these profound changes, in significant ways Beckett's life remained the same. Though he had some minor success with *Murphy*, he could not find a publisher for *Watt*, which he has written during the war, and he still could not support himself with his writing. Post-war inflation in France left him and his future wife, Suzanne, impoverished. Though he made some good friends working to set up a hospital with the

Red Cross in St.-Lô, "it was not work that he relished," "he found the inventory and administrative duties tedious and tiring," and "he felt frustrated that his work at the hospital prevented him from getting on with his writing" (316-7). Though it meant less income at a time when he desperately needed it, the end of the Red Cross job in December 1945 relieved Beckett. In 1946, he returned to Paris where, between the allowance he received from his father's inheritance and Suzanne's work as a seamstress, Beckett lived a life he described as "quiet and meagre," yet over the following four years, he produced a "torrent of work," including *Waiting for Godot* (Knowlson 322).

This biographical backdrop to *Waiting for Godot* suggests some observations. As with *Murphy*, *Godot* functioned as both a creative relief and a self-affirming activity for Beckett during a time of financial crisis and depression. Also like *Murphy*, these experiences made their way into the content of the text. The alienation and economic oppression that Beckett experienced at this time manifest themselves in the play in a number of ways, most notably in Pozzo's exploitation of Lucky. Furthermore, the play also reflects the idea that artistic and creative play provides an alternative to alienating labor. One does not have to reduce Beckett's work to his life to see that despite his quest to find a noumenal truth beyond materiality, the real world of economics and social relations nonetheless stay central to his work.

The intellectual milieu in Paris after World War II also lends support to my reading of *Waiting for Godot*. In *Existential Marxism in Postwar France*, Mark Poster traces how the philosophy with which Beckett's work is perhaps most commonly associated, Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism, became infused with politics as Sartre and

other French intellectuals merged Marx's idea of alienation with existentialism's putatively universal concept of anxiety about freedom. Poster describes,

There was a correspondence between Sartre's feeling of anxiety in freedom and the hostility toward authentic freedom in bourgeois social structures. The individual was not encouraged to question completely his own possibilities for self-transformation. Capitalist morality urged him to calculate his self-interest according to the external standards of property accumulation. And furthermore, the lack of community in capitalist societies, the atomization of individual experience, and the competitive nature of social relations presented added obstacles to Sartrean freedom.

(84)

Although there is no evidence that Beckett read the translations of Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (the source of Marx's concept of alienation that was widely influential among intellectuals in postwar France), there is evidence that Beckett was in the same intellectual milieu as Sartre and may very well have been exposed to these burgeoning ideas. Beckett greatly appreciated the writings of both Sartre and his long-time lover, Simone de Beauvoir (Knowlson 271, 290). Though Beckett and Sartre were not close friends, they knew each other from before the war through their mutual friend, Alfred Péron; Beckett "used to greet [Sartre and de Beauvoir] with a friendly nod in the cafes of Montparnasse," and in 1946, he had a short story published in Sartre's new publication, *Les Temps modernes* (Knowlson 325).

The negativity embedded in Beckett's pursuit of an aesthetics of human folly and futility may on the surface seem at odds with the optimism embedded in Sartre's postwar

belief in the great political significance of individual choice. Yet, even Beckett's most bleak texts contain a glimmer of the irrepressible drive of the human will to push on in search of positive change. Such assertions of the individual will and positivity in the face of desperation and alienation can be located in the creativity, playfulness, and comedy that run throughout *Murphy* and *Godot*. These texts' acknowledgement of alienation accompanied by the persistent drive against it makes them fit well with existential Marxism, which Poster describes as

a non-Leninist Marxism that conceptualizes advanced industrial society in a way that points toward the possible elimination of its alienating structures; that looks to all relations of daily life, not simply to relations of production, to make society intelligible; that picks up from existentialism the effort to capture human beings in the moment of their active creation of their world, in their subjectivity; and, finally, that rejects the attempt to have a closed theory complete within itself. (ix)

Beckett's works have in common with this description a concern for people's subjective creations of their world, the acknowledgement of the economy's role in determining people's modern anxiety and alienation, a hope toward a more free existence, and an openness to different theories and possibilities in the effort to achieve this freedom.

The first chapter examines *Murphy* in the light of Marx's theory of the alienation of labor and some relevant theories about humor and play. I begin by exploring the significance of Beckett's satirical treatment of those characters that unquestioningly conform to the work and social values of capitalist society. I then show how the novel's central character, Murphy, seeks to resist such alienation through creativity and humor,

and I conclude this chapter by showing how the narration of the text, by creating moments of both humor and poignancy, exemplifies a type of artistic resistance to modern alienation under capitalism.

The second chapter uses Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque and Gadamer's theory of spectator participation in the play of drama to argue that through comedic play and the development of sympathetic bonds between Vladimir and Estragon and between them and the audience, these characters seek to resist the type of oppression and alienation that characterizes the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky. In this way, I strive to complicate the seemingly universal "existential" concerns of the text and highlight the liberatory potential embedded within the text and in the space between it and its spectators/ readers.

The conclusion explores how Beckett's concern with alienation under modern capitalism ties in with his conflicted relationship with the craft of writing. While Beckett distrusts sentimentality, these texts are limned with poignancy. Though Beckett sees language as an obstacle to truth and increasingly pares language down in his work, he continued to write until the end of his life. Though his texts reflect a deeply ambivalent and at times even morose view of modern existence, they remain comic. I conclude my thesis by trying to connect the relationship between these paradoxes of Beckett's writing to his view of modern alienation.

From Pain to Champagne: Alienating Work and Creative Play in *Murphy*

Critics have viewed Beckett as an existentialist, a nihilist, a Cartesian, and an idealist, but until recently few have seen him as a social or political writer. Indeed, critical treatment of *Murphy* has tended to ignore the novel's historical and cultural influences altogether. No one argues this point more forcefully than Lidan Lin in "Labor, Alienation, and the Status of Being: The Rhetoric of Indolence in Beckett's *Murphy*." Lin traces this trend from early criticism that views the novel in terms of "Cartesian dualism and existential pessimism" to more recent readings that see the novel through poststructuralist skepticism "of the teleology of language, knowledge, identity, and narrative convention." This is also true of recent deconstructionists like Sylvie Henning who, as Lin points out, emphasizes *Murphy*'s endless "carnivalized and carnivalizing dialogue"¹ (Henning qtd. in Lin 250). Moving away from such apolitical, nonmaterialist readings, Lin reads *Murphy* through Marx's theory of the alienation of labor and observes that Murphy's refusal to get a job reflects his resistance to an alienating and "dehumanizing materialist culture" (250). Lin's application of Marx effectively shows that readings of *Murphy* that rely on ahistorical philosophers, from Descartes to Derrida, fall short of illuminating the social and political significance of Beckett's work.² Using Lin as a jumping off point, I will explore Murphy's resistance to alienated labor under

¹ The concept of the carnivalesque that I refer to in the next chapter on *Waiting for Godot* highlights the political implications of the term, while Henning's use of the term, like other deconstructionists, is apolitical.

² Throughout this chapter, I will refer to Lin's ideas that are relevant to my argument. Lin argues that Murphy refuses "to fulfill the two roles imposed upon him by the consumer society [to produce and consume] and to assume the social responsibility implied in these two roles" (259). Lin points out that Murphy's possessions consists of "a chair" and "a bag," and he cites Murphy's resistance to "interhuman alienation brought about by the modern consumer society in which man is subordinated to such abstract values as labor, commodity, and money" (250).

capitalism, but I will go beyond Lin by discussing some aspects of alienation in the novel that Lin ignores. While I agree with Lin that alienation acts a linch-pin in *Murphy*, I will take this further by showing how the humor and creativity of the novel is inextricably tied to this central theme. I will show how the character Murphy and the eponymous novel use comedy and creative playfulness to satirize this alienation and to suggest an alternative way of being.

Central to my reading is Marx's concept of alienation. Describing the alienation of labor under capitalism, Marx writes,

Labour is external to the worker, i.e. it does not belong to his essential being; ...in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. (*EPM* 72)

Such Marxist writers as Erich Fromm, István Mészáros, and Fritz Pappenheim have elaborated and extended on the many aspects of the alienation of labor, including the separation between people and the product and process of their work, the antagonism between boss and worker, the estrangement between people and their fellow workers, friends, and family, and most importantly, the estrangement of people from themselves and their full capacity as human beings. This conflicted psychological state defines life under capitalism where the ultimate goal is to produce money and commodities, items that are external and hence alien to the existences of producers and consumers, workers and capitalists alike. Fromm observes that as a result of alienation, people lose a sense

not only of their own humanity but also of each other's. In the one place where Murphy uses the word alienation, at the end of Chapter Nine, he expresses a desire to escape the alien "outer world" through "a real alienation" (194), a quasi-psychotic retreat into the "inner world" of his thoughts. Though Murphy never achieves this "real alienation," he copes with the outer world by reasserting himself, through comedy and creativity, in the face of the self-obliterating alienation posed by that world.

In her early study of Beckett's humor, Ruby Cohn points out that Beckett's comedy is hard to characterize – "So ambiguous are Beckett's heroes that we scarcely know why we laugh, and whether we laugh *at* or *with*" (8). This is a fair assessment of Murphy who may be more accurately described as an anti-hero than a hero. Though the comedy surrounding Murphy may be ambiguous, however, the comedy that encircles other characters, such as Cooper and Miss Carridge, is not. They represent the satiric absurdity of those who absolutely and unquestioningly conform to a capitalist way of life. Though faced with the same economic demands and constraints as others, Murphy uses humor and imagination to avoid a job as long as possible, to play with the realities of the capitalist "outer" world, and to attempt to escape the unhappy fates of the characters who unquestioningly embrace values of that world. Mirroring Murphy's playfulness, the narrator creates humorous characters and situations and uses imaginative wordplay to lift an otherwise bleak plot into a place both lively and comic.

Part of the humor arises from Murphy's estrangement from the other characters and from his environment. Although the concept of critical distance is most commonly associated with Bertolt Brecht, an overtly Marxist playwright and theorist, it usefully applies to the comic estrangement in *Murphy*. In "Marxism and Modernist Aesthetics:

Reading Kafka and Beckett,” Geoff Wade provides a concise yet nuanced recapitulation of the debate between Lukács and Adorno over the political significance of modernist aesthetics. In agreement with Adorno on the potential political relevance of modernist techniques, Wade asserts that in such works as Beckett’s *Murphy* and *Waiting for Godot*, “the reader – in Brechtian fashion – is ‘estranged’ from what is happening, is forced away from emotional attachment, and searches for alternatives” (112). Eagleton argues that in Brecht, “Comic distantiation ... is mainly a matter of the estrangement effect, which inhibits ‘Aristotelian’ empathy and thus leaves the audience’s psychical energy unbound for potential liberation in laughter” (157). I argue that this critical estrangement occurs in part at the formal level, as Wade and Adorno point out, but also within the content of the text. *Murphy* and the narrator’s humor create a critical distance from which they poke fun at the capitalist society of the novel’s setting, and through identification with their estranged sense of humor, the reader seeks alternatives to the lives of the satirized characters. In this way, the novel exhibits R.D.V. Glasgow’s idea that “laughter is not simply dependent upon a play-context; it may create such a context,...just as a sense of humor permits its lucky possessor to view the vicissitudes of the world with a detachment akin to that of the theatrical spectator” (18). Similarly, Henri Bergson points out that “laughter has no greater foe than emotion” and to “a disinterested spectator...many a drama will turn into a comedy” (63). Here, what Eagleton holds as true for Brecht is also true for Beckett: “Comic estrangement allows the audience to think above the action’, which clearly entails psychical expenditure, but since thinking itself is pleasurable, this does not wholly dissipate the comic effect” (157). Because *Murphy* occupies the role of a free-thinking outsider, he sees the actions of the other characters as an alien might, and

he, the narrator, who often speaks from Murphy's perspective, and also the reader view Murphy's outer world and its inhabitants with such a comic detachment.

Murphy's irreverence toward money creates such comic detachment. Murphy disdains money as "filth" (94, 103) and tries to acquire and spend as little of it as possible. His interaction with Miss Dew in the park reveals just how little care he gives to cash. After Miss Dew's dog eats the biscuits that Murphy has just purchased for lunch, Murphy is "inconsolable," not over the monetary loss but only over the loss of his beloved biscuits. The thought of how Murphy acquired the lost biscuits does not even enter his mind, and Miss Dew's question, "How much are you out?" leaves him bewildered: "These words were incomprehensible to Murphy, and remained so until he saw a purse in her hand" (103). After this episode, Murphy lies down in the grass and tries to escape the outer world whose desire for money he literally cannot understand: "Murphy continued to sit on his heels for some little time, playing with the five pennies, speculating on Miss Dew, speculating on the sheep with whom he felt close sympathy, deprecating this prejudice and that, arraigning his love for Celia" (104-5). This passage reveals that the causes for Murphy's strained existence in the outer world are not merely existential, but material. As he plays with his money, three cents of which Miss Dew gave him, Murphy feels an affinity with the sheep that took no more interest in the lettuce that Miss Dew proffered them than he took in the coins she offered him. Like the sheep, Murphy only needs enough food to live. He takes the money from Miss Dew not because he wants it, but only because it will make Celia happy. These thoughts cause him to disapprove of peoples' "prejudice" (presumably against those without money) and to

⁴ Marx maintains that under capitalism, there is "no other nexus between man and man than naked self interest, than callous 'cash payment'" (CM 57).

question his love for Celia, whose attachment to him hinges on his becoming a successful breadwinner.

Murphy's absent-minded detachment from material values has a comic counterpoint in his landlady, Miss Carridge, whose obsession with money amounts to monomania. Miss Carridge manifests what Fromm describes as "the person who is given to the exclusive pursuit of his passion for money [who] is possessed by his striving for it; money is the idol which he worships as the projection of one isolated power in himself, his greed for it" (59). Fromm maintains that though such a person "is under the illusion of doing what *he* wants, he is driven by forces which are separated from himself, which work behind his back; he is a stranger to himself, just as his fellow man is a stranger to him" (59). Miss Carridge represents Fromm's tragic depiction taken to a farcical extreme.

When the neighbor upstairs from Celia commits suicide, rather than reacting to the loss of a human being with whom she interacted regularly and the pain that drove him to this desperate act, Miss Carridge, whose every thought revolves around what Marx calls the cash nexus⁴, considers only the monetary loss that may be involved. The narrator assumes Miss Carridge's perspective upon discovering the dead body: "The old boy lay curled up in meanders of blood on her expensive lino, a cut-throat razor clutched in his hand and his throat cut in effect" (*Mu* 134). So alienated is Miss Carridge from normal human emotions, that not even a dead body, blood, and a cut throat can detract her concern over her expensive linoleum. The humour of this passage arises precisely in the space created by this incongruity. The first thing that comes to the landlady's mind is that the blood might ruin her valuable linoleum floor – a comical thought considering

linoleum is generally an inexpensive item. (Beckett's turn of the phrase "cut-throat" to describe the literal throat cutting adds to the comical lightening of the mood.) Though Miss Carridge finds her calmness in surveying the scene surprising, the narrator shows how she rationalizes her insensitivity: "It was so exactly what she would have expected, and must therefore at sometime or other have imagined, that she felt no shock, or very little" (135). This rationale for her blasé response does not fit, however, because she had not expected to find anything wrong with the old boy and only went to check on him because Celia insisted. It follows, then, that Miss Carridge, as Fromm puts it, is a stranger to herself, unwilling to accept that her materialism makes her callous to the death.

Miss Carridge's initial reaction is only the beginning. In the aftermath of the old boy's death, her behavior continues to be driven by money in an almost slapstick string of detail. After worrying about her floor, Miss Carridge frets that if she were to call the doctor, she would have to pay his fee, so instead she runs to look for the police who call the doctor, and so

Miss Carridge was not a penny out of pocket, not one penny. The police, not she, had called the doctor, therefore his fee was on them. The bloody dilapidation of her lovely lino was amply covered by the month's advance rent paid by the old boy the day before. She had carried off the whole affair in splendid style. (*Mu* 136)

The narrator takes on Miss Carridge's perspective as she applauds herself for handling the situation so well. What makes the scene so funny is its extremity; she views her

frugality in handling the old boy's death with an exuberance befitting the windfall from a sharp deal.

Whether by assuming Miss Carridge's perspective or by directly mocking it, the narrator creates a humorously single-faceted depiction of her materialism. After Murphy leaves Celia, Miss Carridge, "whose charity stopped at nothing short of alms," comforts Celia with tea that she received as samples (143). As Miss Carridge recounts the death to Celia, the narrator says that "cupidity [lends] wings to her imagination" and interjects, throughout her version of the death scene, that all of her supposed facts are lies (144-5). Her lie-riddled version of the old boy's death reveals yet again that she can only understand life in monetary terms; she reasons that it must have been accidental because, on the one hand, she cannot fathom why the old boy would have paid rent the day before committing suicide, and on the other, she anticipates that if word gets out about the suicide, she will have a hard time finding new tenants to let the room. Miss Carridge's single-minded obsession with money therefore alienates her from even the most remote understanding of any human desire or woe that does not have material causes.

If Miss Carridge serves as a comic foil to Murphy's antimaterialism, then Cooper, the chronic employee, serves as a foil for Murphy, the "chronic emeritus" (21) - an odd title for Murphy to give himself considering that the novel begins without reference to any of his previous gainful employment, professorial or otherwise. In discussing symmetry in *Murphy*, Rubin Rabinovitz notes the "balanced antithesis" of Murphy and Cooper; Murphy is a teetotaler who feels most at peace in his rocking chair and never wears a hat, while Cooper is an alcoholic who has a fear of sitting and never takes off his hat. Rabinovitz asserts, "Murphy favors thought to action; Cooper, the reverse" (92).

Yet there is another difference that Rabinovitz does not suggest and which speaks to their antithetical portrayals: while Murphy resists work, Cooper works overtime. Murphy seeks to avoid work for as long as he can because in his view, “what was all working for a living but a procuring and a pimping for the money-bags, one’s lecherous tyrants the money-bags, so they might breed” (*Mu* 76). Celia literally works as a prostitute, an occupation that shows capitalism’s corrosion of the most intimate aspect of life, and Murphy’s job at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat (M.M.M.) leads to his death. Given the work experiences of these two central characters, Murphy’s assessment of work is quite fitting. While Murphy tries to avoid being a wage-slave for someone else’s profit, Cooper has almost no life other than his occupation as a private detective, an idea highlighted by his perpetual donning of a hat. He enters the novel as an employee of Neary and later becomes the employee of Wylie and Miss Counihan, separately.⁵

Cooper epitomizes the alienation of labor. For Marx, the very nature of work under capitalism denies its meaning to the worker, and work therefore denies the “essential being,” or humanity of the worker. In their professional capacity, then, workers become almost less than human, robots whose own humanity is estranged from themselves. Because Cooper only exists in his work, he represents alienation incarnate, and throughout the text he appears as a non-thinking, non-feeling automaton. His dull-

⁵ Lin makes a compelling argument that the five characters who seek out Murphy are all motivated by “money and sensual gratification”: “While Celia needs to keep Murphy as a bread-earner, a means of survival, Neary needs to find Murphy to prove Murphy’s ‘demise,’ or ‘infidelity,’ or ‘economic failure’ (54) so that he can win over Miss Counihan, who chases Murphy supposedly ‘amassing a large fortune’ with which she can enjoy the ‘little luxuries to which she was accustomed’ (53). Like Neary, Wylie needs to find Murphy in order to prove the latter’s failure so that he can control Miss Counihan while Cooper needs to find Murphy in order to get paid” (262). While all of these characters are comically self-serving, my exploration will focus in particular on the significance of Cooper as a comic foil to Murphy.

witted detecting skills show how, as Marx would argue, work ruins his mind. As Cooper tails Celia entering her building, he observes, "She let herself in, therefore she lived there...[Cooper] hastened away as soon as he had made a mental note of the number. Cooper's mental notes were few, but ineffaceable" (153). His thinking and movements are so unnatural and strained that others view him as something less than human. When he walks in on Wylie and Miss Counihan kissing, though they pause, "Wylie would not have broken off his love game for Cooper, any more than for an animal, but he feared lest Neary also were at hand" (118). Not only do others view Cooper as an alien, but he is alien to his own emotions and desires as well. Describing Cooper's bizarre reaction to the heavy make-out session, the narrator says,

Now he stood again, bolt upright in the centre of the room, his bowler hat on his head, his scarlet choker tightly knotted, his glass eye bloodshot, sliding his middle fingers up and down the seams of his baggy moleskins just above the knee, saying, 'I do be turned off, I do be turned off,' over and over again. (119)

Clearly, as Wylie points out, Cooper is aroused by the scene, but because he exists only in his professional capacity, in which he denies rather than asserts himself, he does not understand or accept his own sensations. Wylie observes how unnatural and robotic Cooper is, and gives him a glass of whiskey to "help the needle of the crack." The whiskey returns Cooper to his version of normalcy, and thus, in Marx's words, not only does Cooper's work "ruin his mind," but it also "mortifies his body." Indeed, the narrator points out, "Cooper's only visible humane characteristic was a morbid craving for alcoholic depressant" (*Mu* 54).

While Lin suggests that all of the five characters who pursue Murphy do so with the hopes of achieving “some gainful end” (footnote 2), Cooper is the only one of these five who does not have any personal motives. The narrator says that Celia loves Murphy, that Neary “thinks of him as the Friend at last,” that Miss Counihan “wants a surgeon,” that Wylie hopes to marry Miss Counihan, and that Cooper “is being employed to that end” (*Mu* 202). Of all of these self-serving characters, then, Cooper exists as a caricature of the alienation of labor because he does not even have the pretense of a human connection to others in the novel. Fromm describes this particular kind of alienation as a “marketing orientation”: “[Man] does not experience himself as an active agent, as the bearer of human powers. He is alienated from these powers. His aim is to sell himself successfully on the market. His sense of self does not stem from his activity as a loving and thinking individual, but from his socio-economic role” (69-70). Cooper manifests such an extreme alienation that the reader can laugh at the foibles of work under capitalism.

Cooper and Miss Carridge are one-dimensional straight characters; unable to experience their own feelings or to see themselves and others clearly, they also lack a sense of humor. In contrast, Murphy experiences his humanity more fully and enjoys the playful and comic aspects of life. Differentiating among the three zones of Murphy’s mind, the sixth chapter shows how Murphy’s humor is integral to a complex understanding of himself and the world. The narrator explains that the chapter will serve as a “justification” for the expression “Murphy’s mind” and will offer insight “solely with what it felt itself and pictured itself to be” (107). The very premise of the chapter underlines Murphy’s capacity for intellectual thought and desire for self-knowledge.

Each of his mind's zones comes with its own pleasures. The third zone, a "flux of forms, a perpetual coming together and falling asunder of forms" and where Murphy becomes "a mote in the dark of absolute freedom" (112), is Murphy's favorite and the one which he seeks out when he is alone in his rocking chair. But his initial search for a job and subsequent work at the M.M.M. prevent Murphy from entering this zone as often as he would like. He also enjoys the second zone, "where the pleasure was contemplation" (111), which is where Murphy reflects on his life and theorizes about himself and his relationship with the outer world. This is probably the zone where Murphy resides when he comes up with the theory about the inner workings of his psychology that we read about in this chapter. While Murphy spends a significant amount of time and intellectual energy here, it seems that for most of the novel, Murphy and therefore the text as whole exist in the first or light zone where "the elements of physical experience [are] available for a new arrangement. Here the pleasure was reprisal, the pleasure of reversing the physical experience. Here the whole physical fiasco became a howling success" (111). This zone symbolizes Murphy's sense of humor and his love of wordplay and shows that although he may be in the world, he is not of it. Even when in the midst of the outer world, Murphy's sense of humor allows him to play with life's meanings and possibilities and "howl" at life's ridiculousness.

Murphy's sense of humor also allows him to evade the job hunt so that he can avoid, at least until he begins his job at the M.M.M, the alienated fate of Cooper. In "The Comic Mask and Carnival," George Santayana asks, "why continue to harp on propriety and unselfishness and labour, when we are little but labour machines already, and have hardly any self or any passions left to indulge?" (75). Rather than regard themselves as

merely serious-minded workers, Santayana argues that people should be “lively, and see if [they] can invent something worth saying or doing. [They] should then be lively in the spirit of comedy, and the world would grow young. Every occasion would don its comic mask, and make its bold grimace at the world for a moment.” In a spirit similar to Santayana’s prescription, Murphy dons a comic mask and shirks the serious responsibility of work and the deadening effects that accompany it.

Murphy’s love of wordplay gives him a bemused take on the world. Because Celia incessantly pushes Murphy to find a job and because he is set on avoiding it, most of the time they are together, they argue. In a rare display of joy, Murphy tells Celia a joke: “Why did the barmaid champagne?... Because the stout porter bitter” (139). Celia is not amused, but Murphy laughs so hard that he loses control of his body “choking and writhing like a chicken with the gapes, seeing the scene” (140). The narrator describes the phantasmagorical way that Murphy envisions the pun:

On the one hand the barmaid, fresh from the country, a horse’s head on a cow’s body, her crape bodice more of a W than a V, her legs more of an X than an O, her eyes closed for sweet pain, leaning out through the hatch of the bar parlour. On the other the stout porter, mounting the footrail, his canines gleaming behind a pad of frothy whisker. Then the nip, and Tinteretto’s *Origin of the Milky Way*. (140)

Though the pun may seem weak to Celia or the reader, the playfulness of the language sends Murphy into the his “little world,” an imaginary place of free-association, where he envisions a bizarre and comical scene and where wordplay merges with art. Murphy escapes his immediate condition of tension and concern for work and money in a fit of

convulsive, hysterical laughter, or what Sigmund Freud refers to as the “pleasure in nonsense....[which permits adults to escape in a] toxically altered state of mind” (153). But it is precisely Murphy’s lack of affinity to the values of the capitalist big world that frees him to appreciate the comedy of life. Santayana claims,

when not too much starved or thwarted by circumstances, [people can find] all things vivid and comic. Life is free play fundamentally and would like to be free play altogether. In youth anything is pleasant to see or to do, so long as it is spontaneous, and if the conjunction of these things is ridiculous, so much the better: to be ridiculous is part of the fun. (78)

So long as Murphy must exist in the outer world, as Santayana says, he “would like it to be free play all together.” In the scene where Murphy tells this joke, he has just landed a job at the M.M.M. and is infuriated by Celia’s seeming lack of interest in his accomplishment. His joke provides a temporary escape from his anger with Celia and a short detour from a job that will ultimately thwart his freedom and suppresses his playfulness.

Murphy’s sense of humor also allows him to see the world in a more complex way than those characters whose values and desires are singly defined by work and money. Murphy’s unwillingness to conform to the values of his society makes him able to see that “existence involves changes and happenings and is comic inherently, like a pun that begins with one meaning and ends with another” (Santayana 78). Indeed, in his view of the world’s origins, Murphy thinks that only “an imperfect sense of humour could have made such a mess of chaos. In the beginning was the pun” (*Mu* 65). Here Murphy plays on the first line of the book of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and

the Word was with God and the Word was God.” For John the beginning of existence is marked by the rule and order of God and the language He gave humanity; while for Murphy, the beginning is marked by disorder, chaos, and changeableness in language and life. In line with this view, Murphy only finds jokes funny that highlight the contradictions in life, language and society, whereas he finds jokes unfunny when they insist on the fixed values and order of life in general and capitalist society in particular. For instance, Murphy thinks that because Celia is completely fixated on his becoming employed, if he actually were to get a job, Celia’s “visible universe” would collapse, and she would have to completely rethink her life, which Murphy jokes to himself, she is too old to do. Murphy does not share his joke because he anticipates that Celia will respond with a joke of her own that he does not find funny: namely, her repeated quip that if Murphy were to get a job, “Then there will be nothing to distract me from you” (65). Murphy says that this “Joe Miller,” or hackneyed joke, “had never been a good one.” He finds Celia’s joke stale and unfunny because it does not re-envision the world in a fresh, playful, or imaginative way, but rather insists on the stale and established way of life. Thus, Murphy’s playfulness and sense of humor stem from his ability to see the contradictions in language and in existence in ways that Cooper, Miss Carridge, Celia, and the rest of the characters in the novel cannot.

If Murphy’s wordplay helps him to escape the constraints of his surroundings, then the narrator’s wordplay helps free the novel and the reader from bleakness of the plot. Describing Murphy’s increasing alienation after he begins the night shift at the M.M.M., the narrator says that “no sound reached him from the adjacent female wards but the infinite variety of those made by the female wardees, a faint blurred mockery,

from which however as the night wore on a number of leading motifs emerged" (240). The phrase "infinite variety" famously occurs in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* when Enobarbus describes Cleopatra's hold on Antony's attention: "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale/ Her infinite variety. Other women cloy/ The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry/ Where she most satisfies" (II.ii. 276-9). Cleopatra's "infinite variety" refers to the freedom of her imagination and indulgence into the excesses of love, life, and playfulness that so attracts Antony, the restrained and disciplined Roman. Unlike Cleopatra, Celia does not display "infinite variety" or a joyful partaking in the pleasures of life but rather a "morbid ingenuity" in her ability to turn everything into another reason for Murphy to find work (*Mu* 64). While Celia is bound to the tediousness and oppression of the big world, the female mental patients, who are unbound, exhibit the infinite variety that engages Murphy. Even as the text takes on what Maureen Waters calls "an increasingly macabre quality" (118), the narrator's infinite variety of wordplay similarly liberates the text from the storyline.

Just as Murphy derives humor from puns that explode restrictive social and linguistic concepts, so readers derive humor from the narrator's imaginative play with the prose and narrative structure of the novel. At times the narrator achieves humor by assuming a serious air in the discussion of ridiculous characters and situations, such as when the Neary is said to be able to stop his heartbeat and keep it stopped "within reasonable limits" (*Mu* 3). Rubin Rabinovitz points to another scene where the narrator "calls attention to a violation of the laws of physics: 'Miss Carridge's method of entering a private apartment was to knock timidly on the door on the outside some time after she had closed it behind her on the inside....[Nothing] could make her subject to the usual

conditions of time and space in this matter” (9). Rabinovitz asserts that the rejection of rationality makes for a more “interesting” passage, yet more than this it calls attention to the artifice and artfulness of the narrative, where absurdity regularly erupts, and which therefore, like Miss Carridge, is not subject to the usual conditions of time and space.

In one of the novel’s most hilariously absurd character-portrayals, the narrator describes Miss Dew, who has “very bad duck’s disease indeed” (*Mu* 97). Parodying medical jargon in what Bakhtin would call “double-voiced discourse,” the narrator assumes a familiarity with a malady that is in fact non-existent: “Duck’s disease is a distressing pathological condition in which the thighs are suppressed and the buttocks spring directly from behind the knees, aptly described in Steiss’s nosonomy as Panpygoptosis” (97). The humor resides not only in a parody of stilted medical discourse but also in what Waters calls Beckett’s use of “the ancient mode of comedy: laughter at the physically abnormal” (119) (which will reappear in Beckett’s later fiction and plays, including *Waiting for Godot*, the subject of the next chapter). Waters observes that aside from Celia, “the characters in the novel are all physically deformed in some way,” which she argues “reflects a profound distaste for the physical world which is set apart from and opposed to the inner world of the self” (119). These grotesque representations also help free the text from the banal details of conventional description so that the text and therefore the reader can leave behind what Mr. Kelly calls the “beastly circumstantial” and “demented particulars” (*Mu* 13) and soar on the wings of irrational and outrageously comedic character portraits.

It remains ambiguous whether the description of Miss Dew’s Duck’s disease is the narrator’s diagnosis or whether here the narrator adopts the free-indirect style and

channels Murphy's private diagnosis, and this ambiguity is significant because the narrator interjects commentary so often throughout the novel that he becomes as much a character as any of the others in the text. In this case, if Murphy takes pleasure in his private jokes, it is not too far-fetched to say that the narrator takes pleasure in his own absurd descriptions throughout the novel. In a similar vein, John Pilling notes that "the narrator [behaves] in an exceptionally interventionist manner....[and] relishes every opportunity to participate or... 'to interrupt (disfigure)'" (30). Though, as Pilling argues, this interventionist role of the narrator emphasizes a deterministic plot that inhibits the authority of Murphy as a hero, it also functions as a liberating force in a novel whose plot centers on the constrictions of capitalist society. Pilling points out that in the very first line of the book – "The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new" (*Mu* 1) – Beckett's narrator brings the idea of innovation back to that of the novel. Pilling speculates, "It must have given Beckett a wry pleasure to reflect that the framing elements of his opening sentence ... tacitly indicated what he was up to: scouting the very idea of *the novel* as 'something new', whilst nevertheless seeking at some level to put new wine in old bottles" (30). By rearranging the words in an unexpected way, the narrator plays with what otherwise would have been a conventional opening to a novel, and by interjecting commentary, the narrator calls attention to different comical aspects of the text. At times, as with the sun shining because of "having no alternative," the interjections point out and thereby explode clichéd prosaic constructions and hackneyed expressions. At other times, they make humorous observations about otherwise banal details, such as when the narrator says, "The human eyelid is not tear-tight (happily for the human eye)" (51). And when most astutely self-reflexive, they call attention to the

text as a literary construction. In one such instance, the narrator comments about the artistic decision to use the recurring metaphor of Murphy and Celia's lovemaking as music-making: "This phrase is chosen with care, lest the filthy censors should lack an occasion to commit their filthy synecdoche" (76).

The narrative rethinks common conceptions of the novel through a remarkably innovative range of playfulness, from word-play to play with the narrative structure, and through its inventiveness, the text emerges as a piece of artwork and the narrator as its self-aware creator. Addressing *Murphy*'s complex narrative, Pilling notes that it adheres to plot descriptors (of what Murphy would call the big world) to a greater extent than do Beckett's later works of fiction. Yet, "*Murphy* is obedient to the conventional novelistic pieties the better to expose them...for the frauds they are....The competing impulses, the moves both away from and towards time-honored narrative tactics, give the novel its hard-won, but remarkably well-sustained, vitality" (Pilling 33-4). The creativity and humor of the narrative mirrors that of *Murphy*, and in this way, "'form' itself has its 'content': style and plot encode ideas about the material world"⁶ (Richter 1098), or as Beckett has said of *Finnegans Wake*, "Here form is content, content is form" (*DBVJ* 503). If on the level of the plot *Murphy* uses humor and creativity to resist the alienation of work under capitalism, at the formal level, the narrator's novel-writing emerges as creative artwork - a type of work that is non-alienated because, rather than denying the self and ruining the mind, this type of work, by allowing the writer to "develop freely his

⁶ These are David H. Richter's words summarizing Fredric Jameson's ideas. For further discussion see Jameson's *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*.

mental energy,” reaffirms the writer’s self.⁷ Rather than being performed solely for the purpose of accumulating money and consuming goods and in effect reasserting the status quo, the work of novel-writing emerges as a creative activity that reconstructs the world in imaginative and playful ways that undermine materialist values.

By using the trope of repetition at both the plot and formal levels of the novel, the narrator draws a distinction between the type of alienating work that the characters perform and the non-alienating work of novel-writing. The idea that Murphy’s job at the M.M.M. is restrictive recurs at different points of the narrative. Describing the job to Murphy, Bim, the head nurse, highlights how dehumanizing the job is to everyone involved. Six consecutive paragraphs list all of Murphy’s duties; the first begins with what “he would be expected” to do, and the following five spell out all of the things “he would never” do on the job. These include such orders as “never on any account allow[ing] himself to be affected by the abuse, no matter how foul and unmerited, that would be poured upon him” (158), never “los[ing] sight of the fact that he was a creature without initiative,” and “never neglect[ing] to keep his mouth shut” (159). The repetitive language in these commands highlights the dehumanizing monotony of the job. After being told about the requirements of the job, when Murphy asks whether all of the patients are certified, Bim replies that it is none of his business: “You are not paid to take an interest in the patients....All you know about them is the work they give you to do”

⁷ In contrast to Lukacs, Adorno asserts that “‘form’ can be as revolutionary as ‘content’ in its social significance” (Wade 113). Wade acknowledges that unconventional formal technique does not bear a left-wing critique of capitalism in all modernist texts and cites Linda Hutcheon’s comment that “[T]exts could conceivably work to dismantle meaning in the name of right-wing irrationalism, as easily as left-wing defamiliarization critique” (113). Like Wade, however, I agree that in the case of *Murphy*, the evidence suggests this is a fair assertion.

(160). Thus, the job requires Murphy to emotionally detach from himself and his patients and to view them more as objects than people.

As Murphy begins the night shift, his work becomes increasingly repetitive and constricting. The narrator describes in detail the strict routinization of the night rounds, which take ten minutes, "all being well," but "if all was not well" and any patients needed extra care or attention,

then the extra time taken by the round was levied on the pause. For it was an inflexible rule of the M.M.M., laid down in terms so strong as to be almost abusive, that every patient...should be visited at regular intervals of no more than twenty minutes. If things were so bad that the rounds took longer...then there was no pause and all was in order. But if things were still worse and the round took eleven minutes longer than it should, and as less than no pause was unfortunately beyond the powers of even the smartest attendant, then the painful fact had simply to be faced once more that man proposed, but God disposed, even at the [M.M.M]. (237)

No matter how smart or efficient a worker, if the patients need more attention, then the worker must sacrifice his breaks, the sole relief from the tedium of the job. The rounds, which consist of switching on a light, looking into a room to check on the patient, switching off the light, and pressing an indicator to alert Bom, the manager and a "sadist" (238), of the exact second of the visit, resemble repetitive assembly-line factory work – some of the most dehumanizing modern labor, in which the worker becomes merely an extension of a machine. These shifts have an extremely alienating effect on Murphy who

By day ... had not felt the gulf so painfully as he did now, walking round and round the wreck. By day there [were other people] to stimulate his sense of kindred with patients. There were the patients themselves...in the gardens. He could mix with them, touch them, speak to them, watch them, imagine himself with them....But in the night...[there was] no illusion of caress from the world that might be. (239-40)

The conditions during the day mitigate the alienating effects because Murphy can interact with the patients on a more humane level, less restricted by the circumstances of the job, but as he begins to work the night shift, the job takes on what Fromm calls “atomistic management”: “Work is becoming more repetitive and thoughtless as the planners, the micromotionists, ... further strip the worker of his right to think and move freely” (J. J. Gillespie quoted in Fromm). Bom’s use of the indicator exemplifies such bureaucratic micromanagement that Fromm and Gillespie claim exacerbate the problems of capitalist labor.

The repetitiveness of the job is mirrored by repetition in the narrative structure. Rabinovitz traces repetition throughout *Murphy* and discovers that, “there are more than 400 sets of recurring passages; about 150 of these sets contain more than two items; in all, more than a thousand individual passages are involved in the pattern of verbal repetition” (72). Repetition sometimes takes the form of characters repeating ideas that they have had already, and at other times, the situations between the same or different characters repeat themselves. For instance, Rabinovitz points out the recurrence of scenes where one character lies down and another sits nearby (77). In these “parallel scenes” a character emotionally appeals to another who rejects him or her. In two such

instances, Murphy rejects Celia and Mr. Endon rejects Murphy (78). Rabinovitz suggests that “repetition...introduces the idea that human activity is often mindlessly redundant...The narrator seldom calls attention to these recurring episodes, and the characters who figure in them seem unaware that they are repeating their actions...as if they are unwilling to confront the monotony of their lives” (80-1). The monotony of the characters’ lives and their inability to confront it can be seen, at least in part, as an effect of the routinization of work and the conformity of materialism that Beckett critiques. Fromm maintains that though all cultures impose a “man-made, artificial world” onto nature, in modern life routinization exacerbates the problems of work as a “more or less absorbing task” that distracts people from their own desires and needs (71). What Fromm calls the “man-made artificial world” poses the same problems as what Murphy calls the “big world” – both are characterized by the mind-numbing alienation of work. Indeed, once Murphy begins his job, the mood of the narrative becomes increasingly dark and less buoyantly comedic.

By repeating the same lines and scenes using artful techniques, however, the narrator simultaneously represents and transcends the existential obstacles posed by modern, capitalist life. At the plot-level, repetition exposes the monotony of the material world; yet creating patterns at the structural level is a pleasurable activity for the writer just as discerning these patterns is a pleasurable activity for the reader. Such structural patterns and repetitions are also essential to the aesthetics of such other art forms as poetry and music. Eric Prieto notes how Beckett’s fiction incorporates some of music’s formal characteristics, including “repetition, variation, [and] counterpoint” (165). In *Murphy*, repeated words and phrases sometimes echo significant ideas from previous

scenes and sometimes build in effect throughout individual scenes. At the end of the book when Celia is with Mr. Kelly in the park, the park rangers repeat a cry that Celia also hears during her first trip to the park: "All out" (153). As Mr. Kelly flies his kite, the park rangers first say "All out" three times, then a few lines later they say it two times, and then finally once, the note on which the novel ends (281-2). The variations on this phrase build to a sort of emotional diminuendo that brings the novel to a poignant conclusion.

Fromm points out that artistic creation and appreciation assists people in the attempt to break free of the alienation that results from routinized work: "But man can fulfill himself only if he remains in touch with the fundamental facts of his existence, if he experiences the exaltation of love and solidarity, as well as the tragic fact of his aloneness and of the fragmentary character of his existence" (71). Fromm argues that the creation and appreciation of art can help to alleviate alienation. In Greek drama, Fromm points out, "fundamental problems of human existence were presented in an artistic and dramatic form" so that the spectator "was carried away from the sphere of daily routine and brought in touch with himself as a human being, with the roots of his existence" (71). Fromm's view of the social role of artists and their art adds a useful Marxian perspective to a Romantic concept, yet he maintains that there is no modern artistic equivalent to Greek drama in its capacity to produce a "cathartic" effect. More often than not the dramatic effect in *Murphy* is indeed one of more Brechtian estrangement than Aristotelian sympathy; yet toward the end of the novel at times when the humor recedes, so does the reader's emotional estrangement, and these scenes do produce a catharsis. Murphy's final alienation from Mr. Endon and Celia's final scene in the park evoke a

sympathy that is almost haunting in its unexpectedness. This point should not be exaggerated, for dark humor and estrangement persist to the end as well, but moments of poignancy peek through nonetheless. During such moments and certain moments of comic estrangement, the narrative exemplifies a type of artwork, similar to Greek drama, capable of helping both the creator/ writer and the spectator/ reader to engage with the problems of modern life so that they can experience what Fromm calls "the tragic fact of [their] aloneness and the fragmentary character of [their] existence." Just as Murphy's creativity gives him the ability to appreciate the playfulness of life and to assume a more complex view of the world than some of the other more one-dimensional characters, so it makes him aware of his aloneness and fragmentation. In light of this, Murphy and the narrator's humor does not exist as an end in itself. Instead it enables Murphy, the writer, and the reader to experience themselves as creative beings with a will that operates outside of market forces.

Though Murphy's creativity allows him to assume a more complex view of himself and society than other characters, because he still lives within that society, he is also subject to its alienation. He may have a rich inner life, but he does not seem to care deeply about anyone else. Celia harps on his need to get a job, but the need for money is a practical and unavoidable concern, and by not caring whether she will have to return to prostitution, Murphy exudes a callousness toward her well-being and her own desire to be free from the market. Because he cannot forge a relationship not tainted by materialism, Murphy's answer is to escape into his inner world. Yet, Murphy is not completely solipsistic. Lin points out that he pursues one of the "higher schizoids," Mr. Endon, in a "quest to dealienate man...by forging an authentic identification with his Other.... not

perversed by such practical matters as money and property" (260). Murphy feels "bound to Mr. Endon...by a love of the purest possible kind, exempt from the big world's precocious ejaculations of thought, word, and deed" (*Mu* 184). As a "schizoid," Mr. Endon is unable to bond with Murphy, and when, upon staring into Mr. Endon's eyes, Murphy realizes the completeness of his alienation, he narrates the scene himself in a moving passage:

‘the last at last seen of him/ himself unseen by him/ and of himself’

A rest.

‘The last Mr. Murphy saw of Mr. Endon was Mr. Murphy unseen by Mr. Endon. This was also the last Murphy saw of Murphy.’

A rest.

‘The relation between Mr. Murphy and Mr. Endon could not have been better summed up than by the former's sorrow at seeing himself in the latter's immunity from seeing anything but himself.’

A long rest.

‘Mr. Murphy is a speck in Mr. Endon's unseen.’ (249-50)

Murphy's sorrow over his isolation moves him to creative expression, and he recites these words that come to him "demanding so strongly to be spoken that he spoke them, right into Mr. Endon's face" (250). Each set of words expresses a similar sentiment yet in a varied way. He speaks the first in poetic verse, the middle two in prose, and the last in some combination of the two. The narrator's interjections of "A rest" in between Murphy's words help to create a poetic rhythm and add a lyrical quality to the passage – a thought that the musical meaning of the term "rest" underlines. This word also evokes

the idea that in some ways narrating his own alienation provides Murphy with a brief “intermission of labour” and perhaps even some “freedom from distress” and “tranquillity of mind” (“Rest”). In a third understanding of the refrain, however, “a rest” sounds like “arrest,” which brings to mind a temporary failure of the heart, perhaps a sensation that Murphy figuratively experiences as he laments his estrangement from Mr. Endon. Indeed, by calling himself and Endon “mister,” Murphy illustrates that, despite his best efforts, their relationship is only defined by work. That this language lends itself to so many different possible interpretations ultimately highlights the poetic success of the lines. If over the course of the novel the narrator asserts his creative will, effectively becoming another character, here Murphy transcends the plot and merges with the narrator of the novel by imaginatively telling his own story and reasserting himself one last time before returning to his garret and dying in a fire.

After Murphy's death, the denouement of the novel underscores the centrality of alienation and creative resistance in the text. After viewing Murphy's remains, the characters who have spent the duration of the novel pursuing him no longer have anything keeping them together, and they disperse. Cooper, who has been entrusted with the disposal of Murphy's ashes, goes to a bar and throws the bag of ashes at a man who has offended him, and, “[b]y closing time the body, mind, and soul of Murphy were freely distributed over the floor of the saloon, and before another dayspring greyned the earth had been swept away with the sand, the beer, the butts, the glass, the matches, the spits, the vomit” (275). As in life the material conditions of society inhibit the full expression of Murphy's “body, mind, and soul,” in death, the material world debases his remains. Despite the apparent morbidity of the scene, the narrator brings forth poignancy

and humor, and so, as Brian Boyd claims, “Beckett looks at our expectations, and suggests how hollow they are, although even within that hollowness there is endless room for surprise – not that that changes the outcome” (17). By having the “dayspring” “greyen” rather than brighten the earth, the narrator uses archaic words to evoke the expected sadness at a scene that describes the demise of the central character. Yet by stringing together a list of common words to describe the disgusting debris with which Murphy’s ashes end up, the linguistic creativity subverts the poetic language, flouts narrative convention, and defies the reader’s expectations with a surprising turn of absurdly dark humor.

Though the novel concludes with all of the characters alienated from one another, what they lose socially, the narrative recuperates aesthetically. Celia, back to work as a prostitute, goes to a park where she accompanies Mr. Kelly as he flies a kite. Here in the park, there is potential for free play, and watching the kite soar in the clouds, “from the unseen to the seen,” enraptures Mr. Kelly. These words echo Murphy’s search for a true friendship in Mr. Endon’s “unseen” eyes and symbolize the human desire for a life of unalienated freedom. Though the world of the park offers the glimpse of life as free play, it also denies this possibility. The boy, who on Celia’s first trip to the park sings as he passes her, now mourns the collapse of a fallen kite. Celia’s work intrudes on the pastoral scene as an elderly “lecher” tacitly propositions her by “jinkl[ing] his change, his very small change,” and she “clinch[es] the client” (278-9). Finally, the park rangers’ repeated cry of “All out” signals that though people may visit the park, they cannot stay and must return to their alienating work and lives – an image that recollects the banishment of Adam and Eve out of Eden and into a life of labor. This scene highlights

Mészáros's comment that "artistic creation...is considered by Marx a free activity, as an adequate fulfillment of the rich human being," precisely because "[for producers and consumers] art...is an 'end in itself'" (211). Through its literary allusions, repeated refrains, and natural imagery, this last passage underscores the text's liberating achievement as a work of art.

“Recreation as Relaxation”: Carnavalesque Play in *Waiting for Godot*

Beckett sets *Waiting For Godot* on a desolate stage with no scenery besides a country road and a tree. The two central characters, Didi and Gogo, who seem to have no other friends in the world, complain of bodily discomfort and boredom, and each frequently becomes irritated and angry with the other. Their boredom leads them at times to despair and contemplate suicide. In the midst of the bleakness, however, the play finds humor. Didi and Gogo interrupt their wallow in misery with carnivalesque play that not only offers them a diversion but also offers them an alternative to lives even more miserable and alienated than their own, represented by Pozzo and Lucky, the tyrannical boss and oppressed laborer. Viewed through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of the subversive, liberating, and unifying powers of laughter and carnivalesque play and Hans-Georg Gadamer’s idea of audience participation in the play of drama, Didi and Gogo resist the alienating and oppressive work that characterizes life under capitalism.

Bakhtin’s theories about the equalizing power of carnivalesque play and Gadamer’s theories of audience participation in the play of drama complement each other in understanding how Didi and Gogo’s playfulness offers them an alternate, more positive existence than that of Pozzo and Lucky. Bakhtin argues that the medieval “carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical ranks, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” (10). People of all ranks and social standing would abandon their restrictive social roles in this liberating play. Similarly, Didi and Gogo play with different ideas and roles without being restricted to any one position or belief. Because in the medieval carnival everyone would take part in this play, Bakhtin writes, “carnival

does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators" (7). Just as everyone's participation unifies the players in the carnival, Didi and Gogo's playfulness bonds them together and puts them on equal footing with one another without hierarchy or oppression to disrupt their friendship.

The playful interchanges that create a bond between Didi and Gogo also create a bond between them and the play's audience whose experience gives significance to Didi and Gogo's exchanges, even when they can find none. Although, as opposed to the carnival, any production of *Waiting for Godot* technically would have footlights that would separate the audience from the players, Gadamer posits, "In being played the play speaks to the spectator through its presentation; and it does so in such a way that, despite the distance between it and himself, the spectator still belongs to play" (116). Therefore the performance draws in the audience to play along with the players, and this participation of the audience completes the performance. At times Didi and Gogo's interactions are humorously playful, and even when they do not experience the humor, the audience does. At other times Didi and Gogo's interactions are less humorous and are more creatively and artfully playful, and in some of these instances, the audience experiences moments of poignancy and significance that Didi and Gogo do not. Whether the audience finds humor or poignancy or both at different moments of the play, a sympathetic bond develops between these characters and the audience that does not form between the audience and either Pozzo or Lucky whose estrangement from themselves, each other, and Didi and Gogo translates into estrangement from the audience's sympathies.

Though the play does not provide any background on who Vladimir and Estragon

are or where they come from, they appear to be vagabonds without homes or jobs. They wear worn-out, uncomfortable clothes and subsist on raw turnips and carrots. Placing Didi and Gogo in the Irish literary tradition, Declan Kiberd sees them as tramps, figures that Yeats had seen as the "image of the now-rootless Anglo-Irish, neither Irish nor English, but caught wandering across the no-man's-land between two cultures" (Kiberd 537). Kiberd observes that for Synge, "the tramp was a gloriously ambivalent presence....a free spirit, a poet who epitomized all that the emerging rural middle class was busily rejecting in itself" (538). According to Kiberd, Yeats and Synge developed the idea of the rural tramp as a figure that represents the conflicted status of the Irish colonial subject, confused by an unclear sense of self yet resistant to colonial oppression. Though Didi and Gogo fit into the tradition of the Irish tramp, Beckett also invests them with a deracinated quality; though they are not clearly Irish, they are clearly tramps. Because they do not hold jobs and do not have a clear function as moneymakers, they exist in a no-man's-land as marginalized wanderers. Yet, their refusal to participate in a boss/ worker dynamic frees them to play as they will - with language, ideas, and roles that do not bind them.

Didi and Gogo's occupancy of positions on the outskirts of capitalist society offers them a state of being that is neither completely oppressive nor completely free. Vladimir, the more philosophical of the two, voices his uncertainty regarding his expectations and emotions: "Sometimes I feel it coming all the same. Then I go all queer....How shall I say? Relieved and at the same time...appalled" (5). What "it" refers to is not clear; Didi could be referring to the "hope deferred" that he mentions in the previous line, but even if this is the case, he has not specified what that hope was.

Thus, multiple layers of uncertain meaning and unclear references reflect the profundity of Didi's confusion and ambivalence about his identity and his place within a larger social order. Didi's ambivalent life as a vagrant, however, lifts him out of the oppressiveness of mindless labor at the same time that it strips him of a sense of self, leaving him confused and dejected.

Didi and Gogo's ambivalence towards their existence provides a space for them to periodically escape, if only momentarily, the bleakness of their surroundings through a playful banter of ideas that transports them out of their despair. When Didi suggests that they repent, Gogo asks what they have to repent, "Our being born?" which causes Didi to "[break] into a hearty laughter which he immediately stifles, his hand pressed to his pubis, his face contorted" (5). Didi stops himself and remarks, "One daren't even laugh any more," and pulls himself back toward the bleakness of life. Although the humor of Gogo's words may end for Didi here, they continue for the audience and readers of the play as Didi struggles with the absurd notion that laughter is no longer appropriate. That he stifles his laughter by pressing his pubis, rather than his mouth, suggests that laughter is a release like an orgasm, another momentary, recreational escape. Gogo remarks that not having laughter is a "Dreadful privation," as Didi tries unsuccessfully and comically to substitute the feeling obtained through laughter with that obtained through a smile. In attempting to show that life is too hopeless to indulge in laughter, Didi ends up proving the exact opposite – that life must not be taken too seriously because nothing, with the exception of sexual climax, can replace the release of tension that laughter provides. In this and many other scenes throughout the play, Gadamer would stress "the primacy of play over the consciousness of the player" (104). Whether Didi or Gogo consciously

realizes the humor is irrelevant because the humor has been communicated to the audience whose participatory amusement adds meaning to the play as an artistic whole.

If the tramps' playful humor connects them with each other and the audience, it also offers them a freedom from commitment to restrictive social roles and their attendant ideologies. Didi does not just accept that life is without a clear purpose. As an intellectual, he plays with what this idea implies about human existence. He tries on the hat of a pious Catholic and suggests that perhaps taking part in the ritual of penitence will cure what ails them, but at Gogo's irreverent joke that penitence cannot save them from their only guilt, being alive, Didi tosses off this hat with his laughter. The way the tramps irreverently mock religion brings to mind Bakhtin's idea that "in the early stages of preclass and prepolitical social order ...the serious and the comic aspects of the world and of the deity were equally sacred, equally 'official'[whereas] in the definitely consolidated state and class structure such an equality of the two aspects became impossible" (6). Because Didi and Gogo exist in a no-man's-land, somewhere on the outside of the "consolidated state and class structure," they have a freedom similar to the "primitive people" that Bakhtin describes. Furthermore, Didi's laughter is carnivalesque because it is "ambivalent; it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives" (Bakhtin 11-12). His laughter is triumphant because it allows him to throw off the oppressive yoke of religion, and it is simultaneously derisive because it mocks the impulse of all humanity to seek answers in religion. As opposed to the satirist's laughter, however, which alienates the satirist by placing him above and thus apart from the object of mockery, Didi's laughter "expresses the point of view of the whole world; he who is laughing also belongs to it" (Bakhtin 12).

Didi's laughter mocks religion and those who seek answers in it, but he, having tried on the hat of the devout Catholic, is included in the category of such people; thus, rather than alienating Didi from the rest of humanity, this instant of laughter connects him to it, as well as to his friend, Gogo, and the play's audience.

Even when Didi and Gogo discuss macabre and grotesque ideas, playfulness subverts hierarchies and invites the audience to play along. Carnavalesque banter arises when they discuss hanging themselves. The idea appeals to them because, by hanging themselves, they would get an erection. Vivian Mercier observes that this scene contains "a perfect marriage of the macabre and the grotesque in humour. But note the peculiar form of sexuality. Vladimir and Estragon are habitually impotent" (74). Mercier points out that Beckett often uses the malfunctions of the body as a source of comedy.

Describing Rabelaisian carnival, Bakhtin puts forth the idea that laughter and the grotesque offer a way to imbue language and ideas with creativity and that the grotesque "spreads obscenities throughout learned talk, and degrades language in order to transform abstract thought into something more material, concrete, and widely shareable. These indecencies are thus understood as *part of dialogue*" (Morson and Emerson 437-8). By addressing the grotesque messiness of the human body, Didi and Gogo's dialogue similarly works to destroy the oppressive, hierarchical conventions of language that silence discussions of gross, but real, bodily functions as indecent. This play with the grotesque unites Didi and Gogo in its creative restructuring of language so that, even as they contemplate suicide, their unconventional dialogue brings forth the conviviality of their friendship.

As the scene progresses and Didi and Gogo try to argue that it makes more sense

for the other to hang himself first, the playfulness of their discussion brings forth comedy in a potentially tragic scene. Estragon explains that because he is lighter, if he goes first and dies, but the bough breaks for Didi afterwards, Didi will be alone, without the companionship of his friend. But he says, if the bough holds for Didi, it will kill both of them, so Didi should go first. This interchange about suicide is humorous because of the way they discuss such an irrational act with a semblance of rationality. They end up being more rational than they appear because they decide that they cannot take the risk of one of them remaining alive without the other. As Didi says to Gogo when asking him to explain his logic, they are each other's "only hope" (11). Furthermore, Gogo says, "Don't let's do anything. It's safer" (12). Whether they seriously consider committing suicide or merely play with the idea, Didi and Gogo pass the time, entertaining each other and the spectators of the play.

Though at times Didi and Gogo's ambivalence toward life makes it so that they are not always conscious of the effects of their playfulness, at times they acknowledge that it helps them to escape an otherwise oppressive and mindless existence. As they wait for Godot, they contemplate what to do with themselves. Didi suggests that Gogo try on the boots they have found:

VLADIMIR	It'd pass the time. [<i>Estragon hesitates</i>] I assure you, it'd be an occupation
ESTRAGON	A relaxation.
VLADIMIR	A recreation.
ESTRAGON	A relaxation. (Beckett 61)

Vladimir convinces Estragon that by relieving their ennui this diversion will help them escape the oppressive burden of existence. The words Didi and Gogo use here also appear in Bakhtin's description of the carnival: "The influence of the carnival spirit was

irresistible: It made a man renounce his official state...and perceive the world in its laughing aspect. Not only schoolmen and minor clerics but hierarchs and learned theologians indulged in gay *recreation as relaxation* (emphasis added) from pious seriousness" (Bakhtin 13). Didi and Gogo do not have political, religious, or vocational offices from which to escape, but it is precisely their positions as tramps that allow them to escape the oppressive hierarchies of modern capitalist society. Whether they are trying on other people's clothes, role-playing, chasing each other around the stage, or just "blathering about nothing in particular" (Beckett 58), Didi and Gogo's interactions offer them recreation as relaxation.

Such recreation as relaxation is an option available to Didi and Gogo because they are not restricted by oppressive, mind-deadening work. They "play at Pozzo and Lucky" (65), a game with which Gogo quickly becomes bored because understandably no one would want to be in these oppressive conditions. He walks off and begins a game of make-believe, in which he and Didi pretend that they are being surrounded by attackers. When they get bored with this, they play fight and shout hilarious invectives at each other. After the first few insults, Estragon says, "That's the idea let's abuse each other" (67). This line shows that they are aware that this fighting constitutes just another enjoyable part of their play. Gogo wins the game with the ultimate insult, "Crritic!" which causes Vladimir to playfully wilt in defeat, and Gogo says, "Now let's make up," and they embrace. After this sequence of different types of play, Vladimir acknowledges how much fun they have been having: "How time flies when one has fun!" (68). They enjoy this play because it distracts them from their boredom and because they are able to freely switch gears and start new games whenever they please. Here, the old vaudeville

routine of hat juggling takes on more significance than mere silly entertainment; because Didi and Gogo are not bound to the roles of Pozzo and Lucky or any other restrictive social roles, they are free to try on different hats and discard them at will. It makes sense that the games have no clear purpose because “the movement of playing has no goal that brings it to an end; rather, it renews itself in constant repetition” (Gadamer 103). Didi and Gogo play with ideas imaginatively and move among possibilities.

The back and forth of Didi and Gogo’s relationship is also apparent in their conversations that reflect dialogic creativity. At one point, Estragon says, “In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of being silent” (54). This sets them off into a dialogue in which they philosophize together, each adding to the other’s ideas about why they talk to pass the time:

ESTRAGON	It’s so we won’t hear.
VLADIMIR	We have our reasons.
ESTRAGON	All the dead voices.
VLADIMIR	They make a noise like wings.
ESTRAGON	Like leaves.
VLADIMIR	Like sand.
ESTRAGON	Like leaves.
	[<i>Silence</i>]
VLADIMIR	They all speak at once.
ESTRAGON	Each one to itself.
	[<i>Silence</i>]
VLADIMIR	Rather they whisper.
ESTRAGON	They rustle.
VLADIMIR	They murmur.
ESTRAGON	They rustle. (54-55)

Didi and Gogo elaborate on the idea that conversation distracts them from the knowledge that they are going to die. They imagine death as eerie voices that make soft noises like nature’s rustlings. The repetition of phrases and the silent pauses in their dialogue create a poetic rhythm. Unlike Didi and Gogo’s dynamic in which they play off of each other’s

ideas, the “dead voices” that their conversation blocks out speak all “at once,” “each one to itself.” This cacophony of disembodied voices that speak without hearing and without being heard alludes to alienation, and by dialoguing with each other, Didi and Gogo avoid this alienation. This artful segment of dialogue exemplifies the back and forth movement that characterizes their friendship and leads to such moments of poignant creativity. Didi and Gogo are playful philosophers, not lecturing on theories, but imagining different ways of making meaning in life. In this way, their conversation also exhibits key elements of Bakhtin’s concept of unfinalizability in open-ended dialogue. Bakhtin says, “Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (qtd. in Morson and Emerson 60). Didi and Gogo’s dialogue reveals the truth that there are no definite answers; in this unfinalizability lies the potentiality and possibility for creative exchange and development.

Didi and Gogo’s open and creative dialogues stand in opposition to Pozzo’s closed-off and uncreative monologues. Didi and Gogo rarely speak more than a line or two without the other joining in, whereas Pozzo speaks many lines at a time, in long-winded speeches. His sense of superiority and self-importance leads him to constantly make sure that everyone is paying attention to his words. In an exemplary scene, Pozzo says, “Is everybody ready? Is everybody looking at me?....Will you look at me, pig!.... I am ready. Is everybody listening? Is everybody ready?....I don’t like talking in a vacuum” (24). He demands everyone’s undivided attention in order to begin speaking, and he figuratively sets up footlights for himself as though he were about to give a performance rather than have a conversation. When he finally gets the floor, however, he

cannot think of what he wants to say. In the same vein, he proffers a monologue about twilight in that area:

What is there so extraordinary about it? Qua sky. It is pale and luminous like any sky at this hour of the day. [*Pause.*] In these latitudes. [*Pause.*] When the weather is fine. [*Lyrical.*] An hour ago [*he looks at his watch, prosaic*] roughly [*lyrical*] after having poured forth even since [*he hesitates, prosaic*] say ten o'clock in the morning. (31)

This stilted and awkward monologue continues like this as Pozzo strains to impress his audience with poetic references to nature, but as the stage directions show, despite his best attempts, Pozzo's monologue is not a success. At the beginning of this speech, Beckett's stage directions say, "POZZO [*who hasn't listened*]" (30); this stage direction highlights that Pozzo's unwillingness to listen to others alienates him and prevents him from being able to develop the type of creative language that evolves through Didi and Gogo's dialogue.

Pozzo does not even remotely know how to engage in the give and take of a responsive dialogue. When Didi and Gogo ask Pozzo questions, they must repeat them several times and sometimes even mime their questions in order for Pozzo to acknowledge them. At one point Pozzo finally prepares to answer a question, but because he has not been listening, he asks, "What was it exactly you wanted to know?" (24). When Vladimir begins to repeat the question, Pozzo yells angrily, "Don't interrupt me!....If we all speak at once we'll never get anywhere." Pozzo has either forgotten that he has just asked them to repeat themselves, or he was merely asking his question of himself. Either way, he does not engage them in a reciprocal discussion. Though he

demands that everyone listen to him, he may as well be speaking to himself. Much like Didi and Gogo's "dead voices," Pozzo's alienation negates all concern for others' inquiries, thoughts, and feelings.

Similar to the way Pozzo's monologues offset Didi and Gogo's dialogues, Pozzo and Lucky's oppressive boss/ worker relationship serves as a foil for Didi and Gogo's playful friendship. Pozzo enters the stage asserting his power over Lucky whom he treats like a beast of burden. Beckett's stage directions convey the clear oppression that characterizes the relationship: "*Lucky carries a heavy bag, a folding stool, a picnic basket and a great coat, Pozzo a whip*" (16). Pozzo calls Lucky "pig" and "hog"; much as one speaks to a dumb animal, he does not address Lucky in full sentences, but rather shouts commands, using single words to stand for desired actions. Though Pozzo speaks to Vladimir and Estragon more civilly than he does to Lucky, even with them he asserts an air of authority. With pomposity that is out of step in the company of Didi and Gogo, he says, "I present myself: Pozzo" (16), and voices shock that they have never heard of him. Although Pozzo repeatedly says his name, even yelling it at them when they do not get it right, they, especially Didi, remain oblivious to Pozzo's powerful posturing. Flouting Pozzo's authority, Didi asks Gogo a last time, "Is it Pozzo or Bozzo?" When Pozzo advances to him threateningly, Didi tells him of a family named Cozzo - "The mother had the clap" (17). It is Didi and Gogo's status as tramps that affords them the luxury of denying and even mocking Pozzo's dominant stature.

Didi and Gogo's refusal to kow-tow to Pozzo initially provokes his anger, but eventually gets him to hesitatingly acknowledge that, even if he feels superior to them, he cannot abuse them as he does Lucky. Only after their irreverence does Pozzo recognize

that they are "of the same species as myself. [He bursts into an enormous laugh.] Of the same species as Pozzo!" (17). For Pozzo, the idea that such men are of the same species as himself is comical. Unlike Didi's laughter, Pozzo's laughter is not carnivalesque; it does not place him in a community of festive laughers, but like the satirist, his laughter separates him from others by placing him above those he mocks; thus, it reaffirms social and economic hierarchies. Later Pozzo articulates a view that laughter is an individual experience: "The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep somewhere else another stops. The same is true of the laugh" (26). He does not see laughter as an act that joins people together with a sense of festivity or that infectiously spreads joy to others. Rather, Pozzo can only conceptualize laughter as an expression of joy at obtaining an advantage over others; in other words, one can only be happy at the price of someone else's misery. This strictly derisive and divisive understanding of laughter highlights Pozzo's alienation.

If Pozzo represents the alienation of the oppressive boss, then Lucky represents the alienation of the oppressed laborer. For the most part, Lucky does not speak or do anything unless at Pozzo's request. In this respect, he is a caricature of an obedient servant or worker of any kind. Lucky is so alienated from his own desires that his moods depend solely on his oppressor's approval. He cries when Pozzo says that he should kill himself, but when Estragon tries to comfort him, Lucky responds by kicking him in the shins because, Pozzo says, "he [doesn't] like strangers" (26). In effect, Lucky's position as an impoverished and indebted laborer has stripped him of his humanity so that he behaves just as Pozzo treats him, like an abused dog; he is only loyal to the master who throws him bones to eat and is vicious towards all others.

Along with Lucky's emotional and behavioral dysfunction, his inability to coherently express himself also betrays the effects of his alienation. He does not speak until Pozzo commands him to, and when he does, his words are incomprehensible. Pozzo tells Lucky to speak for their entertainment: "Stop!... Back!... Stop!... Turn!... Think!" (35). He puts "think" in a chain of other commands, as though such an action could be elicited by an order, but Lucky's monologue of gibberish proves that it cannot. Lucky's inability to communicate a coherent thought shows the effects of his withstanding years of Pozzo's oppression. Pozzo has denied Lucky human companionship and the dialoguing of ideas through language that accompanies such relationships, and this isolation leads to Lucky's deteriorated capacity to think and use language.

Lucky has not always been such an imbecile because as Pozzo says, it was Lucky who taught Pozzo about such "beautiful things" as "beauty, grace, truth of the first water" (26-7). Lucky also used to dance beautifully "the farandole, the fling, the brawl, the jig, the fandango, and even the hornpipe. He capered. For joy," but now the "best he can do" is the dance that leaves Estragon, Vladimir, and Pozzo unimpressed. Pozzo says that Lucky calls it "The Net. He thinks he's entangled in a net" (33). Indeed, he is figuratively caught in the net of Pozzo's oppression, but Pozzo is too narcissistic and self-deluded to see the effects of his own brutality. Pozzo's obtuse refusal to see his oppression of Lucky and Lucky's inability to relate to other people literally manifest themselves when in the second act they return respectively blind and mute.

Although Vladimir and Estragon's existences are quite problematic, their situation is somewhat more desirable than Pozzo and Lucky's. All of them have deteriorating bodies: Estragon's feet will continue to hurt and Vladimir will continue to have problems

urinating, but they are in no worse position than at the beginning of the play, while Pozzo has lost the ability to see and Lucky to speak. Toward the end of the last act, Pozzo and Vladimir separately reflect on the hopelessness of existence, and Vladimir echoes one of the lines in Pozzo's speech about giving birth – "astride of a grave" (83). This echo and the reflective sentiment of their respective words demand that one consider them next to each other. Though they voice similar ideas, they differ in minor yet significant ways. On the one hand, Pozzo says, "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 a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more" (82). Pozzo has no sense of time or hope for change; for him, all of the days run together, and the day of death may as well be the day of birth. His speech moves from the first person to the third person, as he reveals his alienation from himself and the rest of humanity one last time. Thus, his final line is one of estrangement and hopelessness.

On the other hand, Vladimir also explores the idea that his existence is futile, but his words remain unfinalized and therefore contain possibilities. He acknowledges that he is but a member of a greater world: "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?" (83). Vladimir questions whether his inaction has repercussions outside of his own misery; he philosophically ponders whether his waiting for the answers to all of his problems constitutes irresponsibility to the rest of humanity. Thus, even his estrangement contains a sense of connectedness. Everyone with whom Vladimir interacts has fallible memories: in the second act, Pozzo and the boy do not remember Vladimir or Estragon, and

Estragon does not remember them. This makes Vladimir wonder how much “truth” there is in his own memory and how much significance these days that seem to repeat without meaning hold. He says,

Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. [*He listens*] But habit is the 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)

As with Pozzo, Didi links birth and death, yet unlike Pozzo, his language is not closed off to different possibilities. For Pozzo there is only an instant of light and life before darkness and death. For Didi, there is time, but routinization is what strips life of meaning. Though he and Gogo do not find a permanent way out of their deadening habits, Didi realizes that such a possibility may exist. At the end, when Didi says that someone looks at him and thinks he sleeps, he gestures toward the audience and again calls attention to the idea that their experience gives meaning to the play. Just as he is more aware than Estragon of time, history, and the possibility for change through social action and responsibility, others, the audience, are more aware than he. In these others there is hope. Though when Didi says that he cannot go on, he is on the brink of despair, he then asks, “What have I said?” leaving the thought unfinalized and open.

Although Godot never arrives with all of the answers to Didi and Gogo's problems, this does not necessarily validate their fears about the futility of existence. Beckett leaves Godot an ambiguous figure perhaps because the people of the world put

their faith into different ideologies. Whether Godot represents the proof of god's existence, the end to class oppression, a utopian end to all injustice, or any other promise for a more meaningful life, nothing could resolve all of the problems and discomforts associated with human existence. Memory will continue to be fallible, bodies will continue to deteriorate, and in the end everyone will die. These represent tragic elements of the tragicomedy. Yet Didi and Gogo's playful relationship reflects the possibilities of creativity and connectedness and the potential for change, and thus in their play reside comic elements. As Beckett's label "tragicomedy" suggests, neither of these elements outweigh the other. The oppression that characterizes Pozzo and Lucky's relationship alienates them from companionship and the sympathy of the audience, stifling any potential for growth, whereas the creative and playful responsiveness that characterizes Didi and Gogo's friendship unites them with each other and connects them to the audience. The play ends with Vladimir and Estragon deciding they want to leave. But the curtain falls on them frozen in their footsteps, seemingly compelled to wait another day. This unfinalized ending suspends the performance and leaves the audience waiting as well, emphasizing one last time Didi and Gogo's connection to each other and to the audience. Didi and Gogo do not have the agency to leave. Despite their resistance, they are still subject to the oppression and alienation of their world. By not resolving the action of the play, however, Beckett highlights the potential of the theatrical experience for humor, creativity, and surprise.

Conclusion

In *Murphy* and *Waiting for Godot*, the relationship between alternating humor and poignancy reflects complex ideas about the aesthetic creation of literary texts. That writing is a futile activity, that the impulse to create is doomed to failure, and that Beckett and his narrators and characters continue to write anyway are ideas central to Beckett's work.¹ Tim Parks claims, "Beckett was aware of course of the contradiction of his position, that it is inconsistent if not masochistic to talk...of writing being a 'sin against speechlessness' and then to go on writing, perverse to apply such meticulous control in texts that seek to demonstrate the impossibility of control" (25). Yet this contradiction – "the yearning for expression and the conviction of its futility" – is a driving force for Beckett, one that creates both humorous and poignant passages. In this conclusion, I will explore the significance of this central contradiction in Beckett's work.

To begin, I would like to take note of Parks's treatment of a passage of *Malone Dies* that illuminates my ideas about *Murphy* and *Godot*. Malone, who is lying on his deathbed, seeks to write a story about Sapo, a character whom Parks describes as "ill adapted to the world of his anxious middle-class parents":

The market. The inadequacy of the exchanges between rural and urban areas had not escaped the excellent youth. He has mustered, on this subject, the following considerations, some perhaps close to, and others no doubt far from, the truth.

¹ Many critics have explored these contradictory impulses in Beckett's work. Notably H. Porter Abbott places Beckett's work in the utopian tradition and explores the political resonance of Beckett's "reflexive worlds." Abbott observes that Beckett's dystopian worlds of "reduction, constraint, cruelty, despair, and the dispersion of self" are offset by a "counterpoint" of "the irrespressible return of new beginnings" (146).

In his country the problem – no I can't do it.

The peasants. His visits to. I can't. Assembled in the farmyard they watched him depart, on stumbling, wavering feet, as though they scarcely felt the ground. Often he stopped, stood tottering a moment, then suddenly was off again, in a new direction. So he went, limp, drifting, as though tossed by the earth. And when, after a halt, he started off again, it was like a big thistledown plucked by the wind from the place where it had settled. There is a choice set of images.

Explicating this passage, Parks says,

Only when Malone drops all the social considerations and finds a parallel between Sapo's uncertain style of perambulation and his own narrative hesitations is he able to go on. At once the tone shifts from comedy to lyricism, as we sense Malone's engagement grow. Ironically this can only happen when he ceases to believe in the story he was telling himself and turns back, however indirectly, on his own fragility and unease. (25)

As with *Murphy*, here form and content overlap in intricate ways. I argued that in *Murphy* the self-conscious narrator is as much a character as any other, but here Malone is literally a character and a narrator. Both *Murphy* and *Sapo* undergo economic hardships that alienate them from their society, and in depicting their alienation, the narrators also depict their own alienation from their artwork, an alienation that manifests itself in an expression of futility. In *Malone Dies*, which Beckett wrote shortly after *Godot*, the narrator's alienation from his work is more apparent than in *Murphy* – though even in *Murphy* this idea arises in the scene where *Murphy*, recognizing his alienation from Mr.

Endon, narrates his realization. When I referred to this passage in my first chapter, I commented on the aesthetic success of the lines evidenced by the poignancy in their movement between verse and prose. Yet, read in another light, these lines can reflect Murphy's desire to construct an aesthetically appealing description but fumbling to find the best combination of words to capture it.

Thus, while I argued in the first chapter that the movement between humor and poignancy represent literary creation as a non-alienated work, *Murphy*, *Godot*, and the above passage of *Malone Dies* reveal the idea that, as with other forms of work, the production of literary artwork is also to some degree an alienating activity. Fritz Pappenheim argues,

Consider the artist who goes through a phase of alienation when he tries to express and to articulate an image. It is initially so identified and intertwined with him that he must endure pain and struggle to release it and give it a life of its own. Such a separation is necessary, however, to free the idea from the obscurity it has while it still dwells in the artist's soul. The severance becomes even more poignant when the artist, in the process of his creation, finds himself subject to laws which do not come from within but which are imposed on him from the outside, for example, by the nature of the material and the tools with which he has to work. (92)

These words aptly describe the type of alienation to which Beckett has referred in terms of the obstacles posed by language during his own process of writing. Like other types of material, because language is external to the writer, this estranges writers from the product of their labor. When writers experience such estrangement from their material,

the product can result in stylistically plodding and prosaic writing or writing that is otherwise unsuccessful. The failed product exacerbates the sense of futility and worsens the psychological effects of authorial alienation. Beckett depicts such alienation in the multiple levels of the narratives of *Murphy* and *Malone Dies*, but also, in a more symbolic sense, in the travails of the characters in *Waiting for Godot*, such as when Pozzo fails to create a poetic speech and when Vladimir laments the futility of Estragon and his wait.

Despite the inevitable alienation of writers from their product, this alienation is not as absolute as that of more oppressive types of labor under capitalism. Rather the creation of literary artwork produces only a temporary alienation because “out of this alienation a work of art may be born which is animated by the life the artist has breathed into it. In this moment he finds that his production is no longer severed from him but is taken back into his life, enriching and kindling it” (Pappenheim 92). Such self-affirming writing can be located in both the comic and poignant aspects of *Murphy* and *Godot*. The humor brings forth lively playfulness in the midst of bleak dullness, while poignant moments reflect the possibility of aesthetic creativity in the midst of writing’s (and life’s) prosaicism and sympathetic connectedness in the face of alienation.

Beckett’s movement between comic estrangement and poignancy warrants further examination because these aesthetic techniques appear, on first glance, to be at odds. Tracing “modernism’s well-known rejection of an aesthetics based on readerly engagement and sympathy” (588), Jonathan Greenberg notes that the “suspicion that ‘genuine feeling’ may not be so genuine” has resulted in such trademark modernist movements as “Brechtian...critical estrangement” and “the rediscovery of satire as a

literary mode” (599). Greenberg also cites Michael Bell’s observation that along with Nietzsche and Freud’s theories, Marx’s idea of false consciousness helped determine modernism’s distrust of sentimentality (589). Fitting with these observations, *Murphy* and *Godot* satirize the false consciousness of Miss Carridge, Cooper, Pozzo, and Lucky: Miss Carridge’s unconsciousness of her monomaniacal materialism makes her unaware of her callousness to the death of the old boy; Cooper’s sole identity as a worker alienates him from his own humanity so that he represses any emotional and sexual desires; Pozzo’s identity as an oppressor obstructs his ability to develop any level of friendship or affection with the other characters; and Lucky’s identity as an oppressed laborer forces him to identify solely with his brutal oppressor. These represent the most flat and static characters of the texts, and it follows that they are the least sympathetic to other characters and to the readers/ spectators.

Comic estrangement and satire show that a suspicion of sentimentality is central to Beckett’s texts, but this suspicion is not absolute, just as writers’ alienation from language is not absolute. Indeed, where these texts achieve poignancy, it goes hand-in-hand with alienation and estrangement.² Roland Barthes points out that in the expression of emotion “in literature as in private communication, to be least ‘false’ I must be most ‘original,’ ...most ‘indirect’” (xiv–xv). That is, there must be estrangement in order to express a sentiment in a genuine, rather than trite, cold, or otherwise dubious way. This need for indirection and for originality exacerbates the alienation of the writer from language and the anxiety surrounding the process of writing, because it requires some

² Greenberg’s ideas about West’s novels – specifically concerning an “oscillation between the claims of satire and feeling” (600) and a “fear of the consequences of satire” (605) – influenced my ideas about Beckett’s work.

level of artifice; yet, the alternatives to indirection risk disingenuousness, banality, or silence, which would leave no possibility for genuine expression at all.

Barthes asserts, "whoever wants to write with exactitude must therefore proceed to the frontiers of language" (xv). By using humor in contradictory ways and by weaving together contradictory aesthetic styles (satire and sentiment) at multiple layers of the texts, Beckett reaches for the frontiers. Through comic distance and satire, Beckett's humor distances readers/ spectators from absurd characters and situations, letting them "think above the action" about socio-economic alienation and the accompanying inhibition of freedom. Yet, by allowing readers/ spectators to join in with the laughter of other figures (*Murphy's* narrator, Murphy, Didi, and Gogo), Beckett's humor simultaneously provides some personal, creative freedom and relief, so that the audience does not despair. Similarly, comic distance and poignant sentiment function as opposite sides of the same coin. The creation of absurd characters and situations and the satirical treatment of one-dimensional characters reflect Beckett's aversion to sentimentality. But the toughmindedness behind the absurdity and satire has a paradoxical function. It makes the evocation of genuine fears and anxieties all the more believable and moving. In short, Beckett finds exactitude of expression in the delicate dialectical relationships he creates between humor and sentiment, oppression and freedom, alienation and connectedness. Beckett's use of humor and critique of alienation under capitalism only emerge within this complex dialectic.

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