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**SINGAPORE**

**Beyond Imagination: An Alternative Cruelty in  
Samuel Beckett's Drama**

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SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES  
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# **Beyond Imagination: An Alternative Cruelty in Samuel Beckett's Drama**

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A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University in partial  
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

2024


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Here are the unknowns I have explored over the past two years.

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## SUMMARY

The sensorial experience is a significant element in Samuel Beckett's works and has led to much scholarship being done on it, with many of them particularly focusing on embodiment/disembodiment, absence/presence, and silence/sound. When discussing the spectator's sensorial experience, a notable piece of work is Antonin Artaud's concept of the Theater of Cruelty, created "in order to restore an impassioned convulsive concept of life" (Artaud 81). Cruelty here refers to a sensory disruption – a pure, detached and implacable feeling exercised in the torture and trampling down of everything (114) – using explicit and intense gestures, sounds and images to shock the spectator. It can thus be said that Artaudian cruelty works because the images presented go against the familiar to provoke such discomfort. However, I propose that Beckett's dramatic works, specifically his radio plays, demonstrate how the same can also be achieved through the opposite. Compared to Artaudian cruelty, the cruelty created in Beckett's works draws upon the minimal to provoke the same effects. This approach could possibly be more effective as there are no pre-existing images for the mind to use as a reference, relying purely on sensation. Beckett's works often rely on the unseen and unsaid, thus creating a negative space where the imagination is activated, and intuition is heightened. This thesis will therefore argue for an alternative cruelty that goes beyond the Artaudian form. It creates a sensorial experience that ultimately guides us towards an intuitive mode of spectating. Here, we are pushed to our limits to a "pure, detached and implacable feeling" (114), and towards a lived reality beyond epistemological structures when absence can mean more than presence, and where we can aspire towards an unmediated access to experience.

## **INTRODUCTION**

*“[W]hat is seeing? You’re looking, but what you’re really doing is filtering, interpreting, searching for meaning. The closer you look, the less you see”*

— LOUIS LETERRIER, *Now You See Me* (2013)

In Samuel Beckett’s body of work, much attention has been given to how the body is portrayed, their sensorial aspects, and the ways in which they contribute to Beckett’s works defying artistic conventions. However, it must be noted that these notions are largely drawn from his theater plays, rightfully so considering its place as a visual medium. As S. E. Gontarski would have it, “[t]he paradoxes of the staged body, as figure or figment, visible or invisible, on or off stage, corporeal or incorporeal, and in the later teleplays, real or electronic, are explored and exploited from his first produced play to his final teleplays” (“The Body in the Body of Beckett’s Theater” 169). The comparisons Gontarski draws center around the dichotomy of presence and absence and the way that Beckett plays with presence and absence has become a defining characteristic of his works. Thus, it is imperative that we look beyond theater. For us to have a more well-rounded understanding of what presence and absence entail, we must look at how Gontarski’s assertion extends to Beckett’s radio plays and their effect on the audience as well. For Gontarski, the medium of radio heightens the ways in which Beckett “subverted the very senses with which an audience confirms theater’s concreteness, the thereness of characters, by having the audience question what it thinks it sees, as he offers us figures who are not there” (170). In other words, Beckett’s radio plays, due to the absence of visual referents, infinitely magnify the “assault” (169) on audience expectations that his theater enacts. This thesis will hence largely focus on such observations and explore the largely agreed upon sentiment that Beckett’s works do not pander to rational thought but target the senses instead.

On the ideas of a sensory experience and an assault on audience expectations, Antonin Artaud's concept of cruelty comes to mind. While there are differences in the ways Beckett and Artaud approach the creation of a sensorial experience, echoes of the foundations of Artaudian cruelty can be found throughout Beckett's works, particularly the Artaudian thought that theater is "[i]mbued with the idea that the public thinks first of all with [their] senses", and that it is ludicrous to appeal primarily to their understanding (Artaud, "The Theater and Cruelty" 85). In other words, cruelty, as thought of by Artaud, is centered on how the audience experiences rather than what they understand. On first glance, it is evident that Artaud's brand of cruelty, marked by the use of explicit and intense gestures, sounds, and images to shock the spectator, is vastly different from the characteristically minimalist nature of Beckett's drama. Despite that, many critics have made undeniable connections between both authors, complementary or otherwise. Laurens De Vos, while acknowledging that elements of Beckett's works seem to be endowed with Artaudian cruelty, also observes that "[w]hile the free-flowing body in the Theater of Cruelty is unorganized and deprived of all orifices, in emphasizing mouth, eyes, and ears, Beckett on the contrary seems to overemphasize the corporeal transitional spaces" (270). Here, it is important to note that the bodies presented in Beckett's works are mostly fragmented and/or disabled in some way – "the ghostly division in subjectivity" (270). In being so, they often reside in closed, confined spaces (e.g. Nell, Nagg and Hamm in *Endgame*, Winnie in *Happy Days*, and the characters in *Play*). As such, orifices like the "mouth, eyes, and ears" that can still function despite confinement create detached transitional spaces that destabilize the flexible theatrical body in Artaud's works that some would call the Body without Organs. Beckett directs us to explore the in-betweenness of these transitional spaces in relation to the self, the experiential potential they might hold, and the limits they can surpass.

Following that line of thought, Daniel Katz aptly points out that Beckett “both enable[s] and disable[s] the apparently static structure of specular self-contemplation, [and] [...] defies any easy opposition between visual/aural, image/language, body/mind, or imaginary/symbolic [...]” (66), suggesting a “fascinating juxtaposition of [...] [an] Artaudian and fundamentally anti-Artaudian stance” (De Vos 272) – an argument that might be appropriate to consider in relation to the bodies both off and on stage. Therefore, this dissertation is concerned with not just the portrayal of bodies, but how the receiving body (the audience) responds; specifically, to discomfort created by silence and blindness in Beckett’s radio plays. It is therefore not a stretch to assert that while Artaud and Beckett’s methods differ, the works of both authors share a similarity in the way they invoke discomfort in their audience, which prompts an investigation into where we can locate Beckett’s own brand of cruelty that foregrounds absence over presence and consequently, a sensorial experience over a logical one.

Hence, I believe that there is a case to be made for an alternative Beckettian cruelty and key to this proposed idea, as well as this dissertation as a whole, is the notion of imagination. With imagination playing a pivotal role, I will be focusing primarily on Beckett’s radio plays as the medium itself deprives the audience of visual cues, heightening the potential of one’s imagination. That, coupled with Beckett’s characteristic silences, pushes the limits of what minimalism can achieve and what a Beckettian brand of cruelty might look like. When speaking about *All That Fall*, Beckett made it clear that his radio plays are specifically radio plays and must only be presented as such for a reason: because “[e]ven the reduced visual dimension it will receive from the simplest and most static of readings [. . .] will be destructive of whatever quality it may have and which depends on the whole thing’s coming out of the dark” (*Letters vol.3* 63). What Beckett attempts to convey here is that his radio plays were written with the intention for them to be performed without any

visual referents because to do so, even in the simplest form, would render them ineffective. It is only when they are received from “the dark” that they reach their full potential, emphasizing the role that imagination plays in the experience of his radio plays. In *Sight Unseen*, Elissa S. Guralnick points out that the ending of *All That Fall* “must disorient us in the root sense of the word” (84), echoing Laurens De Vos’s sentiment that “Beckett extends the audience in the disruption of the barrier between actors and spectators” (389). The disorientation is not only a result of visual deprivation, but also a result of the ambiguity and silence that pervades Beckett’s works, both of which are heightened by the lack of images presented to the audience. The combination of these elements provokes a certain, sometimes visceral, discomfort that stems from the inability to know and as such, foregrounds the role of imagination as a possible means to pacify the mind’s desire for knowledge. De Vos accurately notes that “Artaud seeks to transgress repetition and representation, and in doing so he inevitably encounters its very limits” (360) because his brand of cruelty ultimately belongs to the stage and its visual nature. Hence, the ambiguity of Beckett’s radio plays that gives it its boundless nature, by proxy of our imagination, can perhaps be considered a potential means to this Artaudian endeavor.

Through the course of this dissertation, I aim to not just propose Beckett’s brand of cruelty, but to also put forth the thought that the means by which Beckett provokes the audience might be potentially more effective in creating sensorial experiences than what Artaud outlines. Each chapter addresses one of three radio plays – *Embers*, *Words and Music* and *All That Fall* – and is informed by Beckett’s opinion that “writing is not *about* something, *it is that something itself*” (qtd. in Cohn 27), and the danger that lies “in the neatness of identification” (19). The focus is thus not on the script and deciphering a message within but rather, what the script and its performance manages to evoke within us. We might begin to think about Beckettian cruelty by looking at the world created in *Embers* – a “white

world, not a sound” (Beckett, *Embers* 251) – and Beckett’s invitation to “[l]isten to it! Close [our] eyes and listen to it, what would [we] think it was?”. The notion of blinding ourselves and listening to the *nothing* points us to the most important aspect of Beckettian cruelty: absence. With absence comes the opportunity for audience members to have a more well-rounded sensorial experience rather than a logical one that the human mind tends to gravitate to. Meanwhile, the relationship between the seemingly diametrically opposed titular characters in *Words and Music* prompts us to pay attention to the act of listening and the struggle of image recreation – that even with the cooperation of two ends of the spectrum, no clarity and certainty regarding “the face in the ashes” (*Words and Music* 291) can be gained. Lastly, *All That Fall* reminds us that the imaginative quality of Beckettian cruelty renders any form of proper and objective identification difficult. For instance, how can we tell if the voice of Mrs. Rooney can be heard by other characters or if it is her internal monologue? We can guess and infer but we will never know for sure. The examination of these three radio plays aims to propose an alternative Beckettian cruelty that could, as aforementioned, possibly be more effective compared to Artaudian cruelty as it does not rely on any pre-existing images for the mind to use as a reference, relying purely on sensation. Admittedly, this dissertation will only cover a small portion of what cruelty is, means, and can be, but it will also hopefully provide a starting point to push its limits. All that considered, I will ultimately argue for an alternative Beckettian cruelty that goes beyond the Artaudian form, creating a sensorial experience that ultimately guides us towards an intuitive mode of spectating. Here, we are pushed to our limits to a “pure, detached and implacable feeling” (Artaud, “Letters on Language” 114), and towards a lived reality beyond epistemological structures where absence can mean more than presence, and where we can aspire towards an unmediated access to experience. To clarify, I am not referring to an unmediated experience, for that would be impossible. Instead, an unmediated access to experience is a process that involves our own

awareness and intuitive responses, and it is this dissertation's aim to show how such a process might change spectatorship and the ways in which we interact with the environment we live in.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Artaud, Beckett, and Cruelty**

*“If our life lacks brimstone, i.e., a constant magic, it is because we choose to observe our acts and lose ourselves in considerations of their imagined form instead of being impelled by their force”*

– ANTONIN ARTAUD, *The Theater and its Doubles*

#### **1.1 Antonin Artaud and the Exploration of Cruelty**

Recent studies in Artaudian cruelty have shown a growing interest in the relevance of Artaud’s work to contemporary issues. Notable works that utilize Artaud’s work to understand their respective areas of concern include Victoria Brooks’s analysis of the courtroom environment as “a theatrical space, as well as a highly oppressive space” (334), Rick Mitchell’s study where he coins the term “epic cruelty” through his study of post-pandemic performance and how “the theatre of cruelty evokes the sort of overwhelming forces that are in play throughout much of the world today” (124), as well as Riku Roihankorpi’s proposition of eco-cruelty by using Artaudian ethics to approach the current global environmental crisis “in terms of a critical, anarchic ethos, one that reaches out to the prehistory of modern eco-cruelty” (133). Additionally, while Artaud vehemently opposed cinema as a medium of cruelty, Martine Beugnet and Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli push back against this by suggesting their ideas of pocket and para cinema as “a site of potential radical disorganisation invoked by Artaud” (68), pointing us to the possibilities of a Cinema of Cruelty, a concept that can be traced back to William Blum’s essay “Toward a Cinema of Cruelty” in 1971. While these branches of research have undoubtedly contributed much to the field of theater and spectatorship, this dissertation seeks to go back to the origins of cruelty in order to offer an alternative understanding of how cruelty might be enacted in the first place.

By studying Samuel Beckett's works, this dissertation aims to propose a Beckettian Cruelty that can stand in opposition to the Artaudian variation. To begin our investigation into what a Beckettian cruelty might entail, it is necessary to first understand how Artaud conceived and perceived cruelty. For Artaud, the concept of cruelty was conceived in relation to the theater and as such, it is widely, and very aptly, acknowledged that his works gave rise to the concept of the Theater of Cruelty. In "The Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)", Artaud puts forth the argument that "it is essential to put an end to the subjugation of the theater to the text, and to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought" (89), emphasizing how theater should not be dictated by written words (the script) or spoken words (dialogue) and that its essence lies in the expression within the given space of the stage. Cruelty thus seems to be Artaud's response to the need to go beyond the confines of what language can mean and represent; it is the creation of sensory disruption – a pure, detached and implacable feeling exercised in the torture and trampling down of everything (Artaud, "Letters on Language" 114) – through the use of explicit and intense gestures, sounds and images with the intention of shocking the spectator. Ultimately, the Theater of Cruelty was created to "restore to the theater a passionate and convulsive conception of life" ("The Theater of Cruelty" (Second Manifesto) 81) by eliminating the comfortable distance between the performer and the audience and in the process, prevent the suspension of disbelief. By all accounts, it is evident that Artaud's interest lies in appealing to the nerves and creating bodily sensations that viscerally pull one out of the status quo, rather than presenting representations of the body itself.

In 1935, Artaud staged *Les Cenci*, an adaptation of Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Cenci*. Rife with violence and taboo issues that cannot be fully expressed in words, it is clear that *Les Cenci* was staged in a way that closely adhered to Artaud's guidelines of the Theater of Cruelty, but it is crucial to note that *Les Cenci* is by no means the best example of the

concept. Even Artaud himself admitted that it was “not Theatre of Cruelty yet but [...] a preparation for it” (Artaud qtd. in Blin 103). In the opening scene, we see how Cenci immediately collapses the distance between stage and audience by breaking the fourth wall:

The difference between crimes committed in life and those on stage, is that in life we do more and say less, while on stage we talk and do very little. But I, I will restore the balance at the expense of life. [...] I shall torture the soul while enjoying the body.

And when I have done it all as well as any man, then let them accuse me of showing-off and play-acting if they can, that is, if they dare! (Artaud, *Les Cenci* 124)

By using the collective pronoun “we”, Cenci positions himself as part of the audience’s reality and vice versa, blurring the boundaries and including the audience in the play’s world, voluntarily or otherwise. This opening monologue not only serves as an introduction of what a play with cruelty at the forefront will do for the audience, it also echoes Artaud’s critique that “one of the most repellent characteristic of logocentric theater is its preoccupation with the psychological exegesis” (Goodall 118). Here, Artaud identifies a fundamental disconnect between life and what is being *presented* as life in theater – life as presented in theater has been overrun with the inherent need to understand and the search for concrete meaning. He pushes back on the human need for logic and reason and makes a case for cruelty by suggesting that theater should be a medium that is experienced and not intellectualized through conventional frameworks of understanding – it should “torture the soul” by leaving it helpless while “enjoying the body” and its experiences (Artaud, *Les Cenci* 124).

To do so, characters must speak less and act more and this results in Artaud’s stage directions in *Les Cenci* being reminiscent of what Beckett’s was known for – extremely detailed and specific. In the opening of act one scene three, Artaud’s extensive description (126) creates a turbulent environment as he references Paolo Veronese’s painting *The Wedding at Cana*. He leaves the audience with no room to breathe as the crowd on stage is

likened to being engaged in a “violent orgy” accompanied by numerous sounds of various pitches being heard all at once, creating a “spinning rhythm” that borders on sensory overload. With multiple elements fighting for attention, the spectator can only watch and attempt to take in what is being presented to them. When reading the script, there is a particular emphasis on how sound is used to create the unease that the Theater of Cruelty is known for. In terms of creating the play’s environment, Artaud notes that “it was impossible in *Les Cenci* to use direct sound. To equal the vibrations of a cathedral bell, [he] had to record the bell of Amiens Cathedral with a microphone” (qtd. in Blin 103) and these would be played on speakers placed all over the auditorium, making it “the first time stereophonic sound was used in the theatre” (Blin 110). This heightens tension by literally surrounding and enveloping the audience with sound, tightening the distance between them and the stage and creating an almost suffocating atmosphere. Moreover, Roger Désormière, the music director of *Les Cenci*, shifted away from the conventional four or eight-beat rhythm and experimented with “seven-beat Inca rhythm[s]” (Artaud, *Les Cenci* 152). Combined, these two methods of delivering sound undermine the traditional expectations of theater and confront the audience with the unfamiliar.

Other than sounds from the play’s environment, we must also look at the sounds, or the lack thereof, produced during character interactions. One interesting choice on Artaud’s end is his choice to include “[a] considerable amount of dummies” (126) and characterize the assassins as “mutes” (141). He justifies this choice by asserting that the dummies and the mute assassins in *Les Cenci* are present to “make the heroes of the play say what is disturbing them and what is impossible in ordinary speech” (Artaud qtd. in Blin 104) – they target the senses by becoming proxies to commit distressing acts and express that which is unspeakable. During the attempt on Cenci’s life, the assassins continuously move on and off stage, directing the audience to pay attention to everything they see and/or hear on and off stage.

These sounds layer upon each other and we are met with “[a] deathly silence” (145), a “long pause”, “groan[s]”, “[t]he sound of panic-stricken running, mimes from the assassins and “[a] loud cry” (146), all culminating in the assassins entering “covered in blood” and “terrifying fanfares” as Cenci appears holding his right eye. Even though this scene is percolated by dialogue from Beatrice and Lucretia, it does not take away from the confusion and disorientation unleashed upon the audience as they try to keep up, only to be faced with the ghostly image of a gory scene accompanied by ominous fanfares. This haunting image persists as we recall Cenci’s declaration in the first act that “[t]here is no life, no death [...] in my existence” (123) – what then are we seeing? In Robert Vork’s study of the unspeakable subjective annihilation in *Les Cenci*, he explores characters like Cenci and Beatrice and how they present as “evacuated, empty shells driven by abstract, agentless forces – people transfigured as abject marionettes in the place where a subject’s thoughts and feelings might and should have been” (317). Vork’s reference to such “forces” calls to mind the irresistible “forces burning with violence inside me” (Artaud, *Les Cenci* 123) that Cenci speaks of in the first act. When read that way, Cenci becomes a potential vessel to explore the surrender of the subject to the violence of cruelty, literal or otherwise, as he is now “a monstrous non-being, a thing that always was neither alive nor dead [...] driven forward, staggering and blind, by what might be inferred as torment or hunger in the place of a subject, but there is no subject” (Vork 318). Like Cenci, an audience of the Theater of Cruelty must stumble through what they bear witness to, be “wholly void of agency or will” and let themselves be (figuratively) brutalized.

However, as mentioned earlier, *Les Cenci* is not the perfect theater of cruelty; it was in fact considered, by the public, as a failure and a disappointment. In the introduction to *Antonin Artaud Selected Writings*, Susan Sontag points out the fundamental flaws in Artaud’s staging:

The *Cenci* is not a very good play, even by the standards of convulsive dramaturgy which Artaud sponsored, and the interest of his production of *The Cenci*, by all accounts, lay in **ideas it suggested but did not actually embody**. [...] He has exerted influence through his ideas about the theater, a constituent part of **the authority of these ideas being precisely his inability to put them into practice** (Sontag xliii; emphasis mine).

Despite Artaud's attempt to actualize his theories, *Les Cenci* ultimately fell into the trap it was supposed to avoid: the reliance on a prevailing system. Even though there were instances where we see cruelty at work, dialogue between characters is expository and advances a narrative; there is a logical flow for the audience to follow. Violence in the play generates the shock factor of cruelty but since the basic expectations of theater are still met, the audience still has something to hold on to and rationalize the violence they see on stage. As a result, senses are not disrupted, and cruelty has failed to achieve its goal. As Roger Blin rightfully observes, "*Les Cenci* was for [Artaud] only a means toward making the public aware of his ideas concerning Theatre of Cruelty, concerning the word, gesture, certain little-known musical traditions" (110). Put simply, *Les Cenci* is a play that follows the Theater of Cruelty textbook but leaves out the essence of what makes cruelty cruel.

However, another opportunity would soon arise. In 1936, the year after the failure of *Les Cenci*, Artaud embarked on a trip to Mexico to witness that demonic reality in a still existing "primitive" culture (Sontag xlv), a culture that would come to permeate one of his last works, *To Have Done with the Judgement of God* – the radio play that is perhaps the epitome of what the Theater of Cruelty stands for. To understand how the "trampling down of everything" (Artaud, "Letters on Language" 114) creates cruelty, we must first understand why such an act is necessary. Published in 1947 after spending years in mental asylums, *To Have Done With the Judgement of God* bombards the audience with unnerving sounds,

screams and cries, as well as explicit material derived from things like sex (Artaud 555), fecality (559) and blood (560); the body is not represented and understood by the system of language but is instead invoked and aims to be viscerally felt. The body of the performer thus becomes the site of what Artaud terms the “spectacle” (“The Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)” 98) where “[t]he problem is to make space speak” rather than direct it to recite what is written on the script – it does not represent life, it *is* life. In the opening of *To Have Done With the Judgement of God*, the narrator highlights the tension between the feeling body and organized systems through the haunting image of American military artificially creating soldiers by using sperm collected from school children:

It seems that, among the examinations or tests required of a child entering public school for the first time, there is the so-called seminal fluid or sperm test,

which consists of asking this newly entering child for a small amount of his sperm so it can be placed in a jar

and kept ready for any attempts at artificial insemination that might later take place.

[...]

of all the vile synthetic substitutes

in which beautiful real nature has no part,

and must give way finally and shamefully before all the victorious substitute products

in which the sperm of all the artificial insemination factories will make a miracle

in order to produce armies and battleships.

No more fruit, no more trees, no more vegetables, no more plants

pharmaceutical or otherwise and consequently no more food, but synthetic products to satiety

(Artaud, *To Have Done With the Judgement of God* 555 – 6)

Here, the narrator first incites discomfort by drawing connections between sexual reproductive functions and children – two images that, when placed together, bring about disdain and negative perceptions. However, what this achieves is a return to nature (the body’s natural function) and the primal (the child), making what follows even more jarring. The process described above shows us that not only are natural human processes such as reproduction industrialized, but they have also been weaponized to create rogue “miracle[s]”. Introducing such a system to the natural body inevitably distorts and corrupts it, resulting in “vile synthetic substitutes” that are contrived and eventually, fail to sustain life. As the narrator announces in the later part of the play: “[m]an is sick because he is badly constructed” (570) because a body manufactured by institutions and systems like words and language is a body that will forever be synthetic and stagnant. In the context of Artaudian cruelty, the scene can hence be understood as a microcosm of the issue Artaud has with language undermining the immediate bodily experience because by using language to represent something, it ends up replacing what it attempts to represent. In “Letters on Language”, Artaud puts forth an “elementary truth” (106): for “independent and autonomous art” such as theater to live and endure, it must “realize what differentiates it from text, pure speech, literature, and all other fixed and written means”. To Artaud, for theater to depict life, it must remain free from systemic organization and representation.

As such, while it might seem that the Theater of Cruelty is Artaud’s solution to the struggle between the body and systems, it is important to note that “[t]he theater of cruelty is not a *representation*. It is life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable. Life is the nonrepresentable origin of representation” (Derrida 294). This is where the crux of the

Theater of Cruelty lies. If the body cannot be represented linguistically, then it must be felt; not just fleetingly but deep in the guts – it must have the ability to remove expectations and shock the audience out of their systems of understanding because “[f]or the theater to become an essentially psychological matter, [...] is nothing but the perversion on the stage of the idea of concentration” (Artaud, “Letters on Language” 106). To achieve this “idea of concentration”, the audience must completely detach themselves from existing systems of thought and logic and submit themselves to their senses. However, that is not to say that Artaud insists on divorcing the mind from the body. On the contrary, he asserts that “[o]ne does not separate the mind from the body nor the senses from the intelligence” but instead, recognizes that “the endlessly renewed fatigue of the organs requires intense and **sudden shocks** to revive our understanding” (“The Theater and Cruelty” 86; emphasis mine). The idea of shocking the audience into concentration is prevalent and one that can only be felt when listening to a recording of *To Have Done With the Judgement of God*. In the script, the play begins with comprehensible words flanked by gibberish ones in bold:

kré		pue te
kré	Everything must	puk te
pek	be arranged	li le
kre	to a hair	pek ti le
e	in a fulminating	kruk
pte	order.	

(*To Have Done With the Judgement of God* 555)

These lines act as a directive for the rest of the script, ordering them to be organized in a way that vehemently resists order, an ironic parody of the system of language. However, when listening to this opening segment in the recording (00:20 – 04:09), none of the distinctively intelligible words can be heard. Instead, we get a mix of garbled cries against the backdrop of

a somewhat deranged song, creating an unexpected and disturbing dissonance that shocks the audience's senses and compels them to focus by evoking curiosity. These cries recur throughout the play, acting as a motif for the breakdown of language. This then becomes a case of how, as Gilles Deleuze argues in *The Logic of Sense*, "[t]he word expresses an attribute of the state of affairs; its fragments merge with unbearable sonorous qualities, invade the body where they form a mixture and a new state of affairs, [...] a pure language-affect is substituted for the effect of language" (88). Language in *To Have Done with the Judgement of God* is hence destabilized as linguistic order is subverted, becoming a weapon of affect. Such an act shocks the audience out of their desire to logically understand such a play, ultimately prompting them to physically react, connect, and be invested in what they are listening to in the most primal of ways.

While Artaud was right to say that the cruelty in *Les Cenci* "is not a purely corporal cruelty but a moral one" (qtd. in Blin 107), it is perhaps this mixup that resulted in *Les Cenci* missing the mark because the need to convey a moral message exists. It is then in *To Have Done With the Judgement of God* that we can clearly witness Artaudian cruelty in its rawest form and how it "goes to the limits of instinct" by pushing the limits of how much the audience can tolerate. More importantly, we see how it embodies Artaud's assertion that when cruelty acts against the spectator, "it must not permit him to leave the theatre intact, but he also must be exhausted, involved, transformed, perhaps!" (107). Experiencing *To Have Done With the Judgement of God* demands a certain mental stamina; it requires one to abandon their existing frameworks of understanding, to throw themselves into the mess of it all, and above all, it requires one to feel without being able to understand. The difference in Artaud's two experiments of cruelty is obvious: cruelty reaches its peak when the act of defying theatrical conventions is taken to the extreme.

## 1.2 Playing with Imagination: Cruelty in the Beckettian World

While Artaud's brand of cruelty has opened doors to new experiences of theater and sensorial spectatorship, his ideas on how to enact cruelty are clearly delineated, relying largely on highly graphic and explicit disturbances. One cannot help but wonder if cruelty can be evoked in a completely opposite manner: through the minimal. It goes without saying that one cannot discuss minimalism in theater without bringing up Samuel Beckett. In the introduction to this dissertation, I discussed how scholars are very much aware that Artaud's brand of cruelty is vastly different from the characteristically minimalist nature of Beckett's drama and despite that, many critics have made sound connections between both writers. Drawing on Laurens De Vos's work, I suggest that Beckett's emphasis on "corporeal transitional spaces" (De Vos 270) create detached transitional spaces that destabilize the flexible theatrical body in Artaud's works. This section aims to begin our inquiry into a Beckettian cruelty that rests on the minimal by discussing what the appearance of the spaces might mean and the effects they can have on the spectator.

Looking at the analyses of *Les Cenci* and *To Have Done With the Judgement of God*, the common thread tying them both seems to be the invitation to imagine and how such an invitation can enact cruelty – this will form the basis for one of the key tenets of the Beckettian cruelty this dissertation is proposing. One of the reasons the Theater of Cruelty seeks to dismantle language is, as Artaud has pointed out, that "[w]e have overaccustomed the theater to a lack of curiosity and above all of imagination" ("Letters on Language" 118). It is hence not a stretch to say that a large part of what makes cruelty work is imagination because without any explanation or forms of understanding, the human mind wanders and imagines filling in the gap, usually in extremes to satisfy the hunger for knowledge. For example, when presented with the cries and demented song at the beginning of *To Have Done With the Judgement of God*, we instinctively think of the worst, and this is most definitely in

line with Artaud's sentiment on how cruelty's effect on the audience can bring back the essence of theater:

The theater will never find itself again [...] except by furnishing the spectator with the truthful precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism, pour out, on a level not counterfeit and illusory, but interior. (Artaud, "The Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)" 92)

Here, it is evident that Artaud has a desire to draw out the primal nature and instinct of humans through theater and that theater should act on and attend to human interiority. It is his belief that theater should reassert all aspects of both the "objective and descriptive external world" and man's internal metaphysical world, and these are fundamental to propounding "the rights of the imagination" (92) which is a concept central to Artaud's theories.

However, Artaud's concept of cruelty has a fundamental irony embedded in it – Artaudian cruelty relies on extreme graphic quality of sound and image but by doing so, it also depends on creating and imprinting new and existing images in our minds. In other words, even though the senses are shocked, they are shocked because they oppose familiar images and sounds – there is still a reference point. While it achieves the intended effect of cruelty, there is still some form of stability present because the audience has an original, unshocking source of the sound and/or image to go back to – Artaudian cruelty is attempting to create a sensory experience emerging within existing conventions. Yet, that is not to say that Artaudian cruelty is invalid or that imagination is not at work here; they are both valid and engaged but perhaps not at their full potential. How then might one exercise imagination and test its limits when there is an existing visual representation and point of reference?

We might find a recourse to that in Samuel Beckett's work and the kind of cruelty that could emerge from them. As a writer that constantly pushes boundaries and favors silence

and emptiness, Beckett's drama – from stage to radio – is undoubtedly one that encourages imagination, particularly through the experiments with subjectivity and disembodiment that prevail throughout his oeuvre. To understand the effects such experiments might have, we must first look at the body and its role in theater. Souzita Goudouna observes that “[t]he body of the actor has a privileged status in theatrical representation; it introduces presence and actuality on stage; it also constitutes the subject, as the experiencing agent of the dramatic phenomenon” (121) before going on to state that “[t]he ‘live’ immediacy of the performer, the unmediated unfolding of dramatic action and the ‘liveliness’ generated through an actor-audience relationship are among the notions frequently used to explain theatrical experience, and are all underpinned by a specific understanding of ‘presence’” (122). In other words, the actor's body plays two roles: 1) it acts as a vessel for the audience to immerse themselves into the play's world and 2) it denotes existence and consequently, materiality of a character. Hence, Beckett's decision to present characters as fragmented or disembodied disrupts the assurance of a conventional theatrical experience. This exposes an issue that Drew Leder discusses in his book *The Absent Body*, where he remarks that even though “the body is the most abiding and inescapable presence in our lives, it is also essentially characterized by absence” (Leder 1). The absence that Leder refers to is how we are rarely aware of our own bodily states as we move through life's experience because of our tendencies to think about our reality in terms of ideas and concepts with little attention being paid to “physical sensations and posture”. As Beckett's works resist such conventional categorisation, we might begin to view them as a way to negotiate this absence.

While this dissertation intends to focus on Beckett's radio plays to establish Beckettian cruelty, we must not neglect to discuss his stage plays as well. With Beckett's stage plays, instances of subjectivity and disembodiment are naturally more prominent due to the medium's visual nature. The characters brought up in the introduction of this dissertation

(Nell, Nagg and Hamm from *Endgame*, Winnie from *Happy Days* and the characters in *Play*) are some examples of how disembodiment plays out in Beckett's drama. But one of the most notable images across Beckett's works is that of the lone mouth in *Not I* positioned above the stage and reciting an almost incantatory speech, an effect created by the endless use of ellipses in the script. While ellipses would traditionally indicate breaks, the fact that they permeate the entire play negates this function and ironically, devoids it of formal breaks. Moreover, no proper sentences can be formed and the play fails to make syntactical and linguistic sense. Combined with Mouth's stream of consciousness-like speech, the audience gets an overwhelming sense of breathlessness and claustrophobia as they are bombarded by words from a mouth that is relentless. While it can be argued that stage directions such as "[*Pause and movement*]" (Beckett, *Not I* 377, 379, 381, 382) may provide a brief respite, this deceiving stage direction amplifies the overwhelming effect words can have instead. As Mouth resumes speaking, the audience must scramble to refocus and their senses are reattacked by the thing they seemingly escaped from.

Disembodiment is taken a step further in Beckett's 1969 play *Breath* as we are denied the image of a physical body on stage. The play contains no dialogue at all and the only things the audience can hear are two instances of a "[f]aint brief cry" that is specified to be an "[i]nstant of recorded vagitus" (*Breath* 371). This emptiness extends to the staging as well as the set features a simple faint light on a "stage littered with miscellaneous rubbish". According to the script, *Breath* runs for approximately 35 seconds, a far cry from typical plays. In the filmed version directed by Damien Hirst for *Beckett on Film*, we can hear struggles during both cries, stirring up unease within us as we are unable to ignore it. With nothing to focus on but inanimate objects, the sound of the cry in an extremely intimate moment (birth) feels almost intrusive, as if we are trampling on the vulnerability of that moment. Goudouza accurately points out that "[t]here is an essential absence and lack of the

subject, theatrical character and subjecthood” (123) but, as Les Essif points out in his book *Empty Figure on an Empty Stage*, the emptiness in Beckett’s plays “force the fundamental invisibility of exterior things till that very invisibility becomes itself a thing, not just awareness of limits but a thing that can be seen and made seen” (58). A physical absence does not constitute total absence and the fact that we can hear the breath is itself an indication of existence. Furthermore, the paradox here is that absence draws attention to itself and at times makes itself the subject. In *Breath*, the absence of a physical body, coupled with silence, creates an ambiguity that is characteristic of Beckett’s works. We have no preceding information to infer who, what, or where the cries come from, and any kind of imagination and guesswork we engage in will remain unfulfilled because the play does not provide any form of closure either. Unlike *Not I*, we are not even given language, garbled or otherwise, to depend on for some form of familiarity. The emptiness on stage extends itself to our body and we are at its mercy because all we can do is sit with it. This is a brief example of what Beckettian cruelty looks like. It is thus evident, through the examples of *Not I* and *Breath*, that silence and emptiness in Beckett’s work have the potential to create a more understated form of cruelty by making themselves the subject and enhancing discomfort, forcing the audience to sit in stillness and the ensuing unease.

Beckett’s efforts to utilize stillness and silence in his works have no doubt restored a certain organic element to theater. Stanton B. Garner Jr notes that Beckett created a shift towards a theater that explores “the activity lodged within stillness and to sound the depths of visual latency. The result [. . .] is to etch the contours of performance even more within the spectator and to replace a theatre of activity, with a theatre of perception, guided by the eye and its efforts to see” (371). In other words, the stillness in Beckett’s works is not redundant but instead necessary because they contain layers that primarily work to heighten the spectator’s focus because of their need to perceive something or anything. Stillness here thus

involves the audience so much so that the play imprints itself onto them. This is very much in line with Artaud's proposition on theater needing an "idea of concentration" ("Letters on Language" 106) mentioned earlier. To take this a step further, I will be drawing on Anthony Kubiak's assertion that Beckett reveals the most vital moments of theatrical perception – the moment where one questions what is *it* that makes *it* theater and the moment where the mind's eye perceives itself seeing (107). Activating the mind's eye makes Beckett's corpus apt to delve deeper into other possibilities of cruelty because not only do they invoke imagination, but they also encourage it.

### 1.3 "A white world": The Inner Touch of *Embers*

With *Breath*, the level of destabilization and discomfort created puts it near the pinnacle of what emptiness does in the Beckettian world. When we consider how Beckett intended for it to be staged, the parallels with the radio medium are obvious – in a dark auditorium, the absence of a physical actor/human form, and making sure the audience is only attuned to the sounds heard. What this means is that it is within radio plays that the highest potential of Beckettian cruelty lies – if a play with a visual element, albeit just rubbish strewn across the stage, can produce the similar effects of cruelty, then eradicating the visual entirely could uncover new prospects of cruelty. This section, and the sections that follow, will each study different radio plays with the aim of establishing three tenets of what I propose Beckettian cruelty to be: imagination and the senses, absence and ambiguity, and imagination and openness. Starting with *Embers*, this section will take a closer look at how Beckett's radio plays create a sensorial experience as they put our imagination to work.

Written in 1957 and first broadcasted in 1959, *Embers* was what Beckett thought of as "a rather ragged text" (Knowlson 829) but despite that, its abundant, almost Pinteresque, number of pauses and layers of imagination at work make for an interesting study from the

perspective of cruelty. Composed mainly of two monologues and a conversation, *Embers* sees its protagonist Henry recalling his memories with his father, his wife Ada, and his daughter Addie in an attempt to deal with his father's disappearance/apparent death. The play begins with sounds such as the “[s]ea scarcely audible” and “HENRY's boots on shingle” (Beckett, *Embers* 253), creating a tactile soundscape and prompting spectators to exercise their imagination from the start. Additionally, since the radio medium devoids spectators of their sense of sight, other senses, as well as the imagination, are heightened as the spectator experiences the work without any visual referents – is it day or night? Is Henry alone? Where is Henry in relation to the sea? How rough are the seas? These are just some questions that do not have a definite answer and can only possibly be answered as we listen to *Embers* unfold because with no visual elements, it is up to us to create the play in our own minds according to our interpretation of what we hear. Throughout the play, iterations of the phrase “white world, not a sound” repeat themselves six times (255, 256, 263), signalling the way in which we should approach the play – as a blank slate. This also bears a striking resemblance to the minimal nature of the Beckettian landscape and how it invites us to “[l]isten to it! Close [our] eyes and listen to it” and question “what would [we] think it was?” (255). This is emphasized in the numerous instances where Henry desperately exclaims “[l]isten to it!” (253, 255, 256, 258, 261). Sometimes he gets a response from Ada but when he does not, it appears as though he is shouting into the void, and we find ourselves wondering whether it is us that he is imploring to listen. But in the Beckettian landscape where everything is notoriously defamiliarized and unstable, it is impossible for one to be sure of anything or even attempt to “think” and process anything rationally. Furthermore, the notion of blinding ourselves and listening to the *nothing* foregrounds absence over presence and because of that, a sensorial experience over a logical one, paralleling the Artaudian sentiment that cruelty is “[i]mbued with the idea that the public thinks first of all with [their] senses” and that to appeal primarily

to their understanding is ludicrous (Artaud, “The Theater and Cruelty” 85). Beckett creates works that align with this sentiment because encountering a Beckett work involves feeling and experiencing alongside its characters.

The act of listening plays a significant role in *Embers* not simply because it is a radio play, but because it is intrinsically linked to a character’s existence. We might find a plausible explanation for Henry’s desperation to be listened to in the opening monologue where he expresses a desire for his narration to be heard:

Stories, stories, years and years of stories, till the need came on me, for someone, to be with me, anyone, a stranger, to talk to, imagine he hears me, years of that, and then, now, for someone who ... knew me, in the old days, anyone, to be with me, imagine he hears me, what I am, now. [Pause.] No good either. [Pause.] Not there either. [Pause.] Try again. [Pause.] White world, not a sound. [Pause.]. (255)

This is preceded by Henry exclaiming “Father!” before a pause with the stage direction indicating that he is agitated (255), attracting our attention and building tension at the same time. Given that this is a radio play, we are forced to concentrate more than usual as compared to stage plays because what we hear is all we have. As Henry’s slight outburst from before startles and directs our attention to him, we are made to focus even more on this moment and what he says. This is not simply a moment of rumination but rather, a moment that positions the audience as a confidant and entrenches them further into the play. What is notable here is that Henry is under the impression that no one is listening to him even though later dialogue indicates that Ada should have been present with him as she has been there for “[s]ome little time” (257).

However, one crucial thing to note is that we cannot ascertain the extent to which Henry’s father and Ada are physically present with Henry. Regarding Henry’s father, the

audience hears nothing – be it dialogue or sounds from engaging in activities like walking – from him at all. Even Henry acknowledges that his father “must hear [him]” but “he doesn’t answer [him]” (253). Henry’s father’s existence is only made possible through Henry’s words. Likewise, even though Ada’s lines are audible to the audience, there is “[n]o sound as she sits” (257), affirming that she is not physically there with Henry. Ulrika Maude observes that because “sound is by nature wandering and centrifugal, it carries the auditor away [and] make the subject wander, dissolving semblances of stable identity” (59) and in James Jesson’s essay “‘White World. Not a Sound’: Beckett’s Radioactive Text in *Embers*”, he postulates that Ada “is a ghost contrived from a combination of memory and imagination” (53). In other words, she only exists in Henry’s mind and is constructed from his recollections. Ada’s non-physical existence exposes the levels of imagination at work because as a product of Henry’s imagination, this also means that she is then a manifestation of how we imagine Henry to be imagining her. By extension, our act of imagining continuously breathes life into the play and in turn, gives rise to Henry’s presence as well; his existence depends on how much the audience lets themselves engage with the play.

One noteworthy moment of imagination is when Henry heads towards the sea and Ada calls him back by persuading him to not “wet [his] good boots” (Beckett, *Embers* 259). Henry then repeats “don’t” twice, triggering a memory that seemingly takes him back to the past as we hear Ada from “[t]wenty years earlier” (260). The scene that ensues remains ambiguous as we simply get short cries of “Don’t!” and “Darling!” between the two, leaving everything up to the imagination and our interpretation. Even so, considering how the sea suddenly becomes “rough”, the adjectives used to describe the tone of the exchange – “urgent”, “more feebly” and “exultantly” – and Ada’s cry as the sea is “amplified” then abruptly cut off, suggests that this exchange bears sexual undertones. The intimate nature of this scene causes us to feel uneasy as we feel like we are intruding on a private moment,

albeit via our imaginations, and the juxtaposition of Henry's exultant tone and Ada's cry prompts us to question the nature of one of the rawest and most vulnerable encounters in the play. This moment dissipates as quickly as it jolts us out of the calm nature of the preceding scene, leaving us hanging and perplexed. Here, it is precisely imagination that heightens discomfort because we are made to perceive how such an ambiguous scene might play out.

While imagination is rampant in Beckett's works, it is the idea of combining imagination and perception that is key to activating the senses in them. In Daniel Heller-Roazen's *The Inner Touch*, he discusses one specific sense that cannot be reduced to one of the five senses: the sense of being sentient. He questions what our lived realities might look like if "the activities of awareness and self-awareness attributed to the modern faculty were forms not of cognition but rather, [...] of sensation?" ("The Primary Power" 40). *The Inner Touch* is essentially Heller-Roazen's attempt to challenge the Cartesian claim of cogito, ergo sum (I think therefore I am) by putting forth the idea of a common sense. Rather than the conventional meaning of the term that relates to having good sense and sound judgment, Heller-Roazen's idea of the common sense refers to the very ability to sense – it is this ability that roots (and unites) all other senses and above all, it lays the foundation of one's self. While this might seem like an abstract concept, I will attempt to expound on and locate the common sense in Beckett's works, arguably best illustrated through the role that the sea plays in *Embers*. Vital to this discourse is the fact that the sea that can be heard in the background throughout the play. Though faint, it is "*audible throughout what follows whenever pause indicated*" (Beckett, *Embers* 253), making it a play full of sound because the pauses here do not really mean total silence. Henry reaffirms the sea's presence as he tells us that "[t]he sound [we] hear is the sea" and the sound of the sea is unlike any other ambiguous sounds "that if [we] didn't see what it was [we] wouldn't know what it was" (253). The emphasis placed on the sea positions it as more than just white noise but a salient facet of the play.

That, coupled with it being the only constant and consistent element, the sea itself should be considered and read as a character on its own. The sea appears to be inextricably tied to Henry as the sound it makes fluctuates according to Henry's narration and emotions; it is the primary entity of sensorial communication.

As Henry gets more emotionally turbulent, the sea responds accordingly and even reinforces it by growing rougher and louder, becoming a source of tension in the play. In his essay "Samuel Beckett's *Embers*: 'A Matter of Fundamental Sounds'", Clas Zilliacus echoes a similar sentiment as he observes how Henry has no choice between sound and silence because "[w]here his voice ends, the sound of the sea takes over, distorted but inescapable", creating an "auditory antagonism between voice and sea [that] constitutes the chief element of tension in *Embers*" (221). It is almost as if the sea is an open grave for Henry's father, mocking his inability to find closure and peace, effectively imprisoning Henry and by extension the audience in an inescapable loop of desperation. Henry's words thus become his way of avoiding, successfully or not, what the sea confronts him with because "every syllable is a second gained" (Beckett, *Embers* 262). Like *Not I*, the pauses do not provide respite but instead, they carry any residual tension over to the audience. The pauses thus become a means to counter the "obstinacy in making characters talk about feelings, passions, desires, and impulses of a strictly psychological order, in which a single word is to compensate for innumerable gestures" (Artaud, "Letters on Language" 118), providing "a silence in it in which we could listen more closely to life". They are pockets in which we can explore our own interiorities and be conscious of the way we take in all that we encounter.

Despite the arguments made, I recognize that calling *Embers* a play that is filled with sound might sound contradictory to what this thesis is founded upon, but it is the silence in the pauses that allows the sea to constantly antagonize both Henry and the audience. Maude identifies *Embers* as a play that "thematizes hearing" more so than Beckett's other radio plays

because Henry “spends his time listening to diverse sounds” (57). The sound of the sea produces a certain form of auditory tactility and as it rises and falls with Henry’s emotions, we too experience the emotional chaos that Henry does. For Henry, the sea is real but for us, the sounds provided to us by the play allows us to “sense the tangible” (Heller-Roazen, “The Aesthetic Animal” 28). Using the scene of the memory Henry recalls with Ada from twenty years ago as an example, the sea picks up and suddenly gets rough (Beckett, *Embers* 260) right after Henry says “Don’t, don’t...” and before the voice from past Ada is heard, indicating an acceleration of the narrative’s pace because Henry’s words have triggered a memory of emotional intensity within himself. Thereafter, Henry’s ruminating tone is replaced by Ada’s pressing “Don’t! Don’t!”, shocking the audience as it aligns itself with the rough seas that serve as the background for the ensuing exchange that reaches a climax as it is further amplified and finally “*cut off*” after Ada cries out, substantiating this scene as a sexually charged one. This is perhaps the only instance where we have an indication of complete silence as even the sea cannot be heard, making this moment even more gripping as it remains vivid in our minds and suspense lingers in the air. Considering the sensorial nature of the exchange, it is likely that such an intense moment will incite a physical reaction from the audience and the sharp dip after ensures that such reactions linger and do not get a chance to taper off. This mimics the listening experience because as we sit and experience *Embers* the way Beckett intended his radio plays to be experienced – “coming out of the dark” (*Letters vol.3* 63), the environment confines us and forces us to sit with everything we felt, feel and will feel; it is to us what the sea is to Henry.

When the spectator is enveloped by darkness, they become hyper aware of not just what they hear but what they feel and how they feel it as well. Turning back to Heller-Roazen’s idea of the common sense, his discussion on the connection between sensation, subjectivity and one’s lived experience reveals the issues that have been arising in the

contemporary moment. According to him, the contemporary moment is marked by the disappearance of the common sense, the inner touch that links sensation to subjectivity. Heller-Roazen points out that there has been an increasing number of people who report feeling disconnected from the world and their experience of it, and this can manifest in a variety of ways ranging from depersonalization to dissociation. He then questions: “Are the great affects of the twentieth century, the sensible impressions discovered then and not before, not all feelings of the progressive retreat and vanishing of all feeling?” (“The Anaesthetic Animal” 289). Perhaps what he is trying to get at is not so much what affect can do for us but rather, how it provides a way for us to navigate our own contemporary moments and situations by being aware of how we feel and interact with everything we encounter.

As acknowledged before, radio plays such as *Embers* might not be the prime example of the Beckettian cruelty this dissertation proposes but what it does is activate the spectator’s imagination to the highest potential. Radio is a medium where voices are disembodied, freeing the self from the physical body for both the actor and the spectator and in *Embers* particularly, the onus is on the spectator to create a presence for characters whose presence remain ambiguous like Ada and Henry’s father. In the process, the connections and sensations it creates revitalizes “the inner touch” because our abilities to perceive not just the text, but ourselves as well, are put to the test. That said, *Embers* merely serves as the starting point for the potential that Beckettian cruelty can achieve, which the following chapters will continue to probe.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Establishing Beckett's Brand of Cruelty in his Radio Plays**

*"We are so accustomed to disguise ourselves to others that in the end, we become disguised to ourselves."*

— FRANCOIS DE LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

#### **2.1 Uncertainty: Words *and* Music or Words *versus* Music?**

Building on arguments made in the previous chapter about *Embers*, this chapter will take a closer look at what absence in Beckett's works would entail in the context of this dissertation through his 1961 radio play *Words and Music*. This chapter will focus on exploring how uncertainty manifests itself in *Words and Music* before studying how the clashing relationship between its titular characters create a form of cruelty that emphasizes absence over presence, deviating from what Artaud initially outlines in his proposition for cruelty. *Words and Music* sees a discordant, almost hostile relationship between the personified characters of Words and Music play out. On one hand, Words, also named Joe, takes on the authorial responsibility of creating words and performing them – he brings them into being and concretizes them through the system of language. On the other hand, Music, named Bob, embodies the different roles associated with music performance such as the conductor and the orchestra. More importantly, he is also the composer responsible for creating music and score – a process that can be expressed but not represented. These two characters operate under the orders of Croak, a master figure that derives pleasure from them working together. Focusing on the act of listening and the struggle of image recreation, this chapter will also delve deeper into the discomfort that arises from uncertainty caused by absence and how such an uncertainty points us to the notion of thinking with our senses.

When experiencing *Embers*, or any radio play for that matter, the non-visual nature of the medium means that imagination is paramount. While the previous chapter scrutinized how imagination leads to visceral sensations on the audience's part, this chapter aims to study

the nuances of this effect and put it in the context of cruelty. While a purely sensational experience is favored, it is near impossible to achieve because of the innate human gravitation towards reason despite our conscious attempts to let it go. Hence, we must acknowledge that imagination in cruelty is not purely sensation-based and that the aim is not to divorce these two elements but rather, look for ways in which they can work together. Artaud writes that cruelty synthesizes the right (intuitive) and left (logical) sides of the mind to allow “[t]he reality of the imagination and dreams [to] appear there on equal footing with life” (“The Theater of Cruelty (Second Manifesto” 123), suggesting that his form of cruelty allows the mind to create a middle ground that “restore[s] a passionate and convulsive conception of life” (122). The discord between the titular characters in *Words and Music* allows for the logic-intuition dichotomy identified by Artaud to be loosely mapped onto them – Words/Joe as logic and reason, and Music/Bob as intuition. To understand how music can be considered as adjacent to intuition, I look to Arthur Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation*, where he explains how “[t]he inexpressible depth of all music, by virtue of which it floats past us as a paradise quite familiar and yet eternally remote, and is so easy to understand and yet so inexplicable, is due to the fact that it reproduces all the emotions of our innermost being, but entirely without reality and remote from its pain” (264). Music expresses itself in a seemingly universal language, but it is also a language that does not rely on a fixed system of representation but instead, on one’s feelings and instinct based on their own lived experiences – it is something that is expressed and not defined. As such, there is an uncertainty associated with music that directly contributes to the tension between Words and Music in the play.

While Beckett wrote the words (i.e the script) to *Words and Music*, he suggested that Morton Feldman should compose the music to it, resulting in the first full performance of *Words and Music* nearly 20 years later, at the American Beckett Festival of Radio Plays in

1987. Beckett's willingness to relinquish partial control of one of his works to Feldman might seem unusual until we consider how he once wrote and sent a piece of text entitled *Neither* to Feldman without any prior knowledge of his works. Coincidentally, Beckett heard one of Feldman's pieces on the radio a few days later and took a liking to it (Knowlson 1166). Feldman's approach to music involves "'unfixing' the elements traditionally used to construct a piece of music" to let "the sounds exist in themselves - not as symbols, or memories which were memories of other music to begin with" (Feldman 21). Music independent of any structures, systems or predetermined message is what Feldman strove towards. In this sense, his principles might seem complementary to the idea of music acting on intuition – feeling rather than understanding – as well as Beckett's general concerns presented in his works. However, as Catherine Laws points out, Feldman might have seemed like an inappropriate composer for *Words and Music* specifically because "the *Words and Music* commission required him to respond musically to specific words, and the fact that many of these involved emotional concepts must have made the job even more strange for a composer whose music challenges absolutely the notion that the prime function of music is the evocation of emotions" ("Music in 'Words and Music'" 281). We might also regard Laws's observation of the potential incompatibility between the play and Feldman's composition as one that also mirrors the disharmonious relationship between Words and Music.

Referring to the logic/understanding and intuition dichotomy, it is inevitable that Words and Music will be incompatible, and this can be, in part, attributed to each character's perception of uncertainty. This incompatibility is already foregrounded from the start when Music begins with a "[s]mall orchestra softly tuning up" (Beckett, *Words and Music* 287) and Words's constant plea while the tuning gets louder, as if he is beseeching Music to stop. As the tuning dies off, Words asks: "How much longer cooped up here in the dark? [*With*

*loathing.*] With you!”. The dark is often associated with the unknown because it strips one of their sense of sight and it is impossible to tell what is present within it. By bringing up a desire to escape the dark, Words expresses a desire to be seen and perceived because it is only then that he can be free of “[t]he mode in which the mind is most affected and indeed in no mode is the mind more affected than in this” (287). Moreover, his exclamation of “with you!” expresses a contempt for simply having to share a space with Music. His near aggressive treatment of Music highlights how he believes himself and his mode of expression to be superior, further emphasizing the unfriendly nature of their relationship. Even though Words appears to be the main antagonist, even garnering a timid response from Music (291), Music himself is not entirely pleased with Words either and eventually retaliates with a “[b]rief rude retort” (294) at the end after Croak leaves them alone following their attempt to harmonize with each other. Nonetheless, Croak actively impores for them to “[b]e friends!” (291), suggesting that there might be a possibility that the two of them can exist amicably, if not harmoniously, prompting us to imagine what such a relationship might look like.

However, despite this possibility, their dynamics are still largely oppositional, largely due to their competing modes of communication and expression. True to his name, Words makes use of the language system to convey what he wants to say. On the contrary, Music does not verbalize anything and mostly responds with sounds like “[h]umble muted adsum” (287) and “[r]ap of baton” (288, 289, 291). Music also invokes different genres of music such as love and soul (289), as well as age (289), to express his opinions on the corresponding topics. The discordance between both is further drawn out when Croak demands them to discuss the theme of love (288). Words begins his explanation in a way described as “[o]rotund” in the stage directions, indicating a pompous and pretentious tone that suggests an element of flamboyance and disingenuity. He later adopts a more “[p]rosaic” tone, as if

he's an actor putting on a different persona to match the *concept* of love, reflecting the artificial nature of systems like language.

As Words begins to explain love, he does so in an extremely methodical way, describing it as “the most powerful passion and indeed no passion is more powerful than the passion of love” and that it is “the mode in which the mind is most strongly affected and indeed in no mode is the mind more strongly affected than in this” (288). This statement is an exact replication of his opening monologue about the unlikely topic of a sloth, suggesting that it is something Words rote memorizes and regurgitates without any personal involvement or opinion. Words further explains that “[b]y passion we are to **understand** a movement of the mind pursuing or fleeing real or imagined pleasure or pain” (288; emphasis mine), continuing to use factual and near robotic language, reducing an abstract concept to an austere definition. Croak too grows frustrated with Words as he interjects with a “[r]ending sigh”, a “[v]iolent thump of club” and an anguished cry, suggesting that Words’s explanation is not up to par with his standards and is perhaps missing something that Croak is looking for. Croak’s discontentment can be attributed to Words’s habit of breaking everything down to explainable terms through language. As Words continues to explain what love means, he pauses to clarify with Croak: “Love of woman, I mean, if that is what my Lord means” (289), once again proving that there is no place for abstraction in emotion for Words – everything must be defined, specific and clearly delineated. Even as Croak expresses his disappointment at that question, Words does not understand why his interpretation is insufficient and pushes further, asking “What? [*Pause. Very rhetorical.*] Is love the word? [*Pause. Do.*] Is soul the word? [*Pause. Do.*] Do we mean love, when we say love? [*Pause. Pause. Do.*] Soul, when we say soul?” (289). Croak seemingly tries to avoid answering this question as he calls out to Music, but Words persists on getting an answer from Croak, demanding “[d]o we? [*With sudden gravity.*] Or don’t we?”. Words’s sudden change in tone and his perception on how

such a question should be addressed reveals the futile nature of trying to understand emotions and sensations as concepts rather than simply feeling them; he is, as Beckett would say in his interview with John Gruen, “a stain on silence”.

Words then perhaps also embodies one of the key concerns Artaud has about theater that necessitates cruelty as part of the theatrical experience:

In the theater as we conceive it, the text is everything. It is understood and definitely admitted, and has passed into our habits and thinking, it is an established spiritual value that the language of words is *the* major language. But it must be admitted even from the Occidental point of view that speech becomes ossified and that words, **all words, are frozen and cramped in their meanings, in a restricted schematic terminology.** [...] A word thus understood has little more than a discursive, i.e., elucidative, value. And it is not an exaggeration to say that **in view of its very definite and limited terminology the word is used only to sidestep thought; it encircles it, but terminates it; it is only a conclusion.** (Artaud, “Letters on Language” 117 – 8; emphasis mine)

Here, Artaud’s concern with the system of language is once again apparent as he accurately identifies how words (the script) dictates theater as we know it and has eventually grown to be the prevailing standard for how we interact with the world around us – always yearning for definition and striving for certainty. Nonetheless, language has its limitations, as we see in Words’s inability to define love to Croak’s satisfaction. While words do provide some form of assurance, they are, as Artaud points out, only used to “sidestep thought” (118). In other words, they merely defer the role that theater needs to take on: to make us feel and in the process, challenge all that we know. An over reliance on words would mean that we are told what to think and how to think, thus leading to one losing the ability to interpret things on

their own and be comfortable without a clear and concise explanation. For instance, when Croak asks Words to describe age, Words is unprepared and unsure of what definition of age he is referring to and hence, as per the stage directions, falters and fumbles to clarify the parameters with Croak in order to find the right words for his explanation: “Age is ... age is when ... old age I mean ... if that is what my Lord means ... is when ... if you’re a man ... were a man ... huddled ... nodding ... the ingle ... waiting–” (Beckett, *Words and Music* 289). This is an extremely apt example of what Artaud means when he posits that “the obsession with the defined word which says everything ends in the withering of words” (Artaud, “Letters on Language” 118). There appears to be a language malfunction here as the conditions and clauses for definition are not clearly defined for Words and since “[t]he language of speech has its laws” that we are used to, we have also become “too well accustomed [...] to employing words in the theater in a single defined sense” (118). Anything that is indeterminate does not fit into those “laws” and decenters the system. It is after all, *Words and Music* and not *Music and Words*. Thinking back to the argument made in chapter one about imposing systems on the natural body in *To Have Done With The Judgement of God*, Words’s hesitation becomes an example of what happens when the system breaks down in a body where intuition is forsaken in favor of logic and reason – the body is unable to produce any alternative responses that does not originate from the system it is used to.

The impact of this on how we experience theater and other art forms is apparent. The language and linguistic systems, as Artaud would have it, have made us “[overaccustom] the theater to a lack of curiosity and above all of imagination” (“Letters on Language” 118). Words’ constant interjection of groans and protestations “– ‘Peace!’ ‘No!’ ‘Please!’ etc.–” (Beckett, *Words and Music* 288, 289, 291, 292) each time Music attempts to play a piece of music that evokes what Croak asks of them signals Words’s aversion to being in tune with that which cannot be put into words – abstractions like music and free expression.

Additionally, it shows his unwillingness to sit with uncertainty because it threatens the system he operates on, which also explains the hostility he has towards Music because music in its purest form (i.e without lyrics) is often thought to be non-referential. In *Creative Evolution*, Henri Bergson denotes human knowledge as a product of the intellect and its mechanical form and structure that is “so skilful in dealing with the inert [...] [but] awkward the moment it touches the living” (181), as evidenced by how Words reacts to Music’s creations and his cloddish attempts to sing with Music. Bergson proceeds to compare human knowledge with the human instinct that is, conversely, “molded on the very form of life” and treats everything “organically” (182). If we were to use the system/body example in *To Have Done With The Judgment of God*, music can then come to portray the natural free-flowing body that stands in opposition to the artificially structured logic system governed by other microsystems such as language.

Compared to Words’s cold (Beckett, *Words and Music* 291) and automaton-like tone, Music takes a more cordial approach, one infused with emotion. In the face of Words’s cold and disregarding response, he is still able to maintain a warm tone while putting forth his suggestions (291). When Croak grows dissatisfied with Words’s response about love, he calls on Music who presents him with “[s]oft music worthy of foregoing, great expression” (288). As observed earlier in this chapter, Music rarely uses words to communicate, choosing instead to let the unsaid, non-linguistic forms of communication and the music he produces speak for him. In this sense, Music forces us to really listen to what we are hearing and come to our own conclusions instead of waiting for an exposition to tell us what we are supposed to think. As such, music appears to play to the more organic side that responds based on how it feels (i.e the body and its intuition). Composer Christian Wolff once brought up how “music has a static character. It goes in no particular direction. There is no necessary concern with time as a measure of distance from one point in the past to a point in the future... It is not a

question of getting anywhere, of making progress, or having come from anywhere in particular” (qtd. in Cage 54). Understanding music as something that does not require understanding or have the desire to impose meaning requires seeing it as a fluid entity that simply responds instinctively as itself; it does not mind uncertainty. In fact, it can sometimes be the source of uncertainty, especially with the absence of referential elements such as lyrics.

While it might seem that an emotional counter to Words’s cold approach might be what Croak desires, he ultimately expresses displeasure with Music’s musical composition as well. His anguished cry and order for Music to be “[l]ouder!” (Beckett, *Words and Music* 288) prompts Music to play his music extremely loudly – in “*fortissimo*” (288) – so much so that it drowns out Words’s protests and renders “*all expression gone*”. This scene can be regarded as emotions overwhelming the body to the extent that rationality has no place. This overwhelming feeling prompts a need to perform as exaggeratedly as possible to convey emotions, to the point that the body ironically loses its ability to feel such emotions. Even as Music switches to presenting Croak with love and soul music (289) which he likely perceives to be an apt expression of love, Croak once again responds with an anguished cry as he calls upon Words like before. There appears to be a struggle to balance both sides on Croak’s part as he tries to alternate between them in an attempt to get them to work together, calling them “[m]y comforts!” (288) and “[m]y balms” (289). The turbulent relationship that even Croak has difficulty navigating suggests that privileging one over the other will always yield an unsatisfactory result. In the context of cruelty, this can come to mean that while cruelty does aim to target the senses, we must also realize that it is impossible to completely divorce ourselves from rational thought because we are not *tabula rasae* – we have a set of preconceived notions that come about from our lived experiences that cannot be easily forged. As such,

the challenge then is how might we let ourselves feel *despite* such notions that exist within us.

Words and Music clash once again as Croak asks them to express the topic of age. We have previously discussed Words's reaction in this scene in relation to the failure of language and we see that it is one fraught with ellipses that suggests hesitation and his inability to find the right words because this is an unexpected question that he has not prepared for. Seeing this, Croak turns to Music and is yet again disappointed as Music plays "[a]ge music" for him (289), interrupting him with a "violent thump". This time, Croak does not divert to another topic but instead orders Words and Music to work "[t]ogether. [Pause. Thump.] Together! [Pause. Violent thump.] Together, dogs!" (289). Here, Croak's pleas seem to take on a rhythm of their own as he repeats the same words with constant intervals indicated by the pauses and thumps that simultaneously causes tension to rise. Anna McMullan observes that scholars have increasingly identified how Beckett's texts have shaped themselves into semantic and sonorous patterns through such means and points out that "these references to music fail to take account of the agonistic relationship between music and meaning in Beckett's drama" (199). While this statement was made in relation to comments about musicality created through speech patterns and rhythms, an aspect that we will discuss in the following section, it can also be applied to *Words and Music* as a whole and the characters of Words and Music themselves as well.

Indeed, the non-referential nature of music does not naturally cohere with the direct meaning that words convey – the agnostic relationship that McMullan identifies mirrors the relationship Words and Music share. However, McMullan neglects to explore the possibility of reconciling such a relationship. Despite getting off to a rough start as Music's "[l]ong la" is met with Words's firm "[n]o!" (Beckett, *Words and Music* 289, Words eventually attempts to collaborate with Music, setting the words of his earlier attempt at explaining age to

Music's note. Words seems to progress as he manages to string together near coherent sentences and get further than before. However, there still seems to be some hesitation as he interrupts the song with a pause and a violent thump before trying to continue (290). One might argue that the pause here, and throughout the play in general, can be Words's attempt at musicality, and this is a prospect that will be discussed in the next section as we look at how absence manifests in *Words and Music*. Words's attempt at harmonizing with Music shows that they can work together and might even be a hint at what synthesizing the left and right side of the brain, as Artaud desires, might look like.

What is interesting is that Words and Music are eventually able to compose what resembles a verse of song, with Music even inviting Words "*with opening, pause, invites again and finally accompanies very softly*" (291) and Words reciprocating by "[*t*]rying to sing, softly". Here, it is crucial to note that Words is not just working with Music because of Croak's orders, he is also trying to match Music's soft tone, almost as if it is his way of extending an olive branch. This is a stark contrast to Words's previously assertive tone and unwillingness to listen to Music, suggesting his openness to collaborating with Music with the verse being an example of what such a collaboration might produce. The ellipses from Words's speech before are no more and he seems to be taking Music's lead and letting words flow rather than preparing, predicting, and anticipating them. Considering this, we might also perhaps see the earlier hesitations and exchanges as an ideation session between Words and Music, an experiment of how they might best work together because as Words tries to be comfortable with Music's unpredictability, Music also learns to listen to Words and makes numerous improvements and suggestions so that both their works complement each other. Even Croak seems to approve as he immerses himself into their song and repeatedly murmurs about "[*t*]he face" (291) after, almost as if he is imploring them to continue. One might even see this as a small success. What this also means is that cruelty need not necessarily mean an

over-reliance on the senses but instead, it is used to compel us to be more intune with them and not try to suppress them like Words does with Music in the beginning.

However, once Croak mentions “[t]he face” (291) of a woman, Words immediately snaps back to using mechanical language even though Music signals for him to adopt a “*warmly sentimental*” (291) tone befitting of Croak’s moment of reminiscence. Music even tries to gently reiterate his suggestion to Words but is only met with Words’s disregard and cold response of what he thinks the face is: “Seen from above at such close quarters in that radiance so cold and faint with eyes so dimmed by ... what had passed, its quite ... piercing beauty is a little ....” (291). While such an image should evoke emotions and passions, Words’s tone voids it from such. Music is undoubtedly aware that this is not what Croak longs for and attempts to “[renew] *timidly previous suggestion*” only to be met by Words’s violent interruption as he snaps at Music, insisting on “[p]eace!” (291). Seeing how Words was initially averse to the uncertainty Music brings, this scene then reflects how one might feel uncomfortable when sitting with uncertainty for too long and to counteract it, slips back into explanation and logic to bring some form of stability by using it as a crutch. Here, Words demonstrates the concept of the intuition of loss put forth by Michelle Chiang in *Beckett’s Intuitive Spectator*. The intuition of loss refers to “an anxiety-ridden awareness that flux and uncertainty are concealed within the dogmatic system of relations that governs our daily lives”, and that the loss of the “concealing veil constructed by these systems” result in one losing their bearings (19). Therefore, even though it seems like Words may be making progress, his hasty transition back reflects our tendencies to gravitate to such systems because they signal stability and comfort.

Words continues with a slew of suggestive descriptions such as how the woman’s head “is drawn back to a distance of two or three feet, the eyes widen to a stare and begin to feast again” (Beckett, *Words and Music* 292) and “the black disordered hair as though spread

wide on water, the brows knitted in a groove suggesting pain but simply concentration more likely all things considered on some consummate inner process, the eyes of course closed in keeping with this” (292), reminding us of the tension in the air that built up prior to the sex scene in *Embers*. This intrudes upon a deeply personal memory for Croak, and he draws back, calling out for “Lily!” in anguish (292). However, unlike *Embers*, *Words* presents vivid and accurate descriptions of the woman. While we can exercise imagination to a certain extent here, it is tempered because *Words* is directing and telling us what exactly to envision. The discomfort here thus does not come from uncertainty but ironically, too much certainty and explicit images, like *To Have Done With The Judgement of God*.

To reiterate Artaud’s concern, “the language of words is *the* major language” with laws that we have become so well accustomed to (Artaud, “Letters on Language” 117 – 8). Certainty will always be favored over uncertainty, so the question here then is: How do we loosen our grip on the former and let the latter take its natural course? In other words, how do we let them both coexist without one imposing themselves on the other? Artaud also made the statement that “[t]heater, like speech, needs to be set free” (118) but what does it mean for speech and theater to be set free? To Artaud, it is when theater, instead of portraying life, is life. Such a question persists in Beckett’s works and while we might not find a definite answer, we can continue experimenting with what we are given.

## **2.2 The Beckettian Absence**

Beckett’s works have often been thought to be experimental as they do not conform to traditional dramatic conventions and seek to push their limits and while countless studies have been done to analyze how he does so, this dissertation would like to focus more on the experimental space created for the audience through Beckett’s works and what this means for their experience of them. This space, I argue, is created by various forms of absence –

absence of meaning, sound, movement, action, conclusion, certainty, etc – that arise as Beckett’s works defy dramatic conventions. Such a space creates uncertainty, unease and discomfort but more importantly, presents the spectator with moments of introspection that I suggest could be a recourse to Artaud’s belief that no techniques will work unless “they succeed in organically reinvolving man, his ideas about reality, and his poetic place in reality” (“The Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)” 92). In chapter one, this dissertation identified an ironic gap in Artaudian cruelty where its existing visual representations and points of reference hinder the spectator’s imagination from functioning at its full capacity and as a result, prevents cruelty from being explored to its full potential as well. This gap will be addressed further in this section by looking at absence rather than presence and the implicit over the explicit. Beckett’s works tend to leverage on absence to attack our senses and unsettle us as our expectations for action are not met and we are left lingering. To counter this lingering feeling, the spectator is prompted to use their imagination to fill the empty space and circumvent the discomfort in the absence of sound and moving images. While the previous chapter touched upon potential sources of absence in Beckett’s works such as pauses, this section intends to take a closer look at what a Beckettian absence might look like and how it can be a key gateway to experiencing Beckettian cruelty.

There are several ways in which absence presents itself in *Words and Music* and we will begin with the element that has been briefly brought up earlier in this section: the ways, or lack thereof, that Music makes us aware of his presence. When Croak shuffles in at the beginning and addresses both Words and Music, Words acknowledges him with reverence as “[m]y Lord” (Beckett, *Words and Music* 287) while Music’s response is indicated, through stage directions, to be a “[h]umble muted adsum”. Though cryptic, we can interpret this to be just a minimal and adequate show of his presence. Except for the various musical compositions, Music sticks to such minimal forms of expression throughout the play,

contrary to Words's pompous performance. Music appears to take on a more passive role, with his responses ranging from "[a]s before" (288), "[l]ong la" (289), "[i]mprovement of above" (290), "[s]uggestion for following" (290), to repeating suggestions (289) and "[d]iscreet suggestion[s]" (293) – all stage directions and, faithful to his name, without involving any words. While this does not align with the traditional understanding of absence, it is still a form of absence, one that serves to unsettle because while we are aware of his presence, we are not assured of it. Considering the non-visual medium of a radio play, Music's lack of words fully makes use of this and challenges our expectations of presence being indicated by speech. It is thus not a stretch to consider the diametrical opposition of Words and Music as a parallel to Artaudian cruelty that values maximalism and this dissertation's proposed Beckettian cruelty that is evoked through minimalism. The stark contrast between both characters render the emptiness more apparent, creating unease around Words and Music's interaction as it also pushes us to question Music's 'wholeness', an issue that we will return to later in this section.

The bulk of how absence is created in *Words and Music* lies in one of its features that our discussion has come thus far without addressing: pauses. Like *Embers*, pauses pervade the entirety of the play. While such pauses can come across as a part of natural speech cadence and emotional expression, it is also important to look at how employing these pauses can generate tension, especially considering the relationship between characters in *Words and Music*, and how the dynamics created point us to a kind of emptiness that arises from incongruence. From the analysis above, it is undeniable that Words and Music share an unpleasant and tense relationship that continues to build up over the course of the play. This is underscored and only made more apparent by the numerous pauses indicated throughout – pauses occur 80 times in the play and vary from a regular pause to a "long pause".

Considering the context of the exchanges between Words, Music, and Croak, I suggest that the pauses in *Words and Music* can also be broadly considered as either contemplative or antagonistic. Contemplative pauses usually occur when Words is thinking about what he should say next, when Croak ponders upon the inputs he receives from Words and Music, or when Words and Music are attempting to listen to each other. But it should also be noted that the degree of contemplation differs accordingly. For instance, the pause followed by “[r]attled off, low” (Beckett, *Words and Music* 287) near the start of Words’s opening monologue about sloths seems to suggest that he is trying to maintain his composure after snapping at Music and determining the tone in which he should convey his speech through. Additionally, in the scene where Words is trying to set his words to Music’s composition, his multiple attempts to produce lyrics are met with a pause that leads to one of Music’s suggestions, indicating that perhaps Words is affording Music the space for his opinions to be heard without interjection, once again showing us the possibility of a collaborative partnership. The most apt example of a contemplative pause is perhaps the pauses that punctuate the moment when Croak suddenly remembers the face – “[t]he face. [Pause.] The face. [Pause.] The face. [Pause.] The face” (291) – suggests that he is trying to reach for the face from his memory and reaffirm himself of the face he envisions. Compared to the earlier situations where Croak glosses past topics that are not described to his satisfaction, he lingers on the face that Words and Music’s verse prompts him to remember, providing a moment of introspection that also slows down the pace of the play. Moreover, the fact that the pauses are in between the same two words draws the audience’s attention to the face and piques our curiosity as we wonder about the significance of the face and why it captures Croak’s attention to the point where its sight on the stairs made him late at the beginning (287).

Antagonistic pauses mostly happen when Words tries to disregard Music or when Croak expresses his displeasure at Words and Music's inability to work together. Words's protests of "No!", "Please!" and "Peace!" are always followed by a pause, drawing attention to the moment itself and the disdain Words has for Music. These pauses can unnerve the audience as tension is created but left hanging in their air with no apparent resolution. The antagonistic nature of such pauses reaches its peak when Croak orders Words and Music to work "[t]ogether. [*Pause. Thump.*] Together! [*Pause. Violent thump.*] Together, dogs!" (289). These pauses are not just enclosed by the same word ("together"), they are also punctuated by thumps, one even described as "[v]iolent". This directs us to Croak's frustration at Words and Music's inability to work together because pauses here serve to add even more emphasis on top of the repeated word. But since they are accompanied by extra thumps, there is an added air of exasperation as Croak must resort to such methods to express his irritation. The audience are then made to commiserate with Croak and sit with the unease that this situation creates because like before, the tension in the air lingers without dissipating. Pia Brinzeu discerns that "[i]n Beckett's drama, speaking and non-speaking are intimately bound, vocalizations and pauses conjoin: speech cannot be authenticated as a linguistic act unless it is saturated by the constant presence of the pauses" (229). That is to say, the presence of pauses in the play gives more weight to what is being said, even more so considering the radio medium where anything auditory is heightened; the pauses create space and indicate that which we should focus on.

Beyond that, there are also long pauses and a pause-adjacent moment of silence that are more ambiguous. There is only one occurrence of silence as indicated in the stage directions – after Music makes a "[f]urther brief suggestion" and before Words and Music present their first verse to Croak (Beckett, *Words and Music* 291). The timing of this moment of silence is interesting because prior to this, Music's suggestions have all been met with

Words's attempt to put them into practice. Responding to another of Music's suggestions with silence breaks the pattern and undermines the expectations that have built because of preceding events. There is uncertainty in the air as the audience is unsure on how to perceive this silence. New expectations may also be formed as we anticipate what might come after, holding on and contributing to the tension in the air. In this sense, silence makes us hold our breath and allows the play to go beyond character relations, extending it to the character-audience relationship because "the turmoil of stillness establishes a language of mysterious comprehension, a transcendental code which unites all creatures through universal knowledge" (Brinzeu 231). The audience is included in the play's dynamics because while normal pauses, assumed to be of similar duration, can be thought of as spaces to allow characters to reflect and respond, a moment of silence creates unease because there is absolutely nothing for us to engage with – our expectations for action are not met and our brain works to fill the space to give us something to focus on.

Moving on to the long pause, the long pause happens in two instances – once right after the first verse that Words and Music create (Beckett, *Words and Music* 291) and the second after Croak leaves upon hearing the next verse (294). The placements of these two long pauses are noteworthy because they are tied to the two moments where Words and Music can put their differences aside and work together to create a semblance of a song. On the relationship between speech and pauses, Brinzeu explores the idea of words contributing to the impenetrability of the mind and postulates that "[s]peech induces confusion by being antagonistic, discordant, and fragmented, while the pauses become an exploration of **creative multiplicity, an element of stability which resists indeterminacy and contradiction**. Their constant repetition and accumulation transform them from a simple stop into **a place of mutual understanding**" (231; emphasis mine). Here, Brinzeu's description of speech is a splitting image of Words – antagonistic towards Music when he must face Music's non-

linguistic forms of communication, discordant when he rambles, and fragmented when he must address a topic which he does not have all the facts of. Hence, the pauses that are interspersed throughout allow Words and Music, particularly Words, to explore and ruminate on each other's way of expression because in "creative multiplicity", nothing is set in stone. Whether planned or otherwise, the fact that the only two occurrences of a long pause happen after the two verses of song can be seen as something the pauses build up to – moments of "mutual understanding" between Words and Music. As such, pauses and silence are not simply there to create dramatic effect through emptiness, they are also a space of possibilities that ultimately point to how a Beckettian absence is one that speaks. With the bigger picture in mind, it is thus also important to clarify that the Beckettian cruelty that this dissertation is proposing does not fundamentally oppose Artaudian cruelty, it builds upon its foundations to suggest an alternative method of evoking cruelty that expands its potential.

### **2.3 Music of the Mind**

Having established that a Beckettian absence is not one of total silence, we can now look at how the pauses in *Words and Music* 'speak' to us. Brinzeu remarks that while the pauses in Beckett's drama are first of all the absence of words, they are also "endowed with a structural complexity that makes them gain a positive value" (229), one that Ihab Habib Hassan would describe as "self-transcendent, sacramental and plenary" (248). By looking at the placement of the pauses, they seem to create a rhythm of their own, particularly when they occur at regular intervals and/or follow a pattern. Using an example brought up earlier, in the scene where Words attempts to clarify the context of love that Croak wants an explanation of, he asks: "Is love the word? [*Pause. Do.*] Is soul the word? [*Pause. Do.*] Do we mean love, when we say love? [*Pause. Pause. Do.*]" (Beckett, *Words and Music* 289). On closer inspection, there is a pattern that emerges within this line – every four syllables of

words are matched by one pause. We have previously established these questions as a part of Words's insistent nature and his desire for certainty and the rhythm of this sentence reflects the predictability that Words desires. Rhythm also makes it even more compelling because the consistent rise and fall creates a lulling effect that draws us deeper into what is being said. In "The Music of Beckett's Theatre", Catherine Laws goes beyond literal music and studies the music created in Beckett's plays by elements such as repetition and tone. She suggests that

[T]he musicality of Beckett's language actually stems from the tension between his repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with a language system which makes impossible the direct expression of ideas and the impossibility of abandoning our primary mode of expression. Beckett's acknowledgement of the restrictions of language engenders the breakdown of conventional structures and the attempt to negate the referential content of words in order to maximise their ability to express ideas. (126)

While Laws made this argument specifically in relation to Beckett's stage plays, it can most definitely be applied to his radio plays as well, perhaps even more effectively. The irony is not lost upon the fact that the example above exposes the limitations of language as well. The systemic nature of it reduces concepts like love and soul to cold alphabets waiting to be explained methodically. While we might scoff at Words's questions, the pauses "attempt to negate the referential content of words" by providing the audience with space to reflect, albeit shortly, on the ways in which we might see ourselves in Words.

We might also refer to the pauses that occur during Words and Music's endeavors to collaborate harmoniously, particularly the second one. While their attempt at producing the first verse does contain several pauses scattered throughout, they are nowhere as uniform as

the pauses in their second attempt where each pause is sandwiched between one of Music's suggestions and Words's attempt at singing:

[Pause.]

MUSIC: Discreet suggestion for above.

WORDS: [Trying to sing this.]

Then down a little way

Through the trash

Towards where ...

[Pause.]

MUSIC: Discreet suggestion for following.

WORDS: [Trying to sing this.]

All dark no begging

No giving no words

No sense no need .... (Beckett, Words and Music 293)

The uniformity of the pauses can perhaps be attributed to Words being more accustomed to Music and despite being described as “[*t*]rying to sing”, he does not hesitate as much as before. In the previous attempt, Words displays severe doubt, as suggested by the number of ellipses: “[a]ge is ... age is when ... old age I mean ... if that is what my Lord means ... is when ... if you're a man ... were a man ... huddled ... nodding ... the ingle ... waiting—” (289). His responses are also described as “[*f*]altering” and weary (290), even displaying frustration as he cuts himself off mid-sentence by exclaiming “No!” (290). It is evident that the fluidity displayed in the second attempt indicates a level of trust that he now has in Music.

One would also notice that this sentiment extends to Music as well as he goes from “[renewing] timidly previous suggestion” (291) to a “[m]ore confident suggestion for following” (293) near the end, almost as if he acknowledges that he must play a more active

role to create a harmonious relationship. Everett Frost expounds on this relationship more as he reasons that music is “an enabling dramatic force momentarily drawing initially reluctant, resistant words out of his unfeeling pedantic banalities into a feelingful realm of poetic discourse”, creating a space that “rescues words from its own babble, albeit only momentarily, and not entirely by choice” (104). By positioning Music in the role of a rescuer, we might come to realize that Music’s passiveness from before was perhaps intended. In fact, it can even be argued that Music is aware that being overly assertive and imposing like Words was before will yield no results and he was waiting for Words to realize that Croak’s desire for them to be friends depends on Words being open to Music on his own accord, which is also what their moments of harmony depended on. *Words and Music* is, as Frost propounds, a Beckettian creation that is “specific not only to radio but also to the occasion that had prompted it – a radiophonic ‘word/music tandem’ with music in the driver’s seat (104). Additionally, the uniformity of the pauses creates a steady, pulsing rhythm that brings about an air of calm that is removed from the hostility before, suggesting they have come to a mutual understanding that, put in another way, is also the Artaudian venture of synthesizing the left and right brain. The pulsing rhythm of the pauses also generates momentum that propels Words, who was initially unwilling to stay in the dark (Beckett, *Words and Music* 287), “[t]owards where [a]ll dark no begging [n]o giving no words [n]o sense no need” (294) – the dark is what allows them to abandon all devices and create purely on instinct.

On the idea of uncertainty and darkness, one thing we automatically assume is that as characters of a dramatic work, Words and Music must have tangible forms. This harks back to the prior brief discussion on Music’s ‘absence’ and the question of his ‘wholeness’, which we might now extend to Words as well because the unseen medium of a radio play makes both their physical existences hard to verify. Moreover, we are provided a baseline and assured of Croak’s material presence through the shuffling noises his slippers make when he

enters and exits (287, 294), but, like Ada in *Embers*, there are no sonic indications of Words and Music's material existence. Adding to this complication, we cannot even be sure that Words, Music and Croak are situated in a physical location. Unlike *Embers* that begins by establishing Henry near the sea and confirming his existence through the sound of his boots hitting a shingle (253), *Words and Music* begins with Music's orchestral tuning, setting us quite possibly in media res as it also appears that Words is responding to Music and seeing him as an interruption. When read as such, we grow even more uneasy because like *Not I*, we are thrown and suspended in the middle of action without any context or stability.

Given that Croak is the only one whose material existence can be confirmed, we might thus begin to think of *Words and Music* as a play situated in his skullscape, a term first coined by Linda Ben-Zvi. In the space of Croak's skullscape, Zilliacus notes that "a mental process is unfolding" and this process is one where Croak "instigates two of his faculties, at odds with each other, to provide him with solace and entertainment" (105). Interpreting *Words and Music* as such consequently involves us acknowledging that the battle between Words and Music is one that also happens within ourselves due to the constant need to seek certainty and impose definite meaning. It is crucial to recognize this struggle because being aware of it also means that as we listen to the play, we become cognisant of the fact that while we can never rid ourselves of our logical sides, we can, at times, loosen our grip on it and let our senses take over. This is also a goal of cruelty because while cruelty targets the senses, it also acknowledges that the human cannot be fully divorced from its rational tendencies; cruelty aims to create an experience that lets us feel and be guided by our sensibilities despite that. However, even though we can read the play as a skullscape play that features "three characters who seem to represent different psychic functions of a single consciousness" (Lyons, "Words and Music" 136), we must remember that "Beckett does not integrate them into the image of a specific, whole person" (139). This puts into perspective

and makes us aware that these characters reside within us – the need to objectively understand and define everything through various systems of thoughts (Words), the desire to express that which cannot be expressed through language (Music), and how one yearns to be in touch with their feelings (Croak). Yet, by calling the idea of wholeness into question, *Words and Music* emphasizes how these elements in our minds may stay fragmented if we choose to remain the status quo and within our comfort zones. By having no fixed whole, we are confronted with the fact that there is no definite way to negotiate the relationship between these three psychic functions and that uncertainty is something we must sit with, something that Words learns as well. Nevertheless, if we allow them to work together rather than fight against each other, like Words and Music do, we too can create the melody of our own minds.

It is also precisely because of the absence of a defined whole that allows *Words and Music*, like much of Beckett's dramatic oeuvre, to sit in an ambiguity and openness. This is perhaps most drawn out through the play's ending where the audience is not afforded any conclusion or form of resolution. As Words and Music finish their second verse, Words is "[s]hocked" (Beckett, *Words and Music* 294) and calls for Croak, only to be met with the sound of Croak's club falling and the dwindling sound of his slippers shuffling. This is also met with a "[l]ong pause" and while we have previously discussed how long pauses are tied to moments of mutual understanding between Words and Music, almost as if they are speaking a common language, the long pause placed here is also marked by multiplicity. Laws observes that "*Words and Music* seems to hold out for the possibility of language finding, perhaps through the example of music, a way towards this point, yet however effective the final collaboration of Joe and Bob, the play itself never reaches any such point of certainty. We are left unsure as to quite what has been achieved as Croak shuffles off: what is the nature of the shocked pause with which this performance ends?" ("Music in 'Words

and Music” 289). Unlike before, Croak does not respond at all or give any indication about his thoughts. We are left wondering – did he leave because he feels the goal of Words and Music working together has been achieved? Did he leave because their song pulled out another memory that is too much to bear? Or is it something else? These are questions that we can only continue to ponder on as play closes without providing any answers. This, coupled with the idea of a concrete, material body previously brought up being questioned, ultimately points us to the fact that perhaps experiencing a Beckett play goes beyond the physical, reminding us of how Beckettian cruelty first and foremost draws on the spectator’s imagination and the sensory experience it induces.

Referring to Artaud’s stance on language and by extension, systems of thoughts, that have come to govern theater, we might begin to contemplate how a Beckettian absence can come to evoke cruelty:

This obstinacy in making characters talk about feelings, passions, desires, and impulses of a strictly psychological order, in which a single word is to compensate for innumerable gestures, is the reason, **since we are in the domain of precision, the theater has lost its true raison d' etre and why we have come to long for a silence in it in which we could listen more closely to life.** (“Letters on Language” 118; emphasis mine)

Looking at the Artaudian method of cruelty, it is clear that the silence Artaud speaks of here is metaphorical, but I believe that this can also be applied to literal silence and consequently, absence as well. It is especially significant that at the end of *Words and Music*, as Words is seemingly “[s]hocked” (Beckett, *Words and Music* 294) by the form of expression that arises from their collaboration. It is one that pierces “[t]hrough the trash [...] [t]hrough the scum [and] [d]own a little way [t]o whence one glimpse [o]f that wellhead” (293 – 4), something that Words could not achieve by himself before. Words calls out for Bob and while that is

also Music's alternative name, Words is only met with Music's "[b]rief rude retort" (294). Here, it is almost as if their dynamics have shifted and Music feels a certain disdain, almost insult, at Words calling him Bob. However, when Words cries for "Music!" and implores him to play it "[a]gain!", Music accommodates his request. Words no longer wants to be out of the darkness with Music and instead, yearns for Music's company as he now sees Music's merit and is almost addicted to it. Music is also aware of this and as seen from his responses, takes the chance to assert himself. Moreover, Music's composition is enclosed by pauses that, as indicated previously, create space for not just the characters, but for us as well, and this is particularly evident here as we come to reconsider the relationship Words and Music now share.

The play ends with Words's "[d]eep sigh" (294) and many critics have taken this to be a sign of Music admitting defeat and while that is a valid observation, I propose that we might also read this as a sigh of relief. From the beginning, it is clear through Words's constant repetition and preparation that even though he reveres the system of language and the certainty it brings, he himself does not have the confidence to fully express himself naturally through it – his expression relies on scripting and stoic memorization. Wavering on trying to express age (289) is perhaps the moment where he realizes its limitations and how its structured nature is incompatible with the fluid nature of human emotions and their lived realities. Words's vehement disagreement with Music can thus be read as his denial of the failure of language and the continuous attempts at trying to make it work, sometimes even forcibly. Eventually, it is only when he experiences and partakes in music himself that he is convinced of its abilities to let the unspeakable speak.

To that, it is also undeniable that despite having heard two instances of Words and Music working together, the uneasy relationship between Words and Music continues to prevail and with the lack of a satisfactory resolution, the audience is also made to sit in

discomfort, knowing that this is also an internal strife that happens within them. By making us aware of such, *Words and Music* “succeed[s] in organically reinvolving man, his ideas about reality, and his poetic place in reality” (Artaud, “The Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)” 92) through introspection and self-reflection. Ending the play on a sigh creates an eternal openness because the inability to distinguish and identify anything clearly creates a void that spectators can only *attempt* to fill. The uniqueness of Beckettian cruelty lies in how it prompts an engagement with the feeling of discomfort when faced with absence by looking within ourselves for a response, all while accepting that we can never find the solution to our frustration of not being able to see and hear anything with certainty. It points us to the inherent flaws of allowing our reality to be governed by systems and it is perhaps “[t]owards where [a]ll dark no begging [n]o giving no words [n]o sense no need” (Beckett, *Words and Music* 294) that we must strive for so that we can find and create our own melodies. Beckettian cruelty is thus only effective when the spectator is unable to fully understand the work because its essence lies in the unseen and consequently, the unfulfilled.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Challenging the Limits of Our Being: The Potential of Beckettian Cruelty**

*“To and fro in shadow, from outer shadow to inner shadow. To and fro, between unattainable self and unattainable non-self.”*

— SAMUEL BECKETT qtd. in *Damned to Fame*

#### **3.1 Imagining *All That Fall***

Considering all the arguments presented hitherto, this dissertation has discussed how imagination can create a sensorial experience, as well as how minimalism in Beckett’s works created by uncertainty and absence can stand up to and deconstruct systems of thoughts such as language. These are key components of Beckettian cruelty, and this section will aim to synthesize them together through Beckett’s 1956 radio play *All That Fall*, the earliest out of the three radio plays that this dissertation is centered on and also the first ever radio play that Beckett wrote. *All That Fall* follows Mrs Rooney/Maddy’s journey as she travels down a country road to get to a train station to surprise her husband. Along the way, we see Mrs Rooney encounter other characters as well, ranging from her “old admirer” (Beckett, *All That Fall* 177) Mr Slocum to the spinster figure that is Miss Fitt. Mrs Rooney’s journey is fraught with many instances of her provoking others, emotional outbursts, and her compulsion with keeping time. Like *Words and Music*, the problem with systems that govern our reality is also highlighted, although this time we see multiple systems, namely language and time, being addressed.

This chapter is guided by the idea that Beckettian cruelty forces us to confront one pertinent condition of our existence: that we can never be fully knowable and understandable, even to ourselves. It first aims to outline what Beckettian cruelty might mean for the spectator by looking at the imaginative qualities of *All That Fall* and how it might be a double-edged sword, before examining how ambiguity and openness persist and lead us to experiencing

rather than understanding the play. This chapter will then conclude on how sensorially experiencing art can ultimately open doors for us to reach an unmediated access to the world.

*All That Fall* expands on the question of a physical body brought up briefly in the previous chapter by reminding us that Beckettian cruelty renders any form of proper and objective identification difficult and that even the characters themselves challenge our perception of their existence. They subvert our expectations and force us to work for what we want without the promise of ever achieving it. Beckett made it clear that his radio plays are specifically radio plays and must only be presented as such for a reason: because “[e]ven the reduced visual dimension it will receive from the simplest and most static of readings [. . .] will be destructive of whatever quality it may have and which depends on the whole thing’s coming out of the dark” (*Letters vol.3* 63), emphasizing the role that imagination plays in the experience of his radio plays. This is a quote that has been mentioned several times in this dissertation and will be especially important here considering how Beckett made that statement specifically in relation to *All That Fall*. Without any means of visual identification, it becomes clear that Beckettian cruelty, unlike the Artaudian form, does not rely on pre-existing images to create discomfort and shock. It instead relies purely on sensation and what the audience feels and experiences as the play progresses to push them to a “pure, detached and implacable feeling” (Artaud, “Letters on Language” 114) beyond epistemological structures. The sensorial experience created in Beckett’s works can thus serve as a starting point for us to think of what an unmediated access to experiencing the world can be.

In *All That Fall*, Beckett spurs the audience to exercise their imagination by providing us with vivid, details, no matter how minute – such as the sounds of “[s]heep, bird, cow, cock, severally, then together” (Beckett, *All That Fall* 172) – in order for us to better picture the play’s setting in our minds. One thing to note however, is that the play’s environment will still remain incomplete as we are merely given *parts* of the environment and not its totality.

Nonetheless, by providing us with sounds that make up the play's landscape, the play's imaginative qualities are immediately heightened as we can picture a more complete setting compared to *Embers* and *Words and Music*. Moreover, we are given confirmation of Mrs Rooney's physical existence from the start as we hear the "[s]ound of her dragging feet" (172). Compared to the limited, almost non-existent, descriptions of the material body in *Embers* and *Words and Music*, we are given sufficient details to not just be assured of Mrs Rooney's physical existence but to also begin constructing an image of her – "just a hysterical old hag" that is "destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and church-going and fat and rheumatism and childlessness" (174). Similarly, we can begin to imagine other characters and form opinions on them based on bits of their backstory as well – Christy approaching on her cart (172), Mr Tyler who is now "grandchildless" and riding his bicycle (174), Mrs Rooney's "old admirer" Mr Slocum who arrives in his limousine (177), Miss Fitt who is identified by simply "humming a hymn" (182), and more. Given the situation we find ourselves in, we must remember that the play "does not so much describe the image as create it; doesn't so much create it as cause it to be created" (Brienza 59) by the listener. This act of imagining relocates the play's landscape from the page and radio into our minds and the play is now individualized according to each audience member, prompting them to be more involved because they too have a stake in the characters' existences.

While this might reflect an acute awareness of the radio medium and how writing should differ because of it, Beckett admits, in his letter to Nancy Cunnard, that he "[n]ever thought about Radio play technique [...] but in the dead of t'other night got a nice gruesome idea full of cartwheels and dragging feet and puffing and panting which may or may not lead to something" (qtd. in Knowlson 795 – 6). What this means is that despite there being three clear narrative sections in the play – Mrs Rooney making her way to the train station, the wait for the unexpectedly delayed train, and Mr and Mrs Rooney's return home – the journey that

we are following Mrs Rooney on could possibly lead to nothing. However, in the Beckettian world, there is always something to be found in the nothing, and it is often found within us. By not explicitly directing our focus, *All That Fall* allows us to exercise our imagination to fill in the gaps and find new ways of engaging with the play and art in general.

Returning to the detailed descriptions provided, it should also be noted that such descriptions are mostly centered around characters and while we are given some auditory indications of the environment they are in, they are kept to a minimum and the process of identification is thus made harder because we are unable to conjure up a precise image that is comparable to that of a stage play. There is an unease created as well because in our mind's eye, the characters are clear to the extent that Mrs Rooney perceives them while the physical space they are in are negated and thus remains a blur. Such a disparity generates the image of a figure in limbo, creating an uncertainty about the characters's reality and existence, forcing us to be "temporarily reconstituted" (Chiang 44) because the image conjured by the play is a blurry one. In this sense, imagination works differently in *All That Fall* as compared to *Embers* and *Words and Music*. In *Embers*, our imaginations are activated to create a sensorial experience and in *Words and Music*, absence prompts us to imagine and create the melodies of our own mind. Here in *All That Fall*, imagination gives the illusion of stability but also undercuts it, allowing the play to retain the element of ambiguity that is characteristic of Beckett's writing, ultimately rendering any form of objective identification difficult. Now that the play's reality is being called into question, we must also ask: how can we know for sure that the voice of Mrs Rooney in *All That Fall* can be heard by other characters? What if everything is a part of her internal monologue? Conceived as such, we can then see *All That Fall* as potentially an assemblage of Mrs Rooney's mental landscape of her journey to and from the station, consisting of the sound that she hears and the thoughts in her head.

Another point of contention is Mrs Rooney's obsession with her lost daughter Minnie that comes to form the primary image of her consciousness, and the memory of Minnie is also an indication that there will always be elements unknown to us in *All That Fall*. While Mrs Rooney only identifies Minnie by name twice in the entire play, she calls out for "Minnie! Little Minnie!" in a broken (Beckett, *All That Fall* 174) tone the first time and while sobbing (176) the second time. While it is unclear as to whether Minnie is lost or dead, it is evident that there are upsetting memories associated with her for Mrs Rooney but once again, these are conclusions that we come to based on how we interpret what is given to us; we will never be able to fully know for sure. If we consider how the play is an unfolding of Mrs Rooney's mental landscape, we might even begin to consider whether Minnie "ever lived except in Mrs Rooney's imagination" (Mercier 205). As such, like the act of us imagining Henry imagining Ada in *Embers*, imagination itself is also being layered in *All That Fall* except that this time, we imagine a character who in turn imagines her own reality.

To that end, Mrs Rooney herself challenges our perception of her existence. When Mr Slocum asks Tommy to help Mrs Rooney out of his car, she interrupts by saying "[d]on't mind me. Don't take any notice of me. I do not exist. The fact is well known" (Beckett, *All That Fall* 179). On the surface, this might seem like an attempt to brush Tommy off, but the implications of this statement are complex. Firstly, Mrs Rooney's statement highlights how her existence is dependent on people noticing her, in other words, the audience engaging with her. Secondly, the way she emphasizes how she does not exist prompts us to question what we have been presented with thus far. If she does not exist, then whose feet do we hear dragging and shuffling on the ground?

As such, there exists two versions of *All That Fall* – the one that we imagine and the one that Mrs Rooney imagines. In the version that we imagine, we are given a near complete timeline of events as experienced by Mrs Rooney. However, in the version that Mrs Rooney

imagines, there is always something hidden from us. For instance, the relationship she shares with each character she meets is marked by a prevailing system – Christy addressing her as “Ma’am” (162 – 3) shows how their interactions are governed by social niceties and etiquette, Mr Barrell keeping time because he has “work to do” (181) causes their relationship to be intertwined with time, and Mr Rooney regarding their conversation as a “composition” (194) shows how their dynamics is built upon words. Such relationships have clear systems that delineate their daily interactions but what we are not privy to are their backstories, how each character came into Mrs Rooney’s life, and how their relationships got to this point. Since Mrs Rooney does not reveal such information to us in her assemblage, there is only so much that we can imagine in terms of character relationships. Even though each interaction potentially expands the landscape of *All That Fall* that we imagine, we are denied access to the entirety of Mrs Rooney’s mental landscape. As such, vague descriptions such as Christy’s wife doing “[n]o better” and his daughter doing “[n]o worst” (172), and Mr Slocum’s mother being “fairly comfortable” (177) provided to us add to the impenetrability of Mrs Rooney’s imagination; what we know of the characters she encounters are merely on the surface and ultimately remain there. There will always be something out of our reach and as such *All That Fall*, like the two other plays discussed thus far and most of Beckett’s drama, is fraught with uncertainty. Hence, since we are deprived of all the details, all we can do is attempt to imagine and create an image of how we perceive each character relationship to be – imagination without confirmation is the running theme.

Furthermore, another layer of complexity is added to the existing confusion via Mrs Rooney’s challenge to us: “Do not imagine, because I am silent, that I am not present, and alive, to all that is going on” (185). This statement foregrounds the significance of silence and how it does not necessarily indicate non-existence, further emphasizing that what we think we know of Mrs Rooney’s journey is not all there is to know. There could be another

character she passes by without us knowing, or an encounter that she chooses to ignore. In the context of this dissertation, Mrs Rooney's statement highlights what the previous two chapters have attempted to show: that absence in Beckett's drama is multi-faceted and not simply as it is – the Beckettian absence is not a real absence in the most literal form of the word, and that there is always something to be found in the apparent nothing.

Like *Embers* and *Words and Music*, *All That Fall* leverages on uncertainty and openness to activate our imaginations but unlike *Embers* where one character is potentially imagined and *Words and Music* where imagination is more understated, *All That Fall* takes it one step further by suggesting that there are multiple levels of imagination at work. With the different levels of imagination providing varying levels of clarity, the audience is not given a chance to conjure a clear perspective of each character and definitively understand them because they are all a part of Mrs Rooney's mental landscape and as such, will always be seen in relation to her. With *Embers* and *Words and Music*, doubt is casted on the tangible existence of characters when we cannot hear them engage with their environment. However, because there is so much doubt surrounding the materiality of the journey we are listening to in *All That Fall*, sounds from environmental interaction do not guarantee a character's existence. We are reminded of Goudouna's assertion that in a stage play, the body of the actor constitutes it as "the experiencing agent of the dramatic phenomenon" (121) but since we are listening to a radio play, we become the experiencing agent. *All That Fall* is a radio play that not just encourages imagination, it makes sure that the audience continues imagining and wondering to no end.

### **3.2 Feeling and Experiencing *All That Fall***

Our discussion on *All That Fall* will now continue with an inquiry into how it, as an example of Beckettian cruelty, lends itself to a mode of spectatorship that is grounded in the

senses and the ability to feel. An aspect of Artaudian cruelty that cannot be ignored is the corporeal and similarly, it is near impossible to divorce Beckett's works from the sensorial because as we have seen from *Embers* and *Words and Music*, they confuse, upset and more importantly, unsettle. This section aims to establish the kind of sensorial spectatorship we might be able to expect from Beckett's works and the cruelty they enact. Trish McTighe's *The Haptic Aesthetic in Samuel Beckett's Drama* provides insights into the notion of the radiophonic voice and the ability to broadcast a sense of corporeality through sound that can help us make sense of how such instances create a visceral experience in the listening of Beckett's radio plays. Such an experience also recalls Brian Massumi's work on affect theory in *Parables of the Virtual*, as well as Heller-Roazen's research on sensation in *The Inner Touch* that we have previously looked at. While this dissertation would like to, ideally, propose a form of sensorial spectatorship that fully bypasses cognition, the non-tabula rasa nature of humans renders this an impractical goal. Moreover, the ideas put forth by Massumi and Heller-Roazen, while significant, have also been met with criticism. Donovan O. Schaefer traces the evolution of affect theory and points out how the traditional understanding of affect as "resistant to any sort of systematization or methodological improvement [...] [is] worryingly aristocratic, locking affect theory into a permanent mistiness" (65). Despite that, he proposes that affects are best understood "as animal" (66) that have "semi-stable affective architectures" and make up "sovereign engines of our experience and our decision-making, inherently multiple, but each advancing a set of intransigent priorities". Hence, we must take a closer look at the tension between these multiple affective priorities to better understand the form of sensorial spectatorship that might arise from Beckettian cruelty. This section builds upon observations made regarding the senses in chapter one's analysis of *Embers*, aiming to expand upon the idea of sensorial

spectatorship by looking at how imagination contributes to a corporeal experience, how systems are deconstructed, as well as how ambiguity adds an ominous air that unsettles us.

In our discussion of *Embers* and *Words and Music*, attention was brought to the scenes with sexual undertones and how they cause discomfort. *All That Fall* shares a scene with similar qualities as well, one that is equal parts ambiguous and suggestive. On Mrs Rooney's journey to the train station, she encounters Mr Slocum and he offers her a ride. As she has difficulty getting into the car, Mrs Slocum offers to help push her in and the scene plays out in an extremely erotic manner:

MR SLOCUM: [*Switching off engine.*] I'm coming, Mrs Rooney, I'm coming, give me time, I'm as stiff as yourself.

[*Sound of MR SLOCUM extracting himself from driver's seat.*]

MRS ROONEY: Stiff! Well I like that! And me heaving all over back and front. [*To herself*] The dry old reprobate!

MR SLOCUM: [*In position behind her.*] Now, Mrs Rooney, how shall we do this?

MRS ROONEY: As if I were a bale, Mr Slocum, don't be afraid, [*Pause. Sounds of effort.*] That's the way! [*Effort.*] Lower! [*Effort.*] Wait! [*Pause.*] No, don't let go! [*Pause.*] Suppose I do get up, will I ever get down?

MR SLOCUM: [*Breathing hard.*] You'll get down, Mrs Rooney, you'll get down. We may not get you up, but I warrant you we'll get you down.

[*He resumes his efforts. Sound of these.*]

MRS ROONEY: Oh! ... Lower! ... Don't be afraid! ... We're past the age when.... There! ... Now! ... Get your shoulder under it .... Oh! ... [*Giggles.*] Oh glory! ... Up! Up! ... Ah! ... I'm in! [*Panting of MR SLOCUM. He slams the door. In a scream.*] My frock! You've nipped my frock! [*MR SLOCUM*

*opens the door. MRS ROONEY frees her frock. MR SLOCUM slams the door.*

*His violent unintelligible muttering as he walks round to the other door.*

*Tearfully.] My nice frock! Look what you've done to my nice frock! [MR SLOCUM gets into his seat, slams driver's door, presses starter. The engine does not start. He releases starter.] What will Dan say when he sees me?*

MR SLOCUM: Has he then recovered his sight?

MRS ROONEY: No, I mean when he knows, what will he say when he feels the hole? [*MR SLOCUM presses starter. As before. Silence.*]

(Beckett, *All That Fall* 178)

Unlike *Embers* and *Words and Music*, the scene does not present itself as a sudden intrusion of memory but instead, it is a drawn-out moment in the present. As such, this moment is made even more uncomfortable because it feels like we are witnessing the actual occurrence rather than a recall of it, rendering our presence even more intrusive because the temporal distance is shortened.

This scene also exposes the importance of using context in conjunction with language because separately, words are simply words, but language acquires new meaning with added context. However, even though we are given the situation of how such an exchange between Mrs Rooney and Mr Slocum came to be, the way it plays out is still undeniably provocative. The suggestive nature of this scene is already evident on paper through phrases with double meanings like “what will he say when he feels the hole?” and “I’m coming!”, made even more explicit by Mr Slocum’s name. Moreover, the titillating effect expressions such as “That’s the way! [*Effort.*] Lower! [*Effort.*] Wait! [*Pause.*]” and “Oh! ... Lower! ... Don’t be afraid! ... We’re past the age when.... There! ... Now! ...” (178) will only be heightened once they are heard, as a radio play is intended to, because there are no visual elements to provide additional context cues and situate us. We might refer to BBC Radio 4’s recording of

the 2015 performance of *All That Fall* directed by Max Stafford-Clark, where this scene plays out from 12:27 to 13:44. The shiver in Mrs Rooney's voice as she exclaims "[o]h glory!" and her sigh of relief after arguably parallel an orgasm and since it is not a stage play, this possibility will not be undercut as our imaginations are given free reign. Coupled with McTighe's suggestion that the radiophonic voice of Mrs Rooney allows her to "broadcast a sense of her weighty corporeality purely through sound" (40), this scene emphasizes how it is rooted in reality, collapsing the temporal distance that we had the benefit of in *Embers* and *Words and Music*, forcing us to sit in discomfort caused by our own imagination.

Another aspect of *All That Fall* that creates unease is the way Mrs Rooney's emotions are navigated. Oftentimes, she would get caught up in her emotions and seemingly start a monologue, only to be interrupted by other characters. When she encounters Mr Tyler, she has a highly emotional moment where she contemplates not continuing her journey to meet Mr Rooney:

MRS ROONEY: Go, Mr Tyler, go on and leave me, listening to the cooing of the ringdoves. [*Cooing.*] If you see my poor blind Dan tell him I was on my way to meet him when it all came over me again, like a flood. Say to him, Your poor wife, She told me to tell you it all came flooding over her again and ... [*The voice breaks.*] ... she simply went back home ... straight back home....

MR TYLER: Come, Mrs Rooney, come, the mail has not yet gone up, just take my free arm and we'll be there with time and to spare.

MRS ROONEY: [*Sobbing.*] What? What's all this now? [*Calmer.*] Can't you see I'm in trouble? [*With anger.*] Have you no respect for misery? [*Sobbing*] Minnie! Little Minnie!

MR TYLER: Come, Mrs Rooney, come, the mail has not yet gone up, just take my free arm and we'll be there with time and to spare.

MRS ROONEY: [*Brokenly.*] In her forties now she'd be, I don't know, fifty, girding up her lovely little loins, getting ready for the change....

MR TYLER: Come, Mrs Rooney, come, the mail—

MRS ROONEY: [*Exploding.*] Will you get along with you, Mr Rooney, Mr Tyler I mean, will you get along with you now and cease molesting me? What kind of a country is this

where a woman can't weep her heart out on the highways and byways without being tormented by retired bill-brokers! (Beckett, *All That Fall* 176)

In this scene, tone indicators like Mrs Rooney's "[c]ooing" and her voice breaking draws us into her state of mind and allows us to empathize with her despite not having a full grasp on the situation. However, Mr Tyler interjects to remind Mrs Rooney that there is still time and urges her to go with him, breaking the emotional buildup as well. Mrs Rooney's frustration is evident as she scorns about how Mr Tyler cannot see that she is "in trouble", eventually getting angered, questioning: "Have you no respect for misery?" before sobbing. As mentioned briefly earlier, the characters Mrs Rooney meets are associated with a system of thought and in Mr Tyler's case, it is time. Mrs Rooney's attempts to continue despite Mr Tyler's constant interference underscores the central issue that this thesis has constantly looked at: the incongruence between the thinking mind and the feeling body. Mrs Rooney is aware of this as well and her comparison of Mr Tyler's interference to an act of molestation shows how she sees it as an outrage and a stain on her emotional vulnerability. This parallels the relationship that Words and Music share in *Words and Music* but in the interaction between Mrs Rooney and Mr Tyler, the emotional side takes a more active and assertive role,

criticizing the prevalence of systems by using the analogy of a woman unable to “weep her heart out on the highways and byways without being tormented by retired bill-brokers”.

It is also no surprise that this moment is related to the memory of Minnie as well. As Charles Lyons points out, *All That Fall* is a drama “that exists only as language and sound” and “Beckett uses language to hide the presence of a memory that cannot be spoken but remains in consciousness” (“All That Fall” 76). The memory of Minnie is never explicated but it is one that holds Mrs Rooney captive in flesh as she is

just wasting slowly, painlessly away, keeping up my strength with arrowroot and calves-foot jelly, till in the end you wouldn't see me under the blankets any more than a board. [*Pause.*] Oh no coughing or spitting or bleeding or vomiting, just drifting gently down into the higher life, and remembering, remembering ... [*The voice breaks.*] ... all the silly unhappiness ... as though ... it had never happened .... (Beckett, *All That Fall* 180 – 1)

By using grotesque descriptions of the flesh and bodily fluids, we are reminded of the visceral qualities of Artaud's *To Have Done With the Judgement of God*. Mrs Rooney's desire to collapse mind and body here can be read as a more distorted version of Croak's longing for Words and Music to work together. Through all this, the audience is still unable to discern what actually happened to Minnie as the promises of revelation are constantly interrupted or cut off – we are forced to play a game of push and pull with Mrs Rooney's mental landscape while being teased with moments of near disclosure. In other words, we are kept in a limbo-like state, wavering between knowing and not knowing, all without any assurance of whether we will eventually be privy to everything. This feeling is exacerbated by the fact that *All That Fall* forces us to participate in the play by proxy of our imagination and as such, we find ourselves more invested in the narrative because we have a stake in it as well. However, the fact that certainty is not afforded to us forces us to work with what is

presented to us by letting our senses feel all that they evoke. *All That Fall*, like many of Beckett's works, is not a play that depends on the audience understanding what it is about. Instead, it relies purely on sensation and what the audience feels and experiences as the play progresses to push them to a "pure, detached and implacable feeling" (Artaud, "Letters on Language" 114) beyond epistemological structures.

### **3.3 The Cruelty of *All That Fall***

The final section of this chapter aims to address the remaining elements of cruelty, spanning both Beckettian and Artaudian, in *All That Fall* to map out the experience of listening to Beckett's radio plays and show how Beckettian cruelty might change the way we engage with the world around us. As we have discussed in the previous chapters, Beckett's radio plays, and his works in general, do not afford us the comfort of certainty. But it is also in his radio plays that we find the potential of an alternative Beckettian cruelty that forces us to confront one pertinent condition of our existence: that we can never be fully knowable and understandable, even to ourselves. Beckett's use of the radio medium turns the focus away from the explicit to show how it is in the unseen and unsaid that sensorial assault fully transpires. As Beckettian cruelty heavily relies on absence and not knowing, we might see how it can in turn generate a platform for an unmediated access to experiencing the world around us as there is minimal intervention of logic and rationality. With reference to Brian Massumi's *Parables For the Virtual*, this section will investigate what an unmediated access to experiencing the world might look like and the potential it holds.

We begin by once again looking at the elements that have been brought up since the beginning – pauses and silences. Compared to *Embers* and *Words and Music*, the pauses and silences in *All That Fall* are not as dominant and often placed in where one would expect them to be normal conversations and speech patterns. That is not to say that they do not have

any effect at all because when such a pattern is interrupted, they become even more impactful. For instance, when Mrs Rooney meets Christy at the start, nearly every sentence is followed by a silence:

MRS ROONEY: I thought the hinny was familiar. How is your poor wife?

CHRISTY: No better, Ma'am.

MRS ROONEY: Your daughter then?

CHRISTY: No worse, Ma'am.

[*Silence.*]

MRS ROONEY: Why do you halt? [*Pause.*] But why do I halt?

[*Silence.*]

CHRISTY: Nice day for the races, Ma'am.

MRS ROONEY: No doubt it is. [*Pause.*] But will it hold up? [*Pause. With emotion.*] Will it hold up?

[*Silence.*]

CHRISTY: I suppose you wouldn't—

MRS ROONEY: Hist! [*Pause.*] Surely to goodness that cannot be the up mail I hear already.

[*Silence. The hinny neighs. Silence.*] (Beckett, *All That Fall* 172)

Here, the silences are not antagonizing but rather, they create a sense of longingness that remains unrealized. The first silence comes after Christy reports his daughter's condition as "[n]o worse" and being a rather ambiguous answer, the silence placed there evokes an uncertainty as to whether Christy will continue explaining the circumstance. Mrs Rooney verbalizes this question as she asks "[w]hy do you halt? [*Pause.*] But why do I halt?", simultaneously emphasizing that she too has a role in generating silence because silence and absence are not just caused by one party but by the both of them. Her question is then met

with another silence before Christy abruptly comments on the weather. As mentioned, Mrs Rooney's interaction with Christy is marked by social niceties and etiquette and since Mrs Rooney's question is not aligned with that, the silence here can be seen as a rupture in the structure that Christy has to hastily repair after. Similarly, Mrs Rooney's next question of "will it hold up?" after is vague and not what Christy is used to, once again invoking silence as an indication that she does not fit squarely into the system Christy lives by. Hence, silence here forms an emptiness that is reminiscent of a life that is fully guided by systems of thought and not lived on one's own terms.

Another instance where we should take note of pauses and silences is when Mrs Rooney asks Mr Rooney about the reason for the train delay: "But you must know! You were on it! Was it at the terminus? Did you leave on time? Or was it on the line? [*Pause.*] Did something happen on the line? [*Pause.*] Dan! [*Brokenly.*] Why won't you tell me! [*Silence. They move off. Dragging feet, etc. They halt. Pause.*]" (191). Given that the pauses here occur each time Mrs Rooney mentions the train line, it is clear that there is something being hidden from her that she is desperate to find out and the pauses imply Mrs Rooney's unfulfilled desire because Mr Rooney refuses to answer her. Even as she cries out to him "[*b*]rokenly", she is only met with "[*s*]ilence" and they can only continue their journey mundanely because to Mr Rooney, "[a]ll this stopping and starting again is devilish, devilish!" (191); he wants to move forward but Mrs Rooney keeps him from doing so. Silence once again creates an emptiness that will continue to haunt the entire play and this scene foreshadows the ending of *All That Fall* as well.

Considering the arguments made thus far, it is perhaps now appropriate to go back to the roots of cruelty and discuss how *All That Fall* can also shock us. The shock value does not come from any jarring sounds but instead, is caused by language expressing "what it does not ordinarily express" and in the process, reveals "its possibilities for producing physical

shock” (Artaud, “Metaphysics and the *Mise en Scene*” 46). In Mrs Rooney’s conversation with Mr Rooney after being jeered by the Lynch twins, Mrs Rooney suddenly asks: “Did you ever wish to kill a child? [Pause.] Nip some young doom in the bud. [Pause.] Many a time at night, in winter, on the black road home, I nearly attacked the boy. [Pause.] Poor Jerry! [Pause.] What restrained me then? [Pause.] Not fear of man. [Pause.]” (Beckett, *All That Fall* 191). The nature of this question shifts the air into an ominous one and shocks us as we do not just wonder why Mrs Rooney asked that question but also how that thought even came about in the first place. There is almost something primal about it and this reminds us of Artaud’s desire that theater should mirror and expose us to an interior “savagery” (“The Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)” 92) present within ourselves. Perhaps Mrs Rooney’s question is a rhetorical one meant for us as well, but it is also a question no one dares to ask because of how abominable it is. The fact that Mrs Rooney seems to be recounting a personal memory of her nearly “attack[ing] the boy” (Beckett, *All That Fall* 191) and wondering “[w]hat restrained [her] then” adds to the disbelief and makes her question even more sinister. This moment is also punctuated with pauses, which again create emptiness but this time, it is not an emptiness that is filled with yearning but rather, it is a space that compels the audience to do a double take and realize the gravity of possessing the desire to kill a child and Mrs Rooney having had the impulse to do so. But what is unsettling is that because of the nature of the topic and how vague the pauses are, the pauses might indicate remorse and regret as Mrs Rooney exclaims “[p]oor Jerry!” but it can also seem like Mrs Rooney is relishing in the moment as she recalls it, adding to the already ominous air.

This scene also foreshadows the ending of *All That Fall* where Mrs Rooney asks Jerry about the cause of the train’s delay:

MRS ROONEY: Jerry! [JERRY *halts.*] Did you hear what the hitch was?

[Pause.] Did you hear what kept the train so late?

MR ROONEY: How would he have heard? Come on.

MRS ROONEY: What was it, Jerry?

JERRY: It was a—

MR ROONEY: Leave the boy alone, he knows nothing! Come on!

MRS ROONEY: What was it, Jerry?

JERRY: It was a little child, Ma'am.

[MR ROONEY *groans.*]

MRS ROONEY: What do you mean, it was a little child?

JERRY: It was a little child fell out of the carriage, Ma'am. [*Pause.*] On to the

line, Ma'am. [*Pause.*] Under the wheels, Ma'am.

[*Silence. JERRY runs off. His steps die away. Tempest of wind and rain. It abates. They move on. Dragging steps, etc. They halt. Tempest of wind and rain.*]. (199)

The way that this scene builds up reintroduces the tension from before as Mr Rooney's constant interjections begin as an attempt to divert the conversation by trying to convince Mrs Rooney that Jerry would not know why the train was delayed. This eventually grows into agitation as he yells at Mrs Rooney to "[l]eave the boy alone, he knows nothing!" as soon as Jerry tries to answer. This is the moment where Mr Rooney realizes that Jerry does know why the train was delayed and is actively trying to prevent Mrs Rooney from acquiring that knowledge, signalling to us that he has something to hide. The shock comes when Jerry reveals that the delay was caused by a child falling out of a carriage which, on the surface, would seem like an unfortunate accident. However, in light of the preceding events, we are forced to consider the possibility of the child being pushed onto the tracks by Mr Rooney and having to imagine such a scene play out unleashes cruelty onto the audience by leaving us at a loss. Additionally, right after the revelation, it is met with silence and the "[*t*empest of wind

*and rain*” that abates, allowing us to hear Mr and Mrs Rooney walking with “[d]ragging steps” before stopping and allowing the tempest to take over. Given the already turbulent relationship between Mr and Mrs Rooney, the tempest points us to how further chaos is added with the possibility of the child’s accident being attributed to Mr Rooney.

Of course, these are all possibilities and multiple interpretations we can make based on what we are given but we cannot be sure of any one of them. The cruelty at play here is beyond the virtue of simple ambiguity, it is an ambiguity that creates and retains suspense. In *Sight Unseen*, Elissa S. Guralnick points out that the ending of *All That Fall* “must disorient us in the root sense of the word” (84), echoing De Vos’s sentiment that “Beckett extends the audience in the disruption of the barrier between actors and spectators” (389) because we are also participating in characters such as Mrs Rooney’s process of “writing and listening to their own story”. The disorientation is not only a result of visual deprivation due to the radio medium, but also a result of the ambiguity and silence that pervades Beckett’s works, both of which is heightened by the lack of images presented to the audience. The combination of these elements provokes a certain, sometimes visceral, discomfort that stems from the inability to know and as such, foregrounds the role of imagination as a possible means to pacify the mind’s desire for knowledge. De Vos accurately notes that “Artaud seeks to transgress repetition and representation, and in doing so he inevitably encounters its very limits” (360). Hence, it is the ambiguity of Beckett’s works that gives it its boundless nature, by proxy of our imagination, and this can in turn be considered a potential means to this Artaudian endeavour.

There is an eternal openness present in *All That Fall* that I argue is being supported by notions of being half and not full. We have touched on this briefly while discussing the impenetrability of Mrs Rooney’s mind in the first section of this chapter – how vague descriptions such “[n]o better”, “[n]o worst” (Beckett, *All That Fall* 172) and “fairly

comfortable” (177) are not definitive and neither here nor there. In doing so, they reject definition and consequently, defy the structure of logic and rationality. In the same vein, one important point that *All That Fall* brings up is the idea of a person that has “never really been born” (196), a direct reference to C. G. Jung’s lecture where Jung discussed the case of a little girl who had “some most amazing mythological dreams” as an example of children who “were living their life in archetypal dreams and could not adapt” (Jung 205). By comparing dreams to having never been fully born, what Jung seemingly alludes to is that these children are unable to assimilate into the real world because they live in an inner reality of their dreams. However, considering our discussion on systems that govern our world and the impact they have, I would argue that in such a world where systems like language play a significant role, it is crucial to consider that which falls outside these systems and is left unsaid and unspoken – dreams being one of them. Since dreams are a part of our inner reality and not the objective outer reality, they can be positioned outside of language and hence not condemned to a specific meaning within a system of representation. Similarly, things like sensations lie outside of systems of logic and rationality and hence do not need to pander to them. A sensorial and intuitive listening experience does not require the audience to understand anything and as Chiang points out, the audience’s intuitive perspective has a “dreamlike quality” to it (25). As such, Jung’s argument might be looked at in another way, one that suggests that not being fully born refers to one being caged by dogmatic societal systems and hence not being able to experience the world as it is – we are never fully born unless we have the ability to feel. By lying outside of systems, sensorial experiences become sites of life and conversely, systems of thought become sites of death.

As we look at how Beckett’s plays demand a sensorial spectatorship over a logical one, we also see how it evokes a Beckettian cruelty that creates opportunities for an unmediated access to experiencing the world, a process that involves our own awareness and

intuitive responses. On the relationship between sensation and the body, Brian Massumi posits that “sensation is utterly redundant and destructive to our mediated discursive body’s descriptions precisely because it appeals to an unmediated experience” (2). In this context, sensation is redundant in the face of our socially inscribed bodies because these bodies will habitually position sensation within larger systems of signs used to understand the world, but that does not mean that sensation itself is redundant. Massumi further posits that the unmediated experience presents a danger far worse than naive realism – naive subjectivism (2), and foregrounds how sensation needs to remain abstract and unexplainable in order for it to be effective because “[s]tructure is the place where nothing ever happens” (27). His concern of naive subjectivism thus stems from the necessary inability to understand because in the face of incomprehensibility, it is tempting to not engage, to assume passivity and leave things as they are. Massumi’s claims are undeniably valid, and I believe that the unmediated experience is indeed an impossibility as well because we are all predisposed social beings. Hence, it is this dissertation’s argument that Beckettian cruelty does not strive for an unmediated experience through the sensorial but rather, it looks towards the possibility for an unmediated *access* to experience instead. When aspiring towards an unmediated access, predispositions are not disregarded but rather, we allow sensations to take over despite their presence. There is a conscious letting go of the need to know and need to organize and this is particularly evident in the openness in Beckett’s works because they force us to confront the prospect of not knowing and to sit with it, no matter how uncomfortable. By doing so, our attention is directed straight to how we feel, forcing us to think about and engage with our instinctual responses whether we are willing or not.

## CONCLUSION

*“Death is not the greatest loss in life, the greatest loss is what dies inside of us while we live.”*

— NORMAN COUSINS

What might it mean for us to experience the world rather than understand it? This is a question that this dissertation has attempted to answer by charting the possibilities of a Beckettian cruelty. In the process, we have looked at how Beckett’s works collapse the distance between stage and audience, how they have called the effectiveness of systems into question, and how they utilize absence to create a sensorial space of imagination and openness. This dissertation has thus presented a case for Beckettian cruelty as an extension and potentially more potent form of cruelty that can stand up to the Artaudian variation.

We began this investigation by first establishing the roots of Artaudian cruelty through *Les Cenci* and *To Have Done With the Judgement of God* before looking at what Beckettian cruelty entails through Beckett’s radio plays. Beginning with *Embers*, we witnessed how Beckett used the radio medium to his advantage and explored what it means to situate ourselves in a “white world” (Beckett, *Embers* 251) and attune ourselves to sounds coming out from the dark. We saw how even with pauses and moments of silence indicated by the stage directions, *Embers* is still a play that is full of sound but despite that, it still has its moments of absence that are simultaneously haunting and gripping. It requires us to feel and experience rather than attempt to understand. *Embers* also provided a springboard for us to question the materiality of the characters we hear because without visual aids, physical presence is not a guarantee; navigating such a question involves using our imaginations and most importantly, it requires us to sit with the unknown, a theme that runs through this dissertation. Following this, we looked at *Words and Music* to discern what it means for our intuition to be incongruent with systems of thoughts that govern our realities. We saw how

our aversion towards uncertainty and the unknown stems from our over-reliance on systems of thought that gradually came to form our circle of comfort. However, *Words* shows us that it is the comfort that comes from having things definite and clearly delineated that strip us of our innate human ability to feel. This chapter thus took a deeper look into the Beckettian absence by showing how pauses and silences in Beckett's works can be marked by their contemplative or antagonistic quality and how such instances encourage self-introspection with the end goal of us creating the melodies of our own minds. This chapter also highlighted the important consideration that Beckettian cruelty does not aim to privilege the intuitive body and its senses over the thinking, rational mind. Rather, the goal is for them to work together as we learn to be able to consciously let go of the desire for certainty brought about by the thinking mind and let the feeling body take the lead. Finally, we ended our study by attempting to synthesize our observations in *Embers* and *Words and Music* through Beckett's earliest radio play *All That Fall*. *All That Fall* revealed to us the downfalls of language and showed how even though it can aid our imagination, discomfort and tension can arise from it as well. We also saw how *All That Fall* contains multiple layers of imagination and as such, we can never be sure of what we hear. This chapter concluded by analyzing how the Beckettian cruelty incites shock and maintains an eternal openness by leaving us at a loss. It also looked to Brian Massumi's work to put forth the idea of Beckettian cruelty being a gateway to an unmediated access to the world as we are made to engage with our instinctual responses.

Considering all the arguments presented thus far, the last thing that needs to be addressed is how we might translate the experience of listening to a Beckett radio play to our own lived realities. It is this concluding section's aim to put all that we have looked at in the context of our realities and see how the effects of Beckettian cruelty can be maintained beyond his works. I once again turn to Heller-Roazen and his statement that "[t]he

contemporary moment is marked by the possible disappearance of the common sense [and] the inner touch that linked sensation to subjectivity” (“The Anaesthetic Animal” 289). Even though this statement was made more than a decade ago, it is still very much relevant today as we witness ourselves slowly becoming cogs of a machine that serve a specific function to keep society running. As such, Beckettian cruelty jolts us out of such mundaneness by challenging our comfort zone and since it does not rely on the systems of thought that govern society, it can potentially be a means to re-engage with the common sense as it begins with absence and activates our senses while we respond to its ambivalence. Beckettian cruelty is merely a starting point for getting us to feel what it means to sit with discomfort and the unknown and it is up to us to put that into practice. Beckettian cruelty exposes the fallacies of Artaudian cruelty’s graphic nature and introduces us to the potential of emptiness created by absence and the limitations of systems like language that we have come to depend on out of habit. In these spaces of emptiness, we do not have systems to guide us and as such, we are able to hone our intuition as we let ourselves experience the empty spaces that words fail to encapsulate, for language itself is a frame of reference. Comparing both forms of cruelty, an insufficiency of language is assuaged in Artaudian cruelty by being reduced to jarring, inarticulate sounds but in Beckettian cruelty, it remains without recourse. It is precisely in the face of this irreconcilable insufficiency that we rely on our instincts to simply feel and experience the work sensorially, allowing us to be “temporarily freed from the tyranny of habit’s repeatedly extended distortion” (Chiang 185). To that, I acknowledge that such a task is easier said than done and to undo what has been ingrained into us might be a Sisyphean task but perhaps realizing this and wondering how we might experience the world in an alternate way is sufficient, for now.

Beckettian cruelty does not force us to throw ourselves in the deep end immediately. Instead, it urges us to participate in the limits of our potentiality and in the totality of our

being – our experiences, our losses, our sensibilities, and the unknown. For Beckett, “[n]othing is more real than nothing” (*Malone Dies* 17). By opening ourselves to that which we do not know for certain, that which is not explicit – the nothingness that surrounds us – we continue to hone our intuition to reach an unmediated access to experience. As we do so, Beckettian cruelty presents the possibility that we can perhaps, one day, finally dare to seek out a genuinely unmediated experience where we are able to live rather than simply survive.

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