

The Endlessness of Ending: Samuel Beckett and the Mind

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Samuel Beckett's work across the genres has always shown a keen interest in both the topography and the function of the mind. The experience of interiority in Beckett is complex and it is often on the brink of its own collapse. Beckett undertook a comprehensive self-education of the mind, primarily from the disciplines of philosophy and psychoanalysis, to understand this interiority which he would render poetically. If Beckett is interested in a physics and even a geometry of the psychic space, the recurrent image of the skullscape—from *The Trilogy* and *Endgame* to *Worstward Ho*—is also replete with the minimal and yet necessary possibilities of thinking. The 'unformulable gropings of the mind' in *Company* are charged with dialectical tension as they capture the last traces of thoughts and sensations, on their way to absolute 'mindlessness'. This mindlessness in its turn fails to arrive in the final run, teasing the cogito with a 'hauntology' of impending madness.

The crystalized remnant of the Beckettian mind is 'unstillable' and there is always a final stirring on the cards with a potential to unsettle the still. In the midst of a perpetual oscillation, the 'remains of mind' hold on to the experience of fundamental emotions such as joy and pain. From the pre-Socratics to Lacan, Beckett avails himself to centuries worth of theorizing on the functions, and indeed dis-functions, of the mind to grasp the last remaining kernels of thought, feeling, and humanity. The 'profounds of mind' are locked up in a potentially infinite intermittency of motion and stasis. If a desire to end confronts the endlessness of the mind on the one hand; on the other, the mind is seen as a reservoir of ghosts. It is swollen with a desire to conjure the dead other. And as we see across the TV and radio plays, the spectral emanations of the mind may or may not offer relief. The voice's "begging of the mind" in *...but the clouds...* connects with Krapp's 'spools' or May's anonymous loops of traumatic repetition as she goes on, 'revolving it all' in her 'poor mind'.

A geometrical charting of the psychic space in Beckett is almost invariably backed up by the function of the moving body, recalling the three zones in Murphy's mind and their response to a Cartesian mind/body problem. Beckett's stellar images of the mind such as the 'penny farthing hell' speak to a fascinating trajectory where the mind/body dialogue slowly moves towards a mathematical and cartographic interest in the mind. In this 'softening soft' of the mind, words are softened up and liquefied into a process of mental worsening, never to reach the finale of absolute extinction. In Beckett's foregrounding of this heightened and yet minimal mental function, fundamental questions regarding language (voice and speech), intellect, desire, emotion, storytelling and so on are at stake.

Beckett's manifold portrayal of the mind is biographically grounded in his interest in psychology in the so-called *Psychology Notes* as well as his own psychoanalysis with Wilfred Bion. In addition to Bion, Beckett's emphasis on the mind has been variously approached through psychoanalytic doctrines of Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein and Jacques Lacan. If the psychoanalytic readings of Beckett approach the mental question from the perspective of the unconscious, the recent neuro-scientific and cognitivist forays into Beckett have opened up

the debate about the proximities of identification between the mind and the brain. Beckett's work is becoming increasingly important in understanding the subtleties of brain damage. Neurobiologist Antonio Damasio's reference to Beckett's Winnie as an illustration of a specific neurological condition is a case in point. Catherine Malabou's Deleuzean re-reading of Beckettian exhaustion has pushed this further into a 'literary form of neuropathology' where it inhabits a critical space between psychoanalysis and the neuro-sciences.