

Longing for Less

Exploring the minor affect of *sansibility*
in Samuel Beckett's Trilogy

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Abstract

This thesis concerns itself with analysing Samuel Beckett's three loosely connected novels, commonly referred to as the Trilogy, in light of affect theory. Through close readings of *Molloy* (1951/1955), *Malone Dies* (1951/1956) and *The Unnamable* (1953/1958), I wish to explore how the minor negative affect of *sansibility*, a desire for lessness or inclination to exist *without*, is expressed by the various point-of-view characters and how this relates to their physical and mental states. Additionally, this paper will analyse how *sansibility* is reflected in the language, writing style, and structuring of the novels. Before delving into how this particular affect manifests in the novels themselves, I seek to determine its boundaries order to distinguish *sansibility* from other similar feelings and drives, before exploring how it (and, to an extent, affect in general) presents itself in other Beckett works. Throughout the thesis, I will use Sianne Ngai's definition of 'minor affects' from her work *Ugly Feelings* (2005) to illustrate how this feeling fits in with other smaller negative emotions.

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Ambient Affects: Introduction

The literary canon of Samuel Beckett is characterised by subtraction, negation, emptiness, and absence. His ambient spaces are usually desolate, characterised by a sense of lack or post-ness; where there was once more, there is now less (*Waiting for Godot*, *Happy Days*).

Thematically, elements of isolation (*Company*), sensory deprivation (*Murphy*), and an overall focus on social outcasts usually link to involuntary or conscious withdrawals from the world at large. The textual structure itself is visibly affected, as seen in Beckett's emphasis on silence or pause between utterances (*Endgame*) or in the repetition, omitting, or minimal use of different words ("Play", "Krapp's Last Tape", "Lessness"). His later works also see an increasing commitment to simplicity and minimalism, as exemplified by a floating mouth's refusal of the word "I" in "Not I", the 40-second duration of the play "Breath", and the eroded language of Beckett's penultimate prose piece, *Worstward Ho*:

Less best. No. Naught best. Best worse. No. Not best worse. Naught not best worse.

Less best worse. No. Least. Least best worse. Least never to be naught. Never to naught be brought. Never by naught be nulled. Unnullable least. Say that best worse.

With leastening words say least best worse. For want of worser worst. (*Company / Ill Seen Ill Said / Worstward Ho*, *Stirrings Still* 95, hereafter designated *Company etc.*)

This expressed longing for lessness in *Worstward Ho* provides a good entrance to some of the main concerns in this thesis. The novella centres around a voice trying to create their own little world out of a "dim void" (83), to weave something out of nothingness and eventually reduce it to an "[u]nnullable least" (95) a point of absolute *lessness*. Despite the narrator's persistent doubts, constant negations of prior statements, and admissions of failure, they keep inventing, beginning with a pained shadow of a creature: "Say a body. Where none. No mind. Where none. That at least. A place. Where none. For the body. To be in. [...] No ground but say ground. So as to say pain" (81-82). Through a methodical process of creation and nullification, the voice eventually creates more figures which become part of an endeavour to move 'worstward' and effectively reach a point where language can no longer express how bad the situation is, a nod to Shakespeare's *King Lear*: "Edgar. [*aside*] And worse I may be yet. The worst is not / So long as we can say, 'This is the worst'" (IV.1.2279-2280). While language will inevitably struggle in this endeavour, unable to express the inexpressible, the narrator keeps trying, and their expressed desire for lessness is echoed both thematically and structurally. The text appears to employ a grammatical system of its own, its speaker stringing

together words as if purposefully aiming to use as few different words as possible to avoid excessive language, expressing themselves “[w]ith leastening words” (*Company etc.* 95). Typical of Beckett’s works, emphasis is placed on the silence between utterances. Because *Worstward Ho* is divided into many smaller segments with line-breaks to separate them, silence could be said to physically occupy space in the text.

Beckett’s overall focus on removal and subtraction would also famously extend to the writing process itself. Whereas his earlier works were usually written in English, a sudden shift to French in the initial manuscript of his short story “Suite” (later renamed “La Fin”) in 1946, would mark a transition, after which he wrote mainly in French while also translating his own works into English (Dukes 5; Knowlson 358). This decision was born from a wish to write “without style” and thus attain “a greater simplicity and objectivity” (Beckett, qtd. in Knowlson 357). Beckett’s shift in focus would also present a way for him to distinguish himself from one of his great inspirations, James Joyce, with whom he had an ambivalent relationship: “I realised that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one’s material. [...] [M]y own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding” (Beckett qtd. in Knowlson 352). Perhaps ironically, Beckett’s increased commitment to removal would result in a highly productive “frenzy of writing” from 1946 to 1953 (Beckett, qtd. in Knowlson 358), a period that saw the creation of many of his most prominent works, such as *Mercier and Camier*, *Waiting for Godot*, and a series of three novels commonly known as the Trilogy.

These loosely connected books; *Molloy* (1951/1955), *Malone Dies* (1951/1956) and *The Unnamable* (1953/1958), constitutes four extensive monologues by various point-of-view characters; the wandering paralytic Molloy and his pursuer Moran, the dying elderly man Malone, and an unnamed figure in a near-empty space, the Unnamable. In an effort “to empty the novel of its usual recognizable objects—plot, situation characters” (Barrett, qtd. in *Three Novels*, back cover, hereafter designated *TN*), Beckett’s Trilogy remains difficult to decipher due to its focus on contradictory negation. As with many of Beckett’s other works, early readings would usually attempt to place these novels within frameworks of existentialism or “French-inspired nihilism”, although several prominent critics would eventually argue against these readings (Moorjani 23). Others would focus on the Trilogy’s position as post-war literature, analysing the novels in relation to trauma theory, as well placing them within historical and ethical frameworks, with some drawing attention to autobiographical aspects such as traces of Beckett’s own youth in Ireland (24-25). After the Beckett Collection was

unveiled in 1971 at the University of Reading, which is now “the largest holding library of his material in the world” (Lee 50), many contemporary critics have turned to genetic Beckett criticism, the study of drafts, notes and other “unpublished material for the study of his published work” (8-9). Additionally, due to an increased interest “in affect and the material body”, more recent interpretations of Beckett’s works centre on decomposition and decay, notably viewing the Trilogy’s portrayals of the impotent body through transhumanist, psychoanalyst, or medical lenses, and bringing attention to the “downward spiral” which gradually removes any sense of physicality over the course of the novels (Moorjani 30). In line with contemporary analyses, this thesis will also concern itself with portrayals of the decaying body. However, the main area of focus is the Trilogy’s emotional aspects and how Beckett’s own longing for lessness is *felt* by the characters themselves. I intend to analyse this particular feeling, which I have decided to name *sansibility* through the lens of affect theory.

As a series of interrelated disciplinary fields of study, affect theory generally centres around “the role of affect and emotions and their various manifestations in human behaviour, culture and society” (Cuddon & Habib 13-14), deriving its name from the capacity to affect or move. Affect theory’s conception is credited to the work of psychologist Silvan Tomkins, who described nine types of combinatory affects that shape our emotions, such as anger-rage, shame-humiliation, or interest-excitement (Frank & Wilson 4). According to Tomkins, affect acts as an amplifier and assembly programme of “other biological subsystems (drive, cognitive, motor, perceptual, homeostatic)” (Ngai 52). He thus compares affect’s status as a “co-assembler” of these functions to how “letter[s] of the alphabet” are combined “to form different words, sentences, [or] paragraphs” (qtd. in Ngai 55).

From affect theory’s inception, scholars have recognised its muddiness, which has prompted some critique. However, the fact that “[t]here is no single, generalizable theory of affect” fittingly mirrors the inherent subjective quality of affective forces (Seigworth & Gregg 3). In relation to Tomkins’ own comparison, “like words, feelings both are and are not our own” (Frank & Wilson 3). Although our subjective feelings are linked by common characteristics, the way we feel, process, and express them are different. Whereas some people’s sadness may mix with and be expressed outwardly through anger, others may become distant or cold, pensively contemplating the feeling of sorrow. As this thesis aims to categorise and analyse the particular affect of *sansibility* in Beckett’s works by relating it to similar emotions and drives, the terms affect, emotion, and feeling will generally be used interchangeably to refer to an inner “emotional state or reaction” which affects the feeling

subject (Britannica). Finally, although “in many ways synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter* [...] affect need not be especially forceful” (Seigworth & Gregg 2), a point clearly demonstrated by Sianne Ngai.

In her book, *Ugly Feelings* (2005), Ngai investigates “the aesthetics of [minor] negative emotions” (1) in a socio-political context, exploring how capitalist modernity elicits expressions of smaller, ambiguous, and nagging feelings of discontent that compose a “bestiary of [...] rats and possums rather than lions” (7). Her concern is not with the feelings that have traditionally been the focal point of affect theory, the grand, dynamic emotions which are commonly associated with works of art, such as anger, jealousy, and sublimity, but rather minor, uglier feelings that act as smaller counterparts, such as irritation, envy or ‘stuplimity’, a stupefying combination of astonishment and boredom (8). Through her analysis of these “ugly feelings” Ngai seeks “to expand and transform the category of ‘aesthetic emotions,’ or feelings unique to our encounters with artworks” (6) to better account for the affective influences of the modern world. She points to how Aristotle’s concept of catharsis, a healing sense of relief or release, is reliant on preceding emotions of an intense, dynamic, and negative quality, such as anger or fear. However, the ugly feelings that Ngai covers are inherently “*noncathartic*, offering no [...] therapeutic or purifying release” (6), but rather a continuous sense that something is off. As such, they become interesting points of discussion in relation to affect theory, through their expansion of what constitutes aesthetic emotions and how they relate to modernity.

According to Ngai, these ‘ugly feelings’ such as paranoia, anxiety, or stuplimity share several qualities that separate them from traditional aesthetic emotions. As mentioned, they are characterised as weaker or ambient negative feelings that tend to simmer under the surface, and in contrast to sharper, more sudden emotions, they are more maintainable, usually possessing “a remarkable capacity for duration” due to their non-intensive nature (Ngai 7). Because they are less determinate and intense, minor affects instil feelings of uncertainty “about [exactly] *what* one is feeling” (14), creating a sense of disorientating, almost nauseating ambivalence. This uncertainty is further strengthened by meta-level responses that attempt to control or suppress our own negative emotions. Such reactions are influenced by notions of what one *should* (not) be feeling, establishing a certain sense of “ironic distance” towards one’s actual feelings, with guilt and unease being common coordinating responses, e.g. “I feel ashamed about feeling envious” (10). Thus, there emerges a “subjective-objective problematic” (24) that also makes us question the validity of our

emotions, and whether they are unfounded, further adding to their uncertainty. Furthermore, these minor negative affects are usually marked by a passivity enforced by feelings “of obstructed agency” (3), which in turn fosters further inaction. They are also characterised by “processes of aversion, exclusion, and of course negation” (12), which coupled with the propensity for duration and imposed passivity, prevents one from attaining cathartic release.

The particular affect of sansibility that this paper concerns itself with is by no means a classic aesthetic emotion. Rather, it constitutes a passive and slight feeling, a minor negative affect akin to Sianne Ngai’s category of ugly feelings. As its name suggests, sansibility denotes an inclination towards wanting to exist, feel, and experience *sans* (without). It is a wish for lessness or partial obliteration which may present itself in different ways, whether as a desire for self-divestment through removing bodily, cognitive, or other individual parts of oneself; isolating or distancing oneself from the systems and conventions of the world at large; pursuit of sensory deprivation; distaste for (excessive) language; or wishing that one’s physical surroundings were reduced. Like other minor affects, sansibility is shaped by ambiguity, uncertainty, and doubt, as contempt towards life couples with uncertainty around death, instilling a sense of melancholic inhibition in the sansible. Usually informed by suffering, boredom, or mere tiredness, the pensive feeling is usually characterised by a wistful and resigned mood.

Sansibility is in some respects reminiscent of *ennui*, a feeling that denotes “boredom bordering on tragedy” (Beghetto 104). Due to its recultivation by the French poet Charles Baudelaire, *ennui* would garner particular attention among French writers in the 19th century (107). While the affect’s precise limits are disputed, Patricia Spacks argues that *ennui* entails “judgment towards the universe” informed by a sense of superiority “to [one’s] environment” (qtd. in Beghetto 107), a melancholic longing for excitement in a droll world. In contrast, sansibility is mostly marked by indifference or modest contempt, both towards oneself and one’s surroundings. There is no sense of arrogance but rather a feeling that ‘it is all the same’. Instead of wishing for something to happen, the sansible instead draws further into themselves, frequently disengaging from the world at large. Absentmindedly lost in thought, they apathetically long for immersion in stillness and silence. While sansibility may intertwine with a desire for death, there is no dire rush to attain it, but instead, a resigned acceptance or grateful welcoming of the prospect.

Thus, sansibility may be likened to a less severe push towards death, a want of partial oblivion. According to psychoanalysis, all life is influenced by two types of inborn conflicting

drives, namely Eros (sexual drives) and Thanatos (death drives). Although the term Thanatos was never used by Sigmund Freud himself, he explores these internal forces extensively in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”, asserting that both constitute “*powerful tendenc[ies] inherent in every living organism to restore a prior state*” (76). Whereas Eros represents “the embodiment of the will to life” (89), our desire to reproduce and restore life to its foundations, thus beginning the cycle anew, Thanatos corresponds to our “drive to return to the inanimate” (78), a wish to reach oblivion, a state before life. Freud argues that the death drive “account[s] for the alarming degree of [our] self-destructive behavior[s]”, such as aggression, thrill-seeking, substance abuse, self-harm, and humanity’s propensity for war (Tyson 21). Fears of loss or abandonment are also influenced by our relationship with death, which in turn may give rise to other harmful behaviours such as emotionally distancing or isolating oneself from others, refusing to take risks, or even committing suicide for the fear of death (22-23). Lastly, Thanatos may partially account for our morbid curiosity, our obsessive fascination with death and destruction (23). While comparable to Freud’s concept of the death drive(s), sansibility is not an active *drive* per se, but rather a passive feeling. It is not a strong desire for death, but rather an indifferent or resigned wish for lessness. Before delving into how this minor affect manifests in the Trilogy itself, I wish to demonstrate how sansibility may be expressed as a feeling through examples from the wider Beckett canon.

In Samuel Beckett’s literary works, affect is usually intrinsically linked to the body. His characters are usually plagued by physical pains and/or restricted in terms of mobility because of their “ageing, decaying and often suffering bod[ies]” (Maude 182). Avoidance of bodily pain and mental anguish commonly influence their emotional states, and the desire to directly remove the sources of these pains is not uncommon. Feelings of sansibility may be turned inwards, concerned with removing fundamental parts of ourselves, whether as a wish for the mind to exist without the body, or vice versa. Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* illustrate this dichotomy¹. Estragon, who is more in tune with his body, is the more sensitive and emotional of the two, and he longs to ease his physical pains by sleeping. On the other hand, the contemplative Vladimir desires a form of lessness in reflecting on the concept of thought, considering it a source of his existential dread. The desire for divestment of the self is usually portrayed in a nonchalant or ambivalent tone. As if having weighed the positive and negative aspects of thought, Vladimir ultimately concludes that it is merely unneeded,

¹ In my Bachelor’s Thesis, I discussed the relationship between the main characters in *Waiting for Godot* (as well as *Endgame* and *Happy Days*) in symbiotic terms. While I have touched upon the link between body and mind in other Beckett texts before, affect theory was not a focal point of my BA thesis.

feeling as if he could live without the ability to think: “Oh, it’s not the worst, I know. [...] To have thought. [...] But we could have done without it” (*The Complete Dramatic Works* 60, hereafter designated *CDW*). Thus, physical sensation and the various sufferings of body and mind become particularly important in analysing affect in Beckett’s works.

Because of their difficulties with moving, the lives of Beckett’s characters are usually static. They remain where they are usually because of obligation or necessity, or because there is nothing else around. To alleviate feelings of boredom, routine and tedium, characters usually distract themselves with almost meaningless dialogue, or alternatively, they withdraw into themselves, wishing to detach from the world entirely by different means of sensory deprivation. Most of the characters in *Endgame* have a way of immersing themselves in darkness and thus disengage from their surroundings. Whereas Nagg and Nell sleep in dustbins, Hamm covers his face with a handkerchief when attempting to sleep. The play also sees the affect of sensibility turned outward, as the servant Clov’s morbid obsession with order culminates in his expressed desire for a world in which desolation finally engulfs what remains: “I love order. It’s my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust” (*CDW* 120). This wish for absolute stillness and silence in a space that already borders on emptiness demonstrates the non-cathartic nature of sensibility; for when is *less* enough?

Before analysing how sensibility is expressed in the Trilogy, I wish to touch upon the important affective-aesthetic concepts of tone, ambience, and immersion. *Tone* denotes its own “formal aspect” that characterises the overarching *feel* of an artistic work, describing its primary “affective bearing, orientation or ‘set toward’ its audience and world” (Ngai 43). It allows us to describe the atmosphere that a work possesses rather than expresses, the wholistic affective quality integral to the work itself, not necessarily the emotions it may instil in an audience (28). While a work of art usually has an emotional effect on those who experience it, the organising affect is not necessarily directly transmitted (Dufrenne, qtd. in Ngai 47), which allows us to categorise the work itself as *feeling* unsettling, nostalgic, serene, wistful, grim, tense, understated, or comforting. In relation to Beckett’s literary canon, the overall affective tone could be described as one of emptiness or lack, with critics noting that his “writing is a form of social criticism by what it refuses or subtracts, that is – by its very negativity” (Adorno, qtd. in Moorjani 24), meaning that much of its meaning rests in what is absent. Beckett’s general affective tone is perhaps best illustrated by the barren, desolate and sterile atmosphere of his stage, which typically creates a surreal, almost purgatorial physical space

which seemingly belongs nowhere and everywhere at the same time. While these spaces may not necessarily instil sensibility in the reader, characters are visibly affected by the surrounding atmosphere, the *ambience*. Lastly, the term *immersion* is normally used to denote a reader's feelings of absorbing engagement with a literary work, "such that one experiences it – to a certain extent – as if it were the actual world" (Allan et al. 34). However, I wish to examine how the various characters in the Trilogy long for (and sometimes achieve) a sense of immersion or absorption in sensible-ambient spaces, such as silence or darkness.

Unlike Ngai, my approach will be purely affective-aesthetic, rather than affective-political. This paper does not concern itself with demonstrating how feelings of sensibility may be instilled by modernity or capitalism, but rather with determining how this particular affect is expressed in Beckett's novel trilogy (*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*), mostly through close readings of passages analysing the characters' thought processes and emotions, and how these express a want for lessness. I also wish to explore how sensibility is reflected in the narrative and textual structure of the works themselves through analysing specific uses of language and structuring that break with literary conventions.

Chapter 1 will examine how Molloy and Moran, the two point-of-view characters in *Molloy* express sensible sentiments, particularly in relation to the faltering body and mind, contempt towards language, and their respective longings to decompose and 'return to nature'. Referencing Virginia Woolf's "On Being Ill" and Sara Ahmed's "Affective Economies", I wish to demonstrate how the narrators' worldviews and feelings may be influenced by perceived otherness, and their struggles with disability and illness. Most of the chapter will focus on Molloy's narrative and his general wistful disposition, but I will also explore how Moran's attitude and writing style gradually changes throughout Part II of the novel.

The second chapter centres on *Malone Dies* and how the titular Malone expresses sensibility in seeking to disengage from his own existence through inventing a story about someone else. Throughout, I will make particular use of Julia Kristeva's *Black Sun* to compare Malone to Kristeva's description of the melancholic-depressive. I also examine how artistic endeavours may reflect the affective spirit of their creator, and how writing succeeds and fails as a "therapeutic device" (Kristeva 23). Furthermore, I wish to demonstrate how sensible aesthetics of silence and darkness slowly infiltrate the novel's structure and themes.

In the final chapter, I investigate how the narrative voice in *The Unnamable* attempts to escape emotion, bodily sensation, and physicality, linking this to an overarching sense of

sansibility. Wishing to shed layers of false personae and finally speak of the self, the narrator longs to be reduced to a point of absolute lessness. Throughout, there is a particular focus on the disconnect between the speaker's rational mind and emotion, as well as contempt towards the feeling body. Near the end of the chapter, I delve into how the eponymous Unnamable longs for immersion in *silence*, which is portrayed as a sensible-ambient space.

The conclusion to this thesis will provide an economic summary of its most important arguments, before very briefly pointing to related affective-aesthetic topics that may be relevant to analyse in relation to Beckett's literary works.

1. Disease and Decay: *Molloy*

As discussed in the introduction, affect in Beckett's works is usually linked to the sufferings of the body and mind, with bodily and mental deterioration as well as social isolation being common themes. These elements feature prominently in *Molloy* (1951/1955), which is split into two parts. The first half follows the inner monologue of the titular Molloy, an ageing man who suffers from a variety of physical ailments. As he traverses the countryside in search of his mother, his bodily condition gradually worsens. Part II centres around the search for Molloy himself, carried out by the private investigator Jacques Moran, whose bodily and mental state gradually begins mirroring that of his target. While both characters will be discussed in turn, this chapter will mostly concern itself with how the minor affect of *sansibility*, the longing for lessness, is expressed in Molloy's part of the narrative, in which the affect is most apparent.

From the beginning of the novel, a feeling of lack is present. Its opening sentences indicate a lapse of memory, with the eponymous character struggling to recall how he arrived at his current location: "I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now. I don't know how I got there. Perhaps in an ambulance, certainly a vehicle of some kind. I was helped. I'd never have got there alone" (TN 3). Presented in a prolepsis, Molloy now writes about his life, but he knows little of his current circumstances. While his identity and past are mostly kept a mystery at this point in the novel, Molloy's struggles with physical pains and memory loss are both alluded to in this section. The fact that he was escorted to his destination in a vehicle, which he theorises may have been an ambulance, evokes images of vulnerability, old age, or illness, strengthened by his claim that he would never make it alone. Similarly, Molloy's poor memory is represented through a strange prioritisation of details, perhaps best illustrated by him neglecting to mention his own name until page 18, which creates a strange information gap for the reader.

The opening paragraph sets the general tone for the entire novel: "What I'd like now is to speak of the things that are left, say my goodbyes, finish dying" (TN 3). Before the beginning of the main narrative, Molloy states his intentions upfront, expressing *sansibility* by saying that he wants to "finish dying" (a term whose significance will be covered in further detail later). Molloy's precise wording paints his death as an ongoing and tedious process which he wishes to finally complete, having long accepted it as an inevitable and likely impending event. However, his statement does not necessarily denote a strong *drive towards*

death (Thanatos), as depicted in Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", but rather a resigned acceptance, a minor affect akin to Ngai's classification of 'ugly feelings'. Molloy's use of the understated 'would like to' implies not some burning need for an immediate end. Instead, it frames his wish as a tired and modest proposal, as if he feels his death is overdue.

However, death can seemingly wait a bit longer, as Molloy first wishes "to speak of the things that are left" (TN 3), which relates his current situation to the overarching theme of decay present in the Trilogy. The remark confirms that a decaying process has already affected the narrative, that things that were once there have since disappeared, that nothing has taken the place of something, and that the only things left to speak of will eventually be covered. Almost paradoxically, the process of creation becomes instrumental in this decay which will in turn leave nothing to discuss, and thus create the absolute 'lessness' which Molloy desires. Effectively, writing gradually inches one closer to silence, and this desire to empty one's mind to be able to *feel* and enjoy the enveloping silence becomes an integral throughline in the Trilogy. Furthermore, while ridden with uncertainty, Molloy's foreshadowing of the other novels and the ensuing emptiness portrays a surprisingly peaceful resolve: "This time, then once more I think, then perhaps a last time, then I think it'll be over, with that world too" (4). His premonition is presented almost as a promise, as once all else is spoken of, there will be an end, an eventual point of lessness before a peaceful passing.

Befitting of this resigned longing for partial oblivion, Molloy's narrative is divided into only two paragraphs. After the short opening section, his writing comprises of a large block of text that spans over 80 pages, as if he simply wishes to be done as quickly as possible. Molloy expresses little concern for traditional narrative structuring, conventions, or formalities. His stream of consciousness is completely unfiltered, filled with long-winded (though humorous) diatribes on outwardly minor matters (such as his sucking-stones), and numerous references to excrement. Rather than concerning itself with telling a conventionally engaging narrative, Molloy's writing simply depicts his internal thought process, continuously moving from one thought to another, no matter how seemingly irrelevant. It encapsulates "a state of [mere] being" (Dukes 13), a simple existence which correlates with Molloy's perspectives on his own life. His frequent usage of commas and punctuation marks to break up his writing contributes to a staccato-like rhythm, as if the process of forming sentences is mentally or physically taxing for him, perhaps related to his infirmities, or his expressed distaste for language:

[T]he laws [...] of my mind, that for example water rises in proportion as it drowns you and that you would do better, at least no worse, to obliterate texts than to blacken margins, to fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery. (TN 9)

Despite now writing on his life, Molloy displays contempt towards language and texts, presenting his revulsion as a subjective truth, which to him is equally real as his bleak paraphrase of Archimedes' principle, that the water level rises in proportion when something is immersed in it. He expresses *sansibility* in contemplating the nature of language, indicating that he would likely be more contented *without* it, and the imagery of darkness physically enveloping something (in this case text) becomes an important recurring motif in the Trilogy. Considering the obliteration of texts to be preferable to the pointless perpetuation of misery that he feels they represent, Molloy claims blank or blackened pages to be just as, if not more useful, than empty margins. Compare this to Jacques Derrida's thoughts on writing as a *supplement* to speech, "an accessory, an accident, an excess" (127), that serves a complementary purpose to "living, knowing memory" as immortalised pieces which assist in "re-memoration [or] recollection (92). Because Molloy considers language to generally be an insufficient means of expression, having difficulties both understanding and being understood by others, even comparing his own speech to "the buzzing of an insect" (TN 45), he sees no meaningful difference between the spoken and written word: the misery produced is equivalent. Additionally, the one who comes to collect Molloy's texts is indifferent to the latter's declining writing abilities: "I've forgotten how to spell too, and half the words. That doesn't matter apparently. Good" (4). Thus, because Molloy considers texts perpetrators of misery and his survival does not depend on his vocabulary, he discusses this loss of language in an unconcerned tone, as if he would be happier without it.

This equation between texts and misery may be informed by Molloy's attitude towards life in general, which he does not hold in high regard. He generally expresses a negatively charged apathy towards his own existence, a disinterest reminiscent of Hobbesian contempt, which constitutes our attitude towards that "which we neither desire, nor hate" (Hobbes, qtd. in Ngai 336). To Molloy, life becomes something to be tolerated or endured, rather than enjoyed. His main priority seems to be an avoidance or reduction of pain, rather than a desire for pleasure, and his stoical indifference is echoed in the structuring of the text itself, the single paragraph demonstrating his lack of concern. While Molloy harbours a distaste for life, this feeling is somewhat countered by a strong sense of pragmatism, as he begrudgingly

accepts his continued existence when suspecting he can wring some use out of it: “I am still alive then. That may come in useful” (TN 10). Overall, while Molloy may not actively pursue death, his passive dislike of life suggests that he would not particularly mind it either, a notion likely influenced by his health struggles and isolation.

In her essay “On Being Ill” (1926), Virginia Woolf laments how writers usually ignore illness and other physical complications in favour of exploring the nuances of the psyche: “[L]iterature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind; that the body is a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear [...]. On the contrary, the very opposite is true. All day, all night the body intervenes” (27). She contends that illness leads to unique perspectives and observations of details that would otherwise go unnoticed, fostering a slanted view of life that typically goes unexplored in literature. As the literary works of Samuel Beckett usually revolve around characters afflicted with physical pain, illness, or disability, they commonly illustrate the inextricable link between mind and body that Woolf wished to see in writing. For example, *Waiting for Godot* portrays the character Estragon enduring nightly beatings and struggling to find boots that fit him, while *Endgame* sees the wheelchair-ridden Hamm running out of pain-killers. In the Trilogy, this focus on how bodily ailments affect our perceptions of life is on full display, especially in Molloy’s narrative, as his curious perspectives on existence are heavily affected by painful physical illness.

Furthermore, Woolf discusses how our priorities shift when we are affected by disease, stating how any pretence of supposed ‘normality’ or ‘decency’ disappears: “There is [...] a childish outspokenness in illness; things are said, truths blurted out, which the cautious respectability of health conceals. About sympathy for example; we can do without it” (31). The final claim sounds like something Molloy himself would say, and illness actually appears to influence the writing style of Beckett’s novel. Molloy’s meditations are usually presented in a matter-of-fact way, his bluntness and use of crude language reflecting little regard for any pretence of properness. This is exemplified by him vulgarly describing his own birth as his “[f]irst taste of the shit” (TN 12), the first in a series of many references to excrement or intercourse, which exemplifies his general distaste for so-called civility. Molloy’s constant comparisons between life, on the one hand, and excrement, filth, or muck, on the other hand, not only falls in line with his mostly pessimistic perspective on his own existence, but also exemplifies a sensible need for lessness, through a reduction of something so inherently complex to something simplistic and filthy, evoking a sense that ‘it is all the same’ to him.

In line with Woolf's argument, Molloy's views on life are likely influenced by his struggles with physical and mental ailments. Although the loss of language is portrayed in a positive or neutral sense, decay also presents itself in an outwardly negative context through the novel's depictions of the gradual and painful deterioration of mind and body. Firstly, memory and its loss are central in *Molloy*. The titular character is frequently shown to suffer memory loss, perhaps best exemplified when he recalls his own name at the police station: "And suddenly I remembered my name, Molloy. My name is Molloy, I cried, all of a sudden, now I remember" (TN 18). Because this is the first mention of his name, the reader may infer that Molloy has forgotten it from the very beginning of the novel. His recollection is presented as an epiphany, as he repeats his name, immediately and frantically disclosing it to the police officers, as if afraid of forgetting again. It becomes evident that Molloy has not always been plagued by amnesia, as he melancholically reflects on his past: "[F]or I – I used to be intelligent and quick" (20). This aside is presented in a lamenting, stuttering tone. He does not try to rephrase, but simply stops for a moment before picking up where he left off, as if briefly overtaken by a sense of loss that goes against his usually indifferent nature.

Molloy's story is also heavily characterised by physical pain. In his old age, he is missing his teeth and several toes, suffering from asthma and likely arthritis. He also has trouble peeing, has lost his sense of smell and is mostly blind in one eye. Most of his pains stem from his legs, one stiff and the other gradually stiffening. Molloy's already stiff leg causes him general discomfort and makes movement difficult, especially positional shifts, and sitting down is out of the question. Even when remaining stationary, Molloy is always visibly affected by his ailments, as his whole body must adhere to the rigidity of his leg, mimicking its stiffness in the binary choice of standing or lying down: "[T]here were only two postures for me any more, the vertical, drooping between my crutches, sleeping on my feet, and the horizontal, down on the ground" (TN 18). Although this condition may be a result of Molloy's age, no concrete explanation is provided, as he never speaks of any particular diagnosis or event, implying him to be unwilling or otherwise unable to seek medical advice. Of course, it is also possible that Molloy simply does not remember being diagnosed by any medical professional due to his memory loss.

Although Molloy accepts his decreased functionality, seemingly having suffered this for a prolonged amount of time, he still harbours contempt for his sick leg, deeming it a painful deadweight. In this sense too, Molloy is intensely pragmatic. Instead of wishing for two functioning legs, he claims his life would be better if the source of his pain were simply

removed: “I was virtually onelegged, and I would have been happier, livelier, amputated at the groin. And if they had removed a few testicles into the bargain, I wouldn’t have objected” (*TN* 31). Because his stiff leg causes him discomfort without having a strictly practical use, Molloy concludes that he would be better off without it, similarly to how his distaste for language fuels his desire to forget it. This utilitarian perspective extends to other body parts he considers useless, such as his testicles. He sees no need for them in his old age and considers reproduction to be generally undesirable. This desire to remove parts of oneself points to a feeling of sansibility in a physical sense, cementing Molloy’s view of his ailments not as something needing to be repaired but merely alleviated.

To help relieve his difficulties with moving, Molloy uses a pair of crutches and a bicycle. For despite his condition, he is a surprisingly proficient cyclist. His bicycle functions almost as an extension of him, expanding his movement options like no other tool could. Hugh Kenner’s essay, “The Cartesian Centaur”, explores the dynamic between Molloy and the bicycle, and Kenner argues that Beckett’s literary works consistently depict the human body as an unrefined and awkward machine which the mind *could do without*. With regard to mobility, the bicycle acts as the perfect supplement to the human body, allowing it to move efficiently and effortlessly. Kenner fittingly describes the process of Molloy’s cycling in symbiotic terms – as “man and machine mingl[ing] in conjoint stasis, each indispensable to the other’s support” (53). Molloy and the bicycle affect each other in similar ways, both stationary and in motion. Just as Molloy prevents the bicycle from falling when still, it keeps him upright when he needs to rest. Similarly, neither could traverse long distances in a reasonable time frame without the other. The loss of the bicycle also marks “the first stage in a disintegration” (52) of Molloy’s mobility which culminates in total motionlessness. (This will be elaborated upon near the end of this chapter).

The closest Molloy comes to forming a genuine connection is with his beloved bicycle. He expresses a thorough fascination with its intricacies and his mood seems to change for the better when remarking: “Dear bicycle, I shall not call you bike. [...] To describe it at length would be a pleasure” (*TN* 12). Molloy addresses his bicycle directly in a warm, almost infatuated tone, pedantically refusing to use the casual term ‘bike’ for it, as if this would diminish its significance. He practically treats the bicycle as if it were another person and he appears closer to it than anyone or anything else. “Thing Theory” by Bill Brown discusses the dynamics of such “subject-object relation[s]” in a form of “new materialism” (7), exploring several academic and artistic approaches to relations between

humans and objects, notably how we affect and are affected by ‘things’: “[T]hings do not exist without being full of people” (Latour, qtd. in Brown 12). While his bicycle is not sentient, Molloy has formed an almost human connection with it, speaking of and to the bicycle like an old friend, underscoring togetherness in their journeys as if it were alive: “Thus we cleared these difficult straits, my bicycle and I, together” (TN 16). Molloy effectively pours a soul into the bicycle, considering it a trusted companion, and one of the few things in life that actually brings him joy.

Due to his lack of established social connections, Molloy has effectively withdrawn from society at large. Partly due to how he is perceived (or feels perceived) by others due to his infirmities, a sense of isolation forms in him. He imagines the following interaction with a stranger: “I disgust him not a little. I am not a pretty sight, I don’t smell good. What is it I want? Ah that tone I know, compound of pity, of fear, of disgust” (TN 8). This passage reads as a situation Molloy has experienced many times. He pictures the person’s choice of words and tone of voice in detail, imagining that if he were to approach the stranger, it would result in an uncomfortable interaction for both of them, and he thus decides against this course of action. In the essay “Affective Economies”, Sara Ahmed discusses how “emotions work as a form of capital” (120), claiming that affect circulates and “bind[s] subjects together” (119) in distinctive ingroups and outgroups. Her particular focus is on how hateful and fearmongering rhetoric seeks “signs of difference” and ‘degeneration’ (122) to create a distinction “between ‘us’ and ‘them’, whereby ‘they’ are constituted as the cause or the justification of ‘our’ feelings of hate” (124). In *Molloy*, disability becomes a prominent mark of otherness which shapes how the titular character is perceived by others and himself. As Molloy internalises others’ negative perceptions of him, he resignedly avoids interaction because of his felt difference. He considers himself part of an outgroup, effectively putting himself in an object position and viewing himself as a part of “them”, rather than “us”. However, Molloy seemingly does not particularly mind his seclusion, preferring it to the false pretences of a society which he does not quite understand:

Beckett’s first-person narrators, with the partial exception of Moran, are “deadbeats” (as Beckett himself described them). They are not in any strict sense social outcasts; rather they have voluntarily withdrawn from the ‘colossal fiasco’ of social reality, finding social conventions and modes of behaviour odd, if not incomprehensible. (Dukes 14)

Molloy's tranquil apathy and lack of awareness in relation to social situations are perhaps best illustrated when he is escorted to the police station. Rather than being concerned or annoyed with his arrest, he seemingly views it as a minor inconvenience. His mind constantly drifts, and he even stops to listen to music before being hurried on by the police officer, uninterested in or perhaps unaware of his current situation. Instead, his mind is focused on pensive reflections on his own feelings: "I wasn't – I didn't feel unhappy" (*TN* 16). Here, the text shows Molloy interrupting himself and rephrasing his thought process more precisely. Replacing 'be' with 'feel' suggests a temporary emotional state that deviates from a more melancholic norm. Alternatively, it shows that Molloy is unwilling to make any grand claims about his general mood, unsure of whether he can truly call himself 'not unhappy'. This need for clarification demonstrates the character's fastidiousness, and instead of entailing more emotive language, the specific use of 'unhappy' further encapsulates Molloy's feelings of absence or distance, and his disbelief in certainty. Instead of profound sadness, stress or anger, there is a feeling of lack, a negation of happiness rather than an opposition to it, representing a minor affect akin to an 'ugly feeling'.

Perhaps because of his lacking interest in social affairs, the one notable human connection Molloy actually has is with his mother, nicknamed Mag. However, due to difficulties of communication and the former's resentment for even having been born, their relationship constitutes more of a monetary arrangement, with Molloy visiting her whenever he needs money: "[T]hat she should associate the four knocks [on her head] with anything but money was something to be avoided at all costs" (*TN* 14). Mag is revealed to be dead in the opening prolepsis, though it is unclear for how long, which underscores that the relationship between mother and son is not a particularly close one. Alternatively, this may also be attributed to the latter's struggles with memory. Nevertheless, Molloy's overall attitude coupled with a disengagement from the world at large signals that he considers relationships unnecessary. When staying with Lousse, a woman who takes him in after he runs over her dog, Molloy is mostly a passive force. He drifts around her house like a spectre, keeping his interactions with Lousse and her housekeepers to a minimum: "And in the midst of those men I drifted like a dead leaf on springs, or else I lay down on the ground, and then they stepped gingerly over me as though I had been a bed of rare flowers" (47). The various comparisons between himself and plants evokes his apathy or inaction, a purposeful passive disengagement that illustrates his lack of concern for sociability.

While Molloy is mostly indifferent to his lack of genuine connections, his isolation strengthens his perception of himself as different from others, and he harbours minor feelings of resentment or envy towards those he considers dead, whether they actually are or not: “[I]t is not you who are dead, but all the others” (TN 23). Considering common conceptions of death as inherently negative, Molloy seems to turn his otherness (being the only one who is ‘not dead’) into something positive. However, as he seemingly longs for a form of lessness or non-existence, this positioning of everyone else as the ‘*other*’ implies that Molloy wishes he could simply ‘drift around’ like others, without sharp physical pains or feelings of existential dread. Molloy’s envy is perhaps best demonstrated by his dissociated reaction to burying Lousse’s dog, Teddy: “His death must have hurt him less than my fall me. And he at least was dead” (30). Teddy’s death is nonchalantly viewed by Molloy as something between a mercy-killing and a lucky break, jealously presented as if the dog received a better bargain than him. The pains of existence are consistently weighed against the indeterminate nature of death. Although the latter may potentially constitute “a state of being even worse than life” (63), it presents a potential solution for alleviating Molloy’s pains. As such, while he does not possess an active death drive, he wonders if death may be preferable to his current situation.

Intriguingly, Molloy finds it difficult to categorise himself, feeling as if he lacks the vocabulary to sufficiently describe his existence: “My life, my life, now I speak of it as of something over, now as of a joke which still goes on, and it is neither, for at the same time it is over and it goes on, and is there any tense for that?” (TN 31). Again, Molloy’s contempt towards language becomes clear, as its established system of binary oppositions, of life versus death, leaves him unable to define his own state of being accurately. He feels neither fully alive, nor completely dead, yet linguistic restrictions force him to choose between ‘is’ and ‘was’, because no verb tense can accurately describe an existence between the two. Thus, finding himself unable place himself among the living or dead, Molloy refers to his own state as a transitory one: “I was on my way to my mother, whose charity kept me dying” (18). Molloy thus views his existence as a gradual decomposition which will eventually result in the lessness for which he longs. Instead of immediate relief from the miseries of life, he desires a specific kind of sansible sensation, a disengagement or relief, not only from the rest of the world, but from his own existence as well.

Molloy’s forgetfulness actually helps him in this endeavour, demonstrated by him stating that he sometimes fails to remember that he exists: “Yes, there were times when I forgot not only who I was, but that I was, forgot to be” (TN 44). The word ‘forget’ ties this

matter to issues of memory, and while this detachment does not, for the most part, seem deliberate, it corresponds to Molloy's overall outlook on life. Memory loss, which has previously been portrayed in a negative light, attains unexpected positive side-effects in this specific context, as Molloy frequently manages to distance himself from the pains of existence. This relation between existence and failing to remember is frequently referenced in the novel, as Molloy reluctantly admits his gradual dying to be a form of what most consider life: "To decompose is to live too, I know, I know, don't torment me, but one sometimes forgets" (21). In this sense, Molloy's detached attitude towards his own existence suggests a desire to distance himself from and thus lessen the miseries of life, and his pedantic insistence on wording helps him in this endeavour. He is not living, he is *dying*, a distinction which brings him comfort by making him feel less alive. Nevertheless, he seemingly laments the fact that this dying entails a form of living (strictly speaking), and he would rather view his decomposition on its own terms, away from the constraints of life.

Molloy's calm outlook on his own decomposition is most clearly illustrated when he lies outstretched in a ditch, daydreaming of disappearing: "How joyfully I would vanish there, sinking deeper and deeper under the rains" (*TN* 23). His behaviour once again evokes an almost plant-like passivity, as he lies almost motionless among the hawthorn as if he himself constitutes part of the shrubbery, to the point where he even strews dirt on his face and tastes some of it. Expressing a wish to be absorbed into the earth, Molloy reflects on how wonderful it would be to disappear from the world, to truly decompose and end his sufferings. While he harbours contempt for life and feels uncertain around death, Molloy experiences a serenity in viewing his reality as decomposition, of being able to simply exist, with his aging and otherwise painful physical ailments becoming integral and even beautiful parts of this process. His state of perpetual dying promises a peaceful passing, and he thus finds relief in his gradual decay. By viewing this decomposition as his natural state, temporarily forgetting that he is actually alive, Molloy is able to escape his sufferings for some time.

He reflects on his time in the ditch as if it were the best experience he has ever had, which is to be expected, as it perfectly encapsulates his feelings of *sansibility*: "That night was not like the other night, if it had been I would have known. For when I try and think of that night, on the canal-bank, I find nothing, nothing but Molloy in the ditch, and perfect silence, and behind my closed lids the little night and its little lights" (*TN* 23). Everything else disappears from view and becomes irrelevant in this moment, as if the only things that exist are Molloy and the ditch. He is overtaken by a sense of absolute peace, reflected in the still

tranquillity of the perceived nothingness that envelops him. The wording of ‘perfect silence’ not only suggests an absolute lack of sound, but also that these conditions are in fact *ideal* to Molloy, the closest he has come to absolute immersion in silence and stillness. Even the vast night and stars are reduced to minor intricacies behind his eyelids, suggesting that his sensibility is reflected outwards. He not only wishes to be less, but wishes the world itself were lessened, and that there were less for him to engage with. Molloy expresses a total detachment from himself, seeing and describing himself in the third person, as if he is no longer present in his own body, but rather an outsider looking in.

Overall, Molloy’s feelings of sensibility are best summarised in the following quotation: “[T]he most you can hope is to be a little less, in the end, the creature you were in the beginning, and the middle” (TN 28). This statement may be interpreted literally, as Molloy consistently expresses a wish to become less, reflected in his desires to sink into the earth, amputate body parts he deems undesirable, and passively disengage, both from the world and himself. On the other hand, as Molloy is contemplating the difficulties that arise from his somewhat rash nature here, his thoughts imply a surprisingly optimistic view on positive changes in character. His statement suggests a belief that personal growth stems from shedding one’s negative traits, and that one needs to be less, in order to be a better person wholistically. Once the nonconstructive excess is removed, the positives (or at least the lesser negatives) will remain. This belief in the divestment of the self may thus seem like a cathartic process of purification. Although this view seems positive, a familiar degree of cynicism is expressed through Molloy’s use of the word “creature”, which suggests that he views himself and others as appalling or impure in a sense, that no matter how much one removes, one will always remain the same, only less. Furthermore, the overall wistful tone suggests that one must simply settle with becoming less because no better option exists. This relates to Molloy’s emphasis on the minimisation of suffering; if there is less of the self, there is less for the self to suffer, but there will seemingly always be a degree of suffering.

We return to Molloy’s physical ailments. Whereas he begins the story with one bad leg, the eventual stiffening of the other signals that his condition is not only poor, but also on the decline, with the good leg stiffening, and the already stiff leg “growing stiffer than ever” (TN 71). Until now, Molloy’s body has suffered a gradual deterioration, but these changes mark the beginning of a rapid decline in his physical and mental health. This worsening stiffness coupled with the loss of his bicycle restricts Molloy’s already limited mobility. Eventually, he must use his “crutches like grapnels” to move along the ground (84), dragging

himself forward and moving almost like a living corpse. His condition may be interpreted as a prolonged form of *rigor mortis*, the temporary stiffening of the body after death, and his corpse-like nature is also reflected in the decreased function of other body parts, such as his weak heartbeat: “For it does not beat, not my heart” (83). These changes overtly signal that Molloy is getting closer to death, which is also reflected in how Part I closes.

At the end of the novel’s first half, Molloy’s gradual decay culminates in complete motionlessness, and as he finds himself in another ditch, a strange calmness takes hold of him: “I did not fret, other scenes in my life came back to me. There seemed to be rain, then sunshine, turn about. Real spring weather. I longed to go back into the forest. Oh, not a real longing, Molloy could stay, where he happened to be” (TN 85). In his final scene, Molloy quickly dismisses his yearning to return to the forest. He finally appears content, filled with a sense of serenity as he lays motionless in a ditch, like a corpse ready to be buried in its grave. While he is confirmed to be alive in the novel’s opening sections, Molloy presumably thinks he is about to die, as his mind fills with nature imagery while he reminisces on his life. Coupled with his constant comparisons between himself and plant-life, the longing to decompose and overall sense of misplacement and disengagement, nature seems to be the only place where Molloy feels he truly belongs. He once again signals a total detachment from himself by shifting to third person, seeing his near-lifeless body lying there from another’s perspective and not fearing the situation at all. Overall, there is a serene tranquility to Molloy’s final scene, and in a sense, he has returned to where he feels most at home, a ditch where he feels compelled to complete his decomposition and attempt to satisfy his sansibility by finally becoming less.

Whereas the first half of the novel follows the titular Molloy, the second focuses on Jacques Moran, a private investigator in search of him. Although the affect of sansibility is not *as* present in Part II of the novel, there are some interesting parallels between the two characters, as well as some aspects that become unique to Moran. In contrast to the preceding narrator, Moran is not particularly sympathetic. He starts off as strict, prudent, and analytic, concerning himself with decorum to the point of obsession, and is portrayed as consistently suspicious and demanding of the people around him, especially his son, also named Jacques: “No trace of frolic. He said he had been to church alone. I asked him a few pertinent questions concerning the march of the ceremony. His answers were plausible” (TN 93). Initially, Moran speaks in a very formal manner, his writing resembling a written report befitting of his work,

with sensory observations supported by his own interpretations. He has a particular eye for detail and takes care to express himself concisely, choosing his words carefully.

However, throughout Moran's part of the narrative, his bodily ailments, mental state and writing style all start mirroring that of Molloy's. About a quarter into Part II, Moran begins suffering "acute pain[s]" in one of his legs (*TN* 114), which gradually begins stiffening until he can no longer keep himself upright. Just as Molloy employs an unconventional tool to alleviate his disabilities, namely his bicycle, Moran begins using his umbrella as an improvised walking-stick. Like Molloy, he displays a similar fondness for his chosen implement, establishing a bond and attributing a sense of loyalty to it: "Yes, in the end I could go fifty steps before having to stop, for rest, leaning on my faithful umbrella" (159). Moran's search for Molloy and the ensuing journey home become exceedingly strenuous because of these bodily ailments, and this process appears to humble him.

In line with Virginia Woolf's "On Being Ill", Moran's infirmities bring about a change of temper that starts reflecting that of his target, and the writing style in the last quarter of the narrative is visibly influenced by a declining mental state. After being left by his son and ordered back by his superior, Moran struggles home, leaning on his trusted umbrella. During his prolonged return, he gradually loses his composure, and this bleeds into the text itself, which becomes more sporadic, impulsive, and detached, beginning to resemble Molloy's writing. Moran's already condensed wording becomes even more concise, and his thought-processes seem more influenced by his gut feeling, rather than his usually logical and analytical mind. His sentences become simpler, stripped of any unnecessary formalities, and there is a lack of flow and sometimes continuity as he struggles to express himself: "Perhaps I shall meet Molloy. My knee is no better. It is no worse either. I have crutches now" (*TN* 169). While he initially structures his paragraphs in a more traditional manner, these too are visibly affected by his mental state, ranging from longer rambles that span several pages to short and simple one-sentence paragraphs that break with the rest: "Now I may make an end" (168). Effectively, the writing itself becomes less, influenced by a form of what one might call *textual decay*, which gradually deprives it of traditional structuring and formalities.

These changes bring the writing style more in line with Moran's own philosophy on language, which creates an interesting parallel to Molloy: "Anger led me sometimes to slight excesses of language. I could not regret them. It seemed to me that all language was an excess of language" (*TN* 111). While Molloy and Moran's views are similar, there emerges a distinction between their wishes for lessness in communication. Whereas Molloy finds it

difficult to properly communicate within the constraints of language, considering it a restrictive and insufficient means of expression, Moran instead constantly wonders if he could express himself more succinctly or with more precision, to trim most of the unnecessary excess. He tries imparting lessons on brevity to his son as well, berating him for being vague or unspecific: “Out? I said. Where? Out!” (94). Moran immediately reacts with anger, which ironically is the emotion that usually adds excess to his own language. His valuing of thought over feeling reflects this desire for lessness in language, as emotions are generally considered more imprecise or fallible than precise logical reasoning. Moran speaks of regret as if he would reframe and condense every sentence that he considers excessive if he could. Thus, while his feelings of sansibility towards language resembles that of his target, there is a slight distinction between Moran’s wish to methodically remove excessive language, contra Molloy’s urge to fill entire pages with ink.

Related to Moran’s overall change in attitude and writing, his priorities shift as well upon returning from his mission. After having lived outside for so long, he is not fazed at all when he returns to find that the electricity is gone, unconcernedly stating that he has no need for it: “The company had cut off the light. They have offered to let me have it back. But I told them they could keep it” (TN 169). Moran’s previous obsession with bourgeois decorum is extinguished, replaced with an apathetic sense of indifference, and he effectively returns to an almost primitive state, “elect[ing] to give up ‘being a man,’ to live in the garden with the wild birds” (Saunders 61). Thus, like Molloy, Moran too expresses sansibility by desiring to disengage from society at large and in a sense reconnect with nature. However, while Molloy’s behaviour often evokes plant-life, Moran arguably becomes more animalistic. He begins listening to an inner voice which “did not use the words that Moran had been taught when he was little” (TN 169). Speaking of himself in third person, there is a sense of lessening of the self in this scene, but as Moran continues to use the pronoun “I”, he seems to be distancing himself from the person he was before, rather than his current renewed self.

Finally, Moran is intriguingly not mentioned or alluded to in the novel’s title despite narrating its entire second half. Gerry Dukes points out that: “Molloy and Moran are both [...] subsumed under the name *Molloy*, the title of the novel they share, suggesting they are not to be separated or considered individually” (20), which may indicate that they are one and the same. While this point is interesting, both parts concern themselves with Molloy in some way. As such, Moran being absent from the title is not wholly unexpected. Consider the findings of Franco Moretti, who has traced the condensation of (British) novel titles to a development

towards the end of the 18th century. Compared to earlier novels, whose long titles doubled as summaries (186), around 14% of novel titles from the late 1700s constitute “a proper name, and nothing else” (196). Thus, a novel’s title referencing only its most important character was by no means unheard of 150 years later when *Molloy* was published. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning how Moran himself is effectively ‘made less’ by this omission. Even though Part II of *Molloy* is about as long as the other monologues in the Trilogy, Moran is in a sense separated from the others, as if his narrative were a mere footnote. This is also reflected in a harrowing quotation from the final part of the Trilogy, *The Unnamable*: “Moran never spoke, I never spoke” (TN 396), as if Moran’s story and sufferings are rendered void.

To summarise this chapter, the minor affect of sansibility, the longing for lessness, features prominently in *Molloy*, particularly in its first half. While Moran’s story eventually culminates in a sense of tranquil apathy, sansibility most prominently affects his narrative on a textual level, epitomised by how the character seems forgotten by the title of the novel itself. From the beginning, Molloy’s narrative is one of a man wishing to alleviate his physical sufferings and existential dread through detachment. Expressing a distaste for language and difficulties in communication, Molloy has disengaged from the world at large, with his closest connections being tied to pragmatic use-value, and his Hobbesian contempt for his own life being relieved by him forgetting that he exists. Molloy finds great comfort in viewing his existence as a process of dying, of gradually becoming less, a decomposition which promises an eventual end. He regularly compares himself to a plant or a passive observer, and the time he spends in ditches are the most calming parts of his life. In these moments, only he, the soil, and absolute silence exist, demonstrating how his sansibility is reflected outwards: Molloy not only longs to be less himself, but he wishes that the world itself were lessened.

2. Next to Nothing: *Malone Dies*

Originally published the same year as its predecessor, *Malone Dies* (1951/1956), centres around the eponymous Malone, an elderly man who knows his death to be imminent. Confined to a small room, he decides to tell himself stories to pass the time before his death, with interludes detailing his present state and current possessions. Over the course of the novel, Malone's declining physical and mental health begins catching up with him, blending the boundaries between fiction and reality before the novel's title delivers on its promise. Throughout the novel, there is a particular focus on the title character's attempted sensible disengagement from the self while patiently awaiting death by means of immersion in others' stories.

As its title suggests, death features heavily in *Malone Dies*, with the opening sentence clearly setting the scene: "I shall soon be quite dead at last in spite of it all. [...] I have that feeling, I have had it now for some days, and I credit it" (TN 173). Although the tangible sensation of dying is itself a recent phenomenon, it becomes clear that Malone has long awaited his own death. While the precise wording of "quite dead" might under other circumstances be interpreted as Malone intuiting that he will soon be "partly dead", here it implies a degree of excessive finality, as if merely saying "dead" would be inadequate to describe his *absolute* expiration. This suggests that Malone has felt partially dead until now, similar to how Molloy described himself as dying. Intriguingly, Malone's statement is thus less explicit but more severe, as it implies him to be even further removed from life than his predecessor. Furthermore, like Molloy, Malone's end is not only expected, but overdue, with the addition of "at last" demonstrating that he has awaited, accepted, and likely coveted it for a long time. Finally, "in spite of it all" adds a sense of pensive relief, as despite his body clinging to a form of half-death for so long, the end is finally approaching.

The blurred lines between death and near-death are further emphasised by the fact that Malone has to logically reason with himself to figure out whether he is dead: "The truth is, if I did not feel myself dying, I could well believe myself dead, expiating my sins, or in one of heaven's mansions. But I feel at last that the sands are running out, which would not be the case if I were in heaven, or in hell" (TN 177). This statement may be interpreted as a strange rejection of the first principle in Cartesian philosophy, 'I think, therefore I am'. It is not thought, but rather a strong gut feeling and the sensation of dying itself that anchor Malone in reality. Were it not for his body recognising its gradually worsening state, his mind might

have been convinced that he was dead already, but feeling that his time is limited, he concludes that he is not dead yet. Although he continues to grapple with this question over the course of the novel, partly due to a prolonged dying process and an unchanging environment, his death ultimately confirms his suspicions. He is not *quite* dead, but not far off either.

This sensation of being in-between is strengthened by Malone's surroundings, a minimally furnished room enveloped in a dreary and static atmosphere which seems to radiate a palpable, thick greyness, "a kind of leaden light that makes no shadow" (TN 214). Confined to his bed and practically immobile, Malone's world scarcely changes, instilling an eerie sense of stillness, both in the room and its inhabitant, to the point where he himself feels like and reduces himself to part of the scenery, "emit[ing] grey" like the rest of the environment (214). Furthermore, there is an added element of disorientation, as Malone does not know how he arrived at his current location or its precise nature. He speculates that the room might be located in some sort of ominous vault in a trench, in his own head, or even in someone else's head, or merely an unknown apartment complex. The atmosphere borders on purgatorial, and this feeling of being in-between is strengthened by him positing that he might be stationed between storeys: "Unfortunately I do not know quite what floor I am on, perhaps I am only on the mezzanine. The doors banging, the steps on the stairs, the noises in the streets, have not enlightened me, on this subject" (212). There is a feeling that Malone does not belong, with the sounds of slamming doors, strangers' footsteps and unidentified noises creating an almost hostile atmosphere.

Like Molloy, Malone's bleak view of his own existence as a form of half-death leads him to consider himself separate from 'the living', for whom he harbours contempt: "All I know is that the living are there, above me and beneath me" (TN 212). Less than subtly illustrated by the fact that the M in his name barely conceals the word *alone*, Malone is isolated from the world. He is mostly a passive observer, a prey to the unknown noises around him and sometimes a voyeur of a couple living across the street. Being surrounded by the sounds of the living not only disturbs his peace but also furthers his isolation and contempt for others as the world forgets about him: "Coma is for the living. The living. They were always more than I could bear, all, no, I don't mean that, but groaning with tedium I watched them come and go, then I killed them, or took their place, or fled" (188). While Malone slightly adjusts his claim, claiming that not *all* the living are intolerable, he still harbours contempt for them as a group. Much like his predecessor, a sense of othering forms in Malone. However, unlike Molloy, Malone's contempt is not apathetic, but rather aggressively inclined. To him,

the living are excruciatingly tedious, and he states he has killed at least five people (cf. 229), or taken their place, perhaps in an attempt to understand what it means to ‘live’. Malone’s feeling of nonbelonging is further supported by the following passage, in which he expresses that he has tried to fit in with others, but never succeeded:

I was born grave as others syphilitic. And gravely I struggled to be grave no more, to live, to invent, I know what I mean. [...] I say living without knowing what it is. I tried to live without knowing what I was trying. Perhaps I have lived after all, without knowing. I wonder why I speak of all this. Ah yes, to relieve the tedium. (TN 189)

In *Black Sun* (1987/1989), Julia Kristeva explores melancholia and depression in relation to various forms of artistic expression. She claims that melancholia manifests as “inhibition and asymbolia” which often combine with “manic phase[s] of exaltation” (9). Those suffering from depression are “prisoners of affect” (14), considering themselves “afflicted with a fundamental flaw” and intrinsically bound to their depression (12). Kristeva’s descriptions of the melancholic-depressive thus generally apply to Malone. While his mood is mostly pensive rather than actively depressive, he is sometimes afflicted with small fits of mania and sentimentality. He attributes his general wistful disposition to an inborn sense of melancholy, likening this ‘fundamental flaw’ to an illness that separates him from others. Describing himself as being “born grave” (TN 189) not only denotes an overall gloomy disposition, but also underscores his perspective of himself as half-dead by placing words associated with life and death directly adjacent to each other. This comparison is furthered by Malone calling himself “an old foetus” (219), something that has existed for too long without truly having had a chance to live. He claims to never have understood life on a fundamental level, unsure of whether he has ever lived because he has never felt alive. Despite having made an effort to change, Malone has completely resigned himself to the feeling of being incapable of living, instead resignedly welcoming death.

However, Malone is not in any particular rush to die, believing that one of the key factors keeping him alive is actually a lack of will, feeling that an active struggle to attempt to die now would be worse than patiently awaiting his death: “I could die today, if I wished, merely by making a little effort, if I could wish, if I could make an effort. But it is just as well to let myself die, quietly, without rushing things” (TN 173). There is a calmness to his resolve, as while Malone wants to die, he does not feel an active *drive* towards death, and he fears that any attempt to hurry the process will only cause unnecessary suffering. Kristeva describes how “the depressive affect” may counteract the death drive through the “erotization of

suffering” (19), effectively inhibiting suicide by fostering allure of one’s own negative emotions. However, Malone’s dejectedness seems mostly informed by a sense of boredom, rather than fascination with his own despair, a minor affect rather than a grand passion. As his end is imminent and inescapable, Malone’s main concern is to relieve tedium, and he thus distracts himself with his own inner monologue and with inventing stories. Because he associates this feeling of tedium with the living, to relieve it may therefore be interpreted as quenching any possible remnants of life left in him.

Unlike his predecessors, Malone actively concerns himself with telling a narrative, though not about himself. To pass the time before his death, he resolves to tell himself three stories. While Malone has told himself such stories through the years, he claims to never have been particularly amused by them, and in his current state, ideas do not come as easily as they used to. However, he decides to continue, ultimately unconcerned whether he will actually manage to finish his narratives, as he simply needs something, however little, in order to ‘play’: “While waiting I shall tell myself stories, if I can. [...] [T]hey will be calm, there will be no ugliness or beauty or fever in them any more, they will be almost lifeless, like the teller. [...] I need nothing more” (*TN* 174). In seeking to create a story almost devoid of life, Malone effectively pours part of himself into a narrative which reflects his own feelings of sansibility. He recognises that these stories will not be as thrilling as the previous ones, but he has no need for grand emotions. Kristeva relates how artistic creation acts as a “therapeutic device” (24) by “transpos[ing] affect into rhythms, signs, forms” (22). Essentially, Malone’s writing may be seen as an attempted healing process that transmits his feelings on to the page. In relating these (presently) calm, more intimate narratives, Malone seeks to create a safe space, a modest comfort similar to a sedative to ease his pains before his death. This creation process may be interpreted as a transactional one, as while breathing life into a narrative, Malone is losing his own, effectively ‘lessening’ himself.

Malone’s notion of ‘play’ may thus be likened to the *fort/da* (gone/[t]here) game described in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”. Freud observes a boy of one and a half playing a game in which the child throws a wooden reel out of sight, exclaiming “o-o-o-o” (53), which Freud assumes is supposed to mean *fort* (gone). The boy proceeds to pull on the string to make the object reappear, uttering “a joyful *Da!* (‘Here’)” (53). Freud ties this both to a compulsion to repeat and a wish for control over one’s trauma, linking the game to a how the child’s mother would leave during the day. The game would act as a representation of her “disappearance-reappearance” (53) and subconsciously prepare the child for the mother’s

death (248). This game would also extend to represent the child himself, as he would watch his own reflection vanish when crouching in front of a mirror, exclaiming ““Bebi o-o-o-o”” (baby gone) (248). In *Malone Dies*, the act of storytelling becomes a means of preparation for death, as Malone tries to fully immerse himself in a world where he does not exist. Whenever he focuses on his narrative, he temporarily disappears, ‘gone from sight’ like the child squatting under the mirror. Though Malone’s sufferings still persist, they are lessened when he manages to distract himself, reinforcing the value of his storytelling as a sedative. Thus, Malone’s wish to disengage from himself may be interpreted as an expression of sanity.

It becomes clear that Malone tells these stories to distance himself from his current situation, and because their lives are so different, his chosen protagonist Sapo/Macmann becomes an ideal means of escapism: “We are getting on. Nothing is less like me than this patient, reasonable child, struggling all alone for years to shed a little light upon himself, avid of the least gleam, a stranger to the joys of darkness” (*TN* 187). Throughout the novel the compound verb ‘get on’ generally indicates both progress in Malone’s stories and that he himself is nearing death. Here, it attains an additional third meaning, signifying that he is forming some sort of connection with Sapo in an attempt to disengage from his own existence. Malone referencing “the joys of darkness” not only points to his grim disposition but suggests that he revels in the darkness’ ability to obscure. Whereas Sapo strives to understand himself better, “to shed a little light upon himself”, Malone expresses sanity through this detachment from the self. Surrounded by darkness, he decides to shine light upon another in his dying state: “I shall never go back into this carcass except to find out its time. I want to be there a little before the plunge [...]. I was always sentimental” (187) While engaged with this narrative, Malone reduces himself further by comparing his own body to a carcass, an empty husk devoid of life, which he wishes to return to as he dies because of his stated sentimentality. His storytelling may therefore represent an attempt to lessen himself as much as possible before his inevitable demise, so as to suffer less when the time comes.

This forgetting and diminishing of oneself by giving an account of another’s life becomes Malone’s primary goal, and whenever something brings him back to his own reality for a prolonged time, he is noticeably disheartened: “I have had a visit. Things were going too well. I had forgotten myself, lost myself. I exaggerate. Things were not going too badly. I was elsewhere. Another was suffering” (*TN* 261). For a while, Malone becomes fully immersed in his own storytelling, so obsessed with observing the struggles of Sapo, that he completely forgets his own existence. Whereas Molloy managed to view himself from the outside and

sometimes forgot himself because of memory loss, Malone completely loses his sense of self for a moment, not only forgetting to be, but forgetting that he ever was. While seemingly astonished by how successful this process is, Malone is unsurprised upon being pulled back into reality by an unexpected visit from a figure he first assumes to be an undertaker. He resignedly describes this feeling of detachment from the self as too good to last. In typical fashion, Malone modifies his utterance, afraid of appearing too optimistic, suggesting that this lessness is not ideal, but a lesser evil, the best for which he can settle.

Malone's engagement with Sapo's narrative is also broken by a critical attitude towards his own storytelling. He constantly interrupts his own narrative to comment, critique, revise, and rephrase, taking him out of the story. These amendments visibly affect the textual structure itself, as Malone often needs to stop and think before resuming, with spaces between paragraphs being common indicators of pauses between utterances. Although usually reserved for poetry analysis, these pauses will be represented – in a way akin to line-breaks in verse – by slashes for convenience's sake: "Sapo had no friends – no, that won't do. / Sapo was on good terms with his little friends, though they did not exactly love him" (*TN* 183). Such breaks not only illustrate how mentally taxing this process has become for Malone; they are also physical manifestations of lapsed time or moments of silence. These gaps become renderings of lessness that effectively create visible 'holes' in the text itself, which may also symbolise the narrator's own memory as he struggles to remember what he was just talking about. Occasionally, Malone even resumes where he left off despite his own disapproving comments, as if having forgotten, or perhaps because he is unable to think of something better: "Sapo loved nature, took an interest / This is awful / Sapo loved nature, took an interest in animals and plants" (185). Malone interrupting himself for the sake of self-revision may be likened to Moran's contempt for excess, but here, the desire to remove is linked to a wish to weave an engaging narrative, rather than a strict focus on brevity. Nevertheless, this critical attitude frequently breaks Malone's sense of immersion.

Perhaps ironically, Malone best manages to disengage from his current reality in reflecting on his own past, as a calming sense of serenity comes over him: "From the hills another joy came down, I mean the brief scattered lights that sprang up on their slopes at nightfall, merging in blurs scarcely brighter than the sky, less bright than the stars, and which the palest moon extinguished" (*TN* 200). While he has previously mentioned the pleasures of darkness, he seemingly finds greater comfort in observing the faintest of lights, calling them a "joy" without any hint of irony, and reminiscing about them in a frankly enamoured tone.

Echoing the picturesque landscape descriptions of 18th century sentimental literature, pre-Romantic works that were usually concerned with emotions and driven to aim towards “something profound but not quite reachable” (Ahern 286) these lights are hardly visible in the night-sky. They are so slight that they are erased by moonlight, next to nothing, and yet, Malone notices them, and they have had a lasting impact on him. He contemplates why he remembers the lights so well, reasoning that they made an impact precisely because of how slight they appeared; how close they were to absolute nothingness while still being perceptible: “They were things that scarcely were, on the confines of silence and dark, and soon ceased. So I reason now, at my ease. Standing before my high window I gave myself to them, waiting for them to end, for my joy to end, straining towards the joy of ended joy” (*TN* 200). These lights border on silence and darkness, the two forces of lessness made manifest in *Malone Dies*, and while he admires these lights, Malone also awaits another sensation, waiting for them and his joy to cease. This echoes his current situation, as he waits for his own light to finally fade.

Darkness is a recurring motif in *Malone Dies*, and although the phenomenon merely denotes a lack of light, it is seemingly able to physically occupy space in the novel. Instead of obscuring, this darkness envelops, suffocates, and consumes, continually swallowing, extinguishing, and thereby killing light: “But it [the light] entered at every moment, renewed from without, entered and died at every moment, devoured by the dark” (*TN* 197). In this sense, darkness works much like silence, as lessness incarnate occupying or replacing something that ostensibly should be there. While silence manifests itself in the text as breaks between writing, darkness operates on a more narrative level, becoming a representation of narrative holes and dark themes in Sapó’s tale: “For I want as little as possible of darkness in his story. A little darkness, in itself, at the time, is nothing. You think no more about it and you go on. But I know what darkness is, it accumulates, thickens, then suddenly bursts and drowns everything” (184). This also relates darkness to issues of Malone’s gradually faltering memory, as it is described almost like a liquid, an inky blackness capable of drowning all once it has grown sufficiently. In this respect, it evokes how symptoms of dementia usually develop gradually before becoming corrosive. Despite Malone’s precautions, darkness and silence soon enter Sapó’s narrative, representing an unavoidable end for both him and Malone:

But silence was in the heart of the dark, the silence of dust and the things that would never stir, if left alone. And the ticking of the invisible alarm-clock was as the voice of

that silence which, like the dark, would one day triumph too. And then all would be still and dark and all things at rest for ever at last. (TN 197)

Silence, darkness, and time all intertwine in this elegiac section, anticipating an eventual end of everything. The premonition is reminiscent of Clov's ideal world of order in *Endgame*, a space devoid of motion and sound, where the last dust has finally settled. Intriguingly, silence itself hosts sound; it is given a voice in the form of a ticking clock, suggesting that this envisioned end is inevitable. However, while the description appears grim, Malone finds a strange solace in silence and darkness when the sounds around him seem to cease: "Then that silence of which, knowing what I know, I shall merely say that there is nothing, how shall I merely say, nothing negative about it" (TN 215). He reflects on what he can "merely say" of silence, possibly attempting to be as brief as possible. While silence does not awake any strong emotions in Malone, he is not negatively inclined towards it. Coupled with his fascination with darkness and hesitant insistence on never having lived at all, this suggests that Malone would feel just as contented if the world were completely silent. However, as he feels himself dying, it does not really matter to him now.

While Malone himself seemingly possesses a precarious fondness for darkness, referencing its "joys" (TN 187) and apparently longing to return to it (cf. 189), he wants to keep it away from Sapo, which reflects both a desire for clarity in Malone's narratives and a desire to distance himself from his current reality. However, whereas Sapo's story starts off as a sardonic comedy, dark themes of death, incest and insanity begin seeping into the narrative, reflecting how the mind of its narrator is gradually consumed by darkness. As Malone gets closer to death, his storytelling is visibly affected. He not only begins revising and forgetting vital information but goes on longer incidental tangents. For example, Sapo is hurriedly renamed Macmann: "For Sapo – no I can't call him that any more, and I even wonder how I was able to stomach such a name till now. So then for, let me see, for Macmann, that's not much better but there is no time to lose" (222). Malone's hasty tone signals that he is pressured for time, and this hurriedness extends to other sections of his narrative as well. While he has previously expressed pleasure in describing picturesque scenery (mainly in relation to his own past), he begins rushing through the writing process, interrupting himself to move things along: "A stream at long intervals bestrid – but to hell with all this fucking scenery" (270). Feeling his death is approaching, Malone's narrative becomes more and more rushed and progressively more violent, and he begins planning important plot-points such as character deaths in smaller asides: "Moll. I'm going to kill her" (257). Here, Malone speaks as

if he himself is part of the narrative, intending to kill Macmann's caretaker Moll by writing her out of existence. This increase in violence and the concept of writing as 'harmful' will be returned to shortly.

Eventually, Malone shows signs of rapid bodily and mental deterioration. Around the half-way point of the novel, this begins softly, with him losing sensation in his feet. He welcomes this, feeling closer to death than ever: "Strange, I don't feel my feet any more, my feet feel nothing any more, and a mercy it is. And yet I feel they are beyond the range of the most powerful telescope. Is that what is known as having a foot in the grave?" (TN 227). Despite being able to see his feet, Malone senses a great physical distance between them and the rest of his body, as if his feet were completely lost. By shifting from *he himself* not being able to feel his feet to *his feet* feeling nothing, from first to third person, he indicates that they are already separated from the rest of his body. This lack of sensation becomes akin to a blessing, both a relief from his sufferings and a way to physically *feel* less of himself. As Malone is closer to death than ever, he ponders whether a figurative saying applies to his situation. Having lost sensation in both his feet, both are effectively 'in the grave'. Furthermore, Malone pauses for a moment when this sensation appears as if needing to be absolutely certain, before humorously talking to himself as if engaged in everyday conversation: "I feel / I feel it's coming. How goes it, thanks, it's coming" (227). This may represent an effort to lessen his pains by employing humour as a defence mechanism, as discussing the sensation of dying in a nonchalant manner makes it more approachable.

Near the end of the novel, Malone's health significantly worsens. Not only do his physical sufferings increase, but his delirium also triggers hallucinatory visions: "And I? Indubitably going, that's all that matters. [...] *Grandiose suffering*. I am swelling. What if I should burst? The ceiling rises and falls, rises and falls, rhythmically, as when I was a foetus" (TN 276, emphasis added). There is no longer any uncertainty to what Malone is feeling, no discrepancy between his body and mind. He is absolutely certain that his death is imminent. There is a certain heaviness to these descriptions, with brief sentences written in an almost feverish manner mimicking a shortness of breath. Malone's own bodily ailments seemingly bleed into the space around as everything seems to swell, with the comparisons to a womb furthering the birth-death imagery: "All is ready. Except me. I am being given, [...] birth to into death, such is my impression. The feet are clear already, of the great cunt of existence. [...] My head will be the last to die. [...] That is the end of me. I shall say I no more" (276). While Malone has previously welcomed death with open arms, there is now a sting of anxiety

as his sufferings increase. Everything is ready but him, and perhaps in an effort to ignore his own qualms about death, Malone forcefully attempts to focus on his story alone, stating that he will not refer to himself anymore. While he breaks this promise twice in the last five pages, Malone's attempt to discipline himself once again underscores his sanity, articulated as a desire to fully disengage from (but still be able to experience without) the self.

Finally, Malone's life and Macmann's story both come to an end in a frightening final passage. Throughout, both the narrative and writing have become progressively grimmer, effectively consumed by the darkness to which Malone longs to return. After being institutionalised in an asylum, Macmann witnesses his new caretaker Lemuel murder two people on an excursion, and then travelling back in their boat coincides with Malone's own death. The suddenness of this scene reflects Malone's attempt to conclude his story as quickly as possible before his passing. The writing itself is noticeably affected, with Malone's final words consisting of a string of incoherent sentences as he visibly struggles to finish his thoughts. Furthermore, the numerous staccato-like pauses illustrate the increasing mental toll writing takes on him, as well as the increasing influence of silence, while the heavy use of unintended repetition underscores Malone's delirium in his dying moments:

Lemuel is in charge, he raises his hatchet on which the blood will never dry, but not to hit anyone, [...] either with it or with it or with it or with or / or with it or with his hammer or with his stick or with his fist or in thought in dream I mean never he will never / or with his pencil or with his stick or / or light light I mean / never there he will never / never anything / there / any more (TN 280-281).

The novel ends violently and abruptly without a final punctuation mark, and as Malone perishes, the story he relates follows. The blood stains on Lemuel's hatchet that will forever remain underscore a bizarre sense of unfinished finality, that there is no more – this is all there is. The lines between fiction and reality again begin to blur, as Malone deliriously appears to frantically refer back to his current circumstances while struggling to write his final sentences. His repetition of the word 'light' may suggest that he sees his room enveloped by the heavy leaden light in flashes, or alternatively, that he is 'walking into the light' as he dies. Just as Lemuel will be unable to hurt anyone with his hatchet anymore, he himself is unable to cause more suffering for his characters. Malone deliriously notes both his most prominent possessions, a pencil and stick, along with the hatchet, a hammer, and a fist, suggesting them to be harmful. This is furthered by Malone mentioning the conceptual harm done "in thought [or] in dream", the realms in which he has inflicted these sufferings. Lastly, this final scene

works inversely to Molloy's want to "speak of the things that are left" (3), as Malone never gets to finish speaking, in turn leaving a strange gap in his story.

In summary, sensibility plays a prominent part in *Malone Dies*, particularly in relation to escaping from the self and the wish to revel in darkness and silence. As the titular Malone awaits his own death, he tells a story to pass the time, longing to distance himself from his current circumstances by watching someone else suffer. Malone's general disposition may in some ways be likened to Kristeva's notion of the melancholic-depressive. The narrative he relates doubles as an attempted healing process and a preparation for death comparable to the fort/da game described in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle". However, as Malone is highly critical of his own storytelling, his sense of immersion is frequently broken. Arguably the most positive description Malone gives throughout the novel is of the lights he saw in his youth, underscoring his fondness for that which borders on absolute nothingness, perhaps as a reflection of himself. Recognising that Sapo/Macmann's story will not be particularly thrilling, Malone effectively pours his own sensible sentiments into the narrative. Accordingly, the story is gradually consumed by silence and darkness, elements for which Malone harbours fondness and which affect his narrative on a structural and thematic level. As death closes in on Malone, he loses sensation in his body, and the writing becomes progressively grimmer. This culminates in a brutal ending to Sapo/Macmann's story which coincides with Malone's own passing.

3. In Absentia: *The Unnamable*

The final instalment in the Trilogy, *The Unnamable* (1953/1958) comprises an unrelenting and fragmented stream of consciousness. Its narrative voice relates a series of existential musings and tangential stories depicting scenarios that may or may not have happened, laying claim to a variety of personae while asserting to be no one. The unreliability of the novel's narrator (who will be addressed as one entity, in this chapter, for the sake of simplicity), a lack of a centralised plot and numerous contradictory claims make *The Unnamable* a particularly challenging text, with Beckett scholar Ruby Cohn likening its structuring to that of dense "verbal thickets" (qtd. in Dukes 24). While it may seem strange to pursue affect in a narrative which seemingly goes out of its way to avoid both emotion and physical sensation, this text's attempt to escape from affect itself points to the narrator's feelings of sansibility; a wish to escape physicality and immerse oneself in silence.

The eponymous Unnamable is a being beyond understanding. Although the character makes use of the first-person singular pronoun "I" and the gendered pronoun "he" when speaking of himself from an outsider's perspective, these words are seemingly approximants that ultimately fail to grasp his true essence: "[T]here is no name for me, no pronoun for me" (TN 397). However, he exists not only beyond our comprehension, but his own as well, bound by the constraints of language and reasoning, which were taught to him by his "delegates" (291), unknown voices who have instilled in him "a pensum to discharge" which he has forgotten (304). Notable delegates include Mahood and Worm, both of whom will be discussed in further detail later. Whether these figures are real, or figments of the speaker's imagination, is unclear. The Unnamable's unrelenting scepticism and fragmented identity not only relates to the continuous influence of these unknown voices, but to him having taken on the guise of various personae. He assumes the role of the creative wellspring behind a variety of characters, whom he refers to as his "vice-exister[s]" (309), all of whom are previous Beckett protagonists: Murphy, Watt, Mercier, Molloy, Moran, and Malone.

Thus, within the wider Beckett canon, the Unnamable effectively represents a creator figure 'behind the veil', the silent voice behind the other speakers. He summarises his situation with an epigraph featured in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Attributed to Francis Bacon, the quote reads "*De nobis ipsis silemus*" (TN 323; Kant 91), which translates to "Of our own person we will say nothing" (Kant 91). The Unnamable exists close to a point of absolute lessness as an architect behind layers of creation. However, he himself

speculates that there may be other figures who in turn have created him: “Are there other pits, deeper down? To which one accedes by mine? Stupid obsession with depth” (287).

Nevertheless, this reduction of narrative layers to a claimed originator demonstrates the Unnamable’s sanity, as he now wishes to shed the layers of false personae, stating that his goal is to finally speak of himself.

The Unnamable portrays not only a descent into deeper underlying narrative levels, but also a gradual reduction of physical space and mobility. Molloy relied on his crutches and bicycle, ostensibly never having left his region of Ballyba, while Malone wriggled in his bed, able to observe the outside world through his window. In *The Unnamable*, the narrator is confined to an unchanging dark space which borders on nothingness, its vastness unknown, only accompanied by “[d]im intermittent lights” (287) and the ghostly images of previous Beckett protagonists revolving around him: “I believe they are all here, at least from Murphy on” (287). While these figures are left to silently wander, the Unnamable himself sits completely immobile, comparing himself to a watchful owl to indicate his position as a passive observer: “I have always been sitting here, at this selfsame spot, [...] gazing before me like a great horn-owl in an aviary” (287). He theorises that he and this hollow space are intrinsically bound to one another, heightening his feelings of isolation and entrapment. The tone of this ambient space is laden with sane affect, as the emptiness emitted by the surroundings is effectively imparted unto the narrator until he wishes to further immerse himself in the stillness of this space. The Unnamable’s speech in the beginning is calm and collected, as he takes his time to consider his words, repeating them as if meditating on their (lack of) meaning and the extent of his solitude: “I am of course alone. Alone. [...] I shall have company. In the beginning. A few puppets. Then I’ll scatter them, to the winds, if I can” (286). In this section, reminiscent of Malone’s notion of ‘play’, the Unnamable lays out his plans, to distract himself with “puppets” before discarding them and be reduced to himself alone, quietly embracing emptiness and silence.

The novel’s opening lines lay the groundwork for the rest of the novel, as they mostly comprise of existential questions, contradictory statements, and uncertain propositions, all reflecting an overarching sense of “aporia”, a state of “unscrupulous doubt” (Dukes 13) which establishes a paradoxical foundation of uncertainty. Nothing is certain in *The Unnamable*, as the speaker himself attempts to make sense of his own existence: “Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that. Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on. I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not

about me” (*TN* 285). A strange feeling of disorientation is evoked in the introductory questions, as if the speaker has just awoken from a nightmare, only to find himself in a new one, unsure of where, when, and even who he is now. The reliability of language is immediately questioned, with verbs like ‘say’ and ‘call that’ turning outwardly simple assertions into hypothetical postulates, clearly demonstrated in the case of the speaker’s own identity. The pronoun “I” is followed by “say I”, underscoring its role as a mere placeholder term, a hypothetical ‘let us say’, and the subsequent “Unbelieving” indicates that the Unnamable is unconvinced by this pretence. Similarly, he claims to speak of himself before immediately abandoning the thought, claiming that while he seems to speak and be spoken of, it is not truly him.

The decentring of “I”, the indicator of the self, plays a major part in *The Unnamable*, where the concept of (singular) identity is regularly displaced and denied. The Unnamable claims no ownership of the narrative voice itself, quickly displacing it as if it belongs to an unknown third party: “My voice. The voice” (*TN* 386). In addition to elaborating on the dissociative desires of Molloy and Malone, this sensible refusal of the self and rejection of the roles of narrator and narratee is very similar to another Beckett text. In the dramatic monologue appropriately titled “Not I”, a floating mouth with a feminine voice tells the story of a woman, presumably herself. However, she never utters the word “I”. This is most likely deployed as a method of dissociation, entailing a refusal to acknowledge that an unspecified traumatic event may actually have happened to her. Strings of words flow together uncontrollably, sometimes seemingly interrupted by an unheard voice that attempts to correct her: “[A]ll dead still but for the buzzing... when suddenly she realized... words were – ... what?.. who?.. no!.. she!” (*CDW* 379, ellipses as in original). Beckett himself would confirm a connection between the texts by mentioning *The Unnamable* when asked about influences behind “Not I” (Knowlson 590), and they bear many similarities, with both texts being characterised by logorrheic speech patterns, dark voids as settings, continuous refusals of the word “I”, and the apparent influence of unknown voices. However, the respective speakers differ in their general temperament and in the intensity of their denials of the self. Mouth is portrayed as frantic and hyperactive, nervously laughing and deathly afraid of saying “I”, screaming whenever the unheard voice tries correcting her. The Unnamable is generally calmer and more pensive, displaying an exhausted contempt for the word “I”, constantly rejecting it before absently saying “I” again: “[I]t’s not I, I always forget that, I resume” (*TN*

405). Thus, while Mouth seems to be influenced by stronger emotions such as fear or mania, the Unnamable displays more ambient feelings of tiredness or melancholia.

This lack of a centralised self may also be seen in how the Unnamable circumvents the standard naming convention in Beckett's novels, where the letter "M" is a recurring motif. Almost all of the Unnamable's claimed personae and delegates begin with a capital "M", the exceptions being Watt and Worm, where the "W", an "M" turned on its head, takes its place. Other notable characters in the Trilogy, such as Molloy's mother, nicknamed Mag, Malone's fictional characters Macmann and Moll, and the restaurant proprietor who takes care of the Unnamable (as Mahood) in one of his stories, Madeleine or Marguerite, also bear this mark which appears to signal a particular form of importance or personhood. However, in the case of the eponymous Unnamable, the capital "M" is lacking, pointing to his lack of a perceived or unified identity. Instead, a small "m" rests right at the centre of the word "Unnamable", denoting a diminished, or lessened sense of self. Previously the speaker has attempted to distance himself from his own existence by speaking as if he were his vice-existers, attempting to relieve his own sufferings by observing them in smaller, more digestible pieces. If one compares this to Malone's dissociation, there is an extra layer here -- as Sapó/Macmann is two layers removed from the originator of his suffering. However, even this level of distance is not enough, as the Unnamable is unable to fulfil his sensible desires: "I thought I was right in enlisting these sufferers of my pains. I was wrong [...], their pains are nothing, compared to mine" (TN 297). Thus, the speaker turns this concept in on itself. Rather than trying to escape his situation, he desires to embrace the space around him, shedding his multitudinous identities and speaking of himself. This reflects a wish to reduce himself not only to one singular self, but the smallest of selves, the true "m":

Perhaps it is time I paid a little attention to myself, for a change. I shall be reduced to it sooner or later. At first sight it seems impossible. Me, utter me, in the same foul breath as my creatures? Say of me that I see this, feel that, fear, hope, know and do not know? Yes, I will say it, and of me alone. (TN 294)

As with *Molloy*, the process of invention, in this case speaking or thinking, becomes an undertaking that ultimately serves to dismantle thought itself. Once everything else is spoken of, there will be nothing left but the Unnamable and the silence. While the narrator begins questioning whether talking of himself would even be possible, his own voice having been silenced for so long, the last sentence of the previous passage indicates surprisingly determined conviction on his part, though he continues to approach this endeavour with a

prudent scepticism. Furthermore, the Unnamable seems to express contempt towards emotions and physical impressions. He presents the thought of talking of himself, of stating what he feels or senses in the same manner as his ‘creatures’, his previous claimed personae, as an almost demeaning prospect. This is further strengthened by his dismissive tone when he flippantly lists various sensations as if feeling these would somehow be below him.

There is an overarching sense of aversion towards the prospect of emotion in the novel. Like Moran, the speaker generally values logical reasoning over feelings. His dislike for emotion may be partly traced back to a story which he claims was once told to him in order to explain “the nature of emotion” (399). Near the end of the novel, he relates an almost comically tragic narrative in a cold, mechanical tone, a story about a woman who remarries after her husband is believed to have died in a war, only to lose both her spouses once her first love returns: “[H]e dies in the train, of emotion [...] she weeps, weeps again, with emotion again, at having lost him again, yep, goes back to the house, he’s dead, the other is dead [...] hanged himself, with emotion, [...] there’s a story for you” (*TN* 399). Although the narrator recognises that tragedy is present in this story, it does not emotionally impact him at all. There is a sense of futility to the narrative, as if feelings of attachment will always result in emotional distress, with the distanced “yep” and repeated use of “again” underscoring that the Unnamable deems the plot’s outcome predictable or inevitable. Since none of the characters are named, the story may be meant to represent humanity at large. While the woman continually weeps, both men die because their emotions become too overwhelming. They are all effectively reduced to their feelings, a source of outwardly pointless suffering “given favourable conditions” (399). Even love and affection become mere instruments in heightening the inevitable loss. The story portrays emotions as both irrational and dangerous, which may have instilled an aversion towards feelings in the speaker.

This is further explored in tangential stories as the lasting influence of the Unnamable’s delegates continue to affect him, whether through digressions on scenarios that allegedly happened, or visions of a potential future. Under the guise of Mahood, the speaker is reduced to a head attached to a limbless torso in a transparent urn: “[I]n a deep jar [...] on the side of a quiet street, near the shambles, I am at rest at last [...], my face reflects nothing but the satisfaction of one savouring a well-earned rest” (*TN* 321). While this situation may outwardly reflect a feeling of fulfilled sansibility, a calming sensation from being reduced to a sight in a jar, the speaker’s contentment is revealed to be illusory. Although Mahood states that he is gratified, the Unnamable does not feel content, as is revealed in his reflections when

placed under a tarpaulin to protect him from the elements: “It was under its shelter, snug and dry, that I became acquainted with the boon of tears, while wondering to what I was indebted for it, not feeling moved. [...] Is this, was this to be interpreted as an effect of gratitude? But in that case should not I have felt grateful?” (322). There is a strange sense of disconnect between the feeling body and the rational mind, as while the Unnamable recognises that he should feel grateful, the emotion simply is not there.

Throughout *The Unnamable*, this conflict between body and mind is at the forefront, with the narrator finding it difficult to assess emotions and bodily sensations. Crying becomes a recurring motif, but it is usually viewed in almost mechanical terms: “The tears stream down my cheeks from my unblinking eyes. What makes me weep so?” (TN 287). The Unnamable is unable to rationalise why he cries, seeing no practical or logical reason for it. Although it is unclear whether these tears actually stem from suppressed emotional distress, there is nonetheless a great disconnect between the speaker and emotions, both his own and those of others, with his excessive reasoning being unable to account for them. While the Unnamable suspects that strong emotions such as “rage” or “grief” (353) may be the cause of his delegate Worm’s weeping, he also speculates that this crying might simply be a way for Worm to block his sense of sight as he is unable to close his one eye: “[I]f he could close it, the kind he is, he’d never open it again. Tears gush from it practically without ceasing, [...] perhaps he weeps in order not to see” (353). This obstruction of physical sensation may reflect a sensible desire to detach from the outside world on Worm’s part through sensory deprivation.

Despite his delegate’s crying, the Unnamable seemingly envies Worm’s status as a being who lacks consciousness and emotion (though his senses seemingly respond to stimuli): “Feeling nothing, knowing nothing, he exists nevertheless, but not for himself, for others, others conceive him and say, Worm is, since we conceive him” (TN 340). To the Unnamable, Worm represents a state of absolute lessness which he longs to attain. Worm is a creature totally immersed in silence and stillness, not afflicted with the obligation to express. He is only there because someone else says he exists but is seemingly unaffected by subjective perceptions. This leads Paul Saunders to claim that “Worm is the true thing-in-itself” (70), alluding to the Kantian concept denoting the true nature of objects as they exist “*a priori*”, outside the limits of sensory perception (Kant 178). No matter what one says about Worm, he is still just Worm. The Unnamable thus desperately wishes to *be* him, just as he has previously lived through his other vice-existers, but finds it difficult to view the world through

the delegate's eyes: "I'm Worm, no, if I were Worm I wouldn't know it, I wouldn't say it (341).

While the Unnamable never becomes Worm, the connection between his body and mind is gradually severed. In the beginning, he is able to discern his bodily features using logic, knowing he has eyes because he cries and feeling his hands and knees touching because of his lack of back support: "I know my eyes are open, because of the tears that pour from them unceasingly. [...] Why should I have a sex, who have no longer a nose? All those things have fallen, all the things that stick out, [...] I'm a big talking ball (*TN* 298-299). As in *Molloy*, there is a certain feeling of pragmatism to the Unnamable's description of his own body, emphasising what works and does not. There is a sense that this description too is partly hypothesised. His stated lack of genitals seemingly directly stems from him being unable to feel them, and as he considers them unneeded, they may as well not be there. Similarly, the Unnamable states that while he would happily describe himself as being even *less*, the remote sensation in his limbs suggests that this is not the case: "[W]ere it not for the distant testimony of my palms, I would gladly give myself the shape [...] of an egg" (299). Throughout the novel, the link between body and mind weakens until eventually, the narrator has seemingly lost all sensation in his body: "I don't feel a body on me" (405). The Unnamable is thus gradually reduced to his mind and voice alone.

However, the pains of the feeling body are not always presented in a negative light. In fact, one of the more positive descriptions in the novel comes from the Unnamable's desire to lead a simpler existence in which he does not have to think or speak, but merely do, wistfully described through a hypothetical scenario where he repeatedly performs simple tasks: "[S]ome little job with fluids, filling and emptying, always the same vessel, I'd be good at that, it would be a better life than this, [...] I'd have a body, I wouldn't have to speak, I'd hear my steps [...] and the noise of the water" (*TN* 391). Described as "little attacks of hope" (390), these types of pensive daydreams are presented in a longing manner, reflecting the Unnamable's desire to simply exist without the worries of the mind, not necessarily without a functioning body. Compared to the rest of the novel, this passage is surprisingly hopeful, with the Unnamable commenting that he thinks he would do well in this repetitive task, and in contrast to the relentless stream of various agonising scenarios previously imagined, there is a great reduction in scope here. Smaller sensory observations, especially sound, are at the forefront and portrayed in a positive manner, as the sounds of footsteps and water take the place of ceaseless voices, creating a brief moment of calm.

Because the Unnamable generally expresses a certain distaste for sound in particular, associating it with the relentless stream of voices that torment him, he longs for silence, seemingly planning to attain by taking on yet another persona: “[H]e is made of silence, [...] he’s the one to be [...], his story the story to be told, [...] the story of the silence that he never left, that I should never have left” (406). Silence is presented as a story in its own right, in which form and narrative become one, non-communicable by words, a mere state of being. Like Freud’s concept of the death drive, the longing for silence is presented as a desire to return to a prior state, a time before the Unnamable began speaking, or alternatively, from a meta-perspective, before the reader opened the book. The possibility of a circular narrative is hinted at, since the silence connects the beginning and end of the novel. While the story unfolds as it is being read, there is nothing but silence before and after: “[I]t will be the place, the silence, the end, the beginning, the beginning again” (406). Thus, while the seemingly inevitable return to silence may be compared to death, there is a sense of circularity which suggests that the process of falling silent and beginning to speak again will continue.

Additionally, unlike Thanatos, the longing for silence does not denote a strong wish for death. Rather, the Unnamable expresses a sensible desire to immerse himself in silence, to *feel* the silence enveloping him, to still exist, but without the overwhelming amount of auditory sensory information and the professed obligation to speak: “[T]here were moments I thought that would be my reward for having spoken so long and so valiantly, to enter living into silence, so as to be able to enjoy it, no, I don’t know why, so as to feel myself silent” (*TN* 389). While the narrator is unsure of his exact motivation, silence is described in positive terms, as something to be savoured, a reward after an arduous process, or a simple change of pace. In contrast to the heavy focus on thinking, the emphasis lies on the sensation itself, the feeling of being immersed in near-nothingness. Silence thus constitutes a sensible-ambient space of its own, a physical environment in which the narrator wishes to immerse himself. In accordance with the proposed circular structure, this silence denotes a state of waiting, a temporary rest before all begins anew: “[I]t will be the silence, full of murmurs, distant cries, the usual silence, spent listening, spent waiting, waiting for the voice” (406). While the voice is portrayed as a destructive force that tries and fails to produce meaning, this supposed waiting-room of silence is filled with insignificant or remote sounds, a calming state of lessness rather than absolute oblivion.

However, while beautiful, silence is also portrayed as frightening in another sense, since it is able to consume or drown its surroundings, much like the darkness in *Malone Dies*.

The narrator displays both fondness and reverence for the idea of “real silence” (TN 401), which holds a certain sublime quality. Furthering Edmund Burke’s distinction between beauty and sublimity (Cuddon & Habib 692), Immanuel Kant differentiates between the mathematical and dynamical sublime, which respectively denote “things in nature of great or infinite magnitude [...] or of terrifying might” (Ngai 265). In both cases, there is profound reverence for the sublime object, as terror and exaltation couple to form a feeling of awe. Much like seeing mountain peaks or vast oceans, being this close to *real* silence may too be considered a sublime experience: “[L]ashed to a rock, in the midst of silence, its great swell rears towards me” (TN 403). This true silence is presented as an overwhelming force of nature, composed of waves that crash against the Unnamable’s comparably small refuge. The heavy use of drowning imagery in the novel furthers the comparison between silence and an ocean, making its destructive powers feel immediate and threatening: “[A] few gurgles on the silence, the real silence, not the one where I macerate up to my mouth [...] that covers me, uncovers me, breathes with me, [...] that of the drowned” (401). Both temporary and ‘real’ silence are thus portrayed as capable of physically occupying space, breathing and moving, covering and uncovering the protagonist in its forceful waters, making him gasp for air. Immersion in silence may thus be likened to submersion in water.

Furthering this drowning imagery, the Unnamable states that his death will be signalled by the comma: “The comma will come where I’ll drown for good, then the silence” (402). Textually, the comma plays an interesting role as a manifestation of the gradual influence of silence. Around the last third of the novel, the monologue reaches a breaking point, as the Unnamable’s speech becomes more and more frantic, mirroring his gradually declining mental state, with an increasing use of commas rather than punctuation marks to separate gradually shorter full sentences. There are few comfortable points of rest during these long segments, with some sentences spanning several pages. The numerous commas may be interpreted as physical markers of the “withdrawal of breath” trying “to let silence be heard” (Armstrong 191). This rapid stream of commas heightens the perceived sensation of drowning, as silence personified crashes towards and stifles the text, creating brief moments where the Unnamable is essentially submerged beneath its waves:

[I]t’s nobody’s fault, what’s nobody’s fault, this state of affairs, what state of affairs, so it is, so be it, don’t fret, so it will be, how so, rattling on, dying of thirst, seeking determinedly, what they want, they want me to be, this, that, to howl, stir, crawl out of here, be born, die, listen, I’m listening, it’s not enough, I must understand [.] (TN 379)

Alternatively, the text itself may be interpreted as the drowning force, with the commas representing minor points of respite as the Unnamable gasps for air in his unrelenting flow of speech. While punctuation marks have previously provided comfortable breaks in between utterances, the Unnamable, and by extension the reader, is effectively forcefully carried 'downstream' in a river of text. The writing attains an unnerving sense of speed with fewer natural points of rest. Irrespective of whether the drowning sensation stems from the text or the silence, the sense that the end is rapidly approaching is furthered by this change in structure. After the Unnamable's statement that the comma will signal his drowning, the final two sentences in the novel span over five pages combined. However, the declaration itself is also preceded by other streams of commas. This may suggest that he feels he has already drowned, that the following passages are mere convulsions of speech, similar to how the body of a chicken may still move after losing its head. While the exact moment of a supposed death is hard to pinpoint, it is interesting to note that the comma makes its first appearance already in the novel's first full line of text: "I, say I" (285), the very idea of an identity stifled from the very beginning. Nevertheless, the relentless stream of thought implies a need to fill the emptiness with *something*, however seemingly pointless.

Near the end of the novel, the voices of the Unnamable's delegates have already ceased and he himself has lost sensation in his body. He is closer than ever to the silence for which he longs. However, perhaps out of a fear of the unknown, he continues speaking despite apparent futility: "[Y]ou must go on, I can't go on, you must go on, I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me, strange pain, strange sin" (TN 407). The final passage of the novel reads almost as the Unnamable attempting to convince himself to keep himself afloat among the depths of silence until the voices of his delegates return to speak of him and thus further his existence. For what is the Unnamable but words that have not yet been said?: "I'm in words, made of words, others' words, what others" (379). There is an overwhelming feeling of uncertainty to the final lines of the novel, which fittingly end in doubt and contradictions: "I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on (407). Although the Unnamable appears resignedly determined to continue speaking to further his own existence, whether he actually manages to "go on" is left ambiguous as the novel itself ends, ushering in silence.

Overall, in *The Unnamable*, the minor affect of sansibility mainly presents itself through the narrator's desires to dampen physical sensations and shed layers of false

personalities, as well as a longing to immerse oneself in silence, likened to a physical space. The titular Unnamable displays a strong sense of contempt towards his body, disregarding the potential existence of body parts because he cannot feel them, and he would happily be reduced to bare necessities if he could. Additionally, while he has previously attempted to distance himself from his own existence by observing the sufferings of his so-called vice-existers, he now attempts to turn this process in on itself by speaking until there is nothing left to talk about, to reduce himself to the smallest 'true' self. The Unnamable finds it difficult to fully understand feelings, sensibly longing to escape both affect and physicality. There is a gradual reduction of bodily and auditory sensations throughout the novel, as the speaker is ostensibly reduced to his mind and voice alone while the voices of his delegates begin to fade, bringing him closer to a state of silence. While this longing for a prior state is outwardly similar to Freud's Thanatos, it does not reflect a desire for death, but rather a wish to still exist within near-nothingness, to *feel* the enveloping silence. However, amidst the struggle between speaking and silence, the novel ends ambiguously, as it is unclear whether the Unnamable is able to "go on", however meaningless his endeavour seems, or whether he gives in to silence.

Within Without: Conclusion

In reading Samuel Beckett's Trilogy through the lens of affect theory, I have attempted to demonstrate how the fascination with and longing for removal, negation, emptiness, and subtraction is *felt* as a minor negative emotion by the various point-of-view characters in the novels. This affect, which I have decided to name *sansibility*, the longing to be *without*, bears many similarities to Sianne Ngai's category of ugly feelings, representing not a traditional, powerful aesthetic emotion, but rather a passive, nagging and ambient feeling emblematic of Beckett's works. It bears similarities to other feelings and drives, perhaps best understood as a less severe expression of the death drive (Thanatos) combined with melancholic inhibition and a resigned disposition reminiscent of *ennui*. However, the non-severity of this pensive want of lessness and partial obliteration, of the strange inclination towards reduction or detachment, either from the self or one's surrounding environment, makes *sansibility* stand on its own as a separate minor affect.

Affect in Beckett's works is usually intrinsically linked to the body, and often informed by a sense of isolation. As Beckett's "impoverishing use of French" (Moorjani 21) affects the language and textual structure, the affect of *sansibility* also extends to the writing itself. The overall affective-aesthetic tone of his literary canon is one of emptiness or lack, of hollow ambient spaces enveloped in silence, stillness, and darkness. However, his characters often respond with *sansible* sentiments themselves, longing for less rather than more, either through desires for divestment of the self (*Molloy*, *Waiting for Godot*), detachment from the self (*Malone Dies*, "Not I"), sensory deprivation (*Endgame*, *Murphy*), full immersion in the surrounding silence and stillness (*The Unnamable*), or an explicit "want of worser worst" (*Worstward Ho*, in *Company etc.* 95).

The three novels discussed all express *sansibility* in multiple ways. Molloy's narrative concerns itself mostly with divestment of the self, as the titular character wishes to remove physical parts of himself. Expressing almost plant-like sentiments, he views his own existence as a gradual decomposition and longs to be absorbed into the earth. Molloy is most contented when he lies outstretched in a ditch, viewing himself from the outside until he forgets that he exists. His counterpart Moran's *sansibility* is mostly expressed through a change of priorities. Upon returning from his mission, he decides to live in his garden, no longer concerned with bourgeois decorum. His bodily condition and writing style both begin mirroring that of his

target, and the text itself is affected by increasing simplicity and disregard for formalities. Both characters also share a contempt for (excessive) language.

In *Malone Dies*, Malone's general sentiment is a wish to distance himself from the self. Through relating his story about Sapo/Macmann, he longs to disengage from his own existence by watching someone else suffer, only wishing to return to his own body when he dies. However, due to increased bodily pains, unexpected visits, and a critical attitude towards his own writing, Malone finds it difficult to immerse himself in Sapo/Macmann's story. Furthermore, he nostalgically dreams of his past, the smallest of lights, and immersion in darkness. Overall, the affective tone is one of emptiness and tedium, with Malone's room affecting the general mood by seemingly exuding greyness. Throughout the novel, his bodily and mental condition gradually worsens until he eventually dies, unable to finish his story.

Finally, *The Unnamable* depicts the removal of false narrative layers and a descent into near-nothingness. The unnamable speaker seemingly longs to avoid affect and physicality, attempting to reduce himself to the smallest indicator of an identity, the "m" that rests at the centre of his 'name'. Wanting to stop speaking and finally immerse himself within and feel absolute silence envelop him, the Unnamable finds it difficult to stop his logorrheic stream of consciousness, influenced by unknown voices that have fragmented his sense of self. He finds it difficult to comprehend emotion, sensibly longing to experience the world like his delegate Worm does; to not think or feel, merely be.

In their various depictions of negation, escapes from bodily sensation and a general sense of brooding contemplation, the three novels discussed remain particularly relevant to continue exploring through the lens of affect theory. Samuel Beckett remains such a unique literary voice to analyse, and the Trilogy alone is laden with several examples of sansibility that I did not have the space to cover here. (The word count in my list of eligible quotations rivals that of actual thesis). In further affective-aesthetic explorations of his works, in-depth analyses of the aesthetics of other types of negative affect or other non-traditional aesthetic emotions (such as sansibility) may prove relevant, particularly in relation to the affective qualities of Beckett's near-empty spaces, his attention towards the decaying body and mind, and his characters' attempts at distancing themselves not only from the outer world, but their own inner worlds as well.

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