Abstract: *This article discusses the theological implications of Adorno's writings on Beckett by specifically examining their constellative motifs of death, reconciliation and redemption. It addresses not only their content but also their form, suggesting a mutually stimulating relationship between the two as based both on a negative-dialectical approach and an inverse-theological trajectory. Focusing on Adorno's discussion of Beckett's oeuvre as a "metaphysical entity," I argue that Adorno's reading of Beckett is peculiar because it is inextricably tied to his own critical-theological venture. The essay claims that Adorno's reflections on Beckett contour, at their most basic level, meditations on theology in the age of its impossibility.*

Keywords: Adorno + Beckett + inverse theology + critical theory + negative dialectics

Beckett, Adorno and the Hope for Nothingness as Something: Meditations on Theology in the Age of Its Impossibility

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> "Beckett does not believe in God, though he seems to imply that God has committed an
>
> unforgivable sin by not existing."
>
> – Anthony Burgess, *The Novel Now*

In his lectures on metaphysics, Theodor W. Adorno ([1965] 2002: 117) stated of Samuel Beckett's *oeuvre*: "The dramas of Beckett […] seem to me the only true relevant metaphysical entities since the

war." Given this remark, the various references to Beckett's works in Adorno's most explicit theological paragraphs, and the frequency of messianic motifs recurring in his essay on Beckett's *Endgame* in addition to his notes on *The Unnamable,* it is curious that little attention has been paid to the theological implications of Adorno's readings of Beckett. To be sure, there are numerous detailed examinations of Adorno's "inverse theology"[1] and an increasing number of studies dealing with the influence of theology and mysticism on Beckett's *oeuvre*.[2] However, very few of them have responded at length to the critical-theological affinities between Adorno's essays on literature and those of Beckett's writings that he read most intensely: *Endgame* and *The Unnamable*.

The following article suggests a reading of Beckett's reductive language games through the lens of what Adorno himself termed, in an early letter to Walter Benjamin,[3] "inverse theology." I understand "inverse theology" following Christopher Craig Brittain (2010: 197) as a form of critical "engagement with theology" that "establishes a negative correlation with a utopian vision of a reconciled world." The article starts by briefly elaborating on the notion and concept of inverse theology, partly by distinguishing it from negative theology. I argue that inverse theology must be carefully separated from any traditional notion of theology, as it passes through the negative not only *ex negativo* but also, and in the first place, through a critique of theology itself.

To then expose the highly complex relationship between theology and critique in Adorno's reading of Beckett, this article focuses particularly upon Adorno's readings of the motif of death in Beckett's *Endgame* and *The Unnamable*. It argues that Adorno's ([1966] 2004: 372) interpretation of Beckett's "metaphysical entities" can be read as a response to his own theodic question uttered in "Meditations on Metaphysics," namely, whether it is "still possible to have a metaphysical experience." As will be shown, with Adorno, *Endgame* and *The Unnamable* can be read as textual

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[1] To name but a few examples of studies of Adorno's inverse theology: Christopher Craig Brittain's (2010) well-argued *Adorno and Theology* provides a compelling overview. For a more detailed investigation, see Liedke's (1997) comprehensive account as well as Ansgar Martins's (2016) remarkable study on Adorno and Kabbalah, which touches continuously on the concept of inverse theology as well as providing a short, lucid elaboration of Adorno and Beckett, (see pp. 107–114). For an examination with explicit regard to Adorno's occupation with Kierkegaard and existentialism, see also Peter E. Gordon's *Adorno and Existence* (2016), particularly pp. 158–198. Hent deVries' (2005: 621–628) remarkably articulate *Minimal Theologies* indicates the importance of Beckett's works in the context of Adorno's inverse theology yet limits an examination to only a few pages. For a more comprehensive interpretation of (and comparison between) Adorno and Beckett, particularly in light of their concepts of freedom, see Natalie Leeder's (2017) detailed study *Freedom and Negativity in Beckett and Adorno: Something or Nothing*.

[2] See specifically Mary Bryden's works in this context (in particular, *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God*) as well as Andy Wimbush's (2015) compelling article on the influence of quietism on Beckett's novel *Molloy*. Regarding the impact of biblical writings on Beckett's *oeuvre*, see also Beckett and Knowlsen (2006: 29–31).

[3] Ulf Liedke (1997: 436) rightly notes that Adorno used the term "inversion" or "inverse theology" only in his writings during the 1920s and 1930s while increasingly using the term "negative metaphysics" in his later writings.

utopoi that critically negotiate metaphysical experience as a sociohistorically evolved impossibility. Through Adorno's lens, I elaborate on how Beckett's *oeuvre* lends expression to a complication of metaphysical experience that, after Auschwitz, is necessarily confronted with its own violent embeddedness in a "social" theodicy (2004: 361). Such a theodicy is social insofar as it is no longer, in Leibniz's originary sense, attributable to natural phenomena but is rather a product of humanity's second nature. Thus, the aforementioned works of Beckett illustrate a world that seemingly excludes any affirmative relation to metaphysics, let alone theology. However, with Adorno it can be argued that Beckett's plays do not indicate an absolute farewell to God but instead articulate a nuanced exposition of creaturely suffering in the midst of an unlivable life. Crucially, an individual experiencing such a "non-living" life, although unable to believe in God anymore, cannot cease to hope—that is, can only wait in vain. Viewed from this stance, I argue that Adorno's reflections on Beckett are best understood as meditations on theology in the age of its impossibility.

As I illustrate in this essay, these meditations reveal a sense of impossible hope, which, although radically reduced and promised only *ex negativo*, is more than nothing. As Adorno later writes regarding Beckett's *oeuvre*, particularly *The Unnamable,* it precisely indicates "Nothing from Something" or "Nothing as Something."[4] Viewed through the lens of the German critical theorist, Beckett's works thus integrate a metaphysical element that retains the form of an open question, surviving beneath an insistence on determinate negation.[5]

On Inverse Theology and the Fall of Metaphysics: A Few Introductory Remarks

To briefly introduce what Adorno had in mind when referring to "inverse theology," I will expand on four facets that I consider crucial for an understanding of the term, particularly in the context of Adorno's reading of Beckett.

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[4] Leeder decodes in this space between "something" and "nothing" in Beckett and Adorno a fragile form of freedom (cf. Leeder, 2017: xiii).

[5] In her reading of Adorno and Beckett, Leeder (2017: xiv) carefully defines Adorno's concept of determinate negation in contradistinction to Hegel's dialectics (and I am in full agreement with her precise explanation): "Hegel's conception of determinate negation is based on the idea that, *contra* Scepticism, the 'refutation of a theory leads not to nothingness, but to another theory that could not exist without the one that it refutes'. Negation as a critique leads to positivity (…). Adorno's concerns (…) lead him to adapt the term for his own purposes. For Adorno, no affirmation follows from determinate negation: rather the process aims to divulge the truth by revealing the contradictions in play without attempting to resolve them. (…) For Adorno, determinate negation prevents us from jeopardizing that which we are attempting to salvage by prematurely converting it into a positivity."

First, "inverse theology" refers to a highly idiosyncratic approach to theology that is, most aporetically, established through its radical critique. That is, a critique of theology, particularly its traditional form(s) as grounded on affirmative *Setzungen*, is a condition of the possibility of inverse theology itself. Adorno hereby acknowledges the need, at the very latest after Auschwitz—to think of theology itself as damaged while offering no concrete tools to fix it.

Second, while inverse theology passes through the negative, it should be distinguished from negative theology, to which it is sometimes compared (cf. Finlayson, 2012; Wellmer, 1991; and Habermas, 1983). To be sure, Adorno's inverse theology borrows concepts that have played a significant role in the context of negative theology, most notably the ban on images*,* but—and here is where inversion plays a significant role—to idiosyncratically instrumentalize, reverse, and decontextualize the concept for the sake of his own *philosophical* and secularized agenda of ideology critique.

Third, while Adorno's insistence on the primacy of the nonidentical has particularly served as a focal point of numerous comparisons between his approach and negative theology (cf. Finlayson, 2012), in no way does he conceive of nonidentity as an otherworldly entity. While Adorno engages with theology through dialectical forms of negation and shares with negative theology the assumption that nothing can positively be attributed to God, his forms of negation are different from deducting claims about God *ex negativo*. It is crucial to emphasize that Adorno refrains from hypostatizing some being that is "wholly Other." Such a way of approaching God as a divine, transcendent reality through attributing to him what he is not, according to Adorno, risks reinforcing a stance that is ignorant of this-worldly suffering. That is, it relies on revelation instead of focusing critically on the material realities of immanent injustice. In what follows, this context will become illustrative in Adorno's reading of Beckett's forms of negation as well as what he terms the "negative metaphysical content" of Beckett's works.

Furthermore, in contrast to negative theology's emphasis on the unknowable (which I will illustrate with a particular focus on Beckett and Proust), Adorno's work offers a strong notion of metaphysical experience that can indeed be sensed and encountered, even though only negatively in the form of an absence or a forgotten, unfulfilled promise. As in Adorno's concept of inverse

theology, such metaphysical experience is reduced and corrected via a confrontation with a form of dialectical critique. It is not to be equated with the merely irrational, spiritual or mystical.[6] In this context, it is helpful to mention that for Adorno, the very possibility and form of metaphysical experience is subject to historical change. Contrary to Kant, experience is not based on universally given a priori categories but, paradoxically enough, on particular *a prioris* that are shaped historically, i.e., a posteriori. In this vein, I understand Adorno, who rarely sharply distinguishes between theology and metaphysics, to think of inverse theology as becoming articulate through a confrontation with the remainders of metaphysical experience—an instance of which can be an aesthetic experience, or a form of art that provokes (negative-dialectical) thinking. Mediated through such experience, I suggest inverse theology to be, first and foremost, a theology that questions itself—a historico-dialectical reflection on and an unconditional confrontation with a renewed theodicy. Metaphysical experience encountered in the form of an absence can thus point to, or even provoke, a form of attentive reasoning that transcends the existing in recognizing that "the whole is the false" (Adorno ([1951] 2005): 50). As I will try to show through Beckett, it is this awareness that contains in itself an inverted messianic promise. Strikingly, however, although it is accessible only in the form of a seemingly unresolvable question, it can culminate in a form of reasoning that transcends the existing without hypostatizing any specific form of transcendence or presupposing any knowledge, or even consciousness, about God.

On that note, it is worth mentioning that Adorno's critique of the hypostatization of transcendent entities, whether in a positive or a negative fashion, is already evident in his early engagement with Kierkegaard (cf. Angermann, 2013: 168–195; Morgan, 2012; Adorno, 1989: 24ff.). According to Adorno, inwardness in a Kierkegaardian sense is complicit with a false acceptance and tacit affirmation of the innerworldly status quo and serves mainly as a manifestation of bourgeois solipsism. It should, however, be mentioned that, as Gordon (2016: 157) notes, Kierkegaard also helped Adorno "to grasp the unexpected relation between religion and materialism." This latter relation is especially essential with regard to Beckett and underlines the significance of his works in the context of Adorno's critical stance on theology. It also helps illuminate a fourth feature attributable

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[6] It is crucial in this context to note, too, that Adorno, in a letter to Gershom Scholem, rather hesitates to explicitly call his own work, specifically *Minima Moralia,* "negative-theological," as is explicitly suggested by Scholem. Adorno's reaction indicates a careful distancing from the term rather than a straightforward affirmation (cf. Adorno and Scholem, 2015: 84).

exclusively to "inverse," in distinction to negative, theology: namely, that it is, probably most important, closely connected to a historical *Gestaltwandel* of metaphysics. Along those lines, Adorno describes his thinking as in "solidarity with metaphysics at the time of its fall." This comment indicates what Adorno ([1966] 2004: 401), in his *Meditations on Metaphysics*, poses as a question: "whether this utter tenuousness, abstractness, indefiniteness is the last already lost defensive position of metaphysics—or whether metaphysics survives only in the meanest and shabbiest."

If metaphysics has a chance to survive "at the time of its fall," it is in the most profane, the forgotten, the micrological, the *Dinghafte*, the damaged, the radically material. Crucially, if at all, it survives in immanence. The *Jenseitigkeit* of traditional theology is, as it were, corrected by Adorno through shifting the focus on innerworldly suffering. It seems that after Auschwitz, if redemption is at all and any longer possible, it is, first and foremost, dependent on immanent change; that is, it depends on our ability to respond to suffering. At the same time, Adorno insists that metaphysics also survives in our affective, somatic impulses, our initial response to suffering itself that becomes articulate not least in the insistence that things ought to be different. (I will return to this topic in more detail in my reading of Adorno's Beckett interpretation.)

For now, to summarize, the aforementioned four facets attributable to an inverse theology culminate in the intrinsically aporetic approach to save theology from it; as Adorno ([1966] 2004: 391) puts it, to "preserve[s] theology in its critique." For Adorno, it is crucial that the locus for this preservation is metaphysics. In this regard, Adorno's interpretation of Beckett's works, particularly if conceived of as "metaphysical entities," illustrates an approach of saving theology in an age of its impossibility.

Proust, Beckett and the End: Reconsidering Death after Auschwitz

To shift to an explicit exploration of Adorno's reading of Beckett including its inverse-theological implications, I start by expanding on the entwinement of form and content. Significantly, theological motifs are traceable not only throughout the content, particularly of some of Adorno's essays on literature, but also through the form. Indeed, it could be argued that the very compositions of these essays already indicate both a negative-dialectical approach and an inverse-theological trajectory (cf.

Liedke, 1997: 442). To name the most striking examples, his "Trying to Understand Endgame,"

"Notes on Kafka," and "On the Final Scene of Faust" are composed as extensive dialectical

movements of thought, culminating in a somewhat open outcome. Their endings offer an emphatic

insistence on determinate negation, which nonetheless integrates quasi-messianic constellations.

However, in line with his insistence on inverse, as opposed to negative, theology, Adorno always

refrains from hypostatizing such motifs or attributing to them any positive sense or entity.

To exemplify this, I now focus on the ending of Adorno's "Trying to Understand Endgame,"

which also hints at how Adorno decodes in literary writings, from Proust to Kafka to Beckett, a

historical transformation of the very form and possibility of metaphysical experience. Adorno ([1961]

1986: 150) concludes his text as follows:

> Proust, about whom the young Beckett wrote an essay, is said to have attempted to keep
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> protocol on his own struggle with death, in notes which were to be integrated into the
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> description of Bergotte's death. *Endgame* carries out this intention like a mandate from a
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> testament.

I suggest that the best way to understand this quotation is to take it quite literally. First, Adorno reads

Beckett's *Endgame* as a final protocol documented by persons attempting to die yet not succeeding.

Second, he decodes in it what one might term a negative complication of what Proust, decades earlier,

had already depicted as a rather reduced form of metaphysical experience. According to Adorno,

Proust's writings illustrate metaphysical experience as characterized by a sense of vanishing that is

encountered in the form of the question "Can this be all?" Adorno parallels this with the experience of

childhood promises receding "like a rainbow" ([1966] 2004: 373) as soon as the grown-up approaches

the promised entity and suddenly finds himself too near. To frame this situation in Adornian terms, the

experiencing subject is separated by an unbridgeable distance between the particular, the nonidentical

and the identical whole.

To exemplify Proust's (1957: 250–251) sense of metaphysics, his words picturing Bergotte's

night of death after his deathly collapse before Johannes Vermeer's *View of Delft* are particularly

illustrative:

He [Bergotte] was dead. Permanently dead? Who shall say? Certainly our experiments in spiritualism prove no more than the dogmas of religion that the soul survives death. All that we can say is that everything is arranged in this life as though we entered it carrying the burden of obligations contracted in a former life (…). All these obligations which have not their sanction in our present life seem to belong to a different world, founded upon kindness (…), which we leave in order to be born into this world, before perhaps returning to the other (…). So that the idea that Bergotte was not wholly and permanently dead is by no means improbable. They buried him, but all through the night of mourning, (…) his books arranged three by three kept watch like angels with outspread wings and seemed, for him who was no more, the symbol of his resurrection.

Adorno ([1966] 2004: 378) later writes that this passage, "one of the central points of his [Proust's] work," had helped, "gropingly, to express hope for resurrection." Along those lines, Adorno claims that the French novelist, albeit already offering only a limited sense of metaphysical experience, at least suggested a remainder of a concrete eschatological promise. However, Proust refrains from hypostatizing religious content or symbols. To be sure, he does write about books resembling angels, but the motif is seemingly secularized. According to Adorno (373), Proust's *oeuvre* thus already offers a notion of metaphysics beyond "allegedly primal religious experiences." Nevertheless, regarding the relationship between Proust and Beckett, he notes:

Proust, in a subterranean mystical tradition, still clings affirmatively to that physiognomy, as if involuntary memory disclosed a secret language of things; in Beckett, it becomes the physiognomy of what is no longer human. His situations are counterparts to the immutable elements conjured by Proust's situations (…). (Adorno, [1994] 2010: 131)

According to Adorno, Beckett opens the rather solipsistic streams of consciousness of Proust's metaphysics in a sociopolitical and concrete-historical vein. That is, Adorno's interpretation of Beckett encompasses not least a critical examination of the aporia of saying, writing, being and,

probably most important, dying, after Auschwitz.[7] Proust's explicitly theological motif of a "world formed upon kindness" is therefore radically reduced and complicated through the confrontation with what Adorno ([1966] 2004: 362), as mentioned earlier, calls a *social* theodicy:

> The administrative murder of millions made of death a thing one had never yet to fear in just this fashion. There is no chance any more for death to come into the individuals' empirical life as somehow conformable with the course of that life. (…) That in the concentration camps it was no longer an individual who died, but a specimen—this is a fact bound to affect the dying of those who escaped the administrative measure.

After Auschwitz, Beckett's plays take the form of materialized reflections on the historically evolved impossibility of any "world formed upon kindness." Transcendental symbols are hollowed out by Beckett's linguistic subtractions. Whereas in Proust's streams of consciousness, the aura of a single madeleine could open a whole world of forgotten, sublime memories that enrich the present, *Endgame*'s isolated moments referring to past times are nothing but clichéd rhetoric deprived of actual, sensual content: The always-the-same world, in which these four figures are entrenched, is obviously unable to open toward another.

Starting from Proust and culminating in Beckett, Adorno decodes an increasing reduction of both form and content. To Adorno (380–381), this reduction marks a (necessary) response to the social catastrophe of Auschwitz:

> Beckett has given us the only fitting reaction to the situation of the concentration camps—a situation he never calls by name, as if it were subject to an image ban. What is, he says, is like a concentration camp. At one time he speaks of a lifelong death penalty. The only dawning hope is that there will be nothing any more. This, too, he rejects.

That is, Beckett's plays rest on a reversal of what Proust still illustrated as a relative dualism between life and death, which dominated his metaphysical description of Bergotte's passing. For Adorno,

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[7] For a more detailed elaboration on the aporetic situation confronting poetry and the arts more generally after Auschwitz, in particular in the context of Adorno's so-called, much-discussed, and often misread "dictum," see Hofmann (2005) as well as Nosthoff (2014a; 2014b).

Beckett's figures are still-living creatures that are wasting away on a never-ending threshold. The ability to finally die is denied—"and yet," claims Hamm, "I hesitate, hesitate to end" (Beckett, [1958] 2009: 6). Crucially, such existential condition is dominated not by a Heideggerian "being-towards-death" but by an "always-already-dying." Thus, death can no longer be conceptualized as isolated from life or history, but is conceived of as in constellation with them. Thus, in quite the same sense as Adorno decodes dying as no longer possible in an Abrahamic sense—that is, "in a ripe old age, (…) satisfied with life" [Gen 25: 7]—Beckett's *oeuvre* displays the final end not as an ultimate "possibility of no longer being-able-to-be-there" (Heidegger, [1962] 2008: 294), but as a sheer impossibility. Such unbearable agony of death, or the struggle for ever being-able-to-die in these deathly realities, is explicitly understood by Adorno not as individualistic but as concrete-historical. It necessarily concerns society as a whole, indeed, the whole—*das Ganze*—as such. In short, to cite Ferdinand Kürnberger's sentence chosen by Adorno as an opener to his *Minima Moralia,* his *Reflections from the Damaged Life*, published only a few years after WWII: "Life does not live" (Adorno, [1951] 2002: 19).

On Kafka's *The Hunter Gracchus*, Beckett's *L'Innomable* and Death as Salvation

The concrete-historical complications underpinning the entwinement of a seemingly unreachable, redemptive death and an "unliving" life, as suggested by Adorno, can be illustrated further with respect to Adorno's reading of Kafka's *The Hunter Gracchus* that he compared to Beckett's *The Unnamable* (Adorno, [1994] 2010: 174).

Kafka's parable tells of a hunter, who once fell to his death from a rock. However, the supposedly dead man returns, always straying on a seemingly infinite "spacious stair" guiding the way to transcendence. Adorno (1967: 260) interprets the quasi-transcendent figure sociocritically:

History becomes Hell in Kafka because the chance, which might have saved, was missed. (…) In the concentration camps, the boundary between life and death was eradicated. (…) As in Kafka's twisted epics, what perished there was that which had provided the criterion of

experience—life lived out to its end. Gracchus is the consummate refutation of the possibility

banished from the world: to die after a long and full life.

The analogy between the slow death produced in the concentration camps and Gracchus's inability to

die is mirrored in Adorno's reading of Beckett's figures; however, according to him, such motifs are

taken to their (most negative) extremes by the Irish novelist. Kafka's distorted creatures who indirectly

promise survival, such as Gracchus, and Odradek, in whom Adorno famously decoded "a motif (…)

of the overcoming of death" (Benjamin and Adorno, 1999: 69; cf. Gordon, 2016: 179), seem entirely

erased. One of the few things owned by *Endgame*'s main protagonist, Hamm, is a three-legged dog

puppet that has never lived. Adorno views these motifs as a radicalization of Kafka:

> What I have postulated for Kafka (…) holds equally, and to the highest degree, for Beckett. An
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> interpretation makes sense only if you take him [Beckett] literally and don't believe that the
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> metaphysical idea was somehow freely floating above it (…), but that it is related to the (…)
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> material content (…). (Adorno, Boehlich, et al., 1994: 84)

The latter assumption reflects what I have already referred to in my introductory remarks: If

metaphysics after Auschwitz has any locus at all, it is in the shabbiest and radically immanent.

Crucially, Beckett reflects this *Gestaltwandel* of theology through both a radical focus on the material

remainders and sparse language. In this context, it is helpful to mention that Adorno remembers

Beckett as having been "very critical" of Kafka (93), as having claimed that in his predecessor's

oeuvre, "everything remained in the realm of the fable without having passed over (…) to language."

Beckett's works indeed mirror this critique: They transform content into form and form into

content; consequently, the erasure of transcendence reaches the level of language and form as such.

While Kafka (1971a: 228) pictures Gracchus's immanent transcendence enigmatically and with

recourse to a peculiar, quasi-mystic symbolism—as he writes, the hunter's "death ship lost its way" —

Beckett subtracts any potentially meaningful formative narration. History is suspended as anecdotes,

or tales are: Hamm's extended story in the middle of *Endgame* is at best a parody. In this regard,

against the background of *Endgame*'s exhaustive bareness, Hamm's desire to undo Creation seems

reasonable. Indeed, the only thing left for the blind man is to order the annihilation of the last rat, the

only survivor of the already forgotten, yet omnipresent, apocalypse. Thus, it seems only consequential, as Adorno (Adorno, Boehlich, et al., 1994: 114) remarks regarding Beckett's plays, that "after all, hope is only to be searched for in the figures of death (…)".

Indeed, Beckett's works offer no explicit deviation from the negative whole, no signs of salvation or coherent narration. Everything is seemingly trapped in a new sociopolitical, universal context of guilt, in which not only life and history but also language itself are damaged.

The Content and Form of Beckett's Polemics: A Defense against Any Affirmative Metaphysics

In light of the above, Beckett's radical negations initially seem to be accompanied by a per se exclusion of any possibility of theology, let alone metaphysical experience. Even beyond that exclusion, some passages of Beckett's plays can be read as a direct persiflage of theological remainders, such as Hamm's command to "Lick your neighbour as yourself" ([1958] 2009: 41) and Lucky's memorable speech about a God "quaquaquaqua" ([1952] 2010: 40). According to Adorno ([1966] 2004: 361), Beckett's parodies paraphrase, first, a consistent, defensive movement against affirmative *Setzungen* of theological contents after the second social catastrophe: "Lacking the theological, both open and hidden.—Residues of global annihilation" (Adorno, [1994] 2010: 169). Beckett seemingly articulates theological content but subsequently undermines it from within: "What in God's name could there be on the horizon?" asks Hamm, whereupon Clov detects "zero" sun and the remaining waves as "Lead" (cf. Beckett, [1958] 2009: 21). Idioms are reduced to an exclusively materialistic content in these plays, and as Adorno argues, any ontological pathos is thus removed. "Take the theological 'unto dust shalt thou return' literally," he writes about *Endgame*, "filth, (…) piss, pills are the universal as remainder" (Adorno, [1994] 2010: 170). In other words, Beckett's reductions of both form and content define a concentration on the essential, which, however, does not ask for the essence, or *das Wesen*. Rather, the sole suggestion of any potential content is eroded by a retrenchment of metaphysical remainders. Beckett reduces them to sheer absurdity, and one might add that, contra Camus, such absurdity does not offer any affirmative residue. As Adorno ([1970] 2002: 153) frames it: "Beckett's plays are absurd not because of the absence of any meaning, (…), but

because they put meaning on trial."

Methodologically, Beckett achieves this deconstruction of sense by drawing upon an inversion of Cartesian doubt: Descartes' methodological skepticism becomes radicalized in Beckett and is applied all the more consequently to the I and to any word—until they vanish. This radicalization occurs particularly in *The Unnamable*, which reduces language, and with it theological language, to a rather skeletal structure. The Cartesian method is thus inverted by Beckett insofar as the deconstruction of certainties does not end with an indubitable conclusion, i.e., such as in Descartes, the *cogito ergo sum* or the ontological argument for the existence of God in the Fifth Meditation. Rather, Beckett blurs *any* concept, be it the ego, the speaker, nature or change, in short, any form(s) of existence. He also deconstructs any form(s) of theology that could be grasped or expressed conceptually. What Beckett's plays rather unfold is a form of transcendence that is historically eliminated, crossed out, and leaves only what Adorno terms, with Hegel, bad infinity. Such a form of infinity tries to overcome finitude but, while doing so, unendingly repeats the operation of overcoming with the result that the true infinite, as Hegel terms it, is never accomplished.

Given this exposition of endless negativity, it remains to be discussed whether such an (inhuman) condition allows for any metaphysical experience at all. Specifically, it must be examined how Adorno's claim that for Beckett, the "created world is radically evil" could be reconciled with his statement, quoted at the very beginning, that Beckett's works are to be considered "the only true relevant metaphysical entities since the war" (Adorno, [1965] 2002: 117). The following question remains to be answered: In what precise sense does Beckett's portrait of radical barbarity, including the suspension of Abraham's way of dying, allow for a particular form of metaphysical experience? Moreover, on a metalevel, this question must be considered bearing in mind that even Proust's and Kafka's notions of metaphysics are already reduced to something essentially unavailable, not allowing for any concrete content or theological Idea, and that Beckett takes this radical reduction to its ultimate extreme.

According to Adorno, the seemingly endless path toward any possible theology could, if at all, be (re)built only via the articulation of a radical, unsparing, and ultimately true diagnosis of the unreconciled false whole. Such an articulation of truth demands that one travel a seemingly infinite

pathway of extreme critique so that, as Adorno claims, "beside the demand thus placed on thought, the question of the reality or unreality of redemption itself hardly matters." However, at its very least, such a pathway through critique can possibly reveal a true awareness of the false whole within the false whole itself. This task would, however, precisely be confronted with the almost impossible demand to—quoting *Minima Moralia*'s last, most decisive aphorism—

> Attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption (…). Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. (…) It is the simplest of all things, because the situation calls imperatively for such knowledge (…). But it is also the utterly impossible thing, because it presupposes a standpoint removed (…) from the scope of existence (…). (Adorno, [1951] 2005: 153)

According to Adorno, Beckett follows this task of "impossibility" by means of radical art. Following a suggestion taken from *Aesthetic Theory*, such art's "primary colour" is "black" (Adorno, 2002[1970]: 39), or "GRREY!" (Beckett, [1958] 2009: 21), as Clov puts it drastically to express the seemingly all-encompassing dullness surrounding *Endgame*. According to Adorno, particularly after Auschwitz, any content ought to be articulated *ex negativo*; and, of that whereof one cannot speak, one must not be silent but tell with different means—means of art affecting both content and form. More precisely, aesthetic practice ought to neither affirm nor remain silent in any sense, but instead, must attempt to point to, render visible, those barbaric conditions and complicities that have led to the unthinkable and continue to exist, including their theodical and metaphysical consequences while not negating art and culture's own historical and continuing complicity (cf. Nosthoff, 2014a; 2014b). Beckett confronts this aporia in articulating, through radical negation, "a truth which can no longer even be thought," which Adorno relates to an idiosyncratic form of "negative ontology." Crucially, the latter is "a negation of ontology" in the first place (cf. Adorno, [1961] 1986: 348; Gordon, 2016: 114); it carries in itself a radical critique of existentialism's (atheist) affirmation of freedom, of the systemic exclusion of any theodical language by positivism (including the early Wittgenstein's dictum of silence), and

Heidegger's ahistorical, jargonic *Fundamentalontologie*. Beckett's quasi-ontological negation of

ontology is, however, far from hypostatizing or affirming negativity; it rather resists any logic of

arbitrarily positing whatever form of truth-content, or Being. This, precisely, is what Adorno ([1970]

2002: 347–348) means when he writes that "in Beckett, the negative metaphysical content affects the

content along with the form" and that in his works, "metaphysical negation" is far from aesthetically

producing "metaphysical affirmation". As I will argue in the coming paragraph, Beckett's negative

ontology becomes articulate as a questioning, fragile topography, and thus reveals a tacit affinity to

Adorno's own inverse theology.

Impossible Hope for the Sake of the Possible: Metaphysics as a Questioning Topography

Beckett's method of reducing everything to "less than a remnant" is particularly recognized by Adorno

([1994] 2010: 173) as a gesture of criticism, for only the relentless reduction of the whole to the sole

material makes it appear catastrophic at all. However, speaking against false dogmas, Adorno

similarly holds that the world is, at the same time, not everything that is the case. This context

becomes particularly evident in *The Unnamable*, in which the material disappears entirely behind the

word and Beckett's prose seems to Adorno (169), above all, "*not* apologetic."

　　　　Certainly, as I argue in the following section, Adorno ([1966] 2004: 380) reads Beckett's

works as indicative not of nothing (or a hypostatized nothingness in the sense of Sartre's *néant*) but of

"nothingness as something." While Adorno explicitly links the latter to the medieval *nihil privativum*

(whereby "nihil" is understood as the absence of its other, something), his reference to a "nothingness

as something" is also reminiscent of Hegel's (1977: 51) remarks at the beginning of *Phenomenology*

of the Spirit, which, against classically nihilist positions, argues for a "determined nothingness, (…)

which has a content." In any case, most importantly, according to Adorno, such nothingness is, at its

most fundamental, questioning. It opens as an extending topography. This is closely aligned with his

claim that "Metaphysics does not, essentially, exist [*bestehen*] in solid, dogmatic answers, but,

precisely, in questions" (Adorno, 1974: 166). He asks in his notes on Beckett's *The Unnamable:*

Is nothingness the same as nothing? Everything in B[eckett]

revolves

around that. Absolute discardment, because there is hope only

where nothing is retained. The fullness

of nothingness. That is the reason for the insistence on the

zero point. (Adorno, [1994] 2010: 178)

Elsewhere, Adorno (Adorno and Mann, 2003: 161) writes "that the questioning Negative" might stand "as an allegory of hope," a thought reminiscent of the negative-metaphysical ground underpinning Beckett's pieces. Therefore, what Adorno refers to as the "zero point" in Beckett's works is, precisely, not equal to nothing. Rather, whether "Nothingness is the same as nothing" is an open question. Particularly, Beckett's unwillingness to offer an interpretive guide for his pieces or a concrete articulation of any philosophical or theological program (as recapitulated by Adorno (cf. [1970] 2002: 347–348) is crucial in this context. Such an undogmatic approach, in particular, reveals a certain affinity to Adorno's own (inverse) theology: As already indicated, Beckett's writings seem to insist not on a simple negation, that is, a still affirmative *Setzung*. Rather, as Mary Bryden (1991: 189) sums up: "An abandonment of a belief formula might seem to be indicated. Yet, curiously enough, Beckett's work seems not so much to sabotage belief as to pulse faintly but distinctly towards it."

Thus, as I already hinted at regarding Beckett's inversion of the Cartesion method, Beckett's works advocate neither the nonexistence of God, i.e., a radical atheist agenda, nor for the existence of a demonic demiurge—despite his references to a Marcionite God or Epicurean gods carelessly living among humans (cf. Beckett, 2009: 332; Adorno, [1994] 2010: 174). Nor is the assumption of a good Creator implied. At the same time, viewed through Adorno's lens, Beckett's frequent exclusions, his sometimes even openly blasphemous rejections of God, exhaust themselves not in a sole polemic directed at religious content. Rather, the writer's forceful negations of theological idioms imply a hidden yet all the more virulent question about them; that is, to quote Bryden again, they tacitly "pulse

(…) toward" belief. Wolfgang Iser (1975: 55) indicates a similar logic regarding Beckett's peculiar forms of negation:

> If a proposition is negated, its negation does not, after all, imply that from now on, there is nothing anymore. The struck-through content remains (…). The more decisively such orientations are eliminated, the more massively the crossed-out contents impose themselves upon us.

What Beckett imposes can thus be read in close affinity to Adorno's idiosyncratic image ban: Any concrete image potentially approximating God is rendered impossible through either negation or parody. One can indeed read this as a tacit response to Adorno's ([1957] 2005: 142) conviction that there is "no other possibility than an extreme ascesis toward any type of revealed faith." To be sure, theological Ideas are expelled, even explicitly crossed out, by Beckett. However, as one might argue, with Adorno, they persist as an intangible remainder under the negating strokes, and they do so in the form of a question.

Endgame's End: Transcending Bad Infinity?

Now that I have argued that the "crossed-out contents" (Iser) of Beckett's works can be understood, with Adorno, as a questioning negative, it remains to be discussed whether the latter can promise any kind of salvation or emancipation or a reconciled life. In this context, the ends of Beckett's plays, particularly *Endgame*, as well as the final passages of Adorno's reading, once more play a decisive role. To be sure, Beckett thought of *Endgame*, including its end, as a "game of chess," which, following the interpretation of Adorno (1994: 30), is "regulated, prescribed by a system." Beckett thought of it as predetermined, as an endgame whose outcome is known but that must be played until its very end. However, significantly, Beckett's bad infinity did not exclude a possibly transcending element, according to Adorno ([1994] 2010: 171, my emphasis): "The last image is a tableau vivant of a clown […]: with the exception of Clov's *possibly decisive* travel outfit. Thus, it remains open

whether it starts all over again or is finished." Adorno here refers to one of the last scenes of the play, in which Clov, apparently in a process of departing, marks *Endgame*'s preliminary end. Before remaining motionless—an image reminiscent of the opening scene—Hamm calls "Father!" twice. Is this *Endgame*'s end—a transition to a now possible death, the awaited exit from the unliving life?

Seemingly, the outcome of the play remains undecided. Hamm remains motionless, while Clov intends to leave yet stays, albeit now in his travel outfit. However, rather than interpreting this only as an indication of bad infinity, Adorno reads *Endgame* as not necessarily pursuing its own path of sameness, at least not ad infinitum. When delineating the potential for change that is implicitly hinted at by Clov's coat, umbrella and suitcase, he also detects in the consequent indecision a form of critique against dogmatic hypostatization. Strikingly, Adorno's reads Beckett's earlier *Waiting for Godot* in a quite similar vein: Although he rejected any "positive" interpretations of its main figure or its presumably empty signifier, Godot, that would merely read into it the positivity of an immediate Idea (such as God), he writes about Vladimir and Estragon: "if there was really nothing other than these two vagabonds (…) then these plays would not have (…) this tremendous *Gewalt*, (…) in which there is, after all, something by far transcending these [plays]" (Adorno, Boehlich, et al., 1994: 89).

With Adorno, it could thus be argued that Beckett's works, read as dramatic elaborations on total negativity, essentially rest upon the possibility of something other. This other might best be characterized as a moment that transcends the social status quo insofar as it encompasses the demand that things ought to be different. Beckett's works, indeed, do hint at this moment, for instance, in the collective invocation of God in *Endgame*, to which Hamm responds with the rather hasty apodictic phrase "The bastard! He doesn't exist." It is significant that Beckett does not end here but allows Clov to revise marginally: "Not yet" (Beckett, [1958] 2009: 34). These phrases do indeed hint at a rare inverse power, which is preserved in the form of a question. Although this power is mostly explicitly excluded in the midst of the grayness defining Beckett's pieces, it nonetheless includes a remainder of negative hope for what Adorno ([1961] 1986: 150) calls "the ultimate absurdity," namely, that "the repose of nothingness and that of reconciliation cannot be distinguished from each other." In a similar vein, Adorno ([1970] 2002: 31) asserts elsewhere that "at ground zero, however, where Beckett's plays unfold like forces in infinitesimal physics, a second world of images springs forth, both sad and

rich." In fact, Beckett at points does write of light shimmering in the midst of an overarching black constitution. Not only does *The Unnamable*'s narrator speak of a "grey" that "is luminous nonetheless" (Beckett, [1958] 2010: 10) but even Beckett himself declared: "If there were only darkness, all would be clear. It is because there is not only darkness but also light that our situation becomes inexplicable" (Beckett and Driver, 1979: 220). "Grayness," Adorno ([1966] 2004: 377–378) notes in his *Negative Dialectics*, as if in tacit agreement with the Irish writer, "could not fill us with despair if our minds did not harbor the concept of different colors, scattered traces of which are not absent from the negative whole."

The aforementioned quotations indeed lend credence to a presumption already indicated above—that, following Adorno, Beckett's uncompromising exposition of rifts and crevices itself requires, as its own condition of possibility, a transcending moment. The latter enables what Adorno thinks of as a true picture of the untrue. As he notes fragmentarily on Beckett: "As soon as one articulates absolute negativity, without any reservation, something consolatory arises from it, truth devoid of lie. (…) Thereunto, Beckett quoted to me the tremendous passage by Chamfort" (2003: 24). Adorno herein refers to his last meeting with Beckett, in Paris in 1968. It remains indeterminate which of Nicolas Chamfort's verses, quoted by Beckett in Adorno's presence, the philosopher had in mind when writing this note. However, Beckett wrote a short book about the French lyricist that offers a translated variation of a verse taken from Chamfort's *Maximes et pensées*. It reveals close affinities both to Adorno's thoughts regarding an irreconciled life and Beckett's exposition of death as the sole remaining refuge within a false whole:

> *Sleep till death*
>
> *healeth*
>
> *come ease*
>
> *this life disease.* (Beckett and Chamfort, 1977: 134–135)

The End of Stillness: On Death, Critique and Redemption

Chamfort's motifs of sleep and death as cures for an unbearable life are reminiscent of Adorno's reading of Beckett, particularly regarding the exposition of a nonliving life. They also point to the crucial question of the relation between death and utopia, which I now turn to, to further illuminate the hidden messianic motif of Beckett's works, and show how these might be interpreted from an inverse-theological lens. In this context, it is worth mentioning that Adorno (cf. [1966] 2004: 381) writes, with explicit recourse to Beckett's *Endgame,* that as long as the unreconciled state prevails, any images of reconciliation, peace and tranquility resemble death. According to Adorno, Beckett's imagery of disaster thus correlates with the possibility of a positive nothingness that, in the midst of an unlivable life, is to be found only in death. In Beckett, such motifs are often articulated with allusions of coming to rest.

A crucial example of such a motif can be found in *Krapp's Last Tape*, whose narrator "suddenly" sees "the whole thing," namely, "that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most (…) unshatterable association until my dissolution" (Beckett, 1969: 9). Moreover, in "Trying to Understand Endgame," Adorno refers to Hamm envisioning a (Pascalian) end of stillness, when "it will be all over with sound, and motion," obtainable only if "I can hold my peace, and sit quiet" (Beckett, [1958] 2009: 41). Adorno interprets these passages as a Benjaminian dialectics at a standstill. As he writes regarding *Endgame*:

> In the play, the substance of life, a life that is death, is the excretions. But the imageless image of death is one of indifference. In it, the distinction disappears: the distinction between (…) the hell in which time is banished into space, in which nothing will change any more—and the messianic condition where everything would be in its proper place. (Adorno, [1961] 1986: 150)

Strikingly, for Adorno, Beckett's motifs of death play the crucial role of a "photographic negative" and must be decoded as mirror images. Thus, one should read the aforementioned passages of stillness bearing in mind Adorno's interpretation of the eternally nonarriving Godot—in whom Adorno deciphered less a ruthless God than the dull survival of the false whole. That is, the focus is less on a potential redemption in transcendence, let alone an unconditional affirmation of death for its own sake. Rather, Adorno problematizes the not-yet-abolished domination of the immanent always-

the-same with a distinct focus on concrete suffering. The seemingly impossible hope promised by Beckett's motifs of death is thus far from implying transcendent Ideas or an explicit promise of resurrection. It rather indicates a critical, immanent impetus toward the abolition of an unliving life. Indeed, Beckett's hope for death is precisely equal to a negation of the false whole, for the hope for death in an already deathlike reality indicates, paradoxically, a negation of this reality: If life is not living, then the hope for a death that ends it would amount precisely to its other—to a living, reconciled life.

Thus, one should interpret these passages, including the longing for stillness, in the context of Adorno's concept of utopia, which ought to be indicated only imagelessly and qua negation. Accordingly, they must be read against the background of Adorno's aporetic statement that utopian thinking "cannot be conceived at all without the elimination of death," while at the same time it requires a consideration of its "heaviness" (Adorno and Bloch, 1964: 10). Here Adorno arguably not only refers to death as such but uses the term to implicitly indicate any form of suffering, i.e., present and past injustices, as well as those physical realities underpinning it. Thus, as I have already emphasized in the beginning, Adorno's inverse notion of theology implies that one does not merely passively hope for salvation. What is required is, rather, an uncompromising focus on the immanent horrors of physical pain, while any concrete utopia is necessarily overshadowed by the irreparable damage and utter senselessness caused by the ongoing horrors of history. With this aporia in mind, Adorno ([1966] 2004: 391) claims that nothing can "be saved unchanged, nothing that has not passed through the gate of its death."

Far from expressing the desire for an authentic being-toward-death, Beckett's longing for a seemingly impossible end thus rather illustrates a desire for immanence devoid of suffering, for a world in which dying would no longer symbolize the last hope. If read through the lens of Adorno's inverse theology, Beckett's *Endgame,* including the motifs of death it exposes, is in the very first place an act of emancipation against a life that is unlivable. What matters is the abolition of the false life in the false whole, enabled by a shift in perspectives that renders transparent the cracked constitution of the present.

At the same time, a negatively reversed messianic motif is always already immersed in Beckett's works. Strikingly, in this context, Adorno (Adorno and Bloch, 1964: 16) even goes so far as to ascribe both a glimpse of truth and actuality to utopian longing, to forms of thinking that transcend the negative whole, thus drawing what under his own standards seems almost a dogmatic conclusion: "I would think that unless there is no kind of trace of truth in the ontological proof of God, that is, unless the element of its reality is already conveyed in the power of the concept itself, there could not only be no utopia but there could also not be any thinking." The thought that things ought to be otherwise is, as Adorno speculates, enabled only through the potentiality of some other. Following the aforementioned quote and *Minima Moralia*'s last aphorism, it is the latter momentum that forms a tacit precondition for the true representation of the untrue whole. Crucially, negative-utopian thinking, then, does not stop at "the idea of a world that would (…) abolish extant suffering" but addresses, too—and this is where emancipation seemingly requires at least some sort of redemption—the need to "revoke the suffering that is irrevocably past" (Adorno, [1966] 2004: 403). When Adorno thus claims that "beside the demand thus placed on thought, the question of the reality or unreality of redemption itself hardly matters," he is far from implying that it does not matter whatsoever.[8] Rather, it *hardly* matters, given the seemingly infinite demand imposed upon us to adequately respond to immanent suffering. Yet, most importantly, it is precisely in this response, and in recognizing the necessity to respond, that the potentiality of redemption survives if it has any chance to survive at all at the time of metaphysics' fall. In a peculiar way, criticism *and* theology, emancipation *and* salvation are thus entangled in Beckett's motif of death if read as a negation of the false whole.

Following up on this, I will now conclude by summarizing and then, first, expanding on how Adorno's notion of inverse theology offers a frame for viewing critique and theology as invariably linked in Beckett's works, and, second, how critique and theology are exemplary of a (negative-) dialectical approach towards theology in the age of its impossibility.

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[8] This is how Taubes and Agamben misread Adorno's "Zum Ende" when both claim that it amounts to "nothing other than an aestheticization of the messianic in the form of the '*as if*'" (Agamben, 2005: 35; cf. Brittain, 2010: 129ff.). Agamben here refers to Taubes' (2003) *The Political Theology of Paul,* which cites Adorno's aphorism only to interpret "hardly" or "almost" ["*fast gleichgültig*"] in the sense of "completely" or "entirely" ["*ganz gleichgültig*"]. This crucial difference was unfortunately lost through the editing process (in English, both *fast gleichgültig* and *ganz gleichgültig* are translated as *hardly*). To understand the nuances of Taubes's (1993: 104) misreading, see the German version.

Conclusion: Saving Theology from it

This article focused on exposing the inverse-theological implications of Adorno's reading of Beckett, particularly regarding its motifs of death. Read through Adorno's lens and in the context of Adorno's readings of Proust and Kafka, Beckett's plays and writings implicitly negotiate Adorno's question of whether "it is still possible to have a metaphysical experience." This negotiation is particularly apparent in *The Unnamable* and *Endgame*, which radically expose the historical complications confronting metaphysical experience in the context of a renewed social theodicy. As I have argued, Beckett's works indeed integrate a metaphysical dimension, a remainder as it were, but they do so *ex negativo*: by radically addressing metaphysical experience as a sociohistorically evolved impossibility. In this article, I have related this unsparing focus to what I have termed a hidden transcending moment, which I paralleled to Adorno's rather implicit suggestion, that the very possibility of critique itself essentially rests upon the possibility of something other. I characterized such a moment as transcending insofar as it reaches beyond the social status quo and encompasses the demand that things ought to be different. As I argued, with Adorno, such a demand can be detected in Beckett's work: although theological motifs are explicitly crossed out, these remain absently present in the form of a question. Thus, I argued that an inverse-theological affinity exists between Adorno and Beckett in their preoccupation with the (open) question of whether nothingness is the same as nothing. On these grounds, I have shown how Adorno's own inverse theology offers an interpretive frame through which to view Beckett's pieces as mirror images, and thus, a way to decode in these works a metaphysical remainder, hidden behind the foreground of radical negativity. Thus, I argued that following Adorno's reading, Beckett's motifs of death disclose both a hidden hope for transcendence and an emancipatory urge to abolish the immanent false whole. To quote Adorno ([1966] 2004: 381) once more: "To Beckett (…) the created world is radically evil, and its negation is the chance of another world that is not yet."

With Adorno, Beckett's play should be read as a form of resistance directed against the absence of both emancipation and redemption. Furthermore, reading Adorno's "Trying to Understand

Endgame" on the grounds of Minima Moralia's "Finale" reveals less an awareness of an eternally recurring, always-the-same identical than a form of criticism that at least implicitly indicates a possible other. If Beckett's works are in fact a "consummate negativity," a "deathlike" reality, as Adorno ([1951] 2005: 153) suggests; if they themselves are unable to die, to end, since their end is not permitted; if they themselves, like Kafka's Hunter Gracchus, sicken at the inability to die Abrahamitically; then Beckett's bad-infinite world of "rifts and crevices" might, particularly if viewed in the context of the last aphorism of his *Minima Moralia,* simultaneously delineate the "mirror image of its opposite." In this regard, Beckett's completed illustration of the catastrophic whole at the same time promises at least the possibility of its other—indeed, as I showed with particular emphasis on the *Endgame*, it is the sole possibility of Beckettian critique in the midst of a seemingly endless dark constitution that transcends those forms of bad infinity that are inscribed in his works in content and form. Furthermore, what renders the consequent delineation of its disastrous rifts and crevices at all possible is, if one follows Adorno's "Finale," a (quasi-messianic) shimmer shining from the standpoint of redemption.

As I have already exemplified at the beginning, it is particularly the endings of Adorno's own essays on literature that often integrate messianic motifs. To conclude, I now return to the conclusion of his essay on Beckett's *Endgame*. Here, Adorno ([1961] 1986: 150) comments on Clov and Hamm: "Consciousness begins to look its own demise in the eye, as if it wanted to survive the demise, as these two want to survive the destruction of their world." As I showed in this article, through Adorno's lens, Beckett's critique is a radical contemplation of this demise as it is a consideration of a destroyed world—or, for that matter, a damaged life. Yet, it considers the "heaviness" of death for the sake of attempting to transcend its "threshold." Most strikingly, it does so by radically focusing on exposing immanent suffering, thus implicitly taking into account the "fall of metaphysics." In light of Adorno's inverse theology, Beckett's critical reduction toward an ultimate zero point is thus the creation of the possibility of its other: It is both an articulation of critique for the sake of transcending critique as it is a deconstruction of theology for the sake of saving theology. In this vein, (inverse) theology requires critique, while critique requires (inverse) theology. Both would then, precisely, be inseparable—and it

is arguably only in this dialectical tension that, as Adorno ([1966] 2004: 391) explicitly demands and Beckett's "metaphysical entities" implicitly emphasize, theology can be preserved "in its critique."

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