

Tzu-Ching YEH
POLITICIZING SAMUEL
BECKETT'S POSTWAR PLAYS¹

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Abstract: This article examines Samuel Beckett's post-WWII plays in order to contrive a political connection that has received insufficient attention in Beckett studies. The investigation is two-fold: first, I shall make textual analyses of *Rough for Radio II* and *Catastrophe* to investigate various performances of linguistic babbles; and second, I shall theorize Giorgio Agamben's conceptual notions of "bare life" and the "state of exception" based on the analyses done in the first part. This article hopes to throw a useful light on a political reading of Beckett's work, and to foreground the embedded problems in modern democracy.

Keywords: politics, Samuel Beckett, Giorgio Agamben, bare life, state of exception

Although the literature of Samuel Beckett is universally read and fruitfully studied across various disciplines and approaches, political investigations of his work are comparatively rare and unorthodox because Beckett rarely provides political, social, geographical, or historical references to his literature across poetry, prose, fiction, theatre, radio, film, and television. This has also been addressed by Peter Boxall when he made a general scholarly observation that "Beckett's work has come to mark the far limits of apolitical writing" in the opening sentences of his article "Samuel Beckett: Towards a Political Reading". This is because his literature yields little or no clue to a definite time, location or nation, indeterminacy of which has "led critics to suggest that his writing constitutes an abdication from, a denial of, or an indifference to the political" (Boxall 2002: 159). Beckett's oeuvre relentlessly negates cultural, geographical or political specificities to the extent that the theorist Terry Eagleton labels Beckett as "one of the twentieth century's most apparently non-political artists;" however, Eagleton immediately undermines Beckett's *non-politicalness* in the same breath by inserting an archival entry that Beckett "secretly took up arm against fascism" during the Second World War (Eagleton 2006: 67).

With the unearthing of Beckett's German Diaries and the completed publication of his letters in four volumes, Beckett's archives have become increasingly accessible to the general public in recent years. Plowing through these archives, ample evidence of Beckett's political involvement

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emerges. In accordance with Terry Eagleton's suggestion, Beckett joined in the French Resistance as a rebel against Nazi Germany during WWII, and he volunteered in the Irish Red Cross immediately after the war to support the war-stricken town of Saint-Lô, drawing only from the most evident historical events to buttress my point in this article.²

Before the war, Beckett understood the tensions of the Nazi authorities inflicted on local artists in his six-month visit to Germany between 1933 and 1934, and he was genuinely concerned as freedom of artistic expression was jeopardized when political restrictions were imposed. On hearing Arthur Neville Chamberlain announced the outbreak of war with Germany over the radio on 3 September 1939, Beckett even took great trouble to return to France the following day, apparently because he "preferred France in war to Ireland in peace;" it is also possibly because he wanted to assist his friend Alfred Péron to help evacuate his family.³ Furthermore, despite the neutrality of his home country Ireland, the apparent climate of injustice perpetrated on international scale prompted him to fight against the Nazi regime, as he stated that: "you simply couldn't stand by with your arms folded."⁴ Beckett joined the French Resistance in the cell called "Gloria SMH" on 1st September, soon after his Jewish friend Paul Léon was arrested during the second mass round-up of Jews in Paris on 21 August 1941. In the cell, he was exposed to perilous handling of classified documents in Paris.⁵

When the war was over, he returned to the Continent because he was hired as interpreter and storekeeper to the unit by the Irish Red Cross to build a hospital in the destroyed town of Saint-Lô in Normandy.⁶ The shocking sight of and the experience at Saint-Lô made such an abysmal impact on Beckett, that he wrote a report on "The Capital of Ruins" for Radio Telefís Éireann on 10th June 1946. This experience of humanitarian work encouraged his active writing as this particular piece is a first-hand response to the war, and it also contributed to his literary impetus as, drawing from an excerpt in the reportage, "a vision and sense of a time-honoured conception of humanity in ruins" would serve as a good overall description of Beckett's entire literary career (O'Brien 1988: 285). More importantly, the impact also makes itself felt in his highly enigmatic poem "Saint-Lô" (1946):

2 See four complete volumes of *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, and James Knowlson's biographical account in *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*.

3 Knowlson 1996: 297. Quoted in Israel Shenker, "An Interview with Beckett" (1956), *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, eds. Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (London: Routledge, 1979) 146.

4 Knowlson 1996: 304. "Samuel Beckett to Alec Reid, Paris, 10 Feb. 1966" (Reid, in private hands).

5 Beckett 2011: 21n9. Léon had been James Joyce's assistant and was deported to Auschwitz on 27 March 1942.

6 Beckett 2011: 15. Samuel Beckett to Gwynned Reavey, 21 June 1945.

Vire will wind in other shadows
 unborn through the bright ways tremble
 and the old mind ghost-forsaken
 sink into its havoc.⁷

This powerful poem gives the impression that the debris of the destroyed town and its shadowy past lay the ground for the future reconstruction of Saint-Lô. Beckett seems to ask his readers that they remember the “havoc,” for fear that the catastrophe that took place here in the past should be “ghost-forsaken” when the rebuilding is complete. According to James Knowlson, the emotional impact is substantial: “It was there that he witnessed real devastation and misery: buildings—each one someone’s home—reduced to rubble.”⁸

Beckett is not only a witness of humanity reduced to rubbles, but his contributions to the fight against Nazi oppression during the war, together with his overt distaste of it after listening to Adolf Hitler and Goebbels’s propaganda speeches on the radio, truthfully reflect Beckett as a relentless enthusiast devoted to fending off injustice.⁹ Thus, even if his literature refutes political scrutiny due to its depletion of explicit references to the empirical world, Beckett himself is by no means apolitical.

These empirical data allow Eagleton to juxtapose Beckett’s reductive style with Theodor Adorno’s consideration of art after Auschwitz; this makes possible the political stance of regarding Beckett as “one of the few modernist artists to become a militant of the left” in the name of the post-war Europe (Eagleton 2006: 69). According to Boxall, archival documents of Beckett’s biography, personal letters and historical data resemble so much of his literature that “It is through a reading of the excruciating mechanics by which Beckett’s work simultaneously refers and resists reference, simultaneously affirms and denies a partly autobiographical cultural being, that Beckett’s politics can begin to emerge” (Boxall 2002: 168). It is also in this spirit that Boxall points out the fault of turning away from political examination due to an overemphasis on Beckett’s neutrality; whereas the emergence of a political impulse encourages his pursuit of a political enquiry in Beckett’s literature.

Historical events can leave a heartfelt imprint on Beckett’s creative outputs, as “The Capital of Ruins” and “Saint-Lô” evidently show; however, they are in conflict with Beckett’s established literary style, as the majority of his oeuvre reject concrete or overt references to the empirical world. According to James Knowlson’s observation and personal contact with Beckett, he says that “Beckett sometimes expressed regret that, because of his essentially nondidactic approach to writing, he was unable

7 Beckett 2006: 38. “Saint-Lô” was published in *The Irish Times* on 24 June 1946.

8 Knowlson 1996: 350. See Eoin O’Brien, *The Beckett Country: Samuel Beckett’s Ireland* (Dublin: Black Cat, 1986) 333-337.

9 Knowlson 1996: 261. Qtd. originally from SB’s GD, notebook 1, 6 Oct. 1936.

(and had certainly been unwilling) to write anything that dealt overtly with politics” (Knowlson 1996: 596). The central texts of this article *Rough for Radio II* and *Catastrophe* also remain extremely covert and ambiguous; however, I attempt to challenge their non-politicalness because the purpose of this paper is to contrive political implications.

The most evident relevance to include *Catastrophe* to the discussion is because its very existence is conspicuously political. Upon the request of the A. I. D. A. France (in short for the Association internationale de défense des artistes victimes de la répression dans le monde) to contribute a play to “Une Nuit pour Václav Havel” (a night of solidarity) at the Avignon Festival, Beckett quickly responded with the play *Catastrophe* in support of Havel who was imprisoned due to political reasons. Later when Havel was released from prison, he expressed his gratitude in a letter to Beckett: “You not only helped me in a beautiful way during my prison days, but by doing what you did you demonstrated your deep understanding for the meaning of affliction which those who are not indifferent to the run of things have to take upon themselves occasionally, at the present time just as well as they had to do it in the past” (Beckett 2006: 613). Commentator Mel Gussow, therefore, determines *Catastrophe* “a politically prescient black comedy about man’s enslavement by the state” (31 July 1983), despite that “Even without knowing the provenance of the play, there is no mistaking the message. It offers testimony in resolute opposition to tyranny” (16 June 1983). More importantly, for Gussow, this play is “the most overt expression of Beckett’s political consciousness, his compassionate testimony about the cause of human rights” (31 July 1983).

Since *Catastrophe* is dedicated to an imprisoned playwright and politician Václav Havel then, and Knowlson points out that “the theatrical metaphor carries far less political import than the dedication to Havel might suggest,” this article intends to take its “political reverberations” seriously (Knowlson 1996: 597). Furthermore, in view of both Boxall and Eagleton’s political treatments that rigorously tie the archives to the general body of Beckett’s work, their contributions encourage investigation of Beckett’s literature in a social-political light against the dominant trend of Beckett studies. Therefore, I attempt to adopt a political framework to investigate the thematic issue of aporia.

In a letter to Georges Duthuit, Samuel Beckett reveals that his literary mission is to “see a little better what has to be done, any by what means,” and he finds the “boundary work, passage work” agreeable, because “the old rubbish can still be some use, [. . .] if he is never to find expression (and who knows?), is nonetheless heavily involved in . . . the business” (Beckett 2016: 132). Beckett’s concern partially resembles Jacques Derrida’s theory in *Aporia*, where Derrida’s conceptual notion of aporia is threefold: the first one involves closed borders during warfare, the other comes close to an impasse, and the last one is that “The impasse itself would be impossible” (Derrida 1993: 20-21). This paper seeks not to determine which of

the three models Beckett's work may be categorized; instead, I draw from Derrida's definitions to underscore at the very forefront that the concept of aporia can be manifold, and this paper intends to contribute two—one on a linguistic level and the other political—based on Beckett's plays.

On the one hand, if modern aporia targets curious performances of inarticulate babble, non-language, dark and maimed language, tirade, or incomprehensible speech, then these registries are already a distinctive and consistent undertaking of Beckett's literature. Aberrant expressions at odds with rational or conventional linguistics have always been a much sought-after theme among Beckett scholars, and, what is more, the study of aporetic articulation may open up an inquiry to survey "the administered world," borrowing Theodor Adorno's account in *Aesthetic Theory* (Adorno 1999: 31). Probing aporia through various forms of deprived human communication and identification in extreme situations or locations, may reveal Beckett's response to modern democracy.

On the other hand, aporia may feature a liminal spatial concept of a threshold. Now and again, Beckett confronts readers and spectators with paradoxes or antinomies to challenge a rethinking of the threshold, because this gap or lacuna separates or segregates the norm from the morbid. To make sense of his preoccupation, we must acknowledge and address the (overlooked) existence of the threshold, and this justifies my intention to impose a political investigation.

I will base my discussion on Samuel Beckett's *Rough for Radio II* and *Catastrophe*, because they serve as the paradigms that formulate a telling analogy to the condition of bare life in the state of exception theorized by Giorgio Agamben. The focus on democracy and politics must always return to the fundamental question of how power or violence is implemented. *Rough for Radio II* is chosen as one of the central texts because there is hardly any other work by Beckett where violence and physical punishment are so ubiquitous (unlike *Waiting for Godot*, which has a single episode of coercion when Lucky is whipped) and ambiguous (because this is a radio play that annuls visual confirmation) at the same time. The inclusion of *Catastrophe* in the discussion is not only because of the political nature of its creation as mentioned earlier, but also because I consider this play an extension of, or a sequel to *Rough for Radio II*, due to resemblance of characters, roles, themes and plot. It is hoped that my discussion of aporia, and examination of bare life in the state of exception through literary representations of both plays, may throw a useful light on the politics of the threshold, and foreground the embedded problems in modern democracy.

Rough for Radio II is a work for radio, and it was first written in French as *Pochade radiophonique* in the early 1960s. There are four characters in the play: Animator, Stenographer, Fox and Dick. The play begins when Animator asks Stenographer, the only female character in this play, about the writing pad and spare pencils, as they are the tools for

documentation. Once getting through the preparation stage, Animator issues commands to Fox and the mute Dick, while Stenographer keeps meticulous notes of Fox's responses, including his monologues and physical reactions. Whenever Animator demands Fox to proceed, he thumps his ruler on his desk as a signal to carry on. However, when Animator's direct order to Fox fails, he instructs Dick to whip Fox with a bull's pizzle to facilitate obedience. The plot is full of orders given and obeyed among these characters, and coercion is exercised on Fox when listeners hear his cries in response to Dick's whipping.

Catastrophe was also first written in French in 1982 and first staged at the Avignon Festival in France. This play also involves four characters, they are: Director, Assistant (also the only female role in this play), Protagonist, and Luke. The information offered in the script is that they are rehearsing "the last scene" (Beckett 1986: 457). The entire play is replete with directions of casting lights on, managing the outfit of, and adjusting the body of Protagonist according to Director's demand. Similar to the roles of Stenographer and Dick in *Rough for Radio II*, Assistant and Luke also obey Director's orders and execute them on Protagonist accordingly. The similarities between *Catastrophe* and *Rough for Radio II* include the number of characters, their roles, ambiguous locations, and the plots; therefore, I boldly claim that the former is an extension of the latter. Furthermore, both Fox and Protagonist, the subjugated figures, bear resemblance to the existence of bare life, a point I shall argue more fully later.

Scholars and commentators have already paid much heed to the aporetic performances of Beckett's characters, and these acts evidently come through in Fox's prattle in *Rough for Radio II*. Seemingly, Animator finds the deficiencies in Fox's memory unacceptable, so the former reasons with the latter to remember the past, while adopting coercive measures to aid the stimulation of the memory. However, when Fox's recollection is evoked as articulated in his soliloquy—"my brother inside me, my old twin, [. . .] Maud would say, opened up, it's nothing, I'll give him [Fox's brother] suck if he's still alive"—the expression is such a blatant non sequitur that Stenographer pronounces her incredulous astonishment that "it's quite simply impossible! Inside him! *Him!*" (Beckett 1986: 279, 280). The problem of such a rare instance as well as other occurrences of Fox's remarks evoked by extreme measures (of being whipped) is that the content is not only unlikely but unintelligible.¹⁰ It disrupts rational order of the social construct for the ordinary human beings, because words fail to convey logical meaning, and this problem concerns linguistic aporia.

According to Animator's discontent with Fox, Fox repeatedly fails to address the unspecified "subject" when evoked by force to "ramble" or "prattle away" (Beckett 1986: 281). To Fox, words are reduced to intan-

10 We are reminded of a famous paradigm of Lucky's tirade in *Waiting for Godot* (1948), or a memorable play zooming in the mouth's verbal vomit in *Not I* (1972).

gible resources for his “scrabble,” which yields very little in the way of sense-making (Beckett 1986: 279). Language is made null and impotent because of its failure to communicate, and this is the underlying problem with aporia I seek to underscore.

The concentration on aporia in Beckett’s work reflects his literary revolt against the modernist canon, epitomized by his predecessor James Joyce:

Joyce was a superb manipulator of material—perhaps the greatest. He was making words do the absolute maximum of work. There isn’t a syllable that’s superfluous. The kind of work I do is one in which I’m not master of my material. The more Joyce knew the more he could. He’s tending toward omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. I’m working with impotence, ignorance. I don’t think impotence has been exploited in the past . . . My little exploration is that whole zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as something unusable—as something by definition incompatible with art. (cited in Shenker 148)

In view of the insurmountable achievements of Joyce that succeeding writers can hardly outdo, Beckett is acutely aware of the need to explore an alternative in literature, and he has succeeded in moving in the opposite direction from his mentors. Hence, aporia is treated as the means to overthrow traditional shackles, as Beckett famously says: “my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. [...] a mask. [...] To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurk behind it—be it something or nothing—begins to seep through” (Beckett 1983: 171).

Beckett’s attack on language is embedded in Fox’s incomprehensible speech in *Rough for Radio II*, because language is rifted, and there-in retains the aporia. On the other hand, Protagonist in *Catastrophe* is silent throughout, which make it impossible to examine the lacuna in a language based on the verbal expression that does not exist. However, can silence be considered as Protagonist’s means in the battle against language (and the foundation it embodies) in precisely the manner that he gets rid of it altogether? Protagonist’s current state where language is no longer relevant in *Catastrophe*, may have prophesized the trajectory where Fox is approaching in *Rough for Radio II*.

Beckett’s literary revolt against the canon may hold accountable for his consistent choice of featuring tramps, vagabonds, unnamable beings without identities, or those who live in the gutters as protagonists in his work; their common ground is the marginal position in a structural world, working towards oblivion while failing to achieve it at the same attempt. The endeavor to probe the social mechanism that places these characters in the liminal position, may be aided by the examination of aporia to illuminate the problem. Perhaps the aporetic condition is implicitly suggested as Director points us in the spatial direction in *Catastrophe*: “There’s our catastrophe. In the bag” (Beckett 1986: 460). Hence, I would like to

shift the scrutiny of aporia from a linguistic vantage point to a spatial concern, because I suspect they have points of overlap in Beckett's work.

The problem with aporia may reverberate with Giorgio Agamben's thesis, because he points out in *Homo Sacer* that there is a fissure between voice and language, as well as between *zoē* and *bios* in Western politics, a point I shall return to later (Agamben 1995: 10). It is interesting to point out initially that, according to Agamben, when language is considered, a living being "separates and opposes himself to his own bare life" (Agamben 1995: 8). I shall associate this observation with Beckett's work to examine the imposition of aporia on a bare life.

Drawing from a peculiar scene in *Rough for Radio II*, Animator suspects Fox's recognition of life, as the latter verbalizes "live I did, all stones all sides," and Stenographer subsequently confirms that Fox indeed reveals "a life of his own" (Beckett 1986: 277-278). Fox's concern of life that confines and conditions himself is eminent. This performance calls to attention: what sort of a life he claims to be his own? Here, I shall take this snippet as a cue to plunge into an inquiry centered on life or bare life as *zoē*.

The notion of life experiences several shifts in the genealogy of western democracy. Life in the ancient Greek was originally understood as separate terms of *zoē* (a natural life) and *bios* (a qualified life); however, since the classical age, Aristotle's *Politics* suggests that the introduction of *polis* excludes *zoē* from the Western politics. Michel Foucault observes in *The History of Sexuality* the endeavor to transform *zoē* into *bios*, and modern democracy enters *zoē* into *polis* to allow the inclusion of human's natural life in the mechanisms of power. Thereafter, politics becomes *biopolitics*. Bare life as *zoē* is, in this way, in full surrender to the political power as "a politics that deals with life," according to Thomas Lemke in *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction* (Lemke 2011: 2). However, the link of *zoē* to *bios* is unsuccessful, and it creates a fracture of "modern democracy's specific aporia," in Agamben's words (Agamben 1995: 9). The unfortunate fate of *zoē* as bare life is problematically and paradoxically caught up in an indeterminate threshold between law and fact, because it remains included in politics in the form of exception.

Returning to *Rough for Radio II*, Fox represents a bare life in his detachment from human associations, which reinforces his threshold existence in the state of exception. Animator and Stenographer are vigilant to discover Fox's infrequent human ties, for example: Stenographer is moved by Fox's occasional smile that is "so sudden! So radiant! So fleeting," regarding the observation of his "permanence and good repair;" Animator is astonished that Fox is aware of the meaning of "brother;" both Animator and Stenographer are startled when Fox "named" Maud for the first time, which is a landmark improvement of Fox memory, according to Animator; and they both notice the tears that Fox sheds several times before that (Beckett 1986: 275, 276, 280). Animator and Stenographer are enthusiastic and astonished whenever they catch sight of Fox's occasion-

al revelation of human markers, because they consider Fox's abilities to smile or weep, and more significantly, to remember someone as signs of improvement in the process of resuscitating him to a rational human being. These sparse records and observations of Fox's "human trait," therefore, served as pivotal indicators and landmarks of his progress to return to the socially acceptable status of *bios* (Beckett 1986: 281).

If memory further divorces humanity from animal clinging, Fox at times weeps and jibs when he remembers the past; he even reacts so violently to an agonizing reminiscence that he cannot help screaming: "Let me out! Peter out in the stone" (Beckett 1986: 281). Perhaps it is Fox's discordance with human nature that inspires Animator to adopt a humane approach as an alternative punishment to whipping. To be precise, Animator demands Stenographer to kiss Fox with a hope to "stir some fibre" (Beckett 1986: 282). As Beckett wrote in a personal letter that one must "suffer enough to be able to stir," the implemented affliction should prompt Fox to begin and resume his monologue (Beckett, 2011: 405). However, in the case of Fox, where physical coercion may at times successfully stimulate progress, the application of human affection fails, because Fox faints in response to Stenographer's kissing. The tenderness of Stenographer's affectionate kisses proved to be a more overwhelming torture than the physical afflictions. Fox is clearly withdrawn from humanity, while he is capable of withstanding violent blows as would a wild beast.

As Fox strays further from human attributes, he resembles the likes of an animal. In fact, his name "Fox" already carries such a suggestion, and his animal behavior also comes through in his cries after being whipped. According to one of Stenographer's exhortations, she documents a specific entry of Fox's "animal cries" (Beckett 1986: 276). At times, Fox jibs after being tormented, and this reaction is similar to that of a horse or other similar animals when refusing to advance by force. Furthermore, Animator mentions "Those fodient rodents" and "fauna" to imply Fox's former life in the wild among the mammals and his habitat. However, Animator strives to sever Fox's animalistic tie, and persuades him to part companies with the charming life of "those everlasting wilds" (Beckett 1986: 282).

At a glance, Fox seemingly resembles a werewolf due to their ambiguous combination between an animal and a human being, or, according to Agamben, they are "monstrous hybrid[s] of human and animal" (Agamben 1995: 105). The transformation of a werewolf is overt; in contrast, Fox's transition is covert. Therefore, it is an intrinsic transformation for Fox. However, similar to a werewolf that is in the midst of its metamorphosis, "men enter into a zone in which they are no longer distinct from beasts" (Agamben 1995: 107). It is in this way that Fox belongs to "neither an animal life nor a human life, but only a life that is separated and excluded from itself—only a *bare life*" (Agamben 2004: 38). Fox's aberrant narration depleted of rational logic, his removal of or distancing from human features, and his proximity to the nature of an animal, are per-

taining to Agambenian bare life, where the distinction between human and animal is ambiguous. These performances allow us to rethink the substance of life *vis-à-vis* literary and cultural productions of incongruity, discrepancy, distortion and deformation.

This, in fact, is the consequence of operating the anthropological machine, where we are left with “neither an animal life nor a human life, but only a life that is separated and excluded from itself—only a *bare life*” (Agamben 2004: 38). This condition fairly epitomizes Fox as a bare life in *Rough for Radio II*, and the way that he is positioned in the state of exception. The curious logic of bare life in such signature Agambenian categories as the threshold or zone of indistinction lurks in *Rough for Radio II*, because not only has Fox’s animality depleted his human characteristics and subsequently prevented him from returning to his former human life, the indistinctive human-animal rift in Fox makes a sonorous echo in the pivotal concept of the state of exception.

If the state of exception allows life to enter an ambivalent fringe where the legal and the nonlegal meet, this Agambenian threshold parallels a borderline concept that straddles animality and humanity in Fox’s case. Thus, the lacuna created between the human-animal tension represents the state of exception that, according to Agamben, “is not within the law, but concerns its relation to reality, the very possibility of its application.” He goes on to say that: “It is as if the juridical order contained an essential fracture between the position of the norm and its application, which, in extreme situations, can be filled only by means of the state of exception, that is, by creating a zone in which application is suspended, but the law, as such, remains in force” (Agamben 2005: 31).

When Fox’s life lies bare, he fails to coincide with the political realm due to his abnormality. However, he is situated at the margin, instead of outside of the *polis*, because “[b]are life remains included in politics in the form of the exception, that is, as something that is included solely through an exclusion” (Agamben 1995: 11). Bare life remains caught within the social discipline and the political structure, but due to the abnormal condition that is not listed in these regulations or in the constitution, he is therefore excluded from the law. In other words, Fox inhabits the paradoxical position of inclusive exclusion: included in the politics in the form of exception. Drawing from the conceptual notion of *homo sacer*, these figures inhabit the threshold between political life and bare life, and they occupy the zero degree of humanity: these are the beings that have been deprived of human identity in the conventional social and political sense; thereby, the conflict opens up a site as the state of exception.

Bare life in its own right is the exclusion in relation to law, while it is simultaneously included in the juridico-political order. Fox and Protagonist as examples of bare life, therefore, underlie any political structure as life under the law to be in force without significance or referent. It is also in this way that the implementation of physical coercion and insufferable kisses

in order to yield more articulation from Fox, no longer seems aberrant, because these practices realize the content of the state of exception that “appears as the legal form of what cannot have legal form,” in Agamben’s words (Agamben 2005: 1). Similarly, the treatment of Protagonist to be positioned, posed, dressed, and spotlighted at the disposal of Director in *Catastrophe*, also informs its current state of exception that encloses Protagonist.

Drawing from the conceptual notion of *homo sacer*, Fox and Protagonist inhabit the threshold between political life and bare life that embodies the zero degree of humanity: a being that is deprived of human identity in the conventional social and political sense. In other words, they dwell in a paradoxical position of inclusive exclusion, included in the politics in the form of exception, which is, in effect, a no-man’s-land. Joseph Anderton also makes a similar comment by pointing out that Beckett’s post-war characters situate “the edge of humanity” because they are “akin to others biographically speaking and yet exist on the frontier of a socially, culturally and politically endorsed human life” (Anderton 2016: 15). Fox and Protagonist are trapped in an awkward liminal position confronting the social norm that they cannot overcome, and their common plight reveals a site where new models of ethics might emerge in the failure of ordinary juridico-political order.

However, we should be cautious because when the state of exception is taken to extreme, we may be dealing with the historical catastrophe of the extermination camp that lies in the background of Agamben’s thesis: “Insofar as its inhabitants were stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life, the camp was also the most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realized, in which power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation” (Agamben 1995: 171). Such paradigmatic humanitarian catastrophe is not excluded from Beckett’s work either, as Theodor Adorno comments in *Negative Dialectics* that “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 [Beckett] says, is like a concentration camp” (Adorno 1973: 380). Elsewhere Adorno candidly addresses Beckett’s hidden notion of the Holocaust in the following observation:

At ground zero, however, where Beckett plays unfold like forces in infinitesimal physics, a second world of images springs forth, both sad and rich, the concentrate of historical experiences that otherwise, in their immediacy, fail to articulate the essential: the evisceration of subject and reality. This shabby, damaged world of images is the negative imprint of the administered world. (Adorno 1999: 31)

Despite the fact that the Holocaust took place over a half century ago, its repetition is still staged in the forms of the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, genocides, or various refugee camps across the globe. These are the ground zeroes where the state of exception is still operative.

Political specialist Neve Gordon comments that “Not only are humans situated and limited by a social context, but they are also constituted by the context, while the context itself is an effect of power” (Gordon 2002: 129). Hence, every individual is contextualized by the society, and its universal law or norm unfortunately produces outcasts or less-than-human beings as bare lives who take peripheral roles that remain included in the society in the form of exception. These bare lives are the subject matters of this article, because not only do they remind us of their neglected presence in real life, but their awkward place in the society, paradoxically included in the society in the mode of exclusion from the normal bunch, is the consequential problem of the existing order. Bare lives become a necessary vice of modern bio-politics, and their existence has come more and more to the fore to comprehend how the world truly operates.

Michel Foucault maintains that everyone lives in “a singularly confessing society,” thus, “one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. . . . One confesses—or is forced to confess” (Foucault 1990: 59). If confession is inevitable because we are a part of the society, so Fox is coerced to articulate against his will. However, it is worth pointing out that Fox demonstrates a passive or silent form of resistance to conformity in *Rough for Radio II*. Fox knows that he will be punished for going silent, but he at times keeps his silence, and this, I consider, is an example of resistance to power. Another example can be drawn from *Stenographer*: she is mostly submissive to Animator’s direction, but she dares to suggest a gentler approach towards Fox, and she even protests when being asked to falsify the transcript; though both of her endeavors fail in view of Animator’s dictatorship.

Perhaps, the attention to resistance is relevant to Beckett’s particular attention to a face elevated after it was sunken as if in distress, and this gesture is the most compelling when the silent Protagonist raises his head in the final scene of *Catastrophe*. Similar to Fox’s role, Protagonist is also a bare life who is disposed of by other authoritative characters, and his raised head implies, according to Beckett: “you bastards, you haven’t finished me yet” (cited in Knowlson 1996: 680). It is precisely the spirit of this remark that almost encourages an attempt of resistance, however trivial, to make an impact.

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Цу-Чинг Је

Полијтизација послератне драме Самјуела Бекета

Резиме

Рад истражује драме Самјуела Бекета *Скица за радио II* и *Катастрофа*, настале после Другог светског рата, са циљем да се промисли њихово друштвено-политичко значење и однос према хуманитарној кризи савременог света. Истраживање почиње текстуалном анализом различитих коришћења лингвистичких брбљарија као апорија у обе драме. Потом се интертекстуалне везе доводе у додир са друштвено-политичком сфером помоћу теорије Ђорђа Агамбена, како би се показало како су концептуалне представе „голог живота“ и „ванредног стања“ код Бекета остварене као граничне позиције. Овим не толико примењиваним приступом пореди се специфични модел стварности обележен бекетовском двосмисленошћу са Агамбеновим предлошком „прага поткопавања“, како би се указало на пригушени политички глас у позадини Бекетових комада.

Кључне речи: апорија, Самјуел Бекет, Ђорђо Агамбен, голи живот, ванредно стање

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