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Regressive Progression: the Quest for Self-transcendence in Western Tragedy

The quest for a higher self is the recurring motif of the three reformatory eras of Western tragedy. This recurring theme is manifest in the Renaissance Elizabethan tragedy, nineteenth century Domestic drama, and the Absurd Theater. Throughout these three dramatic periods, the idea of the quest reveals itself in three different manifestations—action, imagination and inaction. Based on Nietzsche's notion of tragedy and a Dionysian approach of the quest for the "sovereign individual" (Nietzsche, *Genealogy (GM)*), the process of the quest for the higher self in the three major dramatic periods of Western tragedy reflects a progressive directionality that Nietzsche refers to in terms of a "progressus," a "task" or a "goal" (*GM*, 2, 2).

Nietzsche's aspiration to reach beyond the narrow circle of the ego or the superficial self assumes his anti-narcissistic belief which reinterprets God within himself and acknowledges a higher self. Relating to this notion which, in different traditions, goes by terms such as "oversoul" or "perfect self," Nietzsche refers to the original tragic hero, Dionysius, who communicates the spirit of losing individuality and becoming the great being. Within this context, Dionysius is associated with self-forgetfulness and ecstasy, through which individuals enter the primordial unity or eternal existence and thus attain a higher self. Therefore, based on Nietzsche's idea, individuals are redeemed through immersion into the Dionysian eternal

essence which rests on an underlying substratum of suffering. To counterbalance the effects of such a suffering, Dionysian madness and self-forgetfulness take the individuals to the world beyond the phenomenal world, where the self is transcended in the epiphanic moment of self-recognition and joins primal unity, infinity and the divine. Nietzsche refers to “tragic,” “Dionysian” and “noble” morality as the affirmative agents of self-exploration which emanate from “the eternal joy [lust] of becoming” (Nietzsche, *Twilight (TI)* 5). He asserts: “Affirmation of life even in its strangest and sternest problems, the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the *sacrifice* of its highest types—that is what I called Dionysian, that is what I recognized as the bridge to the psychology of the *tragic* poet [...], to realize in oneself the eternal joy of becoming—that joy [lust] which also encompasses joy in *destruction*, the birth of tragedy was my first revaluation of all values” (8). Within this context, *Lysios*, the epithet of Dionysus, has ranges of paradoxical translation such as “liberate,” “destroy,” “redeem,” “save,” and “heal” (Nietzsche, *Kritische Gesaumtausgabe (KGW)* 3, 16). Based on these paradoxical terms, the constructive destruction of Nietzsche’s ecstatic process of self-transcendence reveals the seemingly destructive Dionysian effects of self-forgetfulness and madness which are manifest in the elements of tragedy and the sufferings of tragic heroes. Nietzsche’s uplifting Dionysian spirit then plays an important role in forming a complete affirmative orientation towards self-transcendence.

Based on Nietzsche’s notion of tragic self-exploration through Dionysian self-forgetfulness, the degree to which Western tragic characters approximate self-transcendence reveals that the developmental process of Western tragedy is “regressively progressive.” The process demonstrates that the

active approach of the Renaissance tragic quest is dramatically doomed to failure while the imaginative way of the quest in nineteenth century Domestic dramas reveals no catastrophic fall. Surprisingly, the inactive quest of the Absurd dramatic characters leads to the characters' spiritual rest which connotes approximating to the longed-for higher self.

The active, pragmatic attempts of the Renaissance Elizabethan tragic characters demonstrate a specific directionality to re-create a higher self. The preoccupation of these characters with the idea of active struggle in the way of the quest for an exalted self is highly manifest in tragedies of Marlowe and Shakespeare as masterpieces of that specific dramatic era. Tamburlaine remarkably equals action to supremacy and grandeur: "My deeds prove that I am the lord but by my parentage a shepherd" (Marlowe, *Tamburlaine* I, ii). It is even noted that his destructive notion of killing people is a way of making Tamburlaine reach the wished-for elegant self: "Wherein, as in a mirror, may be seen / His honor, that consists in shedding blood" (I: V ii 413-16). Similarly, In Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, the hero reveals his determination when he defines his personal achievements as the source of his name and identity.

What Stull mentions about the Adlerian system of strife and the quasi-religious quest for perfection in Marlowian characters significantly interprets the motif that is also the underlying theme of Shakespeare's tragedies as the major representative of the whole Renaissance tragedy. Stull asserts that "[t]he prime mover in Adlerian system is humankind's quasi-religious quest for perfection, understood as self-completeness and fulfillment" (Stull 145). He adds that such aspiration demonstrates "Nicomachean Ethics relating super-human desire of power to descent origin" (165). In my point of

view, the concept of “destructive construction” remarkably defines the devastating attachment to outward means of power, wealth, and magic through which the Renaissance tragic characters try to manifest the highest potential of their selves. Relating to this idea, Faustus’ dismissal of divinity and his inclination towards magic is his choice to feed the desire of transcendence: “Why, Faustus hath thou not attained that end? / “Highest reaches of humane wit” (Marlowe, *Faustus* l.i.18).

Greenblatt recognizes the same directionality in Shakespeare’s tragedies towards self-making: “Shakespeare remains the fashioner of narrative selves, having the capacity to foster psychic mobility in the service of power” (254). Macbeth, for instance, considers that being more than a man prerequisites action: “When you durst do it, then you were a man / Be so. And, to be more than what you were, you would / much more the man” (Shakespeare, *Macbeth* l. vii. 49-51).

Generally, the overall pattern of the quest for the higher self in the Renaissance tragedies of Marlowe and Shakespeare is demonstrated in a pragmatic rational materialism which is completely outward and worldly designed to actualize the self of the characters. Ironically, such an active, pragmatic means of the quest in these tragedies leads the tragic characters to a catastrophic downfall as they are trapped within the pragmatism of the means which acts as a vicious cycle of incessant desires blocking the way of the quest for the final self-realization. The unending desires towards satisfaction of the “suprapersonal” lead the characters to new cravings which make them shallow and finally fail to recognize the supreme self. In Nietzsche’s explanation of how one becomes what one is, severe pragmatic approaches are translated as “great imperatives” of the surface consciousness of which the quester

should beware of. He adds: "Beware even of every great word, every great posture, Sheer danger! That the instinct comes to understand itself too soon—meanwhile the organizing idea with a calling to rule grows deep down—it beings to command" (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo (EH)* 9). "The aspiration to Heaven and the commitment to Hell" is the second part of Stull's argument which specifically explains Faustus' tragic failure and can be recognized as the main reason of the final failure of Marlowe's and Shakespeare's tragic characters. "The commitment to Hell," as I believe, is the over-involvement of these tragic heroes in active pragmatism or excessive rational activities which are the extremism leading to tragic downfall.

While the motifs of the quest for the "higher self" in these Renaissance tragedies generally reveal an outward, pragmatic approach, *Hamlet* manifests a shift of emphasis to an inward journey of self-transcendence. While destructive actions and pragmatic materialism are the means of attaining transcendence with a catastrophic failure, Hamlet introduces inwardness as a foil approach which has the capability to make the hero approximate to the lost grandeur. Hamlet is the first Renaissance dramatic hero who undermines the outside world and takes it only as appearance: "But I have that *within* which passes show / These but the trappings and the suits of woe" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 1.2.85-6, italics mine).¹⁰ Unlike his contemporary characters, Hamlet even asserts that the action destroys the essence: "For use almost can change the stamp of nature" (III.4.169).

The epochal positive change from enactment to repression defines Hamlet's delay and signifies the regressive progression of the quest from outward action to inwardness and inaction in Western tragedy. Considering the motif of self-

construction, Bloom also emphasizes Hamlet's transcendent "inwardness" as a way of constructing identity or "the internalization of self before anyone else was ready for it" (Bloom 429). Oscillating between thinking "too precisely" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* IV.4.41) or madness, Hamlet enters the Dionysian world of "bestial oblivion" (IV.4.40), following what he was challenging as a possibility of "transformation" (II.1.5). Hamlet's Dionysian inward approach then verifies Nietzsche's idea about the impracticality of consciousness as a means for self-realization. Hamlet's constructive transition to doubt and incapacity is the result of his recognition of conscience as disabling and corrupt. He then believes in the impracticality of consciousness and finally switches to Dionysian madness. Hegel's symbolic concept of an old mole that cannot live on the earth describes Hamlet's dissatisfaction with consciousness as a means to transcend his self. Like an old mole who tunnels through earth toward the light, Hamlet tunnels from his consciousness toward feign madness. He switches to Dionysian self-forgetfulness and freedom from blocking the world of reason.

According to Nietzsche, it is Hamlet's Dionysian faculty and nausea which inhibit action and let him look through the essence of things. Nietzsche asserts that, through the ecstasy of the Dionysian state, Hamlet is separated from the phenomenal world and becomes repellent of action: "action needs veils of illusion: that is the doctrine of Hamlet, not the cheap wisdom of Jack the dreamer who reflects too much and as it were, from an excess of possibilities does not get around to action. Not reflection, no true knowledge, an insight into the horrible truth, that outweighs any motive for action" (Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 39). Hamlet's final announcement of the lost grandeur at the grave scene demonstrates the relative

success of Hamlet's Dionysian approach which has made a shield of oblivion from the threats of the phenomenal world: "This is I / Hamlet the Dane" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* V.1.252).

Rayner also refers to Hamlet's final success obtained through an inward inaction. He refers to Calderwood's close analysis of action and consciousness, argues that "Hamlet begins in an act of mourning" and adds that "such mourning is a positive act based upon an absence, leading toward the creation of an identity as a symbol" (Rayner 111). Unlike other tragic characters who, like Lear or Macbeth, even confess their failure, either implicitly or explicitly, Hamlet declares his regained lost identity in his victorious shout.

Hamlet is victorious at the end of his Dionysian madness for other reasons as well. The throne is back to Hamlet, who was excluded from it by his mother, as he is buried like a king. He is successful in fulfilling his vocation in putting right what has been wrong, bringing the true essence back both to himself, other characters, and Elsinore. In one word, his duty is performed. The rest is then Hamlet's final *spiritual* rest, or his spiritual fulfillment of transcendence, as Horatio addresses the hero at the end of the play. Within this context, Hamlet's imaginative inaction finally leads him to claim his lost sublime identity, in contrast to the catastrophic downfall of his contemporary tragic characters. When action cannot resolve the crises, Hamlet clings to the other option left for him, that is inaction—a strategy that, as Lacan once mentions, is unique to modern heroes.

Hamlet's inward model of the quest is then contagious to the modern dramatic characters and becomes the pole of transition between early modern and modern tragic characters. In this context, Hamlet becomes the first Romantic tragic hero, and the shift of emphasis from outward action to inward

world of vision is transferred to other dramatists such as Ibsen and Chekhov.

The transition from the external world to the inward world of spirit in the way of the quest for the higher self is manifest in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, when the hero refers to the transference of the "once redeemed" "uncreated spirit" "from banks of flesh to banks of spirit" (92-3). In a similar vein, Brand refers to the inward world as the specific approach which makes him be born again: "Within, within that is my call / That is the way I must venture, that is my path / *There shall the vulture of the will be slain* / And there shall the new Adam at last be born again (Ibsen, *Brand* 114-15). In relation to this context, Ibsen's three dramatic periods demonstrate a major dominant line of internal struggle where the spirit, ill at ease in material surroundings, tries to find its true home. The romantic motifs of freedom and idealism underlie the central challenge of the characters from Ibsen's early dramatic poems to his final symbolic dramas. Even in social and realistic phases of Ibsen's dramas, where the action is, for the most part, concerned with men's deeds and outward lives in connection with society and the world, the ideal of personal honor still appears as the underlying motif of the drama, based on the characters' internal arena of conflict for a higher self. Although, with *The Pillars of Society*, Ibsen's style demonstrates emancipation from the thrall of romanticism, the motif of the ideal personal honor reveals the underlying liberating Dionysian spirit of manifesting the "sovereign individual."

Ibsen's third dramatic phase is however the culmination of the liberating Dionysian spirit, where symbols such as the wild duck, the mill race, the tower, or the open sea are but the external tokens of something inward, suggesting a world where the spirit, ill at ease in material surroundings, finds its

home. In *When we Dead Awaken*, Irene explicitly refers both to the need for self-transcendence and the inward approach of attaining it: "I must! I must! Thus bids me a voice / *In the depth of my soul and I will follow it / Strength have I and courage for something better / For something higher, than this life*" (Ibsen III, 551, italics mine).

The mystery of Ibsen's tragic world is then unraveled under the romantic characteristic of the unique self which needs to be transformed to the unimagined splendor through Dionysian rapture and the release of energy, and reminds mystic principle of self-annihilation. Ibsen's Dionysian characters demonstrate full ecstatic dissolution through madness and drunkenness as the entrance door of Dionysius. Such dissolution offers an occasion when the reason fails. In *Peer Gynt*, Peer thus delightfully celebrates his farewell to the world of reason and enters to a self-annihilating realm: "Reason is dead and gone: long live Peer Gynt!" (IV, 227) Elsewhere, Ibsen beautifully demonstrates the powerful role of fantasy and imagination in self-forgetfulness: "Little peer and I sat at home together / We knew of no better remedy than forgetting / One person uses liquor, another tries illusion / Oh yes, so we used fairy tales / Of princes and trolls and all kinds of creatures" (II ,ii).

Although the manifestation of the higher self is transitory and the imaginative world of the dream is often shattered by the reality of the phenomenal world, based on Nietzsche's idea, the interpretation of the dreams leads the tragic character to the ultimate truth, heals and protects the ill spirit. Ibsen's *Brand* is then the starting point of his other dramas in reshaping and realizing the self within the protective Apollonian world of the dreams. Moreover, if breaking down the boundaries of the superficial self leads to complete dissolution of the ego, it

can be still considered as a victory, since it offers a rise from the mundane phenomenal world. The ethical teaching of Ibsen's great dramas, as Jacobs believes, makes the characters who lack perfection rise above the mundane considerations of society, paying a paltry price for it. She finally asserts that "if the attainment of this (self-perfection), though the price of attainment of this thing be a sacrifice of life itself, is a victory rather than a defeat, a triumph rather than a tragedy" (Jacobs 430).

What the Button Moulder announces as his motto is generally the incarnation of the motif of self-annihilation Ibsen explicitly introduces in *Peer Gynt*: "To be oneself is to slay oneself" (V. viii). The central mystic motifs of self-annihilation and self-transcendence in Ibsen's dramas appear in the notion of death and rebirth, as Durbach asserts: "The desire for spiritual transformation, for resurrection from the sleep of death into a state of Edenic perfection, finds expression in nearly all of Ibsen's plays. A paradise regained through the artifacts of the artistic imagination." He adds that "[t]he essential self can discover its analogue in the epiphany of natural supernaturalism" (Durbach: 1982 16). These motifs also reflect themselves in Peer's symbolic attempt in his baptismal cleansing which leads him to ascend or "go up": "I'll wash myself clean / In a bath of scouring wind! / I'll go up, and plunge right in / To that bright baptismal font! (II, 291). The manifestation of self-transcendence through self-annihilation represents itself in *When we Dead Awaken*, where the heroes reach the height of their towers only when they pass through the tunnels of mists and frost symbolically connoting self-abolishment.

in Ibsen's dramas, this triumphant passage from the mundane world to the infinite world of imagination and annihilation gives the characters a sense of fullness. Reviewing Ib-

sen's *Rosmersholm*, Northam analyzes the constructive role of discarding the outward world in offering the manifestation of self-recognition. He then refers to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* as another example of detachment which leads to approximating the sense of fullness. His analytic study verifies the basic argument of this study which deals with the regressive progression of Western tragedy regarding the underlying motif of self-fulfillment. He argues that, unlike Shakespeare's situation demonstrated in *The Tempest*, the lavish exaltations of the primitive life of Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* and the renounced world of *Beckett's Waiting for Godot* indicate that "the characters endlessly try to restore a sense of fullness out of their own creative moral imagination." He then explains the world as "the reversed and reduced form of Shakespearean world" (197). Here, Northam concludes that the attainment of self-fulfillment is possible, but not in life: "Not, at least, in life. Thus where Shakespeare's play ends with a return from the isolation of the island to society, Ibsen's ends with departure from society into the ultimate isolation of *an intensely private death*. Only there can Rosmer and Rebekka *achieve the essential union of their different virtues*, the traditional and the individual" (Northam 198, italics mine).

Ibsen's dramatic symbolism, lyricism, and the arena of inwardness act like Chekhov's overall pattern in conveying the romantic Dionysian spirit of self-forgetfulness and self-transcendence. Similar to Ibsen's dramatic world, imaginative inwardness is then the overall pattern of the quest in Chekhov's dramas. Chekhov's dramatic characters reflect Hamlet's Dionysian transition from outward action to inwardness. In Sokolyansky's words, Hamlet's "interior conflict" is a common feature shared between Hamlet and modern figures, specifically Chekhovian characters. He refers to Russian

Hamletism to describe special modern phenomenon which is particular in its “romantic interiority with the incapability of action” (103).

A more inclusive range of Hamletism is also manifest in other modern dramatists in modes of Chekhovian, Pirandellian, Shavian, Odestian, Brechtian, Beckettian and so on. In *The Sea Gull*, Treplefe summarizes Chekhov’s overall pattern of the quest selected by his characters: “living characters! I must show life not as it is, but as it appears in my dreams” (Chekhov, *Sea Gull* 416). In *The Three Sisters*, Irena explicitly demonstrates what is ideally missing in the life they lead: “I must try and find another position, what I wanted so, what I dreamed of, is what’s exactly not there. Work without poetry... I can’t, I am tired” (Chekhov, *Three Sisters* II, 170). What Irena refers to as poetry in her life remarkably reflects the imaginative feature of life for transcendence. Influenced by the inwardness of “Hamletism” and the general romantic spirit of freedom in nineteenth Century, Chekhov’s characters reflect Nietzsche’s idea of tragic heroes who are, like Hamlet, obsessed with delving deep into their own inwardness. Chekhov’s characters obviously disregard the phenomenal world and create their own imaginative world of dream and fantasy. The powerful dream of going to Moscow radically tears off Irena from the phenomenal world in *The Three Sisters*: “Oh my Lord God, I dream of Moscow every night, I am like someone completely possessed...” (II, 170).

The specific approach that Chekhov’s characters demonstrate is an endless delving within themselves which is positively considered as a “mystic” movement. Along with the inward approach of Chekhovian characters, there is a specific kind of lyricism and symbolism which breathe a Dionysian spirit into the body of Chekhov’s dramas, and make the char-

acters meet a manifestation of their wished-for higher self, in the transitory world of dream and imagination. Lucas also sees the visionary realm as a means to satisfy the self in Chekhov's characters. He considers Chekhov's plays as "the evocation of a visionary realm in which the longing of the self may be satisfied in all four of the plays" (Lucas 37). The role of the imaginative world in restoring the wished-for higher self is reminiscent of Jacques Lacan's theory of "the mirror stage" in the formation of the identity, where the characters create an ideal other in their dream world to which they sacrifice themselves. Such an idealizing transference is the manifestation of Dionysian self-forgetfulness and Apollonian healing power of the dream.

Modern dramatic characters demonstrate an inward journey for self-transcendence, wounded by the physical reality caused by incurable stress concerning life and existence. The modern domains of the search are then imaginative creativity, hallucinations, illusions and dreams. Modern drama is the reflexion of a metaphorical journey into the transcendent self. It is the excavation into the very depth of the self to regain a real existence. The regressive journey goes from the outside world to the world of solitude and death, in order to meet the spiritual liberty and the individual soul. Within this context, Chekhov's characters demonstrate a kind of imaginative inaction, which links them to Beckettian characters of the Absurd Theatre in their "eventful immobility, or movement around a still center," as Gilman remarks.

Ibsen's *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* are also reminiscent of the introspective fantasy world of the Absurd theatre, where the action shifts from the external world to the protagonists' dreams of fantasies. Ibsen's influence on such unlikely forms as the Absurd theatre emanates from the bidirectional influ-

ence of Ibsen and Beckett concerning the paradoxical notion of death and rebirth. Durbach explores the idea of selfhood in *Peer Gynt* as a test case, and finally implies that the attempt towards self-rebirth is a recreating process possible only through death, what is also manifest in Beckett's works (Durbach: 2006 396-401).

Although the introspective dream-like world of the Absurdist immediately echoes the inner vision and the fantasy-stricken characters of Ibsen's and Chekhov's dramas, Hamlet is the first Western dramatic character who grows the seed of Dionysian illusion for the achievement of the lost higher self. Therefore, the seemingly absurd notion of inaction of the Absurd dramas is reminiscent of the Dionysian inwardness of Hamlet, empowered and emphasized by the imaginative world of nineteenth-century dramas. Within this context, while the outward, active pragmatism of the Renaissance tragic quest ends in complete failure, the romantic arena of Dionysian inwardness, introduced by Hamlet and followed by Ibsen's and Chekhov's characters, demonstrates a course of development that despite being regressive, inactive, and inward in its overall pattern, is progressive, considering the approximation to the higher self.

Hamlet offers a new interpretation of the Absurd Theatre. In "Self-commenting drama of our times," Rao invites the readers to look at the contemporary dramas like those of Beckett, Pinter, and Stoppard in a new viable way, rather than to regard them as absurd. To do so, he refers to Raynold's interpretation of Polonius' advice to his son, when he says: "*by indirections find directions out*" as a "fresh approach to reality which is different from realism." Within this context, Rao asserts that Polonius' advice "unconsciously defines Hamlet's technique as well as that of contemporary self-commenting

drama. Hamlet uses indirections most of the time in the play, because to his contemplative mind reality is not fixed.” He adds: “Contemporary man experiences Hamlet’s uncertainty in the face of reality. The supreme example of Hamlet’s indirection is the use of illusion to find out reality” (Rao 225, italics mine). He finally concludes that it is possible to reinterpret positively the so-called void, silence and nothingness of the Absurd dramas, basing his assertion on Hamlet’s specific technique of indirection, which, as he believes, rejects the idea of absurdity and uplifts them from the usual approach of seeing the truth to discovering it.

Followed by the relative success of nineteenth-century dramatic characters in their inward imaginative way of the quest, the Absurd characters try to negate themselves through complete detachment and inaction, in order to be safe from the destructive alluring of the outside world which shatters the manifestation of the higher self. They try to approximate to the point of Zero in order to start a new beginning. The point of Zero is an absolute, inexhaustible, fascinating poverty which is the only wealth for the Absurd characters, a point to which they return and reach some of the essence of being. Based on Nietzsche’s conceptions, the detaching, reductive attempts of the Absurd characters can be interpreted as the atrophying vocation which makes them able to approximate the innermost heart of things that is for them the essential being. What Vladimir advises Estragon can be considered as a symbolic motto discarding the outward world and reducing it to its very essence: “Boots must be taken off every day. I’m tired telling you that. Why don’t you listen to me?” (Beckett, *Waiting* 371).

The characters of the Absurd Theater successfully manifest the approximation to a higher self-recognition through perfect self-renunciation. The focus changes from discarding

the material world to self-renunciation where the blocking element appears to be the body itself: "There's man all over for you, blaming on his boots the faults of his feet" (372). The diminishing means of the quest reveals itself in the clown-like features projected in ragged dress, tight coats, short pants, and even the abbreviated names of the tramps in *Waiting for Godot*.

The concept of waiting is itself a reductive means. Ghosh indicates that the act of waiting "can have as consequence a consummation that provides a clear understanding of the self and its relation to the situation—a state of being-free from the morbid transition of matter" (Ghosh 308). That is why, after the consummative act of waiting, a new birth appears as Vladimir announces that the tree is sprouting, immediately after his delightful explanation about waiting: Wait ...we embraced...we were happy...happy...what do we do now that we're happy...go on waiting...waiting...let me think...it's coming...go on waiting...now that we're happy...let me see...ah! The tree! (Beckett, *Waiting* 439).

Severe self-reduction and discarding the phenomenal world in Beckett's dramas can be considered as the continuation of Nietzsche's directionality towards Dionysian self-exploration. It is not unwise to claim that the self-imposed suffering and pain of Beckett's characters reminds Nietzsche's idea of wanderings over and through the mountains and valleys of Primal Pain to approximate the Primal Unity. It is also reminiscent of Nietzsche's doctrine of a tragic suffering which leads to the final recognition of the tragic hero. The way Beckett's characters try to mutilate themselves in order to minimize their access to the phenomenal world reflects Nietzsche's constructive mystery of tragic suffering in the way of attaining the sovereign individuality. Relating to this idea, Coe states

that “Beckett’s characters allow themselves to be mutilated, becoming armless, legless, featureless, in an effort to *approximate to their quintessential ‘selves’*.” He adds that “*they try to die, and dying, strive to detach their ‘selves’ from the unhappy accident of incarnation, hoping thereby to redeem at last the catastrophe of spatial and temporal identity only to discover that their ‘personality’ against all the odd survives*” (Coe 34, italics mine).

The developmental course of descent then follows the suspension of the phenomenal world through Dionysian self-forgetfulness offered by the imaginative world of nineteenth-century drama. Such an ascending descent culminates in the complete abolishment of the physical faculties in the Absurd Theatre, as a means to manifest the essential, inner self. This kind of manifestation reflects Hoffman’s general view about the modern self in the obsessive inclination towards the reduction which ends in immortality and self-assertion. The Dionysian attempts of cherishing the physical life is manifest in Beckett’s characters, who endeavor to detach themselves from the world of flesh, which echoes the mystic notion of the abolishment of physical life to attain self-transcendence. Mobility is explicitly rejected, when Hamm condemns Clov because he pollutes the air when he moves a little in *The Endgame*: “you pollute the air” (Beckett, *Endgame* I,i). In *The Happy Days* Winnie also sees the ultimate happiness in destruction of physicality: “and if for some strange reason no further pains are possible, why then just close the eyes (she does so) and wait for the day to come—the happy day to come when flesh melts at so many hundred hours” (Beckett, *Happy Days* II). Berensmeyer’s review of mystic tradition links mystic view of disregarding physicality to Beckett’s denigrating references to physical organs, as signs of mystic illumination: “Perhaps, the

denigrating references in Beckett to the 'eye of flesh,' even 'this filthy eye of flesh,' eyes that are safer closed, like those of protagonists in *Film*—because then they can open themselves to an *inner light*, an 'illumination' that would abolish all 'trace' of exterior 'always the same place' to self-assertion" (Berensmeyer 487).²

Beckett's characters finally demonstrate a state of spiritual rest which foreshadows Nietzsche's attainment of the primal unity and reminds mystic manifestation of the ultimate whole that is, as Cornwell describes, the transference from "the first zone to the third zone" in a releasing process of "progression—or regression" from the external reality (Cornwell 44). Willie implicitly refers to her spiritual bliss at the end of her self-abolishing attempts: "Though I say not / What I may not / Let you hear / Yet the swaying / Dance is saying." Faithful to the mystic idea of "annihilation and rebirth" and Nietzsche's idea of primal state, Beckett's heroes attempt to reverse the process of birth and speed their return to the state of pre-conscious non-being which indicates the spiritual satisfaction of the self.

Having been transferred, the heroes enter a peaceful state which is the "lost Eden," as Cornwell exhibits. This lost Eden is the genuine being that Beckett's characters have lost. In line with Nietzsche's idea of suffering and rebirth, which is also reminiscent of the mystic idea of self-mortification and rebirth, Robinson also asserts that in Beckett's world, the lost paradise is the hidden reality of the self they have lost at birth. He states that "[t]hey [the characters] connected suffering to the paradise that had been lost at birth and sought to suffer more for in those moments when the mortal microcosm is open to the suffering of being it is most deeply aware of its

existence and perhaps closer to the hidden reality of the self" (Robinson 290).

The paradoxical notion of self-confinement and self-realization also appears in Pinter's dramas. In *The Room*, Rose unravels the secret of her room in its capability to make her know herself: "You know where you are [...] you have got the chance in a place like this." She implies that self-recognition happens while she is detached from the outside world. Similar to Rose's idea, in *A Slight Ache* Edward indicates: "Sometimes, of course, I would take shelter, *shelter to compose myself*." Self-composition is then possible through utterly self-confinement in Pinter's characters. His characters' narcissistic attempts at delving deeply at themselves equals to searching for their identity. Closely related to self-confining attempts, Almond refers to the paradoxical idea of emptiness and fullness in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*: "The Eckhartian soul we will recall is 'empty of self and freed from the knowledge of objects, emptied to prepare a space for the birth of the word in the ground of the soul.' *The Birthday Party* is the story of such birth—the story of the 'emptying of a human being'" (Pinter, *A Slight Ache* 184). Within this context, at the end of this play, the hero is promised to find a relief which follows his self-annihilation: "Someone is coming in a van today to cart you away—to cart you away! When the knock on the door finally comes, you will not run but will welcome it with relief" (Pinter, *Birthday* 86).

The final silence of *The Caretaker* also implies the hero's final annihilation, similar to the long silence which occurs in the final scene of *The Room*. Here, Rose, finally annihilated, discovers her lost transcendent self, which is manifest in her actual name, Sal, symbolizing salvation. This kind of ending, in which the characters demonstrate spiritual relief, is reminis-

cent of the state of rapturous ecstasy and rebirth that, according to Nietzsche and the mystic notion, occur after self-annihilation.

The ultimate state of such a spiritual peace then indicates the approximation of the characters to the wished-for self-transcendence, which confirms the triumphant negative self-assertion of the Absurd dramatic characters. Such a victory then verifies the idea of a regressive progression in the developmental process of Western tragedy, from the anxious disappointment of the Renaissance tragic characters to the spiritual peace of the Absurd anti-heroes.

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