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## Aristeus and Thanatos Samuel Beckett's Insect Poetics

Creepy mutants; vermin emerging from the sewerage; resilient survivors; tentacular left-overs from a previous evolutionary era; one of the seven plagues in Saint John's Apocalypse; signs of the wrath of God as the biblical locusts; insects cover a number of staggering signifying practices.<sup>1</sup>

[T]o hell with animals.<sup>2</sup>

### Beckett's Entomopoetics

Put forward by Moran in *Molloy*, the latter motto of this article hints at Samuel Beckett's complex relation with animals and animality in a twisted and rather perverse way. Anchored in the modernist zeitgeist and the ruptures both world wars with their industrialised genocides enacted, Beckett's works have tended to be read within strictly anthropocentric frameworks: the degradation of Cartesian dualism, the inability to establish one's subjectivity, the failure to connect language with either intention or thought, and so forth. This highly intrapersonal perspective, motivated by scarce depictions of the desolate spaces dwelt by equally wretched – albeit often universalised – creatures, has been cherished by the theory-oriented scholarships of 1980s and 1990s rooted in the Linguistic Turn; for those, Beckett's works are predominantly deploying subjective and internal landscapes. At the same time – and this is the moment when

<sup>1</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses. Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2002), 148.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, in *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), 159.

the perverse side of the motto unfolds – Beckett seems to be obsessed with thinking *of* and *by means of* animal figures, which vividly populate otherwise decaying spaces of his imagination. Steven Connor points out that

[i]t is surprising to find a fictional landscape as recurrently bleak and inhospitable as that of Beckett's so well-stocked with animals. His work contains references to horses, goats, pigs, hens, parrots, sheep, mules, dogs, apes, rabbits, slugs, worms and hedgehogs, as well as a lobster and a llama.<sup>3</sup>

Although ecocritical and eco-philosophical readings still contribute to the marginal tendency in Beckett studies, the animal-oriented approaches prevail, thriving on the plethora of specimen Connor meticulously lists.<sup>4</sup> This critical path, which my article follows as well, cherishes the fact that the barren and deserted spaces which Beckett so eagerly stages or depicts are dwelt by a great variety of animals. Their abundance – contrary to other figures, isolated or at best gathered in pairs or groups of three – and vividness – against the Beckettian view on the exasperated human condition – are at least surprising. What is thus the purpose of such intense animality and numerous animals in the constantly dying worlds of Beckett's? How do animals differ in their practices of living (and dying) among the tortured human figures? Do animals also die in Beckett's realms, which always exist on the verge of desolation?

In this article, I do not aim at providing an all-embracing study of Beckett's animal poetics with regard to death. Instead, I would like to focus on vermin and insect tropes exclusively. It seems that just as Moran turns out to be an avid beekeeper investigating and contemplating the waggle dance, Beckett himself is a keen observer of insect life. Beckett's entomopoetics, as I would call it, relies equally on Aristeus – the mythological beekeeper – and Thanatos; in Beckett, insects and worms experience and embrace death in a more straightforward manner than human beings, who seem to be suspended on the verge of agony with no closure whatsoever. After introducing the theoretical underpinnings

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<sup>3</sup> Steven Connor, "Beckett's Animals," *Journal of Beckett Studies*, no. 8 (1982). Not paginated. Available online: <http://128.186.130.50/jobs/num08/Num8Connor.htm> [accessed 1.07.2018].

<sup>4</sup> Aside from Connor's numerous papers and talks on Beckett and animal studies, see, for instance: Mary Bryden, ed., *Beckett and Animals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Shane Weller, "Not Rightly Human," *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, vol. 19, *Borderless Beckett / Beckett sans frontières* (2008): 211–221. For other ecocritical readings of Beckett, see, for instance: Paul Saunders, "Samuel Beckett's *Trilogy* and the Ecology of Negation," *Journal of Beckett Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2011): 54–77; Steven Connor, "Beckett's Atmospheres," in *Beckett after Beckett*, ed. S. E. Gontarski, Anthony Uhlmann (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006), 52–65; Paul Davies, "Strange Weather: Beckett from the Perspective of Ecocriticism," in *Beckett after Beckett*, ed. S. E. Gontarski, Anthony Uhlmann (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006), 66–78; Greg Garrard, "Endgame: Beckett's 'Ecological Thought,'" *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, no. 23 (2011): 383–397.

of this article based on Alain Badiou's readings of Beckett's works and Giorgio Agamben's anthropological machine, I endeavour to tackle this observation on three different levels. The first one, exemplified by Worm in *The Unnamable*, points to death as the necessity included in any attempt to signify that which by design resists language. Consequently, Worm dies again and again since any attempt at framing him within a coherent narrative simultaneously obliterates him<sup>5</sup>; still, it becomes impossible not to speak about him in such highly metanarrative aesthetics. The second one, which is the case of the bees found dead in *Molloy*, encompasses the basic level of representation of demise happening directly in a text. The third and final one, including wasps heard solely by Mrs Rooney in *All that Fall* and ominous buzzing in *Not I*, demonstrates that by means of metonymy the audial image of insects marks the threat to one's stable identity as the element resisting signification. Unlike human beings, insect reach the dead and the material kernel of reality. Eventually, this last aspects will be discussed in reference to the way technology and insect tropes are intertwined in Beckett's works.

## Dying Is Never Death?

As the famously quoted invective "Think, Pig!" from *Waiting for Godot* might suggest, Beckett often employs animal metaphors in the absence of what they actually represent. Yet, the way in which he insists on using such metaphors along with the variety of specimens he refers to proves otherwise; precisely, he is interested in specific animals, their modes of being, their vividness, and finally – their demise. Let us briefly categorise some of them with regard to this last state. In *The Unnamable*, Worm – whose role will be discussed further on – might be read as a temporary proxy for elusiveness of trauma or absolute otherness, as he escapes any attempt of being grasped within language.<sup>6</sup> In *The Expelled*, the uncanniness of the animal gaze and the social instincts of horses make these animals the figures "initiat[ing] the crisis of

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<sup>5</sup> Although the narrator, Mahood, and Worm seem to be depersonalised and universal figures, Beckett refers to each of them through the masculine pronouns. Despite methodological inconveniences it might cause, I tend to refer to them in the same way for the sake of consistency. Consequently, my take on Worm does not treat him as a particular vermin, but rather expands interpretative possibilities of "Worm" as a proper name and concept rooted in a specific vermin metaphor.

<sup>6</sup> See: Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 2009).

self-identification,”<sup>7</sup> as Joseph Anderton notes. This reflection might be also applied to *All that Fall*, where Mrs Rooney becomes appalled by the fact of being observed by an equine being.<sup>8</sup> In *Embers*, horses are, in turn, disembodied and sensed only by means of the metonymic sound of hooves, compared to the stomping “ten ton Mammoth,”<sup>9</sup> an extinct species itself. It marks the trope of the apocalyptic physicality that will eventually obliterate the audial world of this radio play. Finally, in “Dante and Lobster,” the encounter with the eponymous animal right before it will be boiled alive and then served as a meal raises numerous ethical doubts concerning life and death that the protagonist of this short story, Belacqua, has never considered before.<sup>10</sup> What is of interest in this article are insect and vermin figures, since – aside from the equine ones innovatively analysed by Anderton – they form one of the most developed, repetitive, and consistent animal tropes within Beckett’s literary universe.<sup>11</sup>

In “Tireless Desire,” Alain Badiou notes that the human protagonists of Beckett’s plays and prose, identified as mutilated vessels of tortured *cogito*, gain their peculiar and twisted appearances in order to be reduced to “[their] indestructible functions.”<sup>12</sup> Mechanic and dehumanised, they articulate endless flows of words in order to silence themselves, they declare movement without either an intention or a capacity to leave their places, or simply they flee from the other’s vision without a recognition that this flight has already been anticipated. Such contradictions expose these beings as meta-reflective instances of, among others, vision, hearing, voice, and mobility. Of these functions, the last one is especially interesting. Badiou continues:

Immobility would thereby find its complete metaphor in the corpse: “dying” is the conversion of all possible movement into permanent rest. But

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph Anderton, “‘Hooves!’: The Equine Presence in Beckett,” in *Beckett and Animals*, ed. Mary Bryden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 159. See: Samuel Beckett, “The Expelled,” in *The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, ed. S. E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> See: Samuel Beckett, *All that Fall*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Embers*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 253.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Beckett, “Dante and the Lobster,” in *More Pricks Than Kicks* (New York: Grove Press, 1972).

<sup>11</sup> Such consistency and complexity do not necessarily parallel recent theoretical investigations in posthumanism; sometimes, these features do not prevent Beckett from either objectifying particular animals or treating them as pretexts or decoys for a further exploration of an entirely human perspective instead.

<sup>12</sup> Alain Badiou, “Tireless Desire,” trans. Nina Power, in *On Beckett*, ed. Nina Power and Alberto Toscano (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003), 44.

here again, the irreducibility of the functions means that “dying” is never death.<sup>13</sup>

Hamm, Krapp, Mouth, Malone, Mahood, and many other blinded, deafened, tortured, and mutilated members of Beckett’s miserable pantheon are beings who are stripped of their humanity to nothing but functions. Emblematic for Beckett, the mobility/immobility dyad has already occupied the criticism in 1990s and even 1980s, fascinated with the caricaturised images of beings locked-up in urns and dustbins, rubber cylinders and transparent cuboids, or other vaguely delineated void-like spaces, as well as cherishing the notions of roaming by means of sticks, hacks, or wheelchairs. Still, the manner in which Badiou puts forward his argument deserves attention. Subsuming absolute immobility with corpse under the indestructible function extracts death as a state that can never be achieved, exposing Beckett’s creations to the liminal state *a priori* on the verge of death beyond the death itself.

Similarly to his project inaugurated in *Being and Event*, Badiou’s reading of Beckett’s works covers an entirely anthropocentric perspective, neglecting the question of the nonhuman. Beckett, just as Malarmé, serves Badiou as a paragon for what he sees as the art condition of philosophy: a site of infinite potency.<sup>14</sup> Because of that, Beckett’s works alone are holding the possibility of a pure being.<sup>15</sup> A crucial category for Badiou’s ontology, an event marks the radical rupture within the actual state of things, releasing the excess that might be implemented as a *real*, and not only *symbolic*, change revealed in a new order of counting, new body, or new world, to use Badiou’s terms. Since an event is empty and means nothing in itself, it requires a subject faithful to it who will carry and embody promising excess it holds. This is where Badiou’s mathematical Platonism hints at its Marxist and psychoanalytical roots; his thought has to stage the bearer of a subjective yet prevailing truth, whose fidelity, axiomatically guaranteed, externalises the internal revolution, be it artistic, political, scientific, or amorous. Although Badiou’s sophisticated thought exceeds this brief summary, even in this form its anthropocentric agenda is easily recognisable. Now, in “What Is It to Live?,” a closing chapter of *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou synthesises the ethical obligation to follow the event as a possibility of opening life in its true and superior form; as Badiou argues, embracing the infinite potency of an event and its eternal truths opens one to live “as immortal.”<sup>16</sup> Earlier, in *Ethics*,

<sup>13</sup> Badiou, “Tireless Desire,” 45.

<sup>14</sup> Alain Badiou, “The Writing of the Generic,” trans. Nina Power, in *On Beckett*, ed. Nina Power and Alberto Toscano (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Steven Connor, “Introduction: Beckett’s Finitude,” in *Beckett, Modernism and the Material Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds. Being and Event*, 2, trans. Alberto Toscano (London, New Delhi, New York and Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2009), 507.

he has juxtaposed fidelity to an event with the dangers of betrayal, simulacrum, terror, or a disaster<sup>17</sup>; in *Logics of Worlds*, where these categories are developed, the resistance to an event turns into a biopolitical cut, deciding upon what deserves to be considered as alive and what does not.

Although the nonhuman is excluded from Badiou's thought even before he enacts the straightforward cut in *Logics of Worlds*, Giorgio Agamben's anthropological machine might serve as a useful tool for opening Badiou's reading of Beckett, stemming directly from the ontology of event.<sup>18</sup> For Agamben, this conceptual machine – which might take more or less sophisticated forms – sets the limits of human and nonhuman, life and death, by means of founding their definitions on contradiction.<sup>19</sup> Empty in itself, the anthropological machine is a biopolitical device producing human and nonhuman; it enforces “a kind of state of exception, a zone of indeterminacy in which the outside is nothing but the exclusion of an inside and the inside is in turn only the inclusion of an outside.”<sup>20</sup> If we return to the passage from Badiou, we can notice how the “indestructibility of functions” also enforces a state of exception, albeit a literary one. Human beings are defined by functions – with a special emphasis put on immobility – which deprives “dying” of its ultimate event of death; this process is thus turned into a prolonged agony or torture, whose liminality opens up infinite potency instead of the finite demise. Excluding death as a point in time allows us to associate it with the nonhuman which has also been not counted in the relation, especially for Beckett nonhumans are also based on the contradictory metaphors of movement.

Paul Stewart delineates the relation between animals and death in Beckett as follows: “[a]ccording to Arthur Schopenhauer, arguably Beckett's favourite philosopher, ‘[t]he animal learns to know death only when he dies.’ The hu-

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<sup>17</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics. An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London and New York: Verso, 2001), 71, 78–80, 86.

<sup>18</sup> This remark, along with the synthesised yet concise summary above it, follows Badiou's own declaration on the consistency of his works within the greater purpose of “desuturing” philosophy, as he calls it. For Badiou, for many years philosophy has been subjugated, or sutured, to one or more of its conditions – love, politics, science, or art – which, historically speaking, finds its most recent form in Heidegger's turn to the poem. Badiou's strategy of writing seems to mimic his reevaluation of philosophy and its conditions. Precisely, purely ontological and phenomenological studies, *Being and Event* or *Logics of Worlds*, are completed by lesser writings devoted to particular conditions; *On Beckett* contains essays belonging to this other canon. See: Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 61–67.

<sup>19</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Open. Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 37.

<sup>20</sup> Agamben, *The Open*, 37. Interesting enough, the event itself – as the suspension of the law encapsulated in the orders of counting – might also be read as “a kind of state of exception.”

man figure, however, ‘*consciously* draws every hour nearer his death’.<sup>21</sup> Even though what one encounters here is yet another anthropological machine, I believe that its division might – perhaps against itself – complete our theoretical considerations and be read in a more affirmative manner. It would then stage Beckett’s human protagonists as experiencing the linear and persistent agony without a definite horizon of its end, whereas animal death as something purely nonhuman, an affective charge resisting or disturbing signification, or a void. In a sense, insects and worms in Beckett’s universe tend to cling to the situation diagnosed by Badiou, yet realise it inversely: they are locked within the realm of death, struggling with living and life but never reaching one entirely.

### What Is the Worm?<sup>22</sup>

Worm has been regarded as one of the most mysterious entities in Beckett’s works. *The Unnamable*, whose realm Worm inhabits, articulates a neurotic and rapidly developing monologue of the narrator: a creature without an identity who calls into question everything “he”<sup>23</sup> states. Seemingly deprived of motives and goals, the narrator is driven solely by the desire to finish the story he tells and thus stop the logorrhoea he suffers from; as it turns out, it is not possible whatsoever. Moreover, this “realm between life and death,”<sup>24</sup> as Theodor W. Adorno calls the reality of the novel, cannot be governed by the logical terms. The monologue itself is cut and dispersed. One of the means contributing to this state is a gesture of dividing the narrator into his “vice-exister[s],”<sup>25</sup> as he himself calls them, that is, Mahood and Worm. As for the former, it is revealed in the

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Stewart, “Sterile Reproduction: Beckett’s Death of the Species and Fictional Regeneration,” in *Beckett and Death*, ed. Steven Barfield, Mathew Feldman, Philip Tew (London: Bloomsbury, 2009). Electronic edition, no pagination. Stewart juxtaposes quotes from Arthur Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation*. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>22</sup> I allude here to “what is the word” – Beckett’s most famous poem and his final work – in which he explores the imperfection of speech and language as tools for describing the outer reality; as Beckett shows, they result in inevitable distance instead. See: Samuel Beckett, “what is the word,” in *The Collected Poems of Samuel Beckett*, ed. Seán Lawlor and John Pilling (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 228–229.

<sup>23</sup> Just as in the case of Worm, while discussing the figure of the narrator in *The Unnamable* I am using the masculine pronoun “he,” despite the universality of this figure.

<sup>24</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Frankfurter Adorno Blätter III*, ed. Theodor W. Adorno Archive (Munich: edition text+kritik, 1994), 43. Quoted in: Shane Weller, “Adorno’s Notes on *The Unnamable*,” *Journal of Beckett Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2. (2010): 191.

<sup>25</sup> Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 309.



course of two contradictory stories the narrator tells about him that Mahood is a universal figure of humanity, alluding to the conditions Badiou delineates: at first, he is a legless man roaming the world, and then – an eerie entity held captive in a jar. Furthermore, his name connotes the noun *manhood* and can be divided into *my-hood*, which simultaneously refers to the particular “selfness” and to the act of *hooding* this identity. To an extent, Mahood designates the linguistic incapacity of expressing one’s identity: a human being encapsulated in the misleading and imperfect language.

Worm, on the contrary, connotes a “thing-in-itself,” as his being is immediately interrupted in the very moment language attempts to capture it. As the narrator points out, Worm is the “anti-Mahood.”<sup>26</sup> If Mahood is betrayed by the language since it is incapable of expressing his “I,” Worm is an element that cannot be comprehended in linguistic terms as he is before and beyond them. Let us immerse in a passage depicting his elusive nature:

Yes, now that I’ve forgotten who Worm is, where he is, what he’s like, I’ll begin to be he. Anything rather than these college quips. Quick, a place. With no way in, no way out, a safe place. Not like Eden. And Worm inside. Feeling nothing, knowing nothing, capable of nothing, wanting nothing. Until the instant he hears *the sounds that will never stop*. Then it’s the end. Worm no longer is. We know it, but we don’t say it, we say it’s the awakening, the beginning of Worm, for now we must speak, and speak of Worm. It’s no longer he, but let us proceed as if it were still he, he at last, who hears, and trembles, and is delivered over [...].<sup>27</sup>

While indeed the narrator refers to Worm as “he,” he does so in order to temporarily identify with the entity or to appropriate his position, and, consequently, to gain access to the void Worm dwells in. This is, however, the moment of a sound, or the articulation of its name, that wipes Worm away. What Worm is hearing will never stop, precisely because it will constitute his displaced being within the linguistic terms. In other words, the sound will turn Worm from “it” to “he,” or from Worm to the *word*. If we keep in mind this inevitability of death preceding and prevailing over any moment of coming into life, we might be struck by the fact that Worm is presented as “a pure ear”<sup>28</sup> – an ear which Jacques Derrida describes as “the most tendered and most open organ.”<sup>29</sup> Wary and waiting, Worm seems to be attuned to sudden and instant death that leaves one only with a possibility of pretending that he remains here nonetheless. It

<sup>26</sup> Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 341. Emphasis mine.

<sup>27</sup> Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 342.

<sup>28</sup> Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 347.

<sup>29</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Otobiographies. The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name,” trans. Avital Ronnel, in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Schocken, 1985), 33.



encapsulates, therefore, a strange figure of mobility. Worm is radically immobile, since any attempt at thinking (of) him in terms of movement and standstill would impose notions from the outside on it; simultaneously, however, Worm is constantly fleeing, occupying conceptual spaces different from those one is assigning to him at the precise moment.

In *The Unnamable*, Worm – that is never breaching into life – occupies the realm of permanent death. The narrator captures this nuance: “Mahood I couldn’t die. Worm will I ever get born?”<sup>30</sup> Worm embraces a radical liminality which, as it will be shown further on, will be shared by the selected cases of insects in Beckett’s works. Certainly, worms are not insects; still, the correspondence between them and Worm allows us to think them together. Importantly enough, Connor points to the etymology of an “insect” – *insectare*: something cut or split.<sup>31</sup> This brilliant remark reflects on Worm in a twofold way. First, it emphasises the previously described manner in which he exists on the limits of life and death, a name and an unthinkable image, mobility and immobility. Second, it signals his necessity to exist on another verge, separating Worm’s uninterrupted existence in the unreachable and absent space from the attempts to incorporate this strange entity within the tale of the narrator; even though this act legitimises Worm’s absence instead of making him present, at the same time it induces a change in the narrator, puncturing his otherwise impermeable linguistic limits. In *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti emphasises that death – in its resistance to being comprehended, sensed, or represented – is nonhuman *per se*; hollow, it nevertheless facilitates human becoming and transformation within the boundaries of life.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps, this is the reason why Beckett chooses Worm as an aporetic figure of death; in order to render that which is absolutely nonhuman, a nonhuman species is demanded.

## Dance of Bees, Music of Wasps

Connor’s turn towards etymology in his study on flies in Beckett is not the only philological act he commits; along with probing the word insect, he also plays on the association of *entomos* with *atomos*.<sup>33</sup> After all, insects mostly come in swarms. Most presumably aware of Karl von Frisch’s discoveries, Beckett includes a detailed analysis of waggle dance in *Molloy*. By the end of the novel,

<sup>30</sup> Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 345.

<sup>31</sup> Steven Connor, “Making Flies Mean Something,” in *Beckett, Modernism and the Material Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 55.

<sup>32</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press, 2013), 131.

<sup>33</sup> Connor, “Making Flies Mean Something,” 55.

Moran ponders upon the fate of his bees, reminding himself about the manner they danced in the past. Meticulously, he points at various nuances of this phenomenon: the distances between bees, the significance of their ascending and descending, the hum they produce, and the varying rhythms and figures. What, however, seems to fascinate Moran most is the fact that even though he is convinced that he has rightly read this phenomenon as a mode of sign communication, he is equally sure that he is incapable of understanding the intricacies of the waggle dance fully.<sup>34</sup> As he admits, “I was more than ever stupefied by the complexity of this innumerable dance, involving doubtless other determinants of which I had not the slightest idea. And I said, with rapture, Here is something I can study all my life, and never understand.”<sup>35</sup> For Moran, bees are the objects of contemplation, yet at the same time they, just as his memory of waggle dance, happen to be “the nearest thing to comfort.”<sup>36</sup> Eventually, this realisation is painfully contrasted with Moran’s discovery as he finally returns home; he finds his bees dead, grabs a handful of them, and carefully hides them in his pocket. Bees, which have “weighted nothing,”<sup>37</sup> have turned into “[a] little dust of annulets and wings.”<sup>38</sup>

After their demise, not only do bees “weight nothing,” but also they move towards nothing and reside in nothing. By the peculiar word choice, Beckett disallows us to simply think of their remains in terms of insect morphology.<sup>39</sup> Nor does the linear logic of passing seem to apply here. Instead, annulets employed as an image of a corpse suggest the link to the basic meaning of a different word, “annul,” whose etymology traces the movement *ad nullum* – to nothing. The aliveness of dancing bees has been preserved in the space of memory intact, where their vigorous movements serve primarily communicative purposes, realising an indecipherable code. The purposeful motion ascribed to them is therefore at odds with Beckett’s excessively mobile human characters, whose striding, roaming, rushing, or waiting merge the inevitability of escaping absurdist deadlocks with the inability of ceasing to do so. Indeed, bees move – they dance – but this motion is deprived of a presupposed destination or an intention to change place. Moreover, finding them coexists with the inability to recognise their state in the dark<sup>40</sup>; the final recognition, in turn, is decided solely based on their remnants after Moran has transported a handful of them outside of a hive. More importantly, they are hidden from the senses

<sup>34</sup> Beckett, *Molloy*, 162–163.

<sup>35</sup> Beckett, *Molloy*, 163.

<sup>36</sup> Beckett, *Molloy*, 163.

<sup>37</sup> Beckett, *Molloy*, 168.

<sup>38</sup> Beckett, *Molloy*, 169.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Henrik Steinmann, Lajos Zombori, ed., *Dictionary of Insect Morphology* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 13.

<sup>40</sup> Beckett, *Molloy*, 168.

while being recollected in darkness, and then they disintegrate into dust the very moment Moran interacts with them: after all, he imposes a new form of movement, transporting a handful of bees outside of the place they belong to.

Not only do the bees turn into nothing or move towards nothing, but they also *mean nothing*.<sup>41</sup> Similarly to Worm and any “insect life,” they may mark “an alien presence that we can neither assimilate nor expel,”<sup>42</sup> to put it in Steven Shapiro’s words. In fact, any attempt to frame them within coherent signifying practices and meaning production unfolds the resistance they stand for. In *The Unnamable*, the closing instalment of the *Trilogy* inaugurated with *Molloy*, the poetics of abstraction embodied in Worm stages Beckett’s radicalised stance on nonhumans in his works. More representation-oriented, *Molloy* seems to provide us with a comparable schema. As long as Moran has gained pleasure or has been lost in contemplation of waggle dance, the bees as the objects of his imagination and intention have remained vigorous, even if their intricacies breach through this vision. Then, Moran discovers his dead bees yet does not identify them; this is a situation which deteriorates even more after he decides to move and scrutinise them later. Consequently, when Moran interacts with the otherwise remote realms of humans and nonhumans, the bees cease to exist. Once again, the human prolonged dying is juxtaposed with the lacunae of pure death, inaccessible to human beings. To play on “annul” a bit longer, we might say that what happens here is not so much their demise as the annulment of their relation or communication pact with Moran. Still, the cut of this relation imposes significant differences in the order of death or dying and the split between human and nonhuman that Beckett emphasises.

Despite the fact that in *Molloy* waggle dance is interpreted as a mode of communication, and even in *The Unnamable* words “swarm and jostle like ants,”<sup>43</sup> Beckett also deploys collective insect metaphors that do not become figures of language or code. As will be shown below, just like the dead bees exist through the metonymy of wings in *Molloy*, the deadly potential of insects is conveyed by yet another metonymy – the noise their wings produce. Waggle dance thus finds its counterpart in insect music.<sup>44</sup> In *Not I* – a work equally concerned with “speaking oneself” as *The Unnamable* – it is buzzing which distracts the neurotic speech of Mouth. Moreover, this noise – audible solely to Mouth – is only “so called,” and is always recalled as if in a response to the unsaid remi-

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<sup>41</sup> I purposefully play here with the title of Connor’s article not to neglect the significance of insects, but rather to focus on their conceptualisations beyond linguistic meaning.

<sup>42</sup> Steven Shapiro, “Two Lessons from Burroughs,” in *Posthuman Bodies*, ed. Judith Halberstram and Ira Livingston (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 47. Quoted in: Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, 149.

<sup>43</sup> Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 348.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, 153–157.

niscence.<sup>45</sup> In *All that Fall*, similarly to *Not I*, buzzing recurs, implied by Mrs Rooney's association with wasps.<sup>46</sup> Finally, in *The Unnamable*, the narrator is haunted by an ineffable thought which reaches him as aggressively as "hornets smoked out of their nest."<sup>47</sup> In each of these cases, the motif of communication resurfaces, although differently to that introduced in *Molloy*. Here, it belongs entirely to human and anthropomorphised creatures, and is disturbed by the thoughts or events that cannot be put into words. Instead, these thoughts interrupt the flow, conjuring up thanatic, if not traumatic, content. Similarly to a swarm that multiplies and spreads beyond control, these thoughts resist linguistic domestication, leaving only the animal trace of insect metonymy – the ominous buzzing. Insects once again cover remoteness and distance; even though they do not die, they transfer a deadly element to otherwise coherent anthropomorphised protagonists and disturb the flow of words or thoughts. Unlike insects to human beings (if we consider Mouth as such, too), the latter are continuously reachable to the former. Hence, insects tamper with their consciousness and tales, mind and cognition, opening them to the sudden bursts of alien excess. This excess, finally, stems from the purely nonhuman place of pure death which is contrasted with the human prolonged dying.

In *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway refers to Karen Barad's intra-action to emphasise the originary ground for the companionship between species. Since it is hard to speak of such a partnership in the cases this paper analyses, I would like to turn to Barad's different category – that of diffraction. Not only a feminist scholar but also a physicist, Barad notes that with regard to quantum mechanics diffraction is not solely a process of superimposing waves, be it a sound or a ray of light. Instead, this phenomenon is an intrinsic capacity of any single particle, and a crucial boundary-making process.<sup>48</sup> As I believe, the effable moments which Worm, hornets, or buzzing cover are included in Beckett's works to resonate with the narrative that attempts to appropriate them on its terms; after all, the sonic also forms a wave. The play they enter together posits and transgresses limits, as the language begins to twist and collapse in order to grasp the foreign intruders even though it finally reduces "worms" to "words." However, these entities, although deprived of their existence and replaced with empty referents, have already inscribed their deadly potential on

<sup>45</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Not I*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), *passim*.

<sup>46</sup> Beckett, *All that Fall*, 177.

<sup>47</sup> Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 344.

<sup>48</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 165. Diffraction is a key concept of Barad's theory, developed at length in: Karen Barad, *Meeting Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007). For a more concise reading of diffraction in Barad, see: Karen Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart," *parallax*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2014): 168–187.

the Beckettian realms; these, depending mostly on monologues and tales, have to face hesitation and distraction, interrupting the flow of words and, thus, the looped construction of Beckett's literary worlds. In a sense, the insect and vermin tropes are included as the counterpart of the ceaseless torment of Beckett's protagonists; as the *loci* of death unthinkable from the perspective of the author's all-embracing narratives, insects and worms paradoxically guarantee that the dying of human beings will not be completed by the event of death and puncture particular places within the narrative, so that it has to continuously revise itself. Unlike humans, who are on the verge of death, these tropes are figures of death *per se*, yet regularly breaching the wall of life.

## Insect Technologies

In the previous readings, the trope of metonymy happened to be a central figure; in fact, buzzing might construct yet another one, emphasising its own congruence to technology and media as presented in Beckett's works. While the connection between media and insects is perhaps not new, the intensity of the bond between the two has not lost a bit of its promise: the promise anchored in the fact that both technological media and insects are deeply nonhuman.<sup>49</sup> The very same bond corresponds to two works of Beckett in a diachronic way. Aside from *Not I* finished in the early 1970s, *Molloy* and *The Unnamable* were written in French and English in the 1950s, whereas *All that Fall* was broadcast for the very first time in 1957. In the following two years, Beckett published two more works interesting from our perspective: *Krapp's Last Tape* in 1958 and *Embers* in 1959. Such a configuration encourages one to think that Beckett, having exhaustively exercised the linear narrative of a novel, has turned to the medium which – in spite of similar linearity of transmission – is also affected by the events of recording, replaying, preserving, and even sampling its content. These last two pieces are devoted nearly entirely to the dispersion of the human

<sup>49</sup> Jussi Parikka, *Insect Media. An Archaeology of Animals and Technology* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 119. It is worth noting that Parikka also discusses waggle dance from his new materialist perspective. In his reading of Frisch's discovery, he follows the steps of Gilbert Simondon with whom "we are able to understand the intensive individuation that always takes place in the shifting boundaries of an entity and its milieu" (Parikka, *Insect Media*, 141). Waggle dance is presented through the intense relationship with its milieu in which "[p]erception and communication [are] seen as individuation [and] are not separate modes of being in the world but processes constituting living beings as afforded by their milieus" (Parikka, *Insect Media*, 143). While not explored in detail in this article, Parikka's remarks indebted to Simondon might provide new interpretative paths for the role of insects in Beckett's works, which are worth undertaking. See: Parikka, *Insect Media*, 140–144.

protagonists as presented via the dislocating and dividing practices made possible by the recording devices of radio media. Furthermore, the same two works stage the equally ominous noise as the buzzing mentioned earlier. In *Krapp's Last Tape* the damage done by the neurotic splits and recollections of Krapp's identities is not followed by the sufficient *catharsis*; instead, the stage is filled with the buzzing sound of the reels "running on in silence."<sup>50</sup> In *Embers*, Henry legitimises the noisy radio soundscape in the background as the sea, admitting to himself that this proclamation depends solely on his word and the lack of vision of the audience.<sup>51</sup> Still, this "white world, not a sound"<sup>52</sup> is clearly distinguished from the remaining internal reality of Henry presented in *Embers*; it signifies an excessive residue disturbing the coherence of the subjective plane and the audial reality of the radio play.<sup>53</sup>

Although the congruence of noises is striking in the diachronic perspective, this juxtaposition is more intricate and deserves further attention. In *The Unnamable*, Worm serves as a "pure ear" attuned to the noise which "never stops," connoting both its temporary recognition and death. In *Molloy*, bees are chosen in order to render both their fragility and the intricacies of their communicative skills; this choice, however, implies also a certain affection to their hard work and persistence. The buzzing reverberating in *Not I*, *All that Falls*, and *The Unnamable* covers, also by means of "hornets" and "wasps," sudden disturbance haunting the ones exposed to it. All of these seem to contribute to Beckett's understanding of radio media. First, these media have been intended to be used for communication purposes yet reveal their potential outside of it. Second, they function as the "pure ears" (because of their capacity to record), and after that the "noise" destroys them completely (filling the emptiness of the reel and privileging the record itself). Third, they emit continuous noise either interrupting the silence of the empty reel or accompanying the other events as the inevitable, although not intended, background. Finally – which *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Embers* prove the most – nonhumanity inherent to media disturbs human beings they affect, dispersing their otherwise coherent identities.

In this article, I endeavoured to explore the vermin and insect tropes in Samuel Beckett's selected works. In *The Unnamable* and *Not I*, these figures happen to be intrinsically linked with the narrating human beings and to mark the places and events which evade linguistic precision. Similarly to human beings in Badiou's reading, they are often stripped of their actual animality so

<sup>50</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 223.

<sup>51</sup> Beckett, *Embers*, 253.

<sup>52</sup> Beckett, *Embers*, *passim*.

<sup>53</sup> I touch upon this notion in relation to the figure of the father in *Embers* elsewhere. See: Michał Kisiel, "'White World, Not a Sound'. Paternal Spaces in Samuel Beckett's *Embers*," *Romanica Silesiana*, no. 12, *Le père / The Father* (2017): 64–74.

that particular functions of their being or existence are emphasised; however, unlike human beings, they reside in the realm of death, never reaching life, subtly struggling at its surface instead. Although condemning them to this death without dying ascribed exclusively to human beings, Beckett contributes immensely to the relation between human and nonhuman, even if the latter is envisioned only provisionally. In order to understand this tension, what is demanded are not only nonhumans, but also that which is entirely beyond human, or nonhuman *per se*: death and technology. Only then, according to Beckett's entomopoetics read by means of Badiou and Braidotti, might there occur beneficial transformations and openings, even if to some extent asymmetrical; after all, Mahood never dies, and Worm never gets born.

### Abstrakt

#### Aristajos i Tanatos Owadzia poetyka Samuela Becketta

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest próba nakreślenia sposobów, za pomocą których Samuel Beckett wiąże śmierć z figurami owadów, stanowiącymi jeden z najbardziej dopracowanych i konsekwentnych tropów zwierzęcych w jego literackim uniwersum. Jak się okazuje, w przeładowanych antropocentryzmem dziełach irlandzkiego pisarza zwierzęta zaskakują czytelnika tym, jak wiele z ich gatunków oraz okazów zamieszkuje jałowe i martwe przestrzenie Becketta. Owady nie stanowią w tej kwestii wyjątku: w światach Becketta spotykamy muchy, pszczoły, szerszenie, osy czy mrówki. Wychodząc od antropocentrycznego odczytania dzieł autora *Końcówki* przez Alaina Badiou, autor przesiewa tę interpretację przez maszynę antropologiczną Giorgio Agambena oraz posthumanistyczne rozważania Rosi Braidotti. W odróżnieniu od figur ludzkich, które skazane są na niekończącą się agonię pozbawioną wieńczącego ją wydarzenia, owady zostają odczytane jako byty przynależące w pełni do śmierci, sporadycznie przebijające się poprzez jej mur do świata żywych. Podążając za tym rozpoznaniem, autor stara się ukazać powyższą tezę na kilku różnych planach. W artykule zostaje zinterpretowana rola Worma (dosłownie: Robaka) w *Nienazywalnym*, a także jego niejasny status ontologiczny. W *Molloyu* zanalizowana zostaje relacja Morana do jego pszczoł: obserwacja ich tańca oraz odkrycie ich śmierci oraz zwłok. W końcu, w dalszych częściach artykułu odczytana zostaje fascynująca Becketta logika roju, a także metonimiczne związki owadów z technologią, których tanatyczne aspekty ujawniają intrygujące związki ludzi i nieludzi w dziełach autora *Końcówki*.

#### Słowa kluczowe:

Samuel Beckett, owady, śmierć, maszyna antropologiczna, abstrakcja

### Абстракт

#### Аристей и Танатос Энтомопоэтика Сэмюэла Беккета

В данной статье предпринята попытка представить, каким образом Сэмюэл Беккет связывает смерть с насекомыми, составляющими одну из самых изысканных и повторяющихся образов живых существ в его произведении. Удивительно, но безлюдные и мрачные пространства книг Беккета – несмотря на присущую им антропоцентрическую структуру, на которой они основаны, – населены множеством существ, не являющихся людьми. Насекомые не являются исключением: в мирах Беккета мы встречаем мух, пчел, шершней,



ос и муравьев. В своих размышлениях автор статьи ссылается на теорию антропоцентризма, философию Алена Бадью, антропологические теории Джорджо Агамбена и Розы Брайдотти, включая идею Агамбена об «антропологической машине». В отличие от людей, которые обречены на бесконечную агонию, насекомые принадлежат царству смерти. Другими словами, они изо всех сил пытаются прорваться сквозь стену жизни. Чтобы доказать свою мысль, автор статьи обсуждает, например, непонятный онтологический статус Уорма (буквально: Червя) в романе *Безымянный*. В свою очередь, на примере произведения Моллой, он анализирует отношение *Морана* к его пчелам, то есть к их танцу, смерти и обнаружению их мертвых тел. В дальнейшей части статьи автор обращает внимание на захватывающую Беккета логику роя, а также метонимические связи насекомых с технологией, чьи танатические аспекты раскрывают интригующие взаимоотношения людей и не-людей в работах автора *Конца игры*.

**Ключевые слова:**

Сэмюэл Беккет, насекомые, смерть, антропологическая машина, абстракция