Murphy and the Pursuit of Form

Murphy contradicts Neary's established narrative of romance through his relationship with Celia. Immediately, the default attitude towards love is established within a conversation between Neary and Murphy. "Love required," according to Neary, "is a short circuit" (Beckett 5). Neary, serving as a mentor figure to Murphy, poses the idea that sustainable love can only come through a constant state of craving, which he claims "is foreign to [Murphy]" (Beckett 5). In the context of Murphy's engagement to Miss Counihan, Neary implies that Murphy should follow through with the engagement even though Murphy does not love her. Celia, Murphy's other and *genuine* love interest, is a "striking case of love requited" (Beckett 12). Despite their mutual love for each other, however, Murphy and Celia's relationship, had been marred by material and ideological incompatibility. For one, Celia "spent every penny she earned and Murphy earned no pennies" (Beckett 14). She worked as a prostitute, to Murphy's dismay, while Murphy had no desire to pursue a career until he relented into Celia's pressure. Yet, Celia's desire for Murphy to work is often met with hostility. When asked "Can you work now after that?" Murphy responds with a tirade regarding the nature of Celia's love, claiming that she does not love him for him (Beckett 24). He asks her, 'Then why are you all out to change me? So that you won't have to love me" (Beckett 25). Contradicting Neary's initial hypothesis that Murphy is "foreign" to "love that lifts ups its eyes, being in torments," Murphy demonstrates through his love with Celia that the nature of his love is grounded in turbulence (Beckett 5). Through negating the accepted theory of love provided by his mentor, Murphy utilizes a different philosophical system to understand the nature of love.

Although Murphy genuinely loves Celia, he limits himself from pursuing his love under a self-imposed penitence for breaking off his marriage to Miss Counihan. By nature, Murphy's love for Celia acts as a direct breakage of his engagement with Miss Counihan. He flees from

Ireland to escape Miss Counihan because she believes “him to be hard at work earning enormous sums of money which he will spend on her” (Hesla 31). Similar to Murphy and Miss Counihan, Kierkegaard also broke off his engagement to Regine Olsen through escaping to another city. His guilt of being “scoundrel and a seducer” lead him “live life” in the pursuit of redeeming himself through penance. Despite his infidelity, Kierkegaard sought to minimize Olsen’s suffering by channeling her insecurities towards himself, or “the direction he wanted, the only one he saw as leading to the right goal for Regine: the direction of hate against himself” (Lukács 53). To fully repent, “[Kierkegaard] needed [Olsen’s] marriage so that nothing uncertain, nothing vague should remain about the relationship, no further possibility, only this one thing: the seducer and the jilted girl” (Lukács 47). Because Murphy never had the chance to reacquaint with Miss Counihan, he never actualizes his opportunity to forgive himself for his unfaithfulness because he never discovers that Miss Counihan had also taken on more lovers. Without the exposure to updated information, Murphy continues to view himself as the seducer and Miss Counihan as the jilted girl, although with a different definition of seduction. Murphy’s indifferent attitude towards life elevates him to the role of “the Platonic idea of the seducer, who is so deeply a seducer and nothing else that he is not even that...the absolute stranger who appears to every woman as the eternal stranger.” Because both Murphy and Miss Counihan have not exchanged words to reconcile their respective infidelities, they exist in a state of uncertainty, similar to how Olsen “returned [Kierkegaard's] letter unopened, making a gesture of certainty to make sure that everything should remain uncertain forevermore” (Lukács 55). Without reconciling his decision with Miss Counihan, Murphy exists in a state of limbo where he limits himself from realizing his love for Celia, as long as he continues to feel guilty.

The conflict between Murphy and Celia manifests through a series of conflicts regarding employment, but their arguments only serve as an extension to a conflict between body and mind. Murphy aspires to exist in a state of "will-lessness," but "what prevents him from doing so is his perverse and irrational bondage to Celia, who "is determined not to be the breadwinner in their family" and "forces Murphy to seek employment in the 'mercantile gehenna'" (Hesla 34). Described in the context of her physical traits—"Age. Unimportant… Head. Small and Round… Eyes. Green…"—Celia represents the body (Beckett 9). As a subscriber to Descartes' dualism, Murphy sought to achieve balance in his mind and body, "for it was not until his body was appeased could he come alive in his mind" (Helsa 32). With Celia in his life, however, Murphy must make a choice between his mind and body: "One of these will go, or two, or all. If [Celia], then [Celia] only, if [Murphy's] body, then [Celia] also; if [Murphy's] mind, then all." By coalescing Celia with his body in the choice, Murphy emphasis Celia's influence as another bodily influence within the balance of his body. Because of the influence of Celia in life, he cannot personally mediate the influence of his mind and body, leading his existence to be "a Cartesian catastrophe" (Hesla 36). Murphy attributes his distaste for working to his identity, claiming that it is "[Murphy] as [he is]" (Beckett 25). Although the influence of dualism as an overarching life philosophy can be examined through Murphy's conversations, realistically, he "is a practical man trying to live in world that makes very little sense, given him and given the world" (Hesla 39). Without the means to transcend the schism between the needs of his mind and the needs of his body, Murphy's conflict with Celia exists definitionally within their relationship: Murphy as a figure split into a balance between the mind and body and Celia as the manifestation of the body.

Suffering from a schism between the desires of his mind and body, Murphy seeks the feeling of longing as a means to address his existential loneliness. Despite his feelings of disassociation, Murphy distances himself from Celia by accenting the fundamental discrepancies between their values. Murphy externally manifests his frustration towards Celia by asserting that she wants to change him "so that [Celia] won't be condemned to love [Murphy], so that [Celia will] be reprieved from loving [Murphy]. The nature of his frustration, however, cannot be taken at face value from his dialogue. Through the perspective of other characters throughout the novel, it is revealed that "[Murphy] is far too gone to realize that the price of absolute freedom is absolute isolation." The introduction of other perspectives indicate that Murphy's actions do not necessarily represent his soul. Like "the man of George's songs," Murphy represents "the two human beings that cannot become one," one of the manifestations of the desires of his soul and the other of the desire of his soul itself (Lukács 107). Through Celia's influence, Murphy pushes himself to become "a new man," claiming that "[Celia] has the whip" (Beckett 84). The indifference that he defined as a cornerstone of his personality had been rewritten for the sake of appeasing Celia. Although he claims that Celia has control over his life, his actions to work at a psychiatric hospital represent the external manifestation of an internal change; "...whatever happens within souls is projected into human actions, movements, and gestures, and thus made visible and palpable to the senses" (Lukács 19). Because Murphy cannot directly observe changes to his thought patterns, objective changes to the desire of his soul can only be observed through changes in his actions. Through experiencing love, Murphy "empties [himself] of the spirit of estrangement and fills [himself] with the spirit of kinship" (Lukács 112). Murphy follows that Romantic idea that "only in men is longing often completely dominated by love."

By creating feelings of longing as the result of his frustration towards the divide between his mind and body, Murphy plunges his soul in change through the conduit of love.

Despite Murphy's aversion towards making decisions, he redeems his anxiety through a beautiful death. "No action can be performed without renouncing something, and he who performs an action can never possess universality;" in other words, every action has an opportunity cost. The act of pursuing one option leaves another option unpursued, putting weight on the act of choice. For example, the opportunity cost of Murphy's choice to work at a psychiatric hospital in the name of love is his decision to continue abiding by his identity as someone who does *not* work. Similar to Murphy, "Kierkegaard once said that reality has nothing to do with possibilities, yet he built his whole life upon a gesture" (Lukács 44). Each additional choice leads to greater aggregate opportunity cost, which Murphy reconciles through his inability to make choices. But the concept of death does not entail a choice to live. According to Novalis, "the program of his life could take only one form… to fit his life harmoniously…in between these deaths" (Lukács 69). Regarding answers to how to live, the romantics "wanted to conquer sufficed for no more than a beautiful death. Their life-philosophy was one of death; their art of living, an art of dying. They strove to embrace the world, and this made them into slaves of fate" (Lukács 71-72). To romantics, "fate and soul are but two different names for a single concept" (Lukács 69). Although Murphy has experienced much internal conflict through his divide between the desires of his mind and body, the Romantics believe that Murphy's redemption comes in the form of death. Through his influence on his lovers and acquaintances as well as his patients at the psychiatric hospital, Murphy elevates himself to a god-like figure with the universe he occupies after his death. Through his death, the same issues surrounding the conflict

between his body and mind no longer bother him, and he returns to the same state of ecstasy in his rocking chair.

Murphy achieves form through death. Because "a tragedy in the true, deep sense of the word can only exist where the opposing elements in an irreconcilable struggle have sprung from the same soil and are akin to one another in their innermost essence," Murphy's conflict between his body and mind destined him to be the protagonist in a tragedy (Lukács 77). As the Platonic seducer, Murphy's death "may be tragic, but [Murphy] may not even become a hero of the tragedy." (Lukács 37). His death, like the struggles through his life, is examined in the lens of his acquaintances. Through continuing the story through the perspectives of other characters, Beckett creates a universe that continues to exist even in the absence of Murphy. In this sense, "dramatic tragedy is the form of the high points of existence, its ultimate goals and ultimate limits" or "the becoming-real of the concrete, essential nature of man" (Lukács 183, 185). Although the indifference that defines Murphy's nature seems unconducive in a profound death, Murphy continues to exist through the thoughts of others despite his material death; his form "is the highest form of judge" (Lukács 196). It seems that "that is why, of all possible lives, the poet's life is the most profoundly unpoetic, the most profoundly lacking in profile and gesture" (Lukács 56). Although "the dying heroes of tragedy...are dead a long time before they actually die," Murphy occupies a unique place where his existence becomes livelier *after* he dies (Lukács 163). Without completing his task of reconciling his infidelity with Miss Counihan or pursuing to completion his love for Celia, Murphy dies at a unique point in the development of a story where the protagonist does not resolve the fundamental conflicts of the plot. Because of his premature death, Murphy never experiences "the only real disappointment there is: the disappointment of complete fulfillment." The conflict between his mind and body that had

permeated his thoughts and actions no longer bothered him; because of his death, "[Murphy] would be free," which had been the same phrase used to describe Murphy climaxing in his rocking chair (Beckett 151). Summarized in sentiment regarding Kierkegaard's death, Murphy's death "acquired a thousand meanings, becomes accidental and not really the work of destiny. And then the purest and most unambiguous gesture of his life—vain effort!—was not a gesture at all" (Lukács 58). Through an examination of the nature of love and tragedy, the relationships and events within Murphy's life exist as the representation of a series of philosophical systems towards the pursuit of form.

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