



## A Marxist Analysis of Beckett's Resistive Strategies to Culture Industry in *The Unnamable*

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### ABSTRACT:

Informed by the theoretical assumptions of the Marxist paradigm, this study critically responds to Samuel Beckett's novel *The Unnamable*. This Marxist strain concerns the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, and their discourse on the Culture Industry which implies that the Culture Industry manipulates its consumers and commodifies, and reifies art forms, and presents them to the reading public which consume them mindlessly. This paper contends that form of a literary work is the site of ideological contentions. *The Unnamable*, on account of its atonal and esoteric narrative, not aimed at providing aesthetic pleasure, resists the commodification of culture. Its questioning thrust and the diagnostic modes engage the reader intellectually.

**Key Words:** *The Unnamable*; Culture Industry; Marxist Paradigm; Commodification

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## 1. Introduction

Art composed in the traditions of materialist ideology and the theorizing of the Marxist thinkers and institutions like the members of the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer stress the need of complexity of artistic form. Samuel Beckett's novel *The Unnamable* comes forward to be the example of such type of art. Its complex form works as a medium of resistance against and critique on presented in the said novel. This is high art narrative is foregrounded due to its atonal tone and unkeyed language. It is suggested by the Frankfurt school and Adorno that literature at the level of form should not be uncomplex because it is not meant for the public consumption, unlike the realist novels. They believe that if its form is not hurting, it is not „working“. They value „genuine thinking“ and believe that the popular art is bad because of its superficiality, and the difficult art is good because of its depth. *The Unnamable* falls into the category of prose which was written by Beckett before he started his career as a dramatist. It is not written in any historical context, but an anonymous figure continuously narrates a monologue without focusing on any specific word, meaning, sentence, condition, and situation.

Both the above-mentioned theorists gave the idea of Culture Industry in their critical work, *Enlightenment as Mass Deception* (2002) that refers to commodification of culture as a fast means of capitalist society to overcome the world economy. Here all forms of popular culture including literary texts, movies, radio, music, and TV production etc. are designed to satisfy the growing needs of the consumers for entertainment. Products of the culture industry take the appearance of artwork, but they are subject to the interest of money and power.

Beckett's works are intertwined with absurdism that is born from existentialism in between 1950-1960s which contains the germs of regression of being born. He presents devolution of mythical knowledge of religion that generates a sort of false clarity. Man is impotent in face of everything, and acceptance of this impotency makes his existence absurd. However, Sisyphus' labor is the key example of such existence. Absurdism is the key point of man's massive depression, meaninglessness, expressionless, speechless exhaustion, and senseless violence of time.

*The Unnamable* resists the impacts of the culture industry because of its atonal form, unkeyed language, and absurd thematic values. Like Prometheus, its narrator cannot evade the life imposed on him. He experiences absolute powerlessness and none-execution. His misunderstandings become obvious, and in the whole commentary he quarrels with himself by asking infinitely echoing questions of both repeated and unsaid. He is bound to identify between the good and the real, but he chooses third direction by eliminating all thoughts. He seems the first creator who names the nameless things and people but he himself remains unnamed and supposed to be identical. Generations come and pass but he is like Atlas sticks to one point – holding the whole sky in its position. He neither surprises, nor becomes happy or sad even. He is an embodiment of dumbness and failure of heterosexuality. His world seems women free world





where there is no place for the second sex. It is a journey from the colorful world to the color-blind world.

Limits of existence and language are the same thing, but the narrator wishes timelessness and speechlessness. Language and the world determine each other's limits and to destroy one is equal to destroy the other. Even to justify his existence, he varies from pronoun to pronoun, and eventually amounts to total nothingness. The self always relates to names and subjects. After getting fail in self-search, he longs for silence, depicts the death of language. He believes that if he achieves silence, he can define himself also. So, the atonal language is a kind of last confession. It suggests the deformity of man's existence through language. Hence, he needs another beginning of such world where no language exists to communicate with others but silence.

Roland Barthes (1970) introduces the difference between and worth of high and low art in his book *S/Z*. He expresses that in analyzing or studying any piece of high art, the reader plays an active role while the pieces of low art make the reader passive who just perceive the story from A to Z from the writer's perspective. The difference between high and low art raises the questions about authoritarian personality. The very same issue is discussed in this paper from the point of Adorno and Horkheimer's theory of the culture industry by analyzing Beckett's *The Unnamable*.

The omnipotence virtue of low art is rapidly marginalized in high art. A piece of art cannot be judged by the value of its high consumption because low art is easy to digest, therefore it gets easy success. So, all types of rubbish fall into the category of art. It alienates the consumer from his surrounding and reifies a world around him. This system paralyzes his senses so that he begins to see the world with its glasses. It presents a utopian augmented reality in which demonic values crush the consumer's skull. An unseen mechanism is generated in society. And man is expected to accept a ready-made truth for his private and public narratives.

## 2. Literature Review

To Adorno and Horkheimer, people are the cultural pawns. They get relief through film, radio, broadcast, magazine, and popular novel that create a uniformed system of typical characters. Every component of mass culture follows the same formula in every context. This quality of ever-sameness does not apply to the surface content of popular culture, which is constantly changing, but to its form that holds everything in place. They emphasize in *Enlightenment as Mass-Deception* "In making any society, all the statistic activities are politically manipulated by the culture industry, those rock on the same flow of the system. A uniformed system demolishes or suppresses genuine geniuses by easy to digestive cultural products those fill the houses. These crystalize houses are designed for individuals who're going to fit in these hygienic boxes. This flimsy structure of the culture industry looks like empty food-canes" (Max Horkheimer & Theodor Adorno, 2002, p. 11-16).





The products of the culture industry hide their pseudo-style, and make consumers believe that they are experiencing something unique. A man labors for capitalism, and then the very same labor becomes a consumer to the products of the culture industry. Bored by endless repetition, exhaustion of labor prevents his power of concentration. So, when he requires a break from the patterns of thought, and accustomed work, he achieves leisurely break with the so-called blessing of culture industry. Through this process, the system controls the mind and body of consumers. Man's submission to machine technology does not let his memory stray too far from the cage of pre-decided ideology (Max Horkheimer & Theodor Adorno, 2002).

Pieces of low art highly appeal to consumers, where comparisons are easily done. Sense of perfection is highlighted because it begins with a problem and ends with a solution. The content seems like a ripe fruit hanging on the bough but, life is not as it is presented in such stories. Ignorance is the greatest commodity that is selling highly through the low art of the culture industry. This system generates the false needs. These needs work as a means of social control. It makes people passively aspire to the false fulfillment of 'elitist tastes'. They seem like the plastic bags stuffed with rubbish. They do not allow filling the space of the story and making them totally depend on the writer.

Hence, Samuel Beckett's explanation of failure also does not support any kind of heroism. He often highlights the impotency of modern man through his works, whose bodily functions are reduced to the minimum. His defecation, lovemaking, pregnancy, birth, growth, and death continuously are referred to as shit. The mouth, the anus and the genital organs' zones have equal importance and frequently replaced with each other (Dermot Moran, 2006). In *The Unnamable*, a bodiless narrator lives in a jar and ceaselessly changes his name and others' names as well. This mingling of names suggests the idea that all the people in the world are living same kind of life, bearing same situations, having same kind of physical infirmities with the diversion of names. Molloy feels pain in his knee and sits in the bottom of a ditch. Moran also abruptly falls in a state of symbiotic mutation that makes him retreat from the external world. They both obey orders, visited by a thirsty visitor on Sunday who controls their work. Molloy is taken by a lady in replacement of her late pet dog that is accidentally killed by him while riding a bike. Hence, in case of name and its specification, the person is clearly altered with an animal.

Malone resembles Molloy, both are old writers and creators of many fictitious characters but gradually change their names without giving much reason; Sapo is altered by Macmann and this change makes him livelier even in an insane asylum. Hence, sudden change in name disrupts the casual link between the name and its bearer. Moran loses everything that once confirmed his identity and reminds his past in search of Molloy, i.e., his clothes, his physical agility, his son, and his huge bunch of keys. The scope of his memory is accordingly reduced in a drastic manner. Later, the narrator tries hard to name the Unnamable. He cannot proceed without naming himself and others. Murphy, Watt, Moran, Molloy, Malone, Macmann, Mercier, Sapo, Mahood, Worm, and characters of M and W have firm resemblance in their clothes, preoccupation with writing, personalities, and so on. It seems that mind works like a theater in





which numberless perceptions appear, pass and repass in different postures and situations, said David Hume in *The Treatise* (Maimaitiming Aila, 2009)

### 3. Research Questions

This study aims at providing the answer to the given questions:

- i. How does the rampant commodification and reification of the literary artifact marginalize the consumer's mind?
- ii. How does Beckett resist the culture industry in *The Unnamable* at the level of form?
- iii. Why should writerly literature, need to be promoted in face of the Culture Industry?

### 4. Research Methodology

This article focuses on the impacts of the culture industry – the idea presented by Marxist Theorist Adorno and Horkheimer. Moreover, uses the concept of resistive strategies of culture industry as a yardstick in further procedure. This paper tries to justify the resistive strategies from such homogenous culture that has taken away the identity, thinking, analyzing, and interpreting skills of the consumers. For Adorno and Horkheimer, only the shield of high art can resist such type of omnipresent industry that has made the consumers robotic figures. High art continuously challenges to mind stability, man's power of rebellion, and his questioning desire which is muted by the products of the culture industry. The nature of this research is qualitative as for as descriptive. „*The Unnamable*’ is the text which is taken as a sample to explain the resistance of the culture industry.

### 5. Data Analysis

*The Unnamable* is the third part of the Beckettian trilogy: *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* in which the speaker finds himself unnamed and unidentified, so he is not named, is unnamed and renamed himself as unnamed. His voice diffuses and rules over the whole novel apart from his immovability. He „talks about things that don't exist – or exist perhaps“. He feels that he is manipulated by some other authority. He gradually confesses about his pathetic situation: I can't be silent .... I shall never be silent. Never“.

The Unnamable is a dwarf because from the place in which he is stuck, he can just see things and figures“ profile only. Multiplicity and singleness of gods are mocked and denounced by him with words and impressions. He lives in the dark chaos. He makes multiple theories of assumptions through rough ideas, but about what, he even himself does not know. Missing of speaker's history makes him the residential of a Neverland-limbo of which he has no desire to escape. He thinks „he is simply resting – and he soon finds himself powerless ever to do anything again“.

He is partly devoid of fleshy existence, as he is described, ‘his eyes are open and unceasingly tears pour from them, he is seated with his hands on knees but his spines isn't supported“. At once he rejected these ideas by saying, „his legs are raised and bent with close





eyes, stiff neck, his head is like the ball of the cup. He is not even sure about his clothing, his beard and sex also; he uncertainly gives himself the shape of an egg". He chatters like a parrot repeatedly that leads into doubt and darkness, no past moment comes back but their fragmented recorded memory. He is in an ovary where he gets shape from an egg to human being; a child"s fragile body does not support him in doing anything but to weep.

For him the divine people are the transformed monsters. They are all equal. They have neither meaningful dogma for the world of fools where Adam and Eve, Sisyphus, Prometheus, Heracles, Daedalus, Icarus, Gorgon Medusa, Orpheus, Socrates, Oedipus, Odysseus, Galileo, Christ and many others are punished nonsensically. Beckett says, „Malone"s beard fills the Unnamable with pity, it hangs down on either side of his chin, in two twists of unequal length, he too is fix on a selfsame spot with his hands on his keens, and unblinking eyes" are also somewhat religious references. He notices Malone"s fixation on a self-same spot. Identically he too is fixed and cannot move; it shows each man"s circle of life and everyone observes others by sticking to his own point of view.

The speaker finds himself stuck pointlessly in a limbo. But this is not the Limbo of Dante"s *Inferno*, where we observe only fire and torture. It is a limbo of ice where no bloodshed is seen but everyone is dying in his own self. There are neither seven hells nor rings of fire but only one dark space in which they are tormented. He states about this unnamed world: „Our beginnings coincide: that this place was made for me, and I for it, at the same instant". The same idea is applicable for the rest of creation and the creator. All remain in their own domain/orbit. Man is created to wander in this universe, the god rules in heaven, and Lucifer in hell. Their domains are coincidentally selected at the same instant. He regards life as first and death as a final absurdity done by God. He curses the universal consciousness which satisfies only those who effectively revolt against the divine stupidity and neglects the ghastly idea of a perfect afterlife.

He narrates the irrational and nonsense tales of iconic personalities with the illusions of apparently different characters, who bestowed humanity with complex patterns of endless lies, „all lies from beginning to end". For him, divinity is absurd, sinister: "whistles a merry tune but invented hard knocks for hi". The divine powers hanker after visible existence that consists of flesh and blood because the spiritual existence is equal to non-existence. They are many faced gods with no real identity. Hence, the Unnamable is also the inhabitant of the outskirts of non-existent town. He says, „I invented him (divine power), and many others (in the hope it would console me), and places where they passed and stayed, memories, love, music, the smell of flowers, and organs".

Man is ready to die for 'the innate knowledge of which credibility, he isn"t sure about". He is capable of production unlike divinity because neither god nor Lucifer is able to produce his race. They both are the real victim of nothingness, so in their desperation they want to make man unhappy. "They are not able to be born, live, and die – unable to go forward or back". God"s absence in the vast universe creates a dark abyss. Man"s meditation, consciousness, and deep emotion get futile in search of Him. Man is a difficult opponent in his exile, yet he is expelled





from the mythical Garden of Eden, and „god isn“t the fomenter of calm“. Man denominated Him, in his general fidelity.

The whole novel is knit under the paradigms of timeless myths. His whole life seems an incident that occurred millions of years ago. For the unnamable, „nothing really changes since he has been here... even he mocks at this change by putting hand on his heart.... Notice... nothing to his knowledge“. He denies everything from the beginning till the end that ever had happened. Each part of body is operated on by a habit whether it likes it or not; it has to do the very same habit like legs are to walk, hands are to work, mouth is to taste and talk, arsehole is to shit, genitals for sex, eyes are to watch, ears are to hear, heart is to beat and mind is to think: „nothing has changed since man“s creation – when did all this nonsense stop?’. So where is that damned progress of which man talks about? Man is just fixed in his orb but enchanted by the deception of evolution.

He is the foil of Winnie in *Happy Days*, both stuck in a similar place. But the Unnamable is in worse condition than her; because at least she sees the movement of time that consisted of days and nights. She finds some objects with which she keeps herself busy. Unnamable“s situation is really gloomy because he just „uses the expression of days“ and has nothing to keep himself indulge in. The sphere of his mind is divided into three zones: the dim, the dark, and very dark. These are the same choices in the degree of failure. He has impotent rage for his situation. Reality is fabricated through words, and man blindly believes in that history that he has not written and experienced, as he questions himself, „can history provides him innate knowledge about the good and evil?“. He treats himself as an aborted self that is compatibly less human with stiff body movement. Moreover, he can not become the master of his mood.

God has given man a deceptive impression of motion, that he is the center of this universe. But, he is, in fact, motionless and drudges to the idea of self-surrendering to conceptual justice as the Unnamable depicted through his own condition. He mocks at the notion, „what he wants is my good – a self-satisfying hope of bringing him round to a more reasonable frame of mind“. The Unnamable reflects somewhat the Darwinian world of man because formally god never dies but in the Age of Aquarius, He will die too and become the Unnamable, whose functions are drastically consumed, whose words have vanished, whose assumption are equal to zero. Contrarily, the Unnamable recognizes himself as, „I“m Matthew, and I“m angel, I came in this world before the cross, before the sinning‘.

Generally, man“s first communicative instinct is always based on religious emotion but the unnamable divorced divinity. For him, existence is useless, and useless things won not need thankfulness. Man is bound to do multiple things but „it“s a lot to expect of one creature, he should first behave as if he were not, then as if he were, two falsehoods, two trappings“. His mind is pregnant with the ideas of negative possibilities. He is living in the third dimension of Byzantine iconic space, with the identity of the non-transparent god. Beckett“s Christian Trilogy has no divinity but the self-created fucking hell. The prophetic agents seem to abhor the unnamable because according to rumors „the bright boy – who rescues when things go badly,





who talks about merits and situations, saved many people of suffering – but what suffering, since he always suffered, stop the rot with simple use of mighty word – all are lies spread throughout history by his agents”.

Unlike Mercier and Camier, he has no fairly easy journey but entangled in an infinitely tormented time. There is nullity of nullity. The vessel in which he finds himself imprisoned resembles the Canopic jars of ancient Egypt; equal to the gloomy realm of biblical land of Sheol – Hell or grave; the place which is devoid of colors, isolated from both man and God. But unlike the unnamable, the inhabitants of Sheol neither compelled to speak of their plight before an unknown audience nor permitted to hope. He mentions the sufferings of his unfortunate Jesus because to be Jesus means to be crucified for the crimes he cannot justify. He realizes that listening to his monotonous dialogues must be as infinitely boring as his own existence.

In Frank Baum’s *The Tin Woodman of Oz* (1918), the title refers to a character’s bizarre and surreal-self-confrontation with his own former head which has been stored in an unopened cupboard throughout the years since he was a fleshy human being. He questions his human head, weather he remember his beloved. „No, because head is not made to love but to think, the head replied”. Disembodied, enclosed in darkness for an unmeasured span of time, recalling nothing of happiness and love of his former life: the head of Nick Chopper has a coincidental existential resemblance to the narrator of *The Unnamable*.

Both are thinking things, having rational existence, bear autonomy of situation, devoid of perpetual motion; Nick Chopper’s head belongs to the world where no one can be killed and perhaps the Unnamable is the inhabitant of spectral world of the afterlife; „he isn’t sure about his surroundings even whether it’s ground or water or some other liquid”. However, their inability to escape from such situation is similar: „The Unnamable can’t lower his eyes but only sees the things appear close to him” so does the Nick Chopper’s head. Both abandoned their strange history of ancient resources but the Unnamable proves far dumb than the head of Nick Chopper because at least it, has the ability to „quit thinking”, from which the Unnamable is devoid of.

The unnamable’s surrounding is a life laboratory where each subject is in his cell, or it is womb where eggs give birth to life. Man is not the owner of his will but the product of a company of the society: he is manufactured in the womb by importing sperm, and afterword the company releases its product by deciding its name, its future role. Later on, before expiring, it reproduces the product like himself. Prometheus was the creator of human beings by denaturing clay, domesticating the horses, stealing fire, and granting them with modern techniques and knowledge by revolting against Zeus, even bore eternal punishment for their sake „Is he a culprit of the sin equal to fart”. And there’s no resemblance between Prometheus and the Unnamable because the former is an active figure while the latter is passive.

He is thrown into this world since the fall of Adam and Eve, and a lie he gradually passes to his generations that god has been guiding him since his birth. But what shit guidance is this that everyman born as an infant who has no idea how the world works and the society shapes his character and guides him for the future according to its wish because ‘People give the idea of







god on which he'll have to depend, they mold his instinct of love and hatred according to their will" The monologue consisted on a long night where colors don't exist, no sign of daybreak, he remains immobile. „Malone"s mortal spirit remains there, he is motionless, with grey hairs and imploring gaze". They neither try to cross the threshold of this limbo, nor wallow in despair while their bodies are languishing and heavy with fatigue, but fatigue of what?

## 6. Conclusion

To sum up, the consumers of the culture industry are just becoming the unnamable. Hence, the Unnamable"s monologue is a challenge for the future generations. Though it seems rubbish of chattering, but at the same time it deals with the history related to past, present, and future which is the enemy of the people. So, the unnamed consumers of this system have no quest of change and desire to escape. They eagerly enjoy the omnipotence virtue of the culture industry just to kill the time. The absurdity of such existence is the mockery of this life and concept of reincarnation. This narrative is a challenge to the finality of after death silence. Narrator"s endless chattering, and subconscious beliefs are the result of artificial intelligence or cyber consciousness (Derek Aslop, 2013).

Like the Unnamable, consumers" beliefs are shaped and reshaped by the culture industry in term of its profit. The capitalist society invests money to suppress people"s consciousness because mere listeners and watchers are good consumers (Hsin-I Liu, 1999). Under such system, everyone qualifies for the false consciousness. No one wants to leave his comfort zone, and all ready-made answers are not just far from a single click. People blindly started to quote the texts without their authenticity. They do not even bother to read the complex contents.

Nevertheless, men lose their identity for giving the identity to this system. The unnamable is a fine consumer who assumes an inevitable self-referential boundary of that he cannot cross. For this condition, he feels no remorse. He is unconcerned to his surroundings. He finds an uncontrollable situation since his conscious awoke. His world is far different than a person can imagine, especially the person whose thinking is limited with the dose of the culture industry. The system is going to produce a race of Yahoos with A+ grades that generated conceptual limits for unsolved possibilities. Believing that something pushes man to do nothing is an eternal situation which eliminates all the possibilities of change. So, the unnamable challenges a reader"s sense of belief and drags him from a camouflagic world. A contented believer cannot understand the pain of the fractured reality: how disgusting the world of deception is. He pokes fun at god, religion, cultural knowledge, and social order constructed by men.





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