CONCLUSION

“BECKETT IS A CHICANO!”: ANTIHUMANIST UNIVERSALITY IN CHICANO/A LITERARY STUDIES

In her 2006 presidential address to the Modern Languages Association, Marjorie Perloff—in describing the “global” quality and influence of Samuel Beckett’s work—refers to an interesting, if not strange and unusual, literary-cultural combination. She cites an entry by Michael Sedano in the Los Angeles Chicano/a blog, La Bloga (653), in order to highlight the “disconnect between what writers and scholars at home and abroad seem to be doing and the availability of teaching positions in MLA-related departments” (654). Although this reference is made in passing, I find Perloff’s cross-cultural citation to be much more suggestive than its intended purpose. More specifically, I find the pairing of a “global” writer like Beckett with the cultural particularity or difference represented by a Chicano blogger like Sedano to be, surprisingly, philosophically significant. The unexpected importance of this pairing is especially true when one considers authorial intentionality; that is, Sedano’s blog entry is mostly a response to his own wonderfully bizarre question, “What in the world is a Chicano critic doing writing about Samuel Beckett?” Sedano’s response playfully centers on personal preferences (“I like Samuel Beckett”) and the worldwide celebrations surrounding the Beckett Centennial (“Samuel Beckett is coming to town”), which hardly qualifies his response as a philosophical examination. Like the blog itself, there is a considerable amount of jest underlying Sedano’s more important point regarding the cultural value of Beckett’s work to Chicano/as. Nevertheless, I find in this convergence of genres, cultures, and languages a potential politico-philosophical vision that remains largely unexamined in today’s discussions concerning the humanities and issues of social justice.

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This claim depends, of course, upon one’s understanding of what such a convergence entails. Perloff, for example, associates Beckett with La Bloga strictly to underscore the divide that exists between the interests of public/popular intellectuals and the institutionalized—in many cases nonliterary—work of academics in literature departments. Thus, for Perloff, this cultural convergence represents a useful analogy with which to prove her thesis regarding the current state of academia, and, as such, is not intended to be politically or philosophically visionary as much as it is exemplary of a specific problem. Moreover, if this convergence is understood as a type of culturalist coalition or hybridized nationalism (Chicano-Irish, Latin American-European, Spanish-French-English, etc.), then the politico-philosophical vision in question does not emerge as unique or recent, but can instead be incorporated into other alliance-building strategies present in movements like transatlantic modernism, Third World Feminism, multiculturalism, or even international political institutions like the European Union and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Conversely, such a convergence may also be taken to symbolize, not alliance-building per se, but rather a complex and somewhat ambiguous literary-cultural synthesis. In this case, it is not the separate but equal mentality of alliance-building that dictates, but rather one of confused commingling, reminiscent of hybridity or mestizaje. The convergence-effect, in this latter scenario, can be understood in terms of heterogeneity, in which the blending of differences takes precedence over the aligning of united but independent elements. Difference and separation, therefore, become indistinguishable with hybridity, very much like a Hegelian synthesis. Such blending differs from alliance, where two separate but equal elements come together in common interest, joining as one while remaining autonomous and independent.

Thus, if we restrict our thinking about such a convergence to the traditional models of alliance and synthesis, Perloff’s reference is not very revealing. However, if read through the alternative interpretive model I have been advocating throughout this study—a radical universalism grounded in the anti-identitarianism and antihumanism of a Marxist-psychoanalytic structuralism—then one can better avoid the theoretical shortcomings of these traditional modes of thinking. In fact, Perloff herself alludes to this alternative in quoting one of the comments posted in response to Sedano’s blog entry: “Beckett is a Chicano!” (653). The logic that guides such a statement is not founded on conjunction (the alliance between Beckett and Chicanos) or hybridity (the synthesis of Beckett-Chicano), but rather on equivalence (Beckett is a Chicano). We must first clarify the fact that this equivalence is not meant existentially or intended to serve as encyclopedic knowledge. In other words, it is not meant to