

Ecological Disablism in Samuel Beckett's *The Lost Ones* (1970)

This paper examines representations of bodies and embodiment in Samuel Beckett's short prose *The Lost Ones* (1970), focusing on how Beckett stages disability not merely as a corporeal condition but as an ecological relation between bodies and space. Set within a flattened, enclosed cylinder, the text describes two hundred and five unnamed bodies endlessly moving, pausing, searching, and failing in their attempts to escape. The prose unfolds through an austere, almost clinical narrative voice that catalogues movements, postures, temperatures, light, and bodily states with disquieting precision. Within this environment, bodies are subjected to restricted mobility, sensory distortion, exhaustion, repetition, and pain. These intense scenes of domination and bodily constraint open a critical space for thinking about disability, as the text persistently foregrounds vulnerability, impairment, and the limits of physical endurance. Beckett's attention to the bare materiality of the body—its fatigue, deformity, and exposure—refuses psychological interiority and instead forces the reader to confront bodies as lived matter struggling within an indifferent environment.

The cylinder itself functions as a crucial conceptual and material structure through which Beckett articulates what can be described as a dualistic form of disablism. On the one hand, the space is not designed for any particular set of bodies: its irregular topology, oppressive heat, dim light, and limited vertical and horizontal movement render it hostile to sustained bodily functioning. On the other hand, the bodies that inhabit this space are themselves described as worn, impaired, and unevenly capable, bodies whose very design renders them incompatible with the environment they occupy. Disability thus emerges not solely from bodily difference or limitation, but from the misalignment between bodies and the ecological conditions in which they are forced to exist. In this sense, disability in *The Lost Ones* is ecological in its lived essence, produced through an ongoing interaction between corporeality and environment. Beckett's characteristically flat and unemotive narrative style reinforces this reading, as the flattened cylinder becomes a site for a bare and unsentimental representation of bodily struggle, one that refuses consolation or transcendence.

The alienation and isolation experienced by these bodies—bodies unfit for the space and spaces unfit for the bodies—open a broader philosophical perspective on vulnerability and embodiment. Beckett's prose suggests that this condition is not exceptional but universal: any body whatsoever may find itself similarly misaligned with its environment, subjected to forces that exceed its capacities. Disability, in this sense, is not an anomaly but a latent condition of embodied existence under modernity. The cylinder becomes a microcosm in which the logic of rational organization, measurement, and control reveals its violent underside. The bodies are reduced to units of movement and endurance, their value determined by their functional relation to space rather than by any intrinsic dignity. This reduction exposes the ableist assumptions embedded in rational systems that privilege efficiency, adaptability, and productivity while marginalizing bodies that fail to conform.

Drawing on Theodor Adorno's concept of corporeality, the paper argues that *The Lost Ones* offers a powerful framework for studying the somatic nature of disability as both visible and ecological. Adorno's critique of modern culture emphasizes the contradictory status of the body as raw material: simultaneously enslaved and rejected as inferior, yet also desired, fetishized, and reified. Within this framework, the bodies in Beckett's text appear as radically estranged from themselves, treated as objects to be managed, endured, or discarded. Yet it is precisely in their bare visibility—in their pain, exhaustion, and failure—that an ecological critique of rational, ableist thinking emerges. By reading Beckett and Adorno together, this paper explores the possibility of an ecological solidarity grounded in shared vulnerability and violated abilities. Such a reading gestures toward alternative modes of ethical relation that recognize the dignity of embodied existence, not despite its fragility and limitation, but because of it, opening space for rethinking what dignified living and dying might mean within inhospitable worlds.