

'FIRST DIRTY, THEN MAKE CLEAN':
SAMUEL BECKETT'S PERISTALTIC MODERNISM, 1932-1958

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ABSTRACT

Drawing together a number of different recent approaches to Samuel Beckett's studies, this thesis examines the convulsive narrative trajectories of Beckett's prose works from *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1931-2) to *The Unnamable* (1958) in relation to the disorganised muscular contractions of peristalsis. Peristalsis is understood here, however, not merely as a digestive process, as the 'propulsive movement of the gastrointestinal tract and other tubular organs', but as the 'coordinated waves of contraction and relaxation of the circular muscle' (*OED*). Accordingly, this thesis reconciles a number of recent approaches to Beckett studies by combining textual, phenomenological and cultural concerns with a detailed account of Beckett's own familiarity with early twentieth-century medical and psychoanalytical discourses. It examines the extent to which these discourses find a parallel in his work's corporeal conception of the linguistic and narrative process, where the convolutions, disavowals and disjunctions that function at the level of narrative and syntax are persistently equated with medical ailments, autonomous reflexes and bodily emissions. Tracing this interest to his early work, the first chapter focuses upon the masturbatory trope of 'dehiscence' in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, while the second examines cardiovascular complaints in *Murphy* (1935-6). The third chapter considers the role that linguistic constipation plays in *Watt* (1941-5), while the fourth chapter focuses upon peristalsis and rumination in *Molloy* (1947). The penultimate chapter examines the significance of epilepsy, dilation and parturition in the 'throes' that dominate *Malone Dies* (1954-5), whereas the final chapter evaluates the significance of contamination and respiration in *The Unnamable* (1957-8).

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work, apart from those instances in which I quote or draw upon the work of others, where acknowledgement is clearly given through references within the text. Part of Chapter 4 will shortly be published in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 26, 'Revisiting the Trilogy', edited by David Tucker, Mark Nixon and Dirk van Hulle (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014). No other work in this thesis has been published and no portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification at this or any other institution of learning.

INTRODUCTION

Samuel Beckett's Peristaltic Modernism

I've been writing in French – for the wastepaper basket again.

– Samuel Beckett to Mary Hutchinson, 9 April 1958

It is difficult to envisage the development of Samuel Beckett's artistic practice without considering the extent to which his writing foregrounds the compulsions, drives and obligations of the human body. This is readily apparent in the persistent attention his work devotes to everyday bodily motions, or rather, to the disruption of those motions, for corporeal processes such as alimentation, digestion, ejaculation, pulmonary circulation and respiration seldom function normally in his work. Equally striking is the extent to which his work is littered with textual waste, with abandoned texts, fragments, 'draff', 'disjecta', 'foirades', 'precipitates', 'residua', 'sanies', 'tête-mortes' and 'odds and ends', in a process that destabilises our notions of the totality inherent within the concept of an *oeuvre*, while the connotations of redundancy contained within these titles disrupt the value that we typically ascribe to literature. Repeatedly, too, the syncopated narrative and stuttering syntax of Beckett's prose loops through a series of convulsions, disavowals and disjunctions that have been relentlessly illuminated in post-structuralist readings of his work, yet which we are now discovering bear a marked resemblance to early twentieth-century investigations into medical ailments and psychiatric maladies. Most significant, however, is what Steven Connor has termed, 'the extraordinary corporeality of the linguistic process' in Beckett's mature work, where 'the drama of utterance is embodied in terms of violent alternations of incorporation and emission' (Connor 2008, 23), as speech and writing are envisaged through a series of discharges, excretions and expulsions that challenge perceived notions

of volition, with artistic expression finally emerging as a compulsive, bodily expulsion where ‘language is spewed, vomited, dribbled, shat and belched’ (Salisbury 2012, 90).

In recent years, the representation of the body in Beckett’s work has undergone a substantial reappraisal, yet many questions surrounding its portrayal have only just begun to be addressed. In the first decades of Beckett studies, the existentialist-humanist approach adopted by critics such as Martin Esslin, Hugh Kenner and Samuel I. Mintz tended to equate his work with a rigid Cartesian dualism, reducing the body to an obstacle that thwarted the Beckettian characters’ apparent quest for transcendence in the realm of the mind. Mintz, for example, symptomatically underestimated the vexed depiction of the body in Beckett’s first published novel *Murphy* (1934-5) to link its protagonist to the Occasionalist doctrine espoused by the seventeenth-century Flemish philosopher Arnold Geulincx (1624-1669).¹ Despite the anxious narrative caveats that frame that novel’s portrayal of Murphy’s attempts to retreat into the ‘third zone’ of his mind, Mintz unhesitatingly reads ‘[t]his mental world’ as the ‘scene of Murphy’s bliss’, where he ‘achieves his most transcendent experience, the apprehension of pure intellect, the mind apprehending itself’ (Mintz 1959, 156-7). The body remains, in this reading, a site of deficiency, a problem to be overcome in order for the protagonist to transcend beyond the difficulties of corporeal, embodied existence. Similarly, Kenner’s essay ‘The Cartesian Centaur’ attributes the Beckettian characters proclivity for, yet difficulties with, bicycles to a stuttering locomotion caused by the ‘intolerably defective machine’ of the human body, which pales in comparison with a mechanised bicycle that reflects the ‘seventeenth-century connoisseurship of the simple machine’ (Kenner 1965, 53-54). Beckett studies may still occasionally defer to these approaches, but it has become remarkably suspicious of them and with good reason. These existentialist-humanist approaches fail, for instance, to acknowledge the extent to which Beckett’s work might be thought to be marked by a stern refusal of mystical or transcendental thought. Nor did they account for the sheer diversity of embodied experience in Beckett’s work, such as the privileging of sensory perception, involuntary movements or autonomous reflexes.

¹ Throughout this thesis, parenthetical dates for Beckett’s works refer to the years in which they were written. For these, I have predominantly relied upon John Pilling’s *A Samuel Beckett Chronology* (2006).

If the existential-humanist interpretations that dominated Beckett studies until the 1980s were inclined to reduce the body to an obstacle, the poststructuralist readings of the 1980s and 1990s led to a reappraisal of narrative and subjectivity that frequently coincided with a re-evaluation of the importance of the body in his work. After examining the tropes of anal expulsion, oral incorporation and the bodily foundations of the narrating subject throughout Beckett's mature work, for example, Leslie Hill emphasises the correlation between bodily text and textual body in the post-war trilogy:

[T]he body in Beckett's trilogy finally dissolves into a writing, a writing that functions as a body, as a rhythm, a texture, a fabric of traces and as a discharge of affects. This body, like the fictional text it becomes, is not unchanging or static, but exists as a continual process of assertion and negation, affirmation and difference

(Hill 1990, 120)

Re-iterating similar links between embodiment and language, Daniel Katz suggests that the body in Beckett's work remains 'always itself grammaticised, articulated through a language which it cannot be said to preclude', while the 'convolutions and disavowals' of a short prose piece like the *Texts for Nothing* (1966) should be read as 'allegories of the construction of drives, on a level which precedes any opposition between body and mind, or drive and expression' (Katz 1996, 57-58). In her introduction to *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (2009), Ulrika Maude acknowledges the impact that poststructuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault have had upon the contemporary interest in embodiment, before differentiating her work from these approaches, arguing that throughout these readings: '[t]he emphasis, rather than being on the body itself, lies on discourse' as 'representation is privileged over experience' in a 'curious mutation of the significance of the body into the problem of the body as signification (Maude 2009, 3).

In recent years, phenomenology has played a vigorous role in the re-evaluation of corporeality in Beckett's studies, as scholars have drawn attention to the centrality of the 'experiencing subject' in this philosophical field, with Matthew Feldman and Maude acknowledging the wide array of experiences that phenomenology can encompass:

Phenomena themselves should here be understood widely. They can include temporal, sensory or intersubjective experiences; self-awareness or spatial-awareness; various forms of linguistic activity; our experiences of objects and tools, such as musical instruments or prostheses; bodily movement, emotion, memory, desire and imagination, as well as various forms of social and cultural experience. Furthermore, not all phenomena are fully conscious ones, but reside in the margins of our attention, and are therefore not readily available to self-conscious reflection. Examples of liminal experiences that reside in the ambiguous zone between conscious and unconscious experience include sleep, fainting or involuntary or autonomous functions like breathing. We also experience much of our sensory world [...] only in the periphery of our conscious minds.

(Feldman & Maude 2009, 2)

This phenomenological turn has led a number of scholars to re-examine Beckett's treatment of embodiment in relation to the work of classical phenomenologists as varied as Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-61). By focusing upon the fundamentals of bodily existence, or what Maude terms the 'conditions that are already in swing before culture lays its mark on embodied identity' (Maude 2009, 2), phenomenological approaches to Beckett's work have sought to cultivate a more immediate sense of existence than that conveyed by their post-structuralist predecessors, producing a 'fleshy "phenomenological body" to supplement post-structuralism's body of signs' (Connor 2009, 57). At their most robust, these phenomenological approaches have taken on a distinctly material colouring, reading Beckett's work in relation to the cultural concerns and scientific developments of the early twentieth century. Analysing the mechanisation of the protagonist's sexuality in Beckett's posthumously published novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1931-32), for instance, Yoshiki Tajiri locates that novel's preoccupation with autoeroticism within a specifically modernist content, comparing it with Michel Carrouges's celebrated essay on Duchamp and Kafka, 'Les machines célibataires' (1954), to claim that Belacqua's persistent attempts to mechanise his sexuality represents a distinctly 'modern form of the Narcissus complex', 'a machine for regulating the anarchic sexual force inside the human body' that resonates with the work of modernist artists as diverse as Apollinaire, Duchamp, Jarry, Kafka, Lautréamont, or Roussel (Tajiri 2007, 19, 20). In contrast, Maude has read Beckett's interest in the disorderly body and the neurological condition of Tourette's syndrome in light of the rapid advances in the field of neurology at the start of the twentieth-century,

relating them to Etienne-Jules Marey's studies of motion disorder, Jean-Marie Charcot's focus upon Parkinson's disease and Gilles de la Tourette's clinical delineation of the former (Maude 2008b, 153-4).

Anxiously seeking to differentiate their approaches from post-structuralism's emphasis upon the signification of the body, however, these critics have frequently remained reluctant to undertake a formal analysis of the textual arrhythmias and syntactical disjunctions that dominate his mature prose. Although these phenomenological approaches have frequently shown that Beckett's work might be thought to resonate with a wide array of medical, scientific and technological advances at the start of the twentieth century, they have often elided the manner in which these texts remain inimical to the aetiological impulses that underpin modern medicine. Let's provide some examples. In the short story 'A Case in a Thousand' (1934), the narrative focuses upon the ailments of a physician named Dr Nye, who suffers from an arrhythmic heart that coughs and splutters like a dilapidated internal combustion engine, yet which defies clinical analysis: 'it knocked and misfired for no reason known to the medical profession' (*CSP*, 18-19). A similar resistance to medical aetiologies can be found in a lengthy passage transcribed from Sir Humphry Davy Rolleston's *Medical Aspects of Samuel Johnson* (1924) in the second *Human Wishes* notebook, which lists a wide range of clinical details taken from an account of the lexicographer's autopsy, including descriptions of Johnson's gallstones, distended lungs, enlarged liver, pancreas, trachea and spleen, ossified aortic valves, peritoneal inflammation and extensive kidney damage, but ultimately fails to ascribe a cause of death.² In a recent article on medicine and the composition of pain, Peter Fifield has suggested that the representation of pain is persistently 'undercut, dispersed and disputed' (2012, 118) throughout Beckett's work, yet Fifield's argument can, in fact, be extended to the authority of medical discourse itself. These texts may depict a litany of physiological complaints which resonate with medical advances at the turn of the twentieth century, yet ultimately, these same complaints remain resistant to diagnosis, impossible to attribute to a specific cause; their examination of the 'whole misery', to quote a line from the poem 'Ooftish' (1938), remains perpetually disrupted: 'diagnosed misdiagnosed undiagnosed' (*CP*, 16).

² Cf. *Human Wishes* notebook 2, UoR MS 3461/2/31-39.

Neither have these phenomenological approaches to Beckett registered his ambivalent response to the foundations of Western medicine in pre-Socratic philosophy, or, more specifically, in the Pythagoreans' conception of the links between health, balance and attunement. We know now that Beckett familiarised himself with the origins of modern medicine in Pythagorean philosophy during the early 1930s, by turning to accounts of this school in Archibald Alexander's *Short History of Philosophy* (1907), John Burnet's *Greek Philosophy, Part I: Thales to Plato* (1914) and Wilhelm Windelband's *A History of Philosophy* (1893). Here he noted the affinities between the Pythagorean school and the theories of the ancient physician Alkmaion, who suggested that health was either an 'attunement' (Gk. *ἀρμονία*) or an 'isonomy' (Gk. *ἰσονομίη*) depending on a 'due blend of opposites', whereas disease was attributed to 'the undue predominance of one or the other' (Burnet 1914, 50; cf. TCD MS 10967/21). Beckett also recorded the musical analogy that provides the origin for our modern sense of medicinal tonics, for as Simmias claims in this passage in Plato's *Phaedo*: 'the Pythagoreans held the body to be strung like an instrument to a certain pitch, hot and cold, wet and dry taking the place of high and low in music', so that, 'according to this view, health is just being in tune, and disease arises from undue tension or relaxation of the springs' (1914, 50). Much of the syncopated rhythm of Beckett's mature prose might be thought, then, to resonate with the convulsions found in a number of bodily ailments, yet at the same time, this very syncopation serves to disperse the authority that underpins much of medical discourse. Finally, if apoliticism is frequently depicted as the *éminence grise* of poststructuralist thought, a similar lack of political inflexion appears to have migrated to phenomenological studies of his work which, despite his encounter with politically loaded medical or pseudo-medical texts such as Pierre Garnier's *Onanisme seul et à deux sous toutes ses formes et leurs conséquences* (1895) or Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1895), have frequently remained reluctant to reappraise Beckett's vexed relationship with history and politics.

Turning to the affinities between his work and peristalsis, with the latter understood not merely as 'propulsive movement of the gastrointestinal tract and other tubular organs', but as the 'coordinated waves of contraction and relaxation of the circular muscle' (*OED*), this thesis reconciles a number of recent approaches to Beckett studies by negotiating a different position, one that

combines textual, phenomenological and cultural concerns with a detailed account of Beckett's familiarity with early twentieth-century medical and psychoanalytical discourses. Accordingly, it examines the extent to which these discourses occasioned his corporeal conception of the linguistic process, where the convolutions, disavowals and disjunctions that function at both the level of narrative and syntax are persistently equated with medical ailments, autonomous reflexes and bodily emissions. In this respect, much of this work might be thought to overlap with the attention that Laura Salisbury has recently paid to the formal rhythms, recursions and interruptions of comic timing in Beckett's writings, through a 'style fixated on syncopations, hiccups, and on limping and hindered progression to materialise as affect the complex, often abrasive, sense of time passing', where 'action is rendered out of step with words as verbal desire or ability falls out of phase with physical incapacity or incontinence, or action becomes too quick for the sluggish materiality of language' (2012, 2-3).

To speak of peristalsis and Beckett, to draw attention to what Molloy refers to as 'all that inner space one never sees, the brain and heart and other caverns where thought and feeling dance their sabbath' (*T*, 10), is, however, to locate his work within a specifically early twentieth-century context. In *The Second Brain* (1998), Michael Gershon traces the birth of 'neurogastro-enterology', a field of neurological studies devoted to the discovery that 'the gut contains nerve cells that can [...] operate the organ without instructions from the brain or spinal cord' to scientific research undertaken by William Bayliss and Ernest Starling that led to the discovery of peristalsis in the late 1890s (Gershon 1998, 3). During their experiments on anaesthetised dogs, they isolated a loop of intestine and 'studied the effects of stimulating the bowel from within its internal cavity', mimicking the effects that 'intestinal contents might exert on the wall of the gut', discovering:

Whenever its internal pressure was raised sufficiently, the bowel would exhibit muscular movements that had the effect of propelling the contents of the intestine in a startlingly one-way direction. The propulsive movements consisted of a coordinated descending wave of oral contraction and anal relaxation that forced the intestinal contents relentlessly and invariably in an anal direction.

These discoveries were subsequently augmented by the revolutionary abdominal surgery performed on wounded soldiers during the Great War by the German surgeon Friedrich Trendelenburg and by the English physiologist, J.N. Langley, who published a study entitled *The Autonomic Nervous System* in 1921 (5-8). In this respect, Gershon opens with a discussion of the traditional understanding of our nervous systems, which are typically thought to consist of a central nervous system (the brain and the spinal cord) and a peripheral nervous system, which is subordinated to the former, while the nerves that connect the central nervous system to the rest of the body fall into two categories: the skeletal motor system and the autonomic nervous system. While modern physicians typically divide our autonomic nervous system into two categories (sympathetic and parasympathetic), Langley divided it into three, augmenting the former with what he termed the ‘enteric nervous system’ (8).

Drawing attention to Langley’s classification in a recent essay on ‘Modernity and the Peristaltic Subject’ (2010), Jean Walton notes that ‘[t]his emerging, disappearing and resurfacing division of nerves is of paramount importance for anyone interested in the vagaries of peristalsis’, as the duties of the enteric nervous system are ‘entirely limited to the operation of the intestines’, operating independently of the central nervous system (Walton 2010, 247). In Walton’s account, however, while our gut may function autonomously, ‘independently of our first brain’, its actions are aligned with a discursively produced, poststructuralist conception of the body drawn from Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*: ‘like the leg that marches, the arm that aims the rifle, and the hand that practices perfect penmanship, it offers another target for the modern fashioning of the “docile body”’ (2010, 246). Gershon, however, describes the autonomy of the enteric nervous system as a form of rebellion against the central nervous system; as it can ‘process data its sensory receptors pick up all by themselves’ and act ‘on the basis of those data to activate a set of effectors that it alone controls’, it should be considered a kind of ‘rebel, the only element of the peripheral nervous system that can elect *not* to do the bidding of the brain or spinal cord’ (1998, 17). Accordingly, the enteric nervous system represents ‘an independent site of neural integration and processing’ which allows us to consider it as a ‘second brain’ (17). By challenging our perceived notions of control and volition, Gershon’s account of the autonomy of the gut resonates with much of Beckett’s own work and its reception; for

instance, of the accretive parataxis of *How It Is*, where the reader's slow motion through the text comes to resemble that of the procession of tormentors and victims envisaged by the narrator in part three, 'advancing in jerks and spasms like shit in the guts' (*HII*, 108), or of the psychotic patient described by Wilfred Bion, Beckett's former psychotherapist, in *Second Thoughts* (1967), who claimed that he used his intestine as brain (Bion 1967, 40).

What proves most salient here, however, is the persistent correlation throughout Beckett's work between speaking, writing and excretion, where literature is envisaged as a redundant lack, as a form of textual waste. That Beckett himself conceived of writing as an act that produces waste is readily apparent in the letter that forms the epigraph to this introduction, while three days later, he explained to his friend, the Dutch translator and writer Jacoba van Velde: '[t]here are two moments worthwhile in writing, the one when you start and the other when you throw it in the waste-paper basket' (qtd. in Knowlson 1996, 446). These acts of literary poubellication draw our attention to the atelic nature of his work, which is underscored by titles such as *From an Abandoned Work* (1954) or *Rough for Radio I* (1976), encouraging us to consider the manner in which his 'travail' stages the writing process, through what Daniel Katz has termed, its 'obsessive registration of erasures, corrections, parapaxes, and failures' (Katz 1996, 68). If Beckett's remarks resonate with poststructuralist readings of his work that placed particular emphasis upon the tropes of disjunction, interruption and repetition, his words also attend to the everyday materiality of the writing process, in a peculiar axiology where literature appears to derive from both the production of waste (the act of starting to write) and the designation of that waste as waste (the act of giving up). Writing produces waste, but writing only becomes waste when it acknowledges its own redundancy, when it acknowledges itself as a site of failure, fit for nothing more than to be thrown away.

This trope of the throwaway recurs throughout Beckett's work, a fact registered by the German philosopher Theodor Adorno, whose posthumously published notes on *L'Innommable* (1949-50) describe Beckett's writing by means of a verb, equating that novel's negativity with an act of 'absolute discardment, because there is hope only where nothing is retained' (Adorno 2010, 178). Firstly, Adorno links the negativity of *L'Innommable* to Beckett's subtractive aesthetic, for in his final

note, the German philosopher remarks that Beckett's work should be thought of as 'not abstraction but subtraction' (178). Secondly, following earlier notes made in preparation for the essay 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*' (1961), Adorno reads *L'Innommable* in conjunction with the 'philosophy of the remainder' (173). For whereas in his earlier notes, he claims that *Endgame* takes the theological statement of *Genesis* 3:19, 'unto dust thou shalt return', to its logical conclusion in the staging of this play, where 'filth, the most intimate, chamber pot, piss, pills are the universal as remainder', Adorno subsequently labels *L'Innommable* a 'parody of the philosophy of the remainder', which constricts everything that exists (including the writing subject) into 'a negative quality, into *less* than nothing (filth and stump are less than a remnant) (170, 173). This may apply to *The Unnamable*, where orality and anality are juxtaposed in the emissions and excretions of the narrative voice, 'Squeeze, squeeze, not too hard, but squeeze a little longer, this is perhaps about you, and your goal at hand' (*T*, 312), but as the protagonist's allusion to the 'sour cud and the iron stool' (*CDW*, 222) in *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) indicates, Beckett's work is also interested in digestive ailments, in the arduous processes of rumination and constipation. Peter Fifield incisively notes that, '[t]he novels of the trilogy are clearly linked to linguistic excrement, made of a language so many times chewed, swallowed and digested in permutation and paradox that it no longer contains anything of nutritional worth' (Fifield 2009, 57). This thesis traces these tropes of emission and retention to Beckett's reading in modern medicine and his interest in the Freudian theory of the anal erotic, arguing that these digestive ailments provide a crucial insight into the dislocated, syncopated rhythm of his mature prose.

If Beckett's work might be thought to inscribe its bedevilling attempts to fail into its own procedures, or, as the late prose piece *Worstward Ho* (1981-2) puts it, 'Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better' (*NO*, 89), an interest in textual redundancy is emphasised throughout his titles. In the early 1930s, for example, he drew upon an archaic translation of Thomas à Kempis' *De Imitatione Christi* and Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* to suggest that his 1934 collection of short stories should be called 'Druff', invoking the 'lees of grain left after brewing' (Ackerley 2010a, 39) to imply that they were the equivalent of literary waste, that he was '[w]riting the druff of stories, foregoing the corn' (*DN*, 1167), only for his editor at Chatto & Windus, Charles

Prentice, to encourage him to alter it, with the stories subsequently published as *More Pricks than Kicks* (1933-34). A year later, Beckett amended the title of his first published collection of poetry from 'Poems' to *Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates* (1935), explaining to George Reavey that the latter was more self-effacing, 'plus modeste' (*L I*, 264), with the poems envisaged as a paltry, calcified deposit left behind after precipitation. Later in his career, he would continue to apply these connotations of residue and waste to his work, labelling two collections of short prose pieces *Têtes-mortes* (1967) and *Six Residua* (1978). The first, as Leslie Hill notes, is an unusual translation of the Latin phrase 'caput mortuum', which Beckett had employed in *Textes pour rien* (1950-1951) to describe the narrator's physical appearance, with its connotations of 'grotesque or exorbitant physical incapacity' denoting 'a worthless remainder' (Hill 1990, 142). Like a precipitate, in alchemy and chemistry a 'caput mortuum' is a redundant residue, defined by the *OED* as '[t]he residuum remaining after the distillation or sublimation of any substance, "good for nothing but to be flung away, all virtue being extracted"' (*OED*). The title *Têtes-mortes* might, however, contradict Adorno's assertion that Beckett's work could be linked to the German verb "'Vergammeln" (To go to seed)' (Adorno 2010, 175), for it also 'recalls the English term, to "deadhead", familiar to gardeners, which is to remove a finished flower head before it goes to seed' (Hill 1990, 142). Beckett's interest in this wasteful textual excess continued into the early 1980s, for when Ruby Cohn collected together an edition of his critical pieces, she recommended the title 'Marginalia', only for him to draw attention to the dismembered and fragmented nature of his corpus, proposing either 'Exuviae', a biological term for the cast-off exoskeleton of an arachnid, crustacean or insect that has shed its skin, or 'Disjecta' (qtd. in Nixon 2006), a term subsequently adopted as the title of these pieces, implying that 'in its wake this particular body leaves behind the *disjecta membra poetae*' (Wood 1994, 2).

These titles foreground a fragmented, redundant textual remainder, and a number of his other titles equate this textual waste with everyday bodily motions, or, more specifically, with discharges, excretions and expulsions. In the early 1930s, for instance, he adopted the medical term 'sanies' for two of his poems in *Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates*, linking his poetry with a fetid, seropurulent discharge pouring from a wound or an ulcer (cf. *DN*, 1035), while a letter to his close friend Thomas

MacGreevy of 5 January 1933 speaks of an ‘eschewal of verbal sanies’ as a New Year’s resolution (*L I*, 149). A similar preoccupation with bodily expulsions can be detected in the title of the late prose pieces *Foirades/Fizzles* (1975), which were published in a limited edition with a number of etchings by Jasper Johns. In French, the verb *foirer* can loosely be translated as a ‘splutter of diarrhoea’, as it means both ‘to expel excrement in liquid form’ and ‘a lamentable failure’ (Hill 1990, 145). If literature is akin to a bungled, squelchy fart, this association of writing with anality and failure is overwritten in the English translation of these pieces as *Fizzles*, which Beckett claimed to have ‘farted out’ in a letter to Patrick Magee of 15 December 1975, before defining the term in accordance with a definition in the *OED*: ‘1. The action of breaking wind quietly; the action of hissing or spluttering. 2. A failure or a fiasco. Exactly the sense of *foirade*’ (qtd. in Bair 1990, 680).

Throughout his correspondence of the late 1920s and early 1930s, in fact, Beckett tended to equate the act of writing with involuntary bodily discharges and excretions. Acknowledging MacGreevy’s appreciation for two poems in a letter of 12 September 1931, for example, he describes their composition in remarkably libidinal terms: ‘They came one on top of the other, a double-yoked orgasm in months of aspermatic nights & days’ (*L I*, 87). This collocation of writing and semen recurs in another letter of 18 October 1932 following McGreevy’s praise for an early draft of ‘Serena I’, where Beckett compares his most successful poetry to a compulsive bodily motion; a compulsion figured through a complex metaphor of autonomous reflexes and involuntary bodily emissions: ‘I’m in mourning for the integrity of a *pendu*’s [hanged-man’s] emission of semen, what I find in Homer & Dante & Racine & sometimes Rimbaud, the integrity of the eyelids coming down before the brain knows of grit in the wind’ (135). While writing is equated in these letters with a wasteful emission of semen, as Shane Weller observes, an ‘excremental conception of the literary work dominates [his] correspondence of the late 1920s and 1930s’ (Weller 2010a, 137).

Having compared the profuse loquacity of the first volume of Marcel Proust’s *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913) to a bout of diarrhoea, a ‘gobble-gobble discharge from a colic-afflicted belly’ in an undated letter to MacGreevy from the summer of 1929, for instance, he complained that he still had to

contemplate the French writer ‘at stool for 16 volumes!’ (*L I*, 12). A year later, Beckett described his difficulties with the short essay *Proust* (1930) in remarkably excremental terms, explaining to MacGreevy, ‘I don’t know whether to start at the end or the beginning – in a word should the Proustian arse-hole be considered as entrée or sortie’ (43), whilst a subsequent letter to Samuel Putnam alludes to ‘my Proust turd’ (86). In the former letter, he describes three poems sent to Jacob Bronowski, the editor of *The European Caravan*, as ‘three turds from my central lavatory’, before lamenting the fact that Bronowski had decided not to use ‘the twice round & pointed ones’ (43). This imagery of a decisive act of voiding recurs in correspondence with Charles Prentice from August 1931, where he apologises for the ‘top heavy’ short story ‘Sedendo et Quiescendo’ (1931), before promising to send something more substantial: ‘[w]hen I imagine I have a real “twice round the pan & pointed at both ends” I’ll offend you with its spiral on my soilman’s shovel’ (81). Perhaps more significantly, Beckett’s difficulties with writing are persistently compared to digestive ailments in his correspondence; immediately after complaining in a letter to MacGreevy of 3 November 1932 of ‘obstipation’, that is, a severe case of constipation, the next sentence finds the young writer referring to his unresolved desire to expel exactly the right word: ‘I tried once or twice to get something started, but as soon as a word goes down out it must come’ (138). The act of excretion might also be linked to the rhythm of the writing process, for after complaining to MacGreevy that the composition of *More Pricks than Kicks* was proving to be a ‘bloody grind’, he noted that with only five stories written, ‘I don’t think I could possibly invite a publisher to wipe his arse with less than a dozen’, yet still harboured ‘hopes of its all coming in a gush like a bloody flux’ (159)

To speak of peristalsis solely in terms of digestion and excretion is, however, to ignore the extent to which the syncopated rhythm of Beckett’s prose emerges from his interest in other convulsive processes, such as the peristaltic contractions of the *vas deferens* in the act of ejaculation or the contractions of our cardiovascular systems. Accordingly, the first chapter analyses the collocation of writing and masturbation throughout Beckett’s work of the early 1930s, drawing attention to his interest in the botanical trope of ‘dehiscence’ (*D*, 116; cf. *DN*, 453), that is, ‘[t]he bursting open of capsules, fruits, anthers, etc. in order to discharge their mature contents’ (*OED*) in

his correspondence; subsequently, it evaluates the extent to which these disjunctive ruptures are formally and thematically enacted in the dissociative free verse and libidinal subject matter of the poem 'Return to the Vestry' (1930). Locating the early Beckett's masturbatory poetics alongside both a late nineteenth-century medical preoccupation with physical hygiene and contemporary medico-cultural accounts that tended to focus upon the aetiology, diagnosis and prognosis of decadence and degeneracy in modern literature, the chapter reads this autoeroticism as a wilfully perverse riposte to the pseudo-medical pronouncements that Beckett encountered directly in Pierre Garnier's *Onanisme seul et à deux sous toutes ses formes et leurs conséquences* (1895), Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1895), and, to a lesser degree, in Rebecca West's *The Strange Necessity* (1928). The chapter argues that these masturbatory poetics are simultaneously foregrounded, critiqued and deconstructed in the characterisation of Belacqua, the indolent aesthete protagonist of his posthumously published novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1931-32), who envisages the creative act through the peristaltic contractions of ejaculation, before reaching its apotheosis in the dehiscing, disjunctive narrative ruptures of that novel's syncopated rhythm; a rhythm exemplified in the narrator's autotelic allusion to the protagonist's autoerotic, convulsive 'spasms of subsultus' (*D*, 117).³ This autoerotic, syncopated rhythm is envisaged, then, as a potent critique of the modes of causality and logic that underpin Nordau's scientific positivism, but the chapter argues that it is also imbricated in contemporary debates on the role of rhythm in the modern novel. With this in mind, it examines Beckett's allusions to the music of Beethoven and Schubert, arguing that *Dream's* abrupt narrative disjunctions enact a convulsive, masturbatory rhythm that is founded, not upon a harmonic, linear flow, but on an 'unspeakable trajectory' (*D*, 138), on a series of dissociative narrative ruptures and intermittent pauses that are figured through the recurrent motifs of masturbating seamstresses and unbuttoned symphonies.

The second chapter draws upon Beckett's reading in pre-Socratic and modern medicine to examine the extent to which the narrative of his first published novel, *Murphy* (1935-6), oscillates between two specific types of textual arrhythmia, between two different cardiovascular complaints

³ John Pilling notes that 'subsultus' is 'a rare and effectively obsolete word for "irregular motion, agitation"' (Pilling 2004, 290).

that which ultimately occasion, what William Osler's *The Principles and Practice of Modern Medicine* terms, the 'most extreme disturbance of rhythm' (1895, 684). As this chapter unfolds, it examines Beckett's ambivalent relationship with medicine, before analysing the significance of an ambiguous cardiovascular ailment in the characterisation of the protagonist in an unpublished short story entitled 'Lightning Calculation' (1934), which appears to stem from Beckett's encounter with Osler's text. Turning to *Murphy*, the chapter reads the novel's convulsive narrative of overdetermined plenitude and underdetermined lack against Beckett's reading in pre-Socratic philosophy and physiology, and, more specifically, against Pythagorean conceptions of medicine that depicted health as a form of attunement, that is, as a blend or harmonic balancing of elements. Instead, the chapter argues that the novel's fluctuating rhythm bears a closer resemblance to the systolic-diastolic movement of blood to and from the heart first postulated by Empedocles, but that, drawing from Osler's description of two specific types of arrhythmia frequently found in nervous conditions, *Murphy* oscillates between a bradycardic narrative (Gk. *Βραδύς*, 'slow' and *χαρδία*, 'heart') that becomes clogged and distended by an abundance of 'demented particulars' (*M*, 12) and a faster, tachycardic one (Gk. *ταχύ*, 'swift' and *χαρδία*, 'heart'), marked by a surfeit of such details.

The third chapter opens by reconsidering the repudiation of domesticity in *Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (1949), before turning to analyse the recurrent trope of linguistic constipation in Beckett's third novel, *Watt* (1941-5) in relation to Beckett's own readings in psychology and psychoanalysis, undertaken during his period of psychotherapy with W.R. Bion at the Tavistock Clinic in London between January 1934 and December 1935, and, in particular to his encounter with the Freudian theory of the anal erotic in Ernest Jones's *Papers on Psycho-analysis* (1923) and Karin Stephen's *Psychoanalysis and Medicine: A Study of the Wish to Fall Ill* (1933). Turning to examine the narrative's accretive, syndetic permutations and its congested rhythm of distension and delay, the chapter draws attention to the novel's allusion to a discussion of habit and rhythm in Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), whilst evaluating the significance of its invocation of a number of passages from a section in Osler's *Principles and Practice of Modern Medicine* entitled 'Diseases of the Digestive System', including sub-sections on 'Intestinal Obstruction' and

‘Constipation (Costiveness)’. Finally, the chapter draws a parallel between Osler’s attribution of these intestinal blockages to dietary deficiencies and Beckett’s growing sense of the inadequacy of language through a brief discussion of the ‘churn of stale words’ (*CP*, 25) in the poem ‘Cascando’ (1936).

The fourth chapter begins by re-evaluating the characterisation of Moran in the second part of *Molloy* (1953-54) in relation to both Sigmund Freud’s delineation of the traits of ‘orderliness, parsimony and obstinacy’ in his short essay ‘Character and Anal Eroticism’ (1908) and Ernest Jones’s development of Freud’s position in *Papers on Psycho-analysis*. Turning to a discarded passage from the third *Molloy* notebook, which details the abundant wealth of the coprophagic economy of Ballyba, the chapter considers the extent to which this retentive economy was at one stage imbricated in debates surrounding Swift’s work that took place during the Anglo-Irish trade war of the 1930s, yet argues that the more pressing concern behind this depiction of material wealth was the deprivation of post-war France. After reading this excision as an index of the manner in which the realm of the political is discarded, yet leaves an apophastic remainder in the trilogy, the chapter considers the extent to which Moran’s narrative can be thought to denote a relinquishing of the anal-sadistic phase. Rather than reading the first part of *Molloy* as a chronological development of Moran’s narrative, however, the chapter turns to consider Beckett’s interest in the work of the Marquis de Sade, and, in particular, his later translation of Maurice Blanchot’s essay ‘Le Raison de Sade’ in *Lautréamont et Sade* (1949), where Blanchot speaks of the manner in which Sade’s ‘theoretical ideas set free the irrational forces with which they are bound up’, plunging his narrative into ‘the obscurity of undigested ideas and experiences that cannot be given shape’ (Blanchot 1995, 57-58). Finally, the chapter turns to the novel’s opening imagery of ruminating cows and constipated Pomeranians to consider the fluctuating pace of its narrative, which oscillates between what Molloy terms a profusion of details ‘dashed off in loathing’ and a ‘wealth of filthy circumstance’ (*T*, 63), perpetually relapsing from one state to the other.

The penultimate chapter turns to the recurrent tropes of convulsive ‘throes’ and ‘dilation[s]’ in *Malone Dies* (1954-5), arguing that the etymology of the former term enacts the novel’s preoccupation with the acts of living and dying. As this penultimate chapter unfolds, it considers the

role that entropy might play in Malone's attempts to separate his self from his creations by turning to an image found in Beckett's reading in contemporary physics and consider how that is inflected in the novel through the imagery of scattering and sweeping. Secondly, the chapter turns to Beckett's reading in modern medicine and psychoanalysis to link Malone's encounter with an autonomic parrot to the convulsions of epilepsy, which Otto Rank's *The Trauma of Birth* claimed 'reproduce the act of birth' (Rank 1973, 71; TCD MS10971/8/34). In doing so, the chapter argues that Malone's convulsive narrative trajectory of dilation and throes can be read in terms of the links between neurological disorders and convulsive writing. This, in turn, appears to enact either a protracted death bed-struggle or a prolonged period of labour as the narrative proceeds, with the reader toiling amongst a dilating, overdetermined narrative marked by an 'excess of circumstance' (*T*, 197), which induces a series of violent throes that are enacted in Malone's own disgusted writhing turns away from his stories. Finally, the chapter turns to an image taken from part II of Goethe's *Faust* to consider the role of ingestion and excretion in the creation and destructive of Malone's stories, before closing with an examination of the tropes of voiding, vomiting and phantom births in relation to the novel's dissipative conclusion.

The final chapter focuses upon the representation of contamination and respiration in *The Unnamable* (1957-8), reading it as a parodic reprisal of Jean-Paul Sartre's rejection of a poetic, non-utilitarian language in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (1947), where the French philosopher aligns his concept of *littérature engagée* with a 'cleansing' (*nettoyage*) and 'curing' (*guérison*) of language (Sartre 1950, 210). In doing so, it reads the speaker's interest in respiration alongside Ernest Jones's description of the anal erotic symptom of the 'flatus complex', where the individual displays a preoccupation with internal hygiene that manifests itself through 'an intense aversion for already-breathed air' and 'a passionate interest in the subject of breath control' (Jones 1923, 702). With this in mind, the chapter briefly detours to evaluate the extent to which the short, terse dramaticule *Breath* (1969), written by Beckett whilst he was suffering from a lung abscess, might be thought to stage the Freudian theory of the anal erotic. Soiled by words that are forcefully introjected into its orifices by the voice of the other, which is variously identified as '[m]y master', 'a whole college of tyrants',

‘your Lordship’, ‘these maniacs’, ‘my purveyors’ or Basil and Mahood (*T*, 312, 312, 315, 329, 354), the speaker’s preoccupation with purification collapses, as, to quote Laura Salisbury, ‘words contaminate the body into which they are violently forced, infecting the subject so that it vomits and brings up a monstrosity that can never be the longed-for thing itself – a means of expressing the self alone – but will always be some kind of regurgitated other’ (2012, 165). Instead, the radical reduction of the subject coincides with a perpetual condition of dyspepsia and emesis, where the speaker’s excorporation of language stands as ‘the reflex of a process of unwilled introjection’ (Connor 2008, 25). This endless ingestion and excretion of language operates, in fact, at the level of syntax through a rhetorical form which the chapter describes as an etiolated epanorthosis, whose self-cancellations can productively be linked to Beckett’s interest in the symptoms of obsessional neurosis, as *The Unnamable*’s acts of syntactical discardment accrete into the resistant materiality of textual waste.

CHAPTER ONE

‘The whole fabric comes unstitched’: Dehiscence and *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*

To think, as Kant said, is to unite and bind.

– Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, 269

Writing to his close friend Thomas MacGreevy in the summer of 1930 about the French novelist Marcel Proust’s fascination with botany – a summer spent gathering and harvesting materials for the essay *Proust* (1930) – Beckett revealed that he had recently turned to Gabriele D’Annunzio’s novel *Il Fuoco* (1900) to re-evaluate Proust’s allusions to two paintings by the Renaissance master, Giorgione, only to discover some rather bare and stony ground. ‘I was reading D’Annunzio on Giorgione’, he explains, before promptly dismissing the lecture given on *The Tempest* and *The Pastoral Concert* by D’Annunzio’s autobiographical protagonist, Stelio Effrena, as ‘all balls and mean nasty balls’ (L I, 41). Whereas Beckett considers alluding to ‘Giorgione’s two young men’ for a discussion of ‘Proust’s floral obsessions’, he squeamishly recoils from the decadent writer’s erotic interpretation: ‘D’A. seems to think they are *merely* pausing between fucks. Horrible. He has a dirty juicy squelchy mind, bleeding and bursting, like his celebrated pomegranates’ (41).⁴ This frustration with D’Annunzio’s libidinal analysis soon boiled over into a passage in *Proust*, which insists that ‘the remote, still, almost breathless passion of a Giorgione youth’ is grotesquely misinterpreted by the Italian writer, who ‘sees in the rapt doomed figure of the Tempesta a vulgar Leander pausing between orgasms’ (PTD, 91).⁵ Less than twelve months later, however, when Beckett began to write his first novel, the posthumously

⁴ At the turn of the twentieth century, *The Pastoral Concert* was ascribed to Giorgione, although art historians now tend to attribute it to Titian.

⁵ Beckett’s exasperation with D’Annunzio’s symbolism appears to stem from Stelio Effrena’s description of the young man emerging from the ‘warm shadows’ in *The Concert*, whom he compares to a ‘glowing flower of adolescence’ created under the influence of the ‘Hellenic myth of Aphrodite’, puckering ‘closed lips [...] ready with a kiss as yet ungiven’ (D’Annunzio 1900, 53-54).

published *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1931-32), he drew extensively upon contemporary literary accounts which, in light of recent developments in biology, medicine and psychiatry, tended to classify the radical innovations of a wide range of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature as part of a wider social malaise; a cultural symptom of the evolutionary decline that Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1892) equated with the prevailing mood of the *fin-de-siècle*. Against Nordau's medico-scientific, positivist model of cultural pathology, which Beckett read between 1930 and 1931, *Dream* foregrounds a wilfully perverse, masturbatory poetics through the botanical trope of 'dehiscence' (*D*, 116). While Beckett subsequently employed this term in a review of Seán O'Casey's *Windfalls* (1934), praising *Juno and the Paycock* for its 'dramatic dehiscence', that is, for its representation of 'a mind and world come asunder in irrevocable dissociation' (*DIS*, 82), he originally encountered it in a late nineteenth-century medical textbook explicitly concerned with physical hygiene and the dangers of autoeroticism, Pierre Garnier's *Onanisme seul et à deux sous toutes ses formes et leurs conséquences* (1895). In the *Dream* notebook that he kept between 1930 and 1932, 'dehiscence' is glossed as the 'opening of a pod at maturity' (*DN*, 453), in accordance with a botanical definition of the term akin to the explosive act of sexual rupture symbolised by D'Annunzio's pomegranates: '[t]he bursting open of capsules, fruits, anthers, etc. in order to discharge their mature contents' (*OED*).

The significance of autoeroticism has, of course, frequently been recognised within Beckett studies, perhaps most notably in Julia Kristeva's essay 'The Father, Love and Banishment' (1980), which reads the protagonist's ascetic retreat from the affections of the prostitute Anna/Lulu in the novella 'First Love' (1946) alongside Marcel Duchamp's glass-painting *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even* (1923):

In the manner of Duchamp, Beckett says, after and against the militant bachelors of the early twentieth century, that rather than avoid the sexual act, they should assume it but only as an impossible relationship, whose participants are condemned to a perpetual banishment that confines them within autoeroticism.

(Kristeva 1980, 151)

For Kristeva, this banishment from the love of an ‘undifferentiated woman’ betrays an incomplete process of mourning, where the protagonist remains in thrall to the death of his father, a ‘paternal Death’ that occasions both the acts of loving and writing in the novella’s opening line: ‘I associate, rightly or wrongly, my marriage with the death of my father’ (1980, 149-50; *CSP*, 1). By drawing attention to the theme of autoeroticism, however, Kristeva’s argument recalls an earlier, less positive reading of sexuality and subjectivity in Beckett’s work, namely, Georg Lukács’s *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (1957), which detects an unhealthy fixation with psychopathology throughout modernist literature. For Lukács, the problem with modernism lies in its depiction of the ontological status of the human, for whereas the history of Realist fiction is dominated by the Aristotelian dictum that we are all ‘social animal[s]’ (Gk. *zoon politikon*) inextricably bound to our socio-historical environments, leading modernist writers like Kafka, Joyce and Beckett have seen the individual as inherently ‘solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings’ (Lukács 1963, 19-20). Lukács suggests that this ‘surrender to subjectivity’ represents a politically dubious act, a negation of history that depicts the individual as an ‘ahistorical being’, leading to a loss of the objectivity found in nineteenth-century realism (21, 24). His disdain for literary modernism culminates in a brief discussion of Beckett’s portrayal of the ‘utmost human degradation’ in *Molloy* (1951) which, for Lukács, amounts to nothing less than a ‘frank glorification’ of ‘perversity and idiocy as types of the *condition humaine*’ (31-32): an accusation of decadence which Theodor Adorno later defended Beckett against in ‘Trying to Understand Endgame’. As Anna Katharina Schaffner and Shane Weller observe, Lukács seems to imply that ‘the modernists offer the reader visions of individuals exhibiting various forms of sexual deviance that are both partial cause and symptom of a deeper socio-political alienation’, with the upshot that, ‘by focusing on deviance rather than on the norm, the modernists give us a perverted symptom of the human’ (Schaffner & Weller 2012, 5).

In contrast, this chapter suggests that Beckett’s interest in the links between writing and masturbation can be detected throughout the work of the early 1930s, yet it reads this collocation neither as a cause nor a symptom of a deeper socio-political alienation, but a wilfully perverse riposte to those contemporary cultural discourses surrounding the aetiology, diagnosis and prognosis of decadence and degeneracy in modern literature, which Beckett encountered in Nordau’s

Degeneration, and, albeit to a lesser degree, in Rebecca West's *The Strange Necessity* (1928). Accordingly, this chapter analyses the significance of autoeroticism in his correspondence of that period, before examining the extent to which the trope of 'dehiscence' is formally and thematically enacted in the dissociative free verse and libidinal subject matter of the poem 'Return to the Vestry' (1930). It argues that a masturbatory poetic is simultaneously foregrounded, critiqued and deconstructed in the characterisation of Belacqua, the indolent aesthete protagonist of *Dream*, who envisages the creative act through the peristaltic contractions of ejaculation, before reaching its apotheosis in the dehiscing, disjunctive narrative ruptures of that novel's syncopated rhythm, exemplified in the narrator's autotelic allusion to the protagonist's autoerotic, convulsive 'spasms of subsultus' (*D*, 117). This autoerotic, syncopated rhythm is envisaged not merely as an attack on the conventions of Realism and Naturalism which Beckett lambasted in his lectures at Trinity College Dublin in 1931, but as a potent critique of the modes of causality and logic that underpin Nordau's scientific positivism. When read alongside West's essay, however, it also appears to be imbricated in contemporary debates on the role of rhythm in the modern novel. With this in mind, the chapter turns to Beckett's allusions to the music of Beethoven and Schubert, arguing that *Dream's* abrupt narrative disjunctions enact a convulsive, masturbatory rhythm that is founded on an 'unspeakable trajectory' (138), on a series of dissociative narrative ruptures and intermittent pauses that are figured through the recurrent motifs of masturbating seamstresses and unbuttoned symphonies.

Spontaneity, Compulsion and the Pendu's Emission of Semen

Beckett's interest in the relationship between masturbation and writing can be linked to the staccato rhythm of his own writing process, for in his correspondence of the early 1930s writing is repeatedly envisaged as an autoerotic, reflexive and spontaneous act, where the composition of poetry is equated with an involuntary ejaculation that interrupts prolonged periods of creative impotence. Acknowledging MacGreevy's praise for the poems 'Alba' and 'Enueg I' in a letter of 12 September 1931, for example, he describes their composition in remarkably libidinal terms: 'They came one on top of the other, a double-yoked orgasm in months of aspermatic nights & days' (*L I*, 87). This

furtive, masturbatory imagery is reiterated later as he considers resigning from his post as a lecturer at Trinity College: ‘Nothing is so attractive anyhow as abstention. A nice quiet life punctuated with involuntary exonerations (Albas). Isn’t my navel worth 10 of anyone else’s, even though I can’t get a very good view of it’ (88). Poetry is envisaged, then, not merely as an unmediated, solitary form of navel-gazing, but as a literary form of ‘omphalography’ (Gk. *ὀμφαλός*, ‘navel’ and *γράφω*, ‘to write’); an act of navel-writing that results in autonomous, reflexive ejaculations, for as Yoshiaki Tajiri observes, three entries in the *Dream* notebook from Garnier’s *Onanisme* explicitly ‘link “exoneration” and “exonerate” to the ejaculation of semen’ (Tajiri 2007, 16; cf. *DN*, 447, 458, 466). Shortly afterwards, Beckett adapted another euphemism for masturbation in a letter to Samuel Putnam, the editor of the *New Review*, submitting a number of unspecified drafts with ‘the chiroplatonic flourish that it has taken me years to master’ (*L I*, 108; cf. *DN*, 462).

The most sustained delineation of an autoerotic poetics occurs, however, in a letter of 18 October 1932 to MacGreevy following his praise for an early draft of ‘Serena I’. In this letter, Beckett anxiously tries to distinguish between those of his poems that were ‘*construits*’, pre-meditated acts of volition, but which, as such, were consequently deemed to be optional or ‘*facultatif*’, and the few poems that were involuntary, the necessary product of a spontaneous emotional compulsion:

To know that you like the poem cheers me up. Genuinely my impression was that it was of little worth because it did not represent a necessity. I mean that in some ways it was facultatif and that I would have been no worse off for not having written it [...] Genuinely again my feeling is, more and more, than the greater part of my poetry, though it may be reasonably felicitous in its choice of terms, fails precisely because it is facultatif. Whereas the 3 or 4 I like [...] Alba & the long Enueg & Dortmunder & even Moly, do not and never did give me the impression of being construits.

(*L I*, 133-4)

The composition of these four poems appears to be predicated on a compulsive obligation; a compulsion which is paradoxically associated with an absence of volition through a complex metaphor of autonomous reflexes and involuntary bodily emissions:

There is a kind of writing corresponding with acts of fraud & debauchery on the part of the writing-shed. The moan I have more & more to make with mine is there – that it is nearly all

triggered up, *in terram*, faute d'orifice, heat of friction and not the spontaneous combustion of the spirit to compensate the pus & the pain that threaten its economy, fraudulent manoeuvres to make the cavity do what it can't do – the work of the abscess [...] I was trying to like Mallarmé again the other day, & couldn't, because it's Jesuitical poetry, even the Swan & Hérodiade. I suppose I'm a dirty low-church P[rotestant] even in poetry, concerned with integrity in a surplice. I'm in mourning for the integrity of a *pendu's* [hanged-man's] emission of semen, what I find in Homer & Dante & Racine & sometimes Rimbaud, the integrity of the eyelids coming down before the brain knows of grit in the wind.

(135; with '*in terram*' substituted for 'in terrain' as published)

Masturbation provides an analogue for a materialised, embodied language, where words are equated with semen, in a process whose perverse axiology reveals two different aspects of the writing process. Firstly, Beckett derides the value of the vast majority of his poems, complaining that they are artificial, worthless ejaculations, the inevitable result of a pre-meditated urge to write that he compares to a series of 'fraudulent manoeuvres'. This artificial writing constitutes a negative form of textual waste, in a process where words are emitted *in terram*, a Latin phrase borrowed from Garnier's medical textbook, where it appears in a retelling of the biblical story of Onan's transgression of levirate inheritance laws in his act of interrupted coitus, as he withdraws from Tamar, the widow of his brother Er, to spill his seed upon the ground in *Genesis* 38: 3-10 (Garnier 1895, 18; *DN*, 426). In contrast, this letter privileges a different kind of textual waste, a waste inextricably bound to a compulsive, spontaneous art, partaking of what Sinead Mooney aptly terms 'the instinctive biological exigency of involuntary bodily emissions and reflexes', which are represented in the images of the ejaculation of the hanged man that reappears in *Waiting in Godot* (1955) and the autonomous reflex of a blinking eye (Mooney 2000, 226).

Underpinning this interest in an affective, extemporaneous writing based upon the 'spontaneous combustion of the spirit', as Philip Laubach-Kiani notes, is Wordsworth's famous assertion in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* that '[p]oetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' (Laubach-Kiani 2004, 127; Wordsworth 2005, xix). In this respect, Beckett's interest in a literature of spontaneous compulsions anticipates the 'obligation to express' which emerges as a key aesthetic strategy in *Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (*PTD*, 103), but here the masturbatory imagery serves to invert Nordau's development of the British psychiatrist Henry Maudesley's concept of the 'moral insanity' of the degenerate mind. Nordau claims, then, that '[t]he two psychological

roots of moral insanity, in all its degrees of development, are, firstly, unbounded egotism, and, secondly, impulsiveness – *i.e.*, inability to resist a sudden impulse to any deed’ (Nordau 1892, 18-19). More specifically, Nordau observes in a footnote that in classifying the compulsive obsessions of the degenerate mind, the German neurologist and psychiatrist, Karl Friedrich Otto Westphal has created ‘the good term “*Zwangs-Vorstellung*”, *i.e.*, coercive idea’ – a phrase which Beckett subsequently recorded in the *Dream* notebook (18-19; *DN*, 614).

If writing is explicitly associated with masturbation through the image of the pendu’s involuntary emission of semen, the trope of ‘dehiscence’ is further reinforced in Beckett’s assertion that his successful poems were ‘written above an abscess and not out of a cavity, a statement and not a description of heat in the spirit to compensate for pus in the spirit’ (*L I*, 134). These privileged textual waste products are likened, then, to a collection of pus pouring out of an inflamed, suppurating abscess. A similar meaning is, in fact, conveyed by the medical definition of dehiscence, for a ‘wound dehiscence’ denotes a ‘bursting open or splitting along natural and sutured lines’ (*OED*), although the waste matter expelled in such instances is not semen but ‘sanies’ (*DN*, 1035), the fetid, seropurulent discharge from a wound or ulcer that Beckett adopted as the title for two of his poems in the collection *Echo’s Bones and Other Precipitates* (1935). This persistent emphasis upon bodily discharges might seem like a ringing endorsement of the automatic writing beloved of André Breton, whose work Beckett translated in the Surrealist special issue of *This Quarter* in September 1932 and Nancy Cunard’s *Negro* anthology (1932), but as Seán Lawlor astutely remarks, in this letter ‘inevitability, spontaneity and compulsion emerge as the key requirements’ of Beckett’s early work, where writing is depicted as ‘the material product of a physical necessity’ (Lawlor 2007, 8, 163). These compulsive, spontaneous textual waste products also affirm the importance of a literature founded upon an untidy excess through the peculiar concept of ‘integrity in a surplice’ (*L I*, 135). A surplice, of course, is a liturgical vestment, yet the homophony of ‘surplice’ and ‘surplus’ evokes an artistic process paradoxically tied to the production of a messy, excessive remainder: while a surplus has connotations of redundancy and waste found in its definition as ‘a surfeit’ or ‘an amount remaining in excess’, these are not usually the first things we associate with ‘integrity’, with truth or veracity (*OED*). Conversely, the integrity of this textual remainder diminishes its redundancy, for if

something is truthful, we don't usually think of it as superfluous. As we shall see, this qualified affirmation of a literary excess, in turn, suggests that Beckett's early work needs to be demarcated from the abundant lyricism and continuous flowing of D'Annunzio's bursting pomegranates, in order to account for the syncopated rhythm of dehiscence that characterises *Dream*.

'Spill the doings': Autoeroticism and 'Return to the Vestry'

Beckett's preoccupation with dehiscence is, however, not confined to a theoretical discussion in his correspondence, for it is readily apparent in 'Return to the Vestry', a poem first published in *The New Review* (August – October 1931), which subsequently revised as 'it is high time lover'. Both of these poems rework the clerical renunciation of eroticism found in the sixteenth-century French poet Pierre de Ronsard's 'Magie, ou délivrance d'amour' (c. 1552) into an oblique endorsement of autoeroticism, although the trope of dehiscence is more readily apparent in 'Return'. Knowlson's biography informs us that as a young scholar touring the Loire valley in 1926, Beckett planned an artistic pilgrimage to Ronsard's family home at La Poissonnière and his tomb at Prieuré de Sainte-Côme-les Tours, only to discover that the priory had been demolished and turned into a farm (Knowlson 1996, 64). 'Return' conflates this excursion with the description of an ascent of a mountain, a description which is, as the narrator of *Dream* subsequently acknowledges: 'cogged from the liquorish laypriest's Magic ode' (*D*, 68). In contrast to the autobiographical persona of Ronsard's ode, however, the disjunctive free verse of this ambivalent homage abruptly switches registers, shifting from instructions issued to a lover to the musings of a persona who forsakes love, as 'Return' parodies the French poet's elaborate purification rites, before closing with an elegy to Anteros, the Greek anti-erotic deity. Given this association of autoeroticism with purification rites, an entry in the *Dream* notebook suggests that 'Return' may be predicated on the ecclesiastical euphemism that saw masturbation labelled a form of 'pollution' (*DN*. 447), especially since the persona's ablutions only serve, at least in ecclesiastical terms, to occasion this form of self-pollution.

Whereas Ronsard's poem bids an unequivocal farewell to the bonds of sensual love, Beckett's opening lines invite a lover to strip off their clothes: 'Lover / off with your braces / Slouch in

unbuttoned ease' (*CP* 1-3). As Lawrence Harvey remarks, the imperatives scattered across the fourth line, 'fill a sack take a porter climb a mountain' (4), echo the directions given to the page in Ronsard's seventh stanza, 'Sus page, verse à mon costé / Le sac que tu as apporté' (Harvey 1970, 309, n.116). The next few lines explicitly evoke Ronsard as a prolific philanderer, 'the deaf conceited lecherous laypriest / the vindictive old sausage-sprinkler', while the subsequent description of the poet's remains as 'dirt on a dirt floor' (6-8) originates in one of Ronsard's *Sonnets pour Hélène* (1558) (Lawlor 2007, 50). At this juncture, however, Beckett's allusive interweaving of intertextual echoes abruptly comes unstitched, as the poetic persona turns to the memory of a pilgrimage to 'a chapel barn / by a stifled stream' (9-10), where the chapel has been demolished and Ronsard's diminished poetic reputation is personified in the image of a 'stifled stream'. Towards the end of this first stanza, 'Return' enacts another abrupt dislocation, suddenly introducing the first-person singular pronoun which dominates the rest of the poem:

I may be mistaken
 but –
 tears covering all risks –
 I took a time exposure
 and wept into my hat.

(13-17)

On a literal level, a 'time exposure' conjures up the image of a tourist photographing a shrine, yet as Lawlor comments, the juxtaposition of 'weeping' and 'exposure' introduces 'an onanistic subtext' that subsequently intensifies during the elegy to Anteros (2007, 51). This autoerotic subtext might, in turn, help to account for a variation in the fourth lines of 'Return' and 'it is high time lover', for as Beckett revised the original version he altered the line, 'fill a sack take a porter climb a mountain' (4), producing a rather more explicit image: 'bring the whole scrotum of tricks up onto the high mountain' (*CP*, 4).

The persona's tears are, however, quickly subsumed in a fit of rage as the poem abruptly switches registers at the start of the second stanza:

So
 swell the cairn and spill the doings
 Burn sulphur!
 Juniper flame to a swirl of ashes!
 Drown the Singer
 I'm done with stitch anguish

(18-23)

The injunction to 'swell the cairn' appears to encourage the lover to venerate Ronsard, to add another pebble to this commemorative pyramid of stones, but whereas Harvey glosses 'spill the doings' as a command to 'empty the knapsack' (310, n. 122), the ambiguity of 'doings' complicates this commemorative act. What exactly are these 'doings'? Are they merely miscellaneous objects carried in a hiker's rucksack? Or are they deeds and achievements? And, if so, who might they belong to? Do they symbolise the stones piled up by pilgrims to commemorate Ronsard's life? Or are they markers of a poetic practice? On the one hand, this oxymoronic line appears to encapsulate the ambivalent nature of Beckett's homage to Ronsard; if the 'doings' represent either stones left by pilgrims or Ronsard's poetic achievements, the imperatives 'swell the cairn' and 'spill the doings' represent something of a double-bind, at once serving as a call to commemorate and desecrate Ronsard's memory, just as 'Return' parodies its literary antecedent. On the other hand, the autoerotic subtext underlying the reference to the 'Singer' provides a crucial insight into the importance of 'dehiscence' in Beckett's early work, allowing us to read the imperative 'spill the doings' as a periphrasis for his masturbatory poetics in the early 1930s. This complex allusion to the 'Singer' puns on the anguish expressed in love songs and the brand name of a sewing machine, a pun which Lawlor attributes to 'Ronsard's lustral invitations', before noting that the French poet 'characteristically sings to his beloved' and 'produces lines of verse (or "stichs")' (2007, 52).

Now, around this time, albeit in a letter that postdates the composition of 'Return', Beckett complained to MacGreevy about the 'Alexandrine diction' and 'hemistich neuralgia' (*L I*, 91) of Victor Bérard's French translation of Homer's *Odyssey* (1924). As Bérard explains in his introduction, in order to transpose Homer's verse into an equivalent rhythm in French prose, he had to bind together the Homeric hemistich, sacrificing the major stress on the third iambic foot which

produces a caesura in traditional ‘Alexandrine diction’ (more commonly known in English as iambic hexameter): ‘Que l’on supprime la rime qui jalonne de douze en douze syllabes cette ‘diction alexandrine’ et l’on aura, je crois, un modèle de la prose que l’on peut concevoir pour obtenir en français un rythme équivalent à celui de texte homérique’ (Homer 1924, xxxii). In terms of the rejection of ‘stitch anguish’ in ‘Return’, however, perhaps more significant is the extent to which the poem’s dissociative free verse serves as a direct riposte to the scientific positivism that underpins Nordau’s chapter on Symbolist poetry in *Degeneration*. Whereas Nordau suggests that vigour, strength and well-being are entwined with the individual’s capacity for rational thought, Symbolist poetry’s rapid association of ideas and ambiguous imagery (which Nordau links to mysticism) are presented as the products of a feeble, insanitary mind:

[T]he thought of a healthy brain has a flow which is regulated by the laws of logic and the supervision of attention. It takes for its content a definite object, manipulates and exhausts it. The healthy man can tell what he thinks, and his telling has a beginning and an end. The mystic imbecile thinks merely according to the laws of association, and without the red thread of attention. He has fugitive ideation. He can never state accurately what he is thinking about; he can only denote the emotion which at the moment controls his consciousness [...] When he poetises, therefore, he will never develop a logical train of thought, but will seek by means of obscure words of distinctly emotional colouring to represent a feeling, a mood.

(Nordau 1895, 118-9)

Nordau links this privileging of emotion over reason to an exorbitant eroticism that he finds exemplified in the poetry of Paul Verlaine, which is diagnosed as a symptom of an evolutionary decline, for the ‘special characteristic of his degeneration is a madly inordinate eroticism’ which apparently means: ‘[h]e is perpetually thinking of lewdness, and lascivious images fill his mind continually’ (120).

Given that Beckett was translating Luis Aragon and André Breton’s ‘simulations’ of a variety of mental disorders during this period, which challenged medical and psychiatric accounts of ‘normality’ and ‘abnormality’, it seems highly improbable that he would have treated Nordau’s medico-scientific argument with anything but disdain. In addition to this, Nordau’s position is discredited in the foreword to a study of Romantic literature that Beckett encountered in the early

1930s, Mario Praz's *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica* (1930; translated in English as *The Romantic Agony*). Praz claims, then, that while Nordau's volume 'aims at being a literary nosology of the Decadent Movement, it is completely discredited by its pseudo-erudition, its grossly positivist point of view, and its insincere moral tone' (Praz 1933, v). Praz subverts Nordau's position, arguing that a writer who adopts the essentialist and positivist methods of Cesare Lombroso, the Italian criminologist who advocated anthropometry as a means of discerning external physical signs of criminal behaviour, in order to classify 'a degenerate tram-conductor with Verlaine, and place Rossetti among the weak-minded', is 'hardly capable of tracing the hidden sources of Decadent "degeneration"' (v). In doing so, Praz turns Nordau's medico-scientific discourse back in upon itself, reading the scientific positivism that underpins *Degeneration* as an atavistic throwback to a primitive stage of literary criticism, a discredited product of a degenerate mind, especially since his own discussion of 'the recurrence of certain morbid themes' in decadent literature refuses to diagnose them as 'an indication of a psychopathological state' in the author's mind (v-vi).

While Nordau's argument is predominantly thematic, however, his chapter on 'Symbolism' explicitly links the degeneracy of the Symbolist poets with the degeneracy of their poetic form, since the former occasions a disintegration of the traditional Alexandrine diction of classical French verse:

The Symbolists demand greater freedom in the treatment of French verse. They fiercely rebel against the old alexandrines, with the caesura in the middle, and the necessary termination of the sentence at the end; against the prohibition of the hiatus; against the law of the regular alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes. They make defiant use of the 'free verse', with length and rhyme *ad libitum*, and false rhymes.

(1895, 137)

Whereas, as the epigraph to this chapter shows, Nordau compares the logical binding together of disparate thoughts by the healthy mind to an act of sewing, a rational process that culminates artistically in the strict rhythm of Alexandrine diction, Beckett's syncopated free verse refuses to be neatly sutured together. This may help to explain why, in a letter to MacGreevy of 12 September 1931 regarding the composition of 'Enueg II', Beckett suggested that '[o]ne has to buckle the wheel of one's poem somehow, nicht wahr? Or run the risk of Nordau's tolerance' (*L I*, 87). Instead, Beckett

seems to wilfully embrace this degenerate poetic form, discarding a traditional rhyming structure and varying the length of each line to produce a series of dehiscing, disjunctive ruptures that seem closer to Garnier's description of a masturbating seamstress who came unstuck in a moment of sexual ecstasy, in what Lucien will later refer to as 'l'extase du décollage' (*D*, 20), largely thanks to the friction exerted upon her genitalia by the rhythm of her treadle wheels: 'pedalling her Singer faster and faster, her mouth half-open and her nostrils dilated' (*DN*, 475).

This degenerate, masturbatory subtext intensifies in the second stanza of 'Return', which parodies the purification rites of Ronsard's ode in a profound repudiation of procreative sexuality. At the start of this stanza, the poetic persona implores itself (for, by now, the lover appears to have abruptly disappeared) to '[b]urn sulphur', to reduce the '[j]uniper flame to a swirl of ashes', to apply 'a compress of wormwood and verbena / on my fiery buttocks' and to '[s]mother the place in Cerebos it stinks of breeding' (24-26). As Harvey explains, 'juniper', 'sulphur', 'verbena' and 'wormwood' are 'medicinal herbs' employed in 'purification rites', while Cerebos is 'brand of salt, used here as a purifying agent', all of which can be traced to Ronsard's 'Magie' (1970, 310, n.124-8). The terse assertion that this place 'stinks of breeding', however, implies that the purification rites somehow connote a rejection of reproductive sexuality, for the persona subsequently implores itself to 'pluck that pigeon she dribbles fertility', before bizarrely attempting to bestow '[m]umps and an orchid' on 'Fräulein Miranda' (33-34). The allusion to an 'orchid' puns on the flower's etymology, since the Greek *orkhis* conjures up a 'testicle' (Pilling 2011, 197), but the juxtaposition of 'mumps' and an 'orchid' also plays on *orchitis*, a medical term for the inflammation of the genitals (especially the testes) that Beckett may have encountered in a brief section on 'Epidemic Parotitis (Mumps)' in William Osler's *The Principles and Practice of Modern Medicine* (1895), from which a number of entries are taken in the *Dream* notebook (Osler 1895, 86-88; *DN*, 1007, 1020-4, 1032-5).⁶ The implication, albeit not one specifically found in Osler's medical textbook, is that suffering from 'mumps' or 'orchitis' could potentially make Fräulein Miranda infertile. Just as Beckett cast himself as the 'Baron Extravas' in an unpublished letter to MacGreevy of 12 December 1932, drawing upon

⁶ In John Pilling's *More Pricks than Kicks: A Strait of Two Wills* (2011), the author reveals that Mark Nixon has recently discovered this source material (Pilling 2011, 178-9).

an archaic Latin term for the expulsion of semen ‘outside of the vessel’, that is, outside the female body (Pilling 2004, 68; cf. *DN*, 478), here poetry represents a site of masturbatory spillage that enacts a paradoxically creative sterility. This autoerotic sterility dominates the final lines of ‘Return’, which take the form of a lyrical poem to ‘gentle Anteros’, where the Greek deity is personified as a phallic, autoerotic ‘grave snake’ come to ‘coil at the door of my quarry tomb’ during the ‘weary triumph of morning’ (32-33, 37-38).

Spasm[s] of dislocation

A more sustained delineation of the relationship between masturbation and writing can be found in the unpublished novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. After failing to attract a publisher, Beckett consistently refused to publish this novel in his lifetime, dismissing it in conversation with Eoin O’Brien as merely a ‘chest into which I threw my wild thoughts’ (O’Brien 1993, x). If *Dream* can be said, like Walter Draffin’s book in the short story ‘What a Misfortune’, to resemble a catch-all repository for the early Beckett to articulate his emotional foibles and interrogate his own aesthetic theories, a ‘mere dump for whatever he could not get off his chest in the ordinary way’ (*MPTK*, 143), as we will see, there is also a sense in which its disjunctive, dissociative narrative ruptures remain a product of its time, a direct riposte to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century medico-scientific accounts of literary degeneration. *Dream* predominantly focuses on an indolent author-figure named Belacqua, who plans to write a book but never does, whose peripatetic life-style takes him from Dublin to Kassel, from Paris to Vienna, and who has a string of unsuccessful relationships with a trio of ‘fair to middling women’ (the Smeraldina-Rima, the Syra-Cusa and the Alba). Rejecting direct physical encounters with the opposite sex, Belacqua attempts to withdraw from the external world into the blissful, embryonic state of the ‘wombtomb’ (*D*, 45), but these attempts largely fail to come to fruition, with the narrative implying that this rejection of sexual difference amounts to little more than an autoerotic fantasy, for in the previous episode, Belacqua stops visiting brothels in favour a ‘fraudulent system of Platonic manualisation, chiroplatonism’ (43). Attempting to summarise *Dream* is, however, a thankless task; as John Pilling notes, the narrative is ‘always exploding away from any

nucleus in an exhilarating but alarming centrifugal fashion’, ‘gravitating towards an exploded entity in which “the units of continuity have abdicated their unity”’ (Pilling 2011, 129, 135). Despite being published in the early 1990s, critics have frequently inscribed Belacqua’s retreat from the voracious sexual appetites of the Smeraldina-Rima and the Syra-Cusa within the parameters set by the existential-humanist approach that dominated Beckett studies until the 1980s, reading his retreat into the blissful state of the ‘wombtomb’ (45) as a Cartesian rejection of the body in favour of the mind. Less attention has been paid, however, to Belacqua’s deliberate revelling in the peristaltic contractions and gushing explosions of autoeroticism, nor to the extent to which the protagonist envisages the creative act through a distinctly libidinal, masturbatory poetics, gesturing towards, yet self-reflexively deconstructing, *Dream*’s preoccupation with the trope of dehiscence.

Throughout *Degeneration*, Nordau remains rather squeamish when it comes to the subject of the excessive sexual desires, or hyperaesthesia, of the degenerate mind, but as a practicing physician he follows late nineteenth-century medical accounts of sexual deviancy such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) and Paul Moreau’s *Des Aberrations du Sens Génétique* (1887) by equating these disproportionate desires with physiological deficiencies that affect the ‘organic nerve centres’, which are ‘frequently malformed, or morbidly irritated within the degenerate’ (1895, 61). Already burdened by the strains of rapid industrialisation and technological development, Nordau argues that the degenerate mind is particularly prone to a kind of sensory overload, in which even the most innocuous stimuli awaken ‘emotions of an erotic nature’, whereas exactly the same stimuli would ‘produce no such impression on the mind of a sound person’ (61). A case in point is the brief opening paragraph of ‘ONE’, which immediately draws the reader’s attention to Belacqua’s perverse sexuality, as the juxtaposition of a sadistic act of flagellation and a defecating horse stimulate his infantile sexual desires:

Behold Belacqua an overfed child pedalling, faster and faster, his mouth ajar and his nostrils dilated, down a frieze of hawthorn after Findlater’s van, faster and faster till he cruise alongside of the hoss, the black fat rump of the hoss. Whip him up, vanman, flickem, flapem,

collop-wollop fat Sambo. Stiffly, like a perturbation of feathers, the tail arches for a gush of mard. Ah...!

(D, 1)

This opening paragraph seems to consist of little more than an inventory of fetishes, in which the infantile Belacqua revels in the delights of bestiality, homoeroticism, masturbation and sadism. Shane Weller argues, for instance, that this scene could ‘be read as essentially homoerotic in nature’, for ‘not only is the horse identified as male’ but the ‘frieze of hawthorn’ recalls an episode in Proust’s *Du Côte de chez Swann* (1913), which Beckett provides as one of the examples in a ‘list of fetishes’ in *Proust* (Weller 2010a, 137; *PTD*, 37). Pilling draws attention to the fact that the precise phrasing of Belacqua’s sadistic instructions, ‘Whip him up, vanman, flickem, flapem, collop-wollop fat Sambo’, is derived from two separate sadistic anecdotes in a history of flogging, William M. Cooper’s *Flagellation and the Flagellants* (1887) (Pilling 2004, 17; cf. *DN*, 410). In addition to this, both Pilling and Paul Stewart link Belacqua’s fascination with the horse’s ‘gush of mard’ (an Anglicisation of the French *merde*) to the case study of Little Hans in Sigmund Freud’s *Three Studies in Sexuality* (1908), remarking that Freud’s young analysand shares Belacqua’s obsession with horse’s buttocks, although Stewart ultimately differentiates between them, noting that the climactic moment of the horse’s defecation is absent in Freud’s narrative (Pilling 2004, 18; Stewart 2011, 20).

In relation to Freud’s case-study, Pilling wonders ‘whether Belacqua shares this neurosis’ or whether *Dream* is ‘mocking the very idea that it might be one’ (2004, 18), but when read alongside Rebecca West’s *The Strange Necessity*, Belacqua’s autoerotic ecstasy takes on a surprisingly political tone. In his first published essay, ‘Dante... Bruno.Vico..Joyce’ (1929), Beckett had launched a scathing critique of West, an attack which is all the more venomous for its subversion of two of her key arguments, namely that the depiction of Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) is symptomatic of the author’s own sentimental narcissism and that the Behaviourist experiments of Ivan Pavlov’s *Conditioned Reflexes* (1927) might help us to understand the nature of reader-response:

When Miss Rebecca West clears her decks for a sorrowful deprecation of the Narcissistic element in Mr Joyce by the purchase of 3 hats, one feels that she might very well wear her bib at all her intellectual banquets, or alternatively, assert a more noteworthy control over her salivary glands than is possible for Monsieur Pavlov's unfortunate dogs.

(*DIS*, 26)

What has hitherto remained unacknowledged, however, is the extent to which Belacqua's autoerotic climax in 'ONE' parodies the final chapter of *The Strange Necessity*, where West produces an impassioned disquisition on the subject of the British Empire, race and degeneracy. In this chapter, West defends the Empire as both 'a political necessity' and 'a glorious one', before suggesting that its maintenance 'involves a very heavy sacrifice in thrusting back certain of those who work for it into a state of being below the level of that enjoyed by their fellow countryman' (West 1928, 140-1). For West's broadly eugenic argument, the nearest example to hand is Beckett's 'Anglo-Irish Protestant society', and, in a bizarre chapter that compares the poetry of W.B. Yeats and George Moore to the insensible slobbering of Pavlov's decorticated canines, she argues that this Anglo-Irish population has 'deteriorated [when] compared with the stock that stayed at home', before diagnosing the principal symptoms of Anglo-Irish degeneration as 'a narcissistic sense of their charm and a preoccupation altogether beyond reason with the horse' (140-1). The autoerotic climax of *Dream's* 'dirty low-church Protestant' (*D*, 227) protagonist at the sight of a defecating horse appears, then, to be connected to contemporary debates on degeneracy, serving to obliquely parody West's argument about the decline of the Anglo-Irish population.

By foregrounding the peristaltic convulsions of autoeroticism, however, 'ONE' gestures towards the spasmodic, dislocating narrative trajectory that will come to characterise *Dream's* syncopated rhythm. As Pilling has shown, Beckett was familiar with Garnier's description of the masturbating seamstress who rapidly pedalled her treadle wheels to achieve orgasm, substituting 'Singer' (the brand name of both a bicycle and a sewing machine) for Garnier's 'sewing machines' in an entry in the *Dream* notebook, before comparing himself to Garnier's *fricatix* (Lat. she who rubs) in an undated letter to MacGreevy from August 1931 (Pilling 2004, 296). In this letter, the image of the *fricatix's* masturbatory climax coincides with Beckett's praise for a convulsive phrase in

MacGreevy's poem 'Crón Tráth Na nDéithe' (Ir. Twilight of the Gods): 'I was reading your cab poem. Went up in a spasm is a great phrase' (*L I*, 84). Whereas, as Alex Davies notes, the 'ruptured narrative' of MacGreevy's poem consists of 'its persona's personal perceptions of, and reflections on, the Irish Free State in the aftermath of both the Civil War and the Great War' (Davies 2003, 83), with the 'spasm' symbolising the flames that engulfed the Public Records Office in Dublin's Four Courts when it was burnt down by anti-Treaty forces on June 1922, the prurient allusions of 'ONE' culminate in the convulsive, dissociative spasms of masturbation. In this respect, it is significant that the recent phenomenological turn in Beckett studies has led to a renewed focus on the tropes of convulsions and involuntary motility. Analysing the numerous examples of disorderly and involuntary movement in Beckett's mature prose, for example, Ulrika Maude has read the prevalence of 'shaking, trembling, tics and convulsions' in relation to the rapid advances in the study of neurology at the start of the twentieth century, arguing that '[t]he texts themselves appear to suffer the symptoms of the kind of dyskinesia that preoccupied neurologists in the first half of the twentieth century', before linking the convulsive tics and utterances of the Trilogy to Tourette's syndrome (Maude 2009, 156-7). More recently, Laura Salisbury has examined the significance of the 'convulsive and pathological' nature of sardonic laughter in Beckett's early critical pieces, drawing attention to the ways in which the haughty, supercilious tone of the early critical voice convulsively turns in on itself, becoming complicit with the object of its derision and rendering itself laughable (Salisbury 2012, 54).

What proves to be most significant, however, is not merely the fact that Beckett adapted MacGreevy's phrase in the opening lines of 'Enueg I', jerking the poem into being with an involuntary convulsion with the lines 'Exeo in a spasm / tired of my darling's red sputum / from the Portobello Private Nursing Home' (*CP*, 1-3), but that at least two of his critical pieces of the early 1930s draw attention to their subject's convulsive, spasmodic narrative trajectories. Firstly, while detecting a 'romantic strain' in Proust's work, Beckett notes the French writer's sceptical attitude towards causality, before differentiating his treatment of Time from that of the classical artist: 'Proust's chronology is extremely difficult to follow, the succession of events spasmodic' (*PTD*, 81). This vision of Proust's convulsive narrative trajectory would later be reiterated in a review of Albert

Feuillerat's *Comment Proust a compose son Roman* (1934) where, disparaging the notion that an ideal novel would resemble 'a respectable parabola', Beckett compares Proust's narrative to the irregular 'chart of an ague' (*DIS*, 64). Secondly, in the aforementioned review of O'Casey's *Windfalls*, the Irish dramatist's mastery of 'knockabout' is entwined with his mastery of dehiscence; his ability to discern 'the principle of disintegration in even the most complacent solidities' and 'activate it to their explosion', which culminates in the one-act play 'The End of the Beginning', where 'the entire set comes to pieces, and the chief character, in a final spasm of dislocation, leaves the scene by the chimney' (*DIS*, 82-83). Just as Beckett's lectures at Trinity College linked the 'bonheur' or 'moment of ecstasy' of Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1830) to an absence of 'logical endeavour' (Pilling 1996, 315), these convulsive narrative trajectories challenge an artistic procedure based upon continuity and coherence. Instead, Beckett appears to be privileging the erratic quality that he later detected in George Reavey's sequence of poems, *Nostradam* (1932), which he lauded for 'that threat or promise, swelling like some orgasm whose term is unpredictable' (*L I*, 269). Returning to 'ONE', both the disorganised muscular convulsions of Belacqua's climax and the explosive voiding of the defecating horse provide the first premonitions that logic and coherence are about to give way to a series of dehiscing ruptures; an indication that, as Pilling suggests, the novel is already 'starting to become unstitched' (Pilling 2004, 208). The brief splutter of the second paragraph, '[a]nd what is more he is to be surprised some years later climbing the trees in the country and in the town sliding down the rope in the gymnasium' (*D*, 1), only serves to reinforce this autoerotic imagery by casting the protagonist as a recurrent masturbator, for Garnier describes both these activities as 'surrogates for [...] masturbation' (Pilling 2004, 208; cf. *DN*, 473).

This predilection for masturbation is reiterated at the start of 'TWO', where Belacqua sublimates his sexual desires by working up an emotional 'little teary ejaculation' on the Carlyle Pier following the departure of his lover, the Smeraldina-Rima (*D*, 3-4). Recalling her shabby beret, he vacillates between releasing and staunching the flow of his emotions:

He sat working himself up to the little gush of tears that would exonerate him. When he felt them coming he switched off his mind and let them settle. First the cautious gyring of her in mind till it thudded and spun with the thought of her, then not a second too soon the violent voiding and blanking of his mind so that the gush was quelled, it was balked and driven back for a da capo.

(3-4)

Analysing this passage, Tajiri convincingly argues that ‘what is really at issue’ is ‘sexual drive rather than mind or emotion’ for ‘Belacqua seems to be trying to regulate and control his sexual drive by mechanising it’ (2007, 16-17), as the text posits a link between the emission of tears and semen (Tajiri 2007, 16; cf. *DN*, 447, 458, 466). With this mechanised sexuality in mind, Tajiri locates *Dream*’s preoccupation with autoeroticism within a specifically modernist content, turning to Michel Carrouges’s celebrated essay on Duchamp and Kafka, ‘Les machines célibataires’ (1954), to claim that Belacqua’s persistent attempts to mechanise his sexuality represents a distinctly ‘modern form of the Narcissus complex’ (Tajiri 2007, 20). Whereas Carrouges argues that the recurrent image of the bachelor machine in modern literature and painting reveals a ‘characteristic mental attitude’ that is ‘founded on a certain loss of human sense, or on the impossibility of communion with women’ (Carrouges 1954, 6, qtd. in Tajiri 2007, 19), Tajiri suggests that Belacqua’s dysfunctional version of this modernist masturbation machine might also be thought of as a ‘prosthetic body’, as ‘a machine for regulating the anarchic sexual force inside the human body’ that resonates with the work of modernist artists as diverse as Apollinaire, Duchamp, Jarry, Kafka, Lautréamont, or Roussel (2007, 19).

Belacqua’s emotional response may, however, be even harder to demarcate from his sexual impulses than Tajiri implies, for Nordau follows the work of the French psychiatrist Bénédict Morel, arguing that in conjunction with egotism and impulsiveness, one of the key ‘mental stigmas of the degenerate is their emotionalism’:

Morel has even wished to make this peculiarity their chief characteristic – erroneously, it seems to me, for it is present in the same degree among hysterics, and, indeed, it is to be found in perfectly healthy persons, who, from any transient cause, such as illness, exhaustion,

or any mental shock, have been temporarily weakened. Nevertheless it is a phenomenon rarely absent in a degenerate. He laughs until he sheds tears, or weeps copiously without adequate occasion.

(1895, 19)

Nordau links the degenerate mind with an unbridled egotism, emotionalism and eroticism, but when Belacqua's peculiar emotional activity is subsequently described as a 'chamber-work of sublimation', the psychoanalytic terminology reinforces the reader's sense that Belacqua's emission and retention of tears has a latent erotic subtext:

So, having fixed the technique, he sat on working himself up to the little teary ejaculation, choking it back in the very act of emission, waiting with his mind blank for it to subside, and then when everything was in order switching on the tragic beret and the semaphore vail [sic] and starting all over again. He sat hunched on the stanchion in the evening mizzle, forcing and foiling the ebullition in this curious way, and his hands were two clammy cadaverous slabs of cod in his lap.

(D, 4-5)

Belacqua's 'clammy' hands are metaphorised as the result of his sublimated sexual desires, but his peculiar activity is tied to a specific type of sexual practice: the protagonist's act of checking his tears resembles a form of *coitus reservatus* or sexual continence, wherein the peristaltic convulsions are prolonged as an individual refrains from orgasm, or '*dominando l'orgasmo*' as Lucien would say (21). Belacqua appears to be attempting to bring the involuntary, peristaltic contractions of ejaculation under volitional control, within the domain of the autonomous nervous system, yet if Tajiri links the mechanical imagery of this passage, with its talk of 'switch[ing] of the mind' or 'turn[ing] over the piston', to Carrouges's concept of the 'masturbation machine', the 'complete breakdown of the works' (D, 5) might also be read as a failed attempt to bring the peristaltic convulsions of the *vas deferens* under volitional control. The irony of this episode lies, of course, in the fact that the 'wharfinger' subsequently expels Belacqua from the Pier with an 'exuberance of coprolalia' (7), that is, a medical term for a burst of obscene language taken from Nordau's text, where it is employed in a discussion of Émile Zola's *La Terre* (1887) to prove that the author's 'nervous system is out of order'

(Nordau 1895, 499). Nordau observes that Gilles de la Tourette had coined this term for those ‘obsessional explosions of blasphemies and obscenities’ that typify a disorder described by M. Catrou as a ‘disease of convulsive tics’ (1895, 499; Maude 2009, 160), which suggests that the oral, phonetic convulsions of the wharfinger might not be that far removed from Belacqua’s subsequent vision of the peristaltic spasms of the creative process.

Botany, Anemophily and the ‘Blown Roses of a Phrase’

In a letter to MacGreevy of 29 May 1931, Beckett explained that he had recently been ‘writing the German Comedy in a ragged kind of way, on & off’ (*L I*, 78-79), but as he proceeded to write *Dream*, it appears to have retained something of this staccato rhythm. By early November, for example, he appears to have reached a creative impasse, complaining to MacGreevy, ‘I can’t write anything at all, can’t imagine even the shape of a sentence, nor take notes’, precisely because his reliance on secondary sources threatened to grow out of hand, lumbering him with a stash of ‘butin verbal’ (i.e. verbal booty) that would ‘strangle anything I’m likely to want to say’ (93-94). These compositional difficulties continued into late December, when Beckett informed his friend: ‘I started yet again & soon saw no reason to continue’ (100); a comment which, as Pilling plausibly suggests, implies that the writing of *Dream* occurred ‘only in fits and starts’ (Pilling 2004, 12). Three years later, in a review of Eduard Mörike’s novella *Mozart on the Way to Prague* (1934), Beckett would claim that Mörike’s talent is ‘sporadic, eager in attack and rapidly exhausted’ (*DIS*, 61); a judgement that appears to speak about, or rather to, himself, rather than the readership of *The Spectator*. This sporadic, staccato rhythm of the writing process is, in fact, integrated into *Dream*, where Belacqua envisages the creative act through the peristaltic motions of a phallus achieving orgasm:

The ecstatic mind, the mind achieving creation, take ours for example, rises to the shaftheads of its statement, its recondite relations of emerald, from a labour and a weariness of deep castings that brook no schema. The mind suddenly entombed, then active in an anger and a rhapsody of energy, in a scurrying and plunging towards exitus, such is the ultimate mode and factor of the creative integrity [...] That was the circular movement of the mind flowering up

and up through darkness to an apex, dear to Dionysus the Aeropagite, beside which all other modes, all the polite obliquities, are the clockwork of rond-de-cuirdom.

(*D*, 16-17)

Belacqua's vision of the creative mind is, strictly speaking, nothing of the sort, less a mind than a phallus rising to 'the shaftheads of its statement' in a 'rhapsody of energy' as it thrusts towards expulsion. The oblique allusion to the 'circular movement' favoured by a Christian theologian, Dionysus the Aeropagite, appears to stem from W.R. Inge's *Christian Mysticism* (1899), from which a number of entries are taken in the *Dream* notebook, including one that notes the mystic's preference for the 'circular (meditative) movement of the mind [compared] to [the] oblique (rational) and (direct) affective sensuous' (*DN*, 686). In Inge's account, this circular movement denotes a period of meditation where 'the soul returns in upon itself' (Inge 1899, 180, n.2), yet the 'flowering' of this mind seems closer to the botanical definition of 'dehiscence' than any mystical act.

When Belacqua proposes in 'UND' to write a book that would 'catapult the reader' from the 'blown roses of a phrase' into the 'tulips of the phrase that follows', *Dream* obliquely implies that its own disjunctive narrative ruptures are somehow related to botany (*D*, 138). The novel's ideal reader seems to consist not of an industrious bee flying from one episode to another, harvesting a series of phrases, but of a piece of pollen buffeted from phrase to phrase, in a process akin to anemophily, or wind pollination. Now, as Terence McQueeney observes, Beckett reiterates much of Ernst Robert Curtius's argument about Marcel Proust's interest in botany in *Proust*, arguing that the French writer 'assimilates the human to the vegetal' and remains 'conscious of humanity as flora, never as fauna' (*PTD*, 89), but whereas Curtius attributes this to 'the influence of Darwinian science', Beckett associates it with the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer (McQueeney 1977, 112-3). Schopenhauer argues that the physiognomy of plants represents a naked expression of the 'will-to-live', that is, a 'mere blind impulse to exist without end or aim'; to quote the philosopher, '[t]he plant reveals its whole being at the first glance and with complete innocence' as 'it carries its genitals exposed to view on the upper surface' (Schopenhauer 1966, 156). As McQueeney notes, Beckett restates Schopenhauer's argument in *Proust*, arguing that '[f]lower and plant have no conscious will. They are

shameless, exposing their genitals' (1977, 113; *PTD*, 89). For a reader in the early 1930s, however, a rather different context may have sprung to mind, as barely eighteen months earlier, the German photographer Karl Blossfeldt had published *Urformen der Kunst* (1929), a collection of magnified photographs of plant genitalia that quickly became an international bestseller. Shortly after its publication, Georges Bataille wrote an essay for the Surrealist magazine *Documents* inspired by Blossfeldt's close-ups of pistils and stamen entitled 'The Language of Flowers' (1929), an essay which debunks the symbolic meanings we typically derive from the flower's petals, instead focusing upon the stark realities of their reproduction and decay: 'after a very short period of glory the marvellous corolla [petal] rots indecently in the sun' (Bataille 1985, 12-13).

It is alongside this contemporary artistic reappraisal of plant reproductive organs that *Dream's* interest in dehiscence emerges, but the relationship between botany and the novel's syncopated rhythm only becomes apparent when read in conjunction with Belacqua's earlier delineation of an uneven, 'perpendicular writing' that differentiates itself from the 'uniform, horizontal writing' of a stylist like D'Annunzio' (*D*, 48). When Lucien drops a 'beautiful phrase' in 'TWO', Belacqua attempts to distinguish his own artistic practice from the heavily adorned lyricism of the Italian writer:

It was he who let fall nonchalantly, à propos of what we don't happen to know, so nonchalantly that it must have been his and not another's: "Black diamond of pessimism". Belacqua thought that was a nice example, in the domain of words, of the little sparkle hid in ashes, the precious margarita and hid from many, and the thing that the conversationalist, with his contempt of the tag and the ready-made, can't give you; because the lift to the high spot is precisely from the tag and the ready-made. The same with the stylist. You couldn't experience a margarita because he denies you the pebbles and flints that reveal it. The uniform, horizontal writing, flowing without accident, of the man with a style, never gives you the margarita. But the writing of, say, Racine or Malherbe, perpendicular, diamanté, is pitted, is it not, and sprigged with sparkles; the flints and pebbles are there, no end of humble tags and commonplaces. They have no style, they write without style, do they not, they give you the phrase, the sparkle, the precious margarita. Perhaps only the French can do it. Perhaps only the French language can give you the thing you want.

(47-48)⁷

⁷ Beckett had himself encountered the phrase 'black diamond of pessimism' in a letter from his friend, Jean Beaufret (*L I*, 73).

That Belacqua should choose to repudiate a ‘horizontal writing’ is particularly significant in light of Eugene Jolas’s manifesto, ‘Poetry is Vertical’, which Beckett signed when it appeared in *transition* 21 (March 1932). In this respect, Belacqua’s masturbatory poetics resonate with a number of points in this manifesto, such as its proclamations of ‘the autonomy of the poetic vision’ or ‘hegemony of the inner life over the outer life’, its emphasis upon the ‘immediacy of the ecstatic revelation’ (Jolas et al. 2001, 529).

There is, however, a more oblique allusion to D’Annunzio’s writing in ‘THREE’, where the narrator rejects the libidinal symbolism of *Il Fuoco* by deciding to stage a love scene between Belacqua and the Alba on Wicklow’s Silver Strand, despite the fact that D’Annunzio’s ‘Venice, where the waters wither and rot and *pomegranates bleed their sperm* [...] is nonpareil for that class of thing’ (*D*, 189; emphasis mine). That D’Annunzio’s pomegranates should ‘bleed their sperm’, typifying the ‘uniform, horizontal writing’ that Belacqua associates with a lyricism that keeps ‘flowing without accident’ (48), without a grammatical inflexion that might staunch the flow of the sentence, perhaps suggests that Beckett is disparaging the Italian writer for the attention he lavishes upon the affective pulsations of artists like Giorgione and Pindar, the ‘violent throbbing of their pulses’ which the former links to the ‘veritable rhythm of Venetian art’ (D’Annunzio 1900, 51). The Beckett of *Dream* does not appear, however, to have associated this ‘violent throbbing’ with the cardiac palpitations and narrative arrhythmias that will subsequently dominate *Murphy*, for in an essay that he wrote as an undergraduate at Trinity College on D’Annunzio and Carducci, the Italian writer’s overtly mellifluous and melodious symbolism is derided as ‘*un ammalato di nervi*’ (It. ‘a nervous condition’) (TCD MS10965a/1r, qtd. in Caselli 2009, 210). As Daniela Caselli notes, this essay subverts ‘the rhetoric of disease and dissolution dear to decadent D’Annunzio himself’, but although Caselli argues that it is not ‘a Beckett easy to adopt or adapt as representatively “Beckettian”’, the student’s critique of D’Annunzio’s symbolism obliquely anticipates Belacqua’s argument. The young Beckett claims that D’Annunzio’s entire oeuvre ‘*porta l’impronta d’uno sforzo continuo di sorprendere, di abbagliare, quasi direi di sopraffare il lettore*’ (It. bears the mark of a continuous effort to surprise, to dazzle, almost – I would say – to overcome the reader), with the

decadent writer employing ‘*un diluvio di parole assai musicali ma che sono se non sfrenante almeno guidate con redini sciolte*’ (It. a deluge of very musical words which are, however, if not unbridled, at least given loose rein) (TCD MS10965a/1v-2r, qtd. in Caselli 2009, 209). If D’Annunzio’s ‘uniform, horizontal writing’ fails to provide the reader with the symbolic pearl, with that ‘precious margaret’ that Beckett excavated from Thomas à Kempis’s *The Imitation of Christ*, it may be because the Italian writer only provides a steady flow of heavily adorned, yet undifferentiated, lyrical phrases, cultivating a forest of symbols so heavily planted that it is difficult to see the wood for the trees (*D*, 49; cf. *DN*, 595). In contrast, the bumpy, uneven, ‘perpendicular’ writing of Racine and Malherbe is full of clichés, littered with an abundance of literary ‘druff’, an excess of chaff that allows the ‘precious margaret’ to shine even more brightly (*D*, 48, 46). Belacqua’s appreciation of this indented, syncopated symbolism may resonate with his later praise for the gaps and pauses of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony, but the narrator’s self-reflexive aside, ‘Don’t be too hard on him, he was trying to be a professor’, anxiously deconstructs the novel’s own procedures. Beckett’s lectures at Trinity suggest, in fact, that these self-reflexive gestures were an integral part of modern writing, for Beckett stressed that ‘[w]hen the French artist abdicates as critic everything goes wrong’, a problem that he repeatedly detects in the work of Corneille and Balzac, whereas ‘Racine is always present as critic’ (Le Juez 2008, 55).

Beethoven’s punctuation of dehiscence

Abruptly buffeted from phrase to phrase, from one episode to another in a series of disjunctive transitions, *Dream*’s fragmented structure pitches itself against the harmonic, linear narrative trajectory that ‘one gets from one’s favourite novelist’, the concordant intervals of a ‘purely melodic [...] Pythagorean chain-chant solo of cause and effect’ that one finds in a ‘one-figured telephony’ (*D*, 9-10). Although the text provides a number of insights into its irregular, dehiscing narrative trajectory, such as when Lucien’s letter speaks of both ‘l’extase du décollage’ and ‘le calme plat ponctué [...] de vertigineuses éjaculations d’écume et de clarté’ (21-22), Belacqua provides the clearest delineation in the quasi-theoretical exposition ‘UND’:

The experience of my reader shall be between the phrases, in the silence, communicated by the intervals, not the terms, of the statement, between the flowers than cannot coexist, the antithetical (nothing so simple as antithetical) seasons of words, his experience shall be the menace, the miracle, the memory, of an unspeakable trajectory.

(138)

Expanding upon this statement, Belacqua links this ‘unspeakable trajectory’ to the dissolution inherent within Rembrandt’s canvases:

I think now [...] of the dehiscing, the dynamic *décousu*, of a Rembrandt, the implication lurking behind the pictorial pretext threatening to invade pigment and oscuro; I think of the *Selbstbildnis*, in the toque and the golden chain, of the portrait of his brother, of the cute little Saint Matthew angel that I swear van Ryn never saw the day he painted, in all of which canvases during lunch on many a Sunday I have discerned a disfaction, a *désuni*, an *Ungebund*, a *flottement*, a *tremblement*, a tremor, a tremolo, a disaggregating, a disintegrating, an efflorescence, a breaking down and a multiplication of tissue, the corrosive ground-swell of Art.

(138-9)

Many of these terms can be traced to Beckett’s reading of this period: ‘*disfaction*’ to the ‘*disfazione*’ (It. *undoing*) of Leonardo da Vinci’s notebooks (*PTD*, 112), ‘*Ungebund*’ to a letter by Beethoven that describes the *Eighth Symphony* as ‘*aufgeknoepft*’ (Ger. unbuttoned), which Beckett mis-transcribed from Romain Rolland’s biography *Vie de Beethoven* (1903) (*DN*, 1107), or ‘dehiscence’ to Garnier’s comparison of the botanical ‘opening of a pod at maturity’ and the parting of the female sexual organs during orgasm: ‘la dehiscence des parties sexuelles chez la femme’ (Garnier 1895, 68; *DN*, 453). On the one hand, Belacqua’s emphasis upon these dissociative narrative ruptures clearly resonates with *Dream*’s own ‘unspeakable’ narrative trajectory, especially in light of the narrator’s decision to discard an extended musical analogy that sought to equate each of the novel’s characters with an interlude played on a Chinese lute: ‘We call the whole performance off, we call the book off, it tails off in a horrid manner. The whole fabric comes unstitched, it goes ungebunden, the wistful fabric. The music comes to pieces. The notes fly about all over the place, a cyclone of electrons’ (*D*, 112-3). On the other hand, these dozen technical phrases appear to deconstruct the novel’s preoccupation with a dehiscing textual excess, to simultaneously constitute a ‘multiplication’ and a ‘breaking down’ of its

masturbatory poetics, for they amount to twelve different ways of saying the same thing, namely, that the narrative will come disconnected, undone or unstitched.

Turning directly to the music of Beethoven, Belacqua provides the clearest intimation of *Dream*'s syncopated rhythm of dehiscence, yet what has hitherto remained unacknowledged within Beckett studies, is the extent to which his comments on Beethoven are inextricably bound to contemporary debates on the role of pattern and rhythm in modernist literature:

I think of Beethoven, his eyes are closed, the poor man he was very shortsighted they say, his eyes are closed, he smokes a long pipe, he listens to the *Ferne*, the *unsterbliche Geliebte*, he unbuttons himself to Teresa ante rem, I think of his earlier compositions where into the body of the musical statement he incorporates a punctuation of dehiscence, flottements, the coherence gone to pieces, the continuity bitched to hell because the units of coherence have abdicated their unity, they have gone multiple, they fall apart, the notes fly about, a blizzard of electrons; and then vespertine compositions eaten away with terrible silences [...] pitted away with dire storms of silence, in which has been engulfed the hysteria that he used to let speak up, pipe up, for itself.

(139)

Belacqua's preoccupation with the Beethovenian pause, in fact, responds directly to a brief passage in West's *The Strange Necessity*, where she seeks recourse to E.M. Forster's 1927 Clark Lectures that were delivered under the auspices of Trinity College Cambridge and subsequently published as *Aspects of the Novel* (1927). For while analysing the 'interweaving rhythms' of the interior monologues of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, West quotes Forster's discussion of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* (1808) in his fifth lecture on 'Pattern and Rhythm' to illustrate her own reservations about literature's attempts to emulate the rhythm of music:

In the course of the Clark lectures Mr E.M. Forster delivered on 'Aspects of the Novel', he discusses whether any but the simplest rhythms, those that consist of *repetition plus variation*, have ever been created in fiction. "Is there any effect in novels", he asks, "comparable to the effect of the Fifth Symphony as a whole, where, when the orchestra stops, we hear something that has never actually been played?"

(West 1928, 47; cf. Forster 1927, 210-5; emphasis mine)

Beckett's suggestion in 'Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce' that Joyce intertwines Vico's three themes into a 'decoration of arabesques' also serves to develop West's grudging praise for the 'interweaving rhythms' of *Ulysses*, for while complaining about Joyce's lack of variation, West compares the novel's rhythm to a repetitious wallpaper pattern, but Beckett transforms this negative judgement drawn from the field of interior design into a positive one drawn from architecture (West 1928, 50; *DIS*, 22).⁸ More significantly, Belacqua's plan to write a novel that would emulate Beethoven's 'vespertine compositions eaten away by silence' (*D*, 138) takes up the implicit challenge of Forster's pronouncements on the modern novel, a challenge met by *Dream*'s disjunctive pauses and syntactical dislocations. Rather surprisingly, it may be Forster's comments on rhythm that provide the first intimation of the movement towards a '*Literatur des Unworts*' (Ger. *literature of the unword*) (*D*, 52; 173) that Beckett famously equated with Beethoven in his 1937 letter to Axel Kaun:

Is there any reason why that terrible materiality of the word surface should not be capable of being dissolved, like for example the sound surface, torn by enormous pauses, of Beethoven's seventh Symphony, so that through whole pages we can perceive nothing but a path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence?

(*DIS*, 172)

Despite their convergence, however, the libidinal subtext of Belacqua's comments on Beethoven in *Dream* diverge from Beckett's later delineation of his own artistic practice. While the former associates Beethoven's music with a series of autoerotic, dehiscing ruptures, Beckett's 1937 letter insinuates that the 'Wörterstürmerei' (Ger. *assault on words*) represents a more violent sexual act, as the attempt to bore 'Lochs' (Ger. *holes*) into language 'carries the identical connotation of vagina' in the original German (*D*, 54; 173; Furlani 1996, 117).

That Beckett was thinking about the links between the act of orgasm and the centrifugal, dissipative nature of this Beethovenian 'punctuation of dehiscence' is suggested by a passage in the unpublished short story 'Echo's Bones' (1934), where Lord Gall and Belacqua sing a harmonious

⁸ 'I would prefer man to draw a better design, even if it was drawn but once and was not repeated like the pattern on a wall-paper' (West 1928, 50).

duet. After completing their rendition, the latter praises the former, ‘you centre your notes like a lepidopterist’, only for Lord Gall to correct the protagonist’s expression by alluding to the antithesis of Garnier’s masturbating fricatrix: ‘[s]ay rather an invisible seamstress’ (B389/122, 17). With this in mind, it is significant that although Rolland’s biography describes Beethoven’s *Seventh Symphony* as a ‘flood of energy’ (Rolland 1927, 30), Catherine Laws astutely observes that Beckett seems more interested in the ‘ruptures’ within this piece. When *Dream* quotes a musical phrase from the accompaniment to the lower instruments of the orchestra in the first movement (*D*, 106, 229), it employs a phrase that ‘cuts unexpectedly into the first movement’s texture to provide a sudden pause at the end of the exuberant *tutti* statement of the *vivace* main theme’, in what Ackerley and Gontarski call: ‘the pause before the “stürm”, a moment of quiet passing into frenzy’ (Laws 2003, 125; Ackerley & Gontarski 2004, 45). It is, then, the ‘punctuation’ that follows acts of autoeroticism that provides the clearest intimation of *Dream*’s syncopated rhythm, where the narrative trajectory consists of little more than a series of abrupt dislocations, dissonances and hiatuses, instead of a continuous, smooth transition between episodes. Most frequently, this is achieved either through a typographical break between paragraphs, separating brief, disparate blocks of material to ensure that each episode functions independently, or through the narrator’s abrupt interpolations, which disrupt narrative continuity, such as ‘Nor on brothels...’, ‘*Cæsura*’ or ‘Alas cang of emblem’ (*D*, 38, 170, 188).

Another analogue for this narrative trajectory of hiatus and recommencement can be found in the ‘Smeraldina’s Billet-doux’, where the Smeraldina quotes a short excerpt from the passage depicting Gretchen at the spinning-wheel in the first part of Goethe’s *Faust* (1808), which had been set to music by Franz Schubert as *Gretchen am Spinnrade* (1814): ‘*Mein Ruh’ ist hin / Mein Herz ist schwer / Ich finde Sie nimmer / Und nimmermehr*’ (Ger. My peace is fled, / My heart is sore; / I shall find it never, / Ah! Nevermore) (*D*, 59; Goethe 1926, 116).⁹ Nixon may argue that this quotation typifies *Dream*’s derisive treatment of ‘an excessively sentimental strand of German Romanticism’ (Nixon 2011, 65), but Schubert’s piano composition also echoes *Dream*’s own preoccupation with autoerotic ruptures, with its imagery of masturbating seamstresses and unbuttoned symphonies. As

⁹ Early 1930s: ‘The probable source of the German fragments incorporated in the early poems and prose is Schubert’s *Lieder*, with which Beckett was familiar from an early date’ (*DTF*, 98)

Charles Rosen remarks, Schubert's piece mimics the revolutions of a spinning wheel, where 'the right-hand *sempre legato* represents the turning wheel; in the left, the tenor *sempre staccato* imitates the continuous clicking sound of the spinning, and the bass [...] the occasional impulse that the spinner's foot must give to the pedal' (Rosen 1997, 72). Just like the musical phrase from Beethoven, this phrase also cuts unexpectedly into the structure of Schubert's *Lied*, for as Gretchen recalls Faust's kiss and becomes increasingly excited during the climax of the piece, the piano abruptly comes to a halt, as 'the wheel ceases to spin, only to start up again as she returns to the contemplation of her sorrow and despair' (1997, 72). In light of *Dream*'s recurrent motif of the masturbating seamstress, the punctuation of Schubert's piece reverberates with the narrative's libidinal trajectory, where the dissociative climax of each narrative episode is frequently followed by a lull, a lull which in turn occasions a return to the treadle wheels, engendering another vignette.

Given this syncopated rhythm, *Dream* posits a non-ideal reader in the figure of Jean du Chas, who repeatedly disrupts the protagonist's vision of 'more nervous treatment of the caesura' (*D*, 144). Belacqua informs his friend, for instance, that he has 'a strong weakness [...] for the epic caesura', which, in an anticipation of the arrhythmia of *Murphy*, he compares to 'the heart of the metre missing a beat' (144). Employing the rhetorical device of aposiopesis, Belacqua quotes a dehiscing, truncated line of verse from Racine's *Phèdre*, which is broken down into a single hemistich, 'Vous mourûtes aux bords...'; abruptly stopping 'in midstitch' like the mysterious woman who watches the narrator at the start of *How It Is* (144; *HII*, 6). Against this dissociative device, Chas sutures Belacqua's ambiguous thoughts and feeling, neatly stitching together and finishing Phèdre's line: 'Où vous fûtes laissée' (where you were abandoned) (*D*, 144). Shortly afterwards, in conversation with the Polar Bear, Chas once again completes the thoughts of his interlocutor, only to be lambasted by the narrator for this conjunctive act of syntactical closure:

That was the worst of Chas, that was his weakness [...] a mysterious terminus of fitness closing the line or the couplet or the quatrain or the phrase or the period, whatever the area to which he felt dimly closure should be applied, we don't presume to know how that point was established. Anal complex anyway. Many a time had Belacqua, responding to the obscure need to verbalise a wombtombing or such like, murmured a syllable or two of incantation:

“La sua bocca...”, “Qui vive la pietà...” [...] only to have this filthy little hop-me-thumb Bartlett-in-the-box pop aloft with a hod of syllables, gash a glaring Cæsarean in the nightfall of the ambiente, stitch and hemistitch right left and centre the dying meditation, and drum the brain back into the counting-house.

(148)

The narrator’s aversion to Chas appears to stem from his fastidious obsession with neatness and syntactical closure; an aversion that chimes with the accusation that Chas exhibits an ‘anal complex’. In his short paper, ‘Character and Anal Eroticism’, Freud had characterised an obsession with ‘order’ as one of the three principal characteristics of anal eroticism (Freud 1959, 169). By labelling Belacqua’s truncated quotations from a variety of secondary sources a form of ‘incantation’, the narrator implies that his furtive, solitary thoughts are akin to ritual or prayer, yet these private moments are desecrated by the finicky Chas.

Against Nordau’s image of the healthy mind logically binding together disparate thoughts, there appears to be a Romantic subtext at work here, as Praz’s *The Romantic Agony* specifically equates the term Romanticism with ‘words expressing states of mind which cannot be described, such as the German ‘Sehnsucht’ and the English ‘wistful’ (Praz 1933, 14). For Praz, the ‘essence of Romanticism’ lies in a rejection of ‘concrete expression’ that embraces ‘that which cannot be described’ or the ‘magic of the ineffable’, which he links to Keats’s poem ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’: ‘Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter’ (15). In contrast, just as Chas is said in ‘A Wet Night’ to have a mind like a well-thumbed, ‘tattered concordance’, here his proclivity for explaining away the ineffable is linked to John Bartlett, a Victorian compiler of concordances, whose *A Complete Concordance to Shakespeare* Beckett owned (MPTK, 55; Pilling 2011, 159). Stitching Belacqua’s truncated hemistichs into complete lines of verse, Chas works against the grain of both Beckett’s early correspondence and *Dream*’s own narrative trajectory. When the narrator threatens to send Chas and his lover to a ‘thalamus’, he reinforces Beckett’s early interest in the messy, botanical trope of expulsive rupture, as a thalamus denotes ‘a flower’s receptacle and secret chamber’ (D, 149; Pilling 2011, 259). Only after reading Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) in February 1935 would Beckett become amenable to the interconnected, logical connections of stitching, remarking in

a letter to MacGreevy that the English novelist had taught him that some material ‘can be treated most conveniently in the crochet mode’ (*L I*, 252), although somewhat characteristically, by the time he started to work on *Human Wishes*, an aborted play on Samuel Johnson’s inner circle, the act of knitting had once more given way to a tangled process of ‘knotting’ (*DIS*, 155-6). Despite Belacqua’s best efforts, however, there is little sense that *Dream*’s narrative ‘punctuation of dehiscence’ might be replicated at the level of syntax; as Gilles Deleuze notes in ‘The Exhausted’, his afterword to *Quad et Trio du Fantôme, ...que nuages..., Nacht und Träume* (1992), language always remains encumbered with semantic links that cannot be picked apart. Deleuze argues that whereas this ‘punctuation of dehiscence’ might be possible on the surface of a painted canvas or a symphony, words are ultimately too adhesive to achieve such a program: ‘they are so burdened with calculations and significations, with intentions and personal memories, with old habits that cement them, that their surface, barely broken, heals over again. It sticks together’ (Deleuze 1995, 22).

If *Dream*’s ‘coprotechnics’ foreground the abject expulsions of autoeroticism as a riposte to Nordau’s positivism, a similar preoccupation can be detected in the ‘severe bout of hepatic colics’ that dominate an episode in ‘TWO’, which was separately published in *transition 21* as ‘Sedendo et Quiescendo’ (*D*, 61). At the start of this episode, Belacqua’s writes to the Smeraldina-Rima informing her that he is suffering from a bout of diarrhoea, which means that he will have to delay his journey to Kassel, but after receiving a stinging rebuke from her mother, he drags himself out of bed ‘in a spasm’ to catch the earliest train:

Down you get now and step around. Two hours menopause at least. Drag your coffin my lord. Half a day and I’ll be with. HIER! The bright beer goes like water through the shortsighted fliegende Frankfurter porter. In Perpignan exiled dream-Dantes screaming in the plane-trees and freezing the sun with peacock feathers and at last at least a rudimentary black swan with the blood-beak and HIC! for the bladderjerk of the little Catalan postman. Oh who can hold a fire in his hand by thinking on the frosty Caucasus! Here oh here oh art thou pale with weariness [...] Ten Pfenige in such a dainty slot gives the la I am bound to concede and releases the appropriate tonic for the waning love. Moderate strength rings the bell. Like hell it does. Così fan tutte with the magic flute. Even in the Xmas holidays. Half a day and I’ll be in.

(*D*, 64)

On the basis of a series of letters from the summer of 1932, where Beckett and MacGreevy admit the Joycean influences behind this ‘sublimen of blatherskite’ (74), Pilling labels this ambiguous homage ‘an explosion of freely associative writing’, which ‘attempt[s] to excrete the Joyce of *Work in Progress* from his system’ (Pilling 2004, 120-1). With its recurrent imagery of diarrhoea, masturbation and menstruation, the profuse loquacity of this ‘gobble-gobble discharge from a colic-afflicted belly’ can also be read as part of *Dream*’s wider attempts to stage the staccato rhythm of the writing process, in which Beckett ‘found it more and more difficult to write’, but retained the ‘hope of its all coming in a gush like a bloody flux’ (L I, 12, 159).

Belacqua’s ‘intestinal incohesion’ may, however, represent another retort to *Degeneration*, for in his concluding prognosis for the twentieth century, Nordau imagines these degenerate ‘beings in competition with men who rise early, and are not weary before sunset, who have clear heads, solid stomachs and hard muscles’; a comparison that ‘will provoke our laughter’ (1895, 541). On closer examination, as Pilling remarks, a number of these images ‘invite an initial reading in terms of masturbation rather than [...] incontinence’; the ‘little Catalan’, for instance, might allude to Salvador Dalí, whose painting ‘*The Great Masturbator*’ dates from 1929, and a misquotation of Shelley’s fragment ‘To the Moon’ implies that ‘the “weariness” here may be the aftermath of masturbation’, as in the *post coitum omne animal triste* tradition which is frequently ascribed to Aristotle, whereas the conflation of two Mozart operas obliquely hints at ‘Belacqua’s inability to magic his ‘flute’ [...] in the way Smerry would like’ (Pilling 2004, 123-4). That masturbation places a crucial role in this spontaneous outburst becomes more apparent when Belacqua refers to the ‘Livid rapture of the Zurbaran Saint-Onan’ (D, 72), despite the fact that the ‘Spanish painter (Zurbarán) could not paint a Saint-Onan because there isn’t one’ (Pilling 2004, 125). *Dream* often reads like a perverse hagiography of this fictional saint, and, once again, here writing is tied to an excessive surfeit through the metaphor of a wasteful effusion of semen, yet after this frenzied episode, there follows a ‘punctuation of dehiscence’ akin to the text’s allusions to Beethoven and Schubert: ‘Now there is a lull’ (D, 139, 74).

As *Dream* draws to a close in 'THREE', the focus shifts from Belacqua to the ensemble piece of the Frica's party, where a series of inflated egos jostle for attention, transforming the party from a communal event into a rather more solitary one; as in *Proust*, here '[t]here is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication' (*PTD*, 64). The Homespun poet, for instance, paces back and forth practicing for his recital of a poem with a distinctly masturbatory subtext, 'Calvary by Night', determined to flaunt his creative ability and 'make something of a stir' (*D*, 214). With its emphasis upon creative dehiscence, upon 'an act of floral presence on the water / the tranquil act of its cycle on the waste / from the spouting forth / to the re-enwombing', Pilling notes that this is both 'a serious poem (it appears in the prospective contents for 'POEMS' by Samuel Beckett) and a parody of modernist, semi-Surrealistic practice', which employs the 'sewer outlet of the Poodle into the Liffey at Capel Street Bridge and fictional material from Joyce ['Flood' from *Pomes Penyeach*] to suggest that this writing is equivalent to onanism' (2004, 334). A couple of days before this party, Belacqua and the Alba get 'pleasantly drunk' in each other's company, slowly becoming unstuck like Beethoven's symphony, 'less buttoned up in their cohesion, more Seventh Symphony and more contrapanic-struck than usual', if not quite 'melting in that shameless ecstasy of disintegration' (*D*, 188), yet this imagery reappears as they make a hasty exit. Having shared a nightcap, the drunken protagonist wanders off into the night in 'UND', with *Dream* ending in much the same way as it began, with Belacqua suffering from an intestinal ailment and sublimating his sexual desire, 'wringing his hands faute de mieux' (5):

What was that in his lap? He shook off his glasses and bent down his head to see. That was his hands. Now who would have thought that! He turned them this way and that, he clenched and unclenched them [...] He opened them in unison at last, finger by finger together, till there they were, wide open, face upward, rancid, an inch from his squint, which however slowly righted itself as he began to lose interest in them as a spectacle. Scarcely had he made to employ them on his face when a voice, slightly more in sorrow than in anger this time, enjoined him to move on, which, the pain being so much better, he was only too happy to do so.

(241)

With the rain falling upon ‘the central bog’ with ‘a rather desolate uniformity’, ‘AND’ gently parodies Joyce’s short story ‘The Dead’, but whereas Joyce’s Gabriel Conroy undergoes an epiphany as he pictures the snow falling on the Bog of Allen and the grave of his wife’s former lover, Michael Furey, there is no epiphany at the end of *Dream*. The novel instead ends with a profound sense of anti-climax, without any real development or conclusion of events, yet as Katherine Weiss observes, this is consistent with *Dream*’s dehiscing narrative trajectory, for ‘[o]nly in this drunken state, not concerned with the stitching up of the textual fabric, can the text wind down’ (Weiss 2002, qtd. in Pilling 364).

Whereas Leslie Hill argues that ‘the body in Beckett’s trilogy finally dissolves into a writing, a writing that functions as a body, as a rhythm, a texture, a fabric of traces and a discharge of affects’ (Hill 1990, 120), the correlation between corporeality and writing can be traced all the way back to *Dream*, where the narrative’s staccato rhythm is bound up with its libidinal disjunctive ruptures, with the exposition of masturbatory poetic that is formally and thematically enacted through the trope of ‘dehiscence’. This autoerotic, syncopated rhythm is, however, politically inflected, allowing *Dream* to emerge as a potent critique of the modes of causality and logic that underpin Nordau’s scientific positivism.

CHAPTER TWO

‘An irrational heart’: Arrhythmia and Murphy

Let him not to / Who will not fro.

– Samuel Beckett, *Watt* notebook 3, 59

Reviewing J.B. Leishmann’s translation of Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Poems* (1934) for T.S. Eliot’s magazine *Criterion* in July 1934, Beckett detected a ‘turmoil of self-deception and naïf discontent’ throughout Rilke’s verse, before contrasting this falsified, inauthentic emotion with the *Sturm und Drang* of early German Romanticism. The majority of Rilke’s poems, Beckett claims, are tarnished by a ‘breathless petulance’, a kind of hyperventilating tantrum that leads to an ‘overstatement of the solitude which he cannot make his element’ (*DIS*, 66-67). To support this bold assertion, the review compares the asystolic, calcified heart of the poem ‘Der Einsame’ in *Neue Gedichte* (1907), ‘No, my heart shall turn into a tower’, with the ‘blue flower’ of Novalis’s incomplete prose romance *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802), pouring scorn upon the former as a manifestation of ‘[t]he mystic heart, geared to the *blaue Blume*, petrified!’ (*DIS*, 66-67).¹⁰ Rilke’s inauthentic Romanticism appears to ossify the emotional turbulence and transcendental longing of early German Romanticism; an argument strengthened by the fact that this critique derives its terminology from J.G. Robertson’s *A History of German Literature* (1902), a book which, as Mark Nixon observes, Beckett read and took extensive notes from, most probably in early 1934 (Nixon 2011, 63).¹¹ Located alongside Rilke’s earlier collection of poems *Stundenbuch* (1905), and, in particular, the widening gyres of the poetic

¹⁰ Intriguingly, in his 1931 lectures at Trinity College, Beckett suggested that the work of the French novelist André Gide is marked by a profound scepticism towards ossification: ‘Petrification, immobilisation, etc. words hated by Gide’ (Le Juez 2008, 44).

¹¹ Robertson claims, for instance, that unlike the protagonist of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* (1796), the eponymous protagonist of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* remains self-reliant: ‘he is not a blind seeker after the true path of his existence; he begins life as a poet, and with the clear consciousness that he has the find the wonderful “blue flower” in which the ideals and yearnings of Romanticism were symbolised’. In addition to this, Robertson argues that Novalis’s cycle of poems *Hymnen an die Nacht* (1800) are the authentic product of a ‘mystic fervour’ (Robertson 1902, 426-7; cf. TCD MS 10971/1/33v).

persona in the second stanza of *'Ich lebe mein Leben im wachsenden Ringen'* (Ger. I live my life in ever-widening circles), the petrified emotion of *'Der Einsame'* is derided as an act of 'apostasy', that is, the abandonment of a religious belief. Rather disingenuously, the review suggests that in this earlier poem, 'God is the tower and the heart whatever you please to call it', although neither of Rilke's stanzas allude to this specific organ (*DIS*, 66). For Beckett, however, the repetitive circulation of *'Ich lebe mein Leben'* is preferred to the asystolic heart of *'Der Einsame'*, while the juxtaposition of these two poems obliquely encourages the reader to supplement the conclusion of the former with an additional term: the widening gyres of Rilke's first-person poetic persona not only symbolise *'ein Falke, ein Sturm, oder ein großer Gesang'* (Ger. a falcon, a storm, or a great song) (Rilke 2011, 17), but the circulation of red and white blood cells around the body. Rilke may be accused, then, of 'indulg[ing] his sense of incommensurability in the crassest of antitheses', but Beckett's review obstinately refuses such neat binaries, inviting the reader to augment Rilke's poem with an additional term (*DIS*, 66).

This denigration of the asystolic heart of *'Der Einsame'* does not merely endorse the metronomic, repetitive circulation of *'Ich lebe mein Leben'*, however, for Beckett's review gestures towards the arrhythmic narrative trajectory of his first published novel, *Murphy* (1935-6). This novel predominantly focuses upon a solipsistic, eponymous protagonist, who suffers from a peculiar cardiovascular complaint that defies clinical analysis to the extent that 'no physician could get to the root of it' (*M*, 6), and his star-crossed love affair with a prostitute named Celia. This young woman tries to convince him to abandon the pleasure he derives from retreating into the 'third zone' of his mind, 'a flux of forms, a perpetual coming together and falling asunder of forms' (65), to find a job, only for Murphy to break off their relationship when he finds a more satisfactory state of affairs working as an orderly in a mental hospital. Naively believing that he has discovered a fraternity amongst the patients of the asylum, this illusion is shattered during a game of chess with a schizophrenic named Mr Endon, but before he can return to his lover, Murphy dies in a gas explosion, leaving Celia and a number of his former acquaintances to dispose of his remains. Despite this relatively simple narrative trajectory, *Murphy* is a novel preoccupied with questions of circulation and exchange, from the planetary orbits that underpin the protagonist's fluctuating faith in astrology to the

peregrinations of its characters around London's streets, from the circular, Racinian model of desire afflicting a number of its ancillary characters to Murphy's abortive attempts to return to the economic order of the 'jobpath' (44). If, as we have seen in the previous chapter, *Dream*'s syncopated narrative trajectory rejects the 'purely melodic [...] Pythagorean chain-chant solo of cause and effect' by incorporating a series of autoerotic ruptures in a 'punctuation of dehiscence' (*D*, 9-10, 139), the narrative of *Murphy* draws upon Beckett's reading in medicine to oscillate between two specific types of textual arrhythmia, between two different cardiovascular complaints which ultimately occasion, what William Osler's *The Principles and Practice of Modern Medicine* terms, the 'most extreme disturbance of rhythm' (1895, 684). The narrative of *Murphy* is told through what, speaking of Beckett's mature prose, Leslie Hill has labelled a peculiar 'logic of lacks and excesses' (1990, 57), oscillating between a bradycardic narrative (Gk. *Βραδύς*, 'slow', and *χαρδία*, 'heart') that becomes clogged and distended by an abundance of 'demented particulars' (*M*, 12) and a faster, tachycardic one (Gk. *ταχύ*, 'swift', and *χαρδία*, 'heart'), marked by a surfeit of such details. As this second chapter unfolds, then, it examines Beckett's ambivalent relationship with medicine, before analysing the significance of an ambiguous cardiovascular ailment in the characterisation of the protagonist in an unpublished short story from 1934 entitled 'Lightning Calculation'. Turning to *Murphy*, the chapter reads the novel's convulsive narrative against Beckett's reading in pre-Socratic philosophy and physiology, and, more specifically, against Pythagorean conceptions of medicine that depicted health as a form of attunement, that is, a blend or harmonic balancing of elements. Instead, the chapter argues that the novel's fluctuating rhythm bears a closer resemblance to the systolic-diastolic movement of blood to and from the heart first postulated by Empedocles, but that Beckett juxtaposes this movement with Osler's descriptions of bradycardia and tachycardia to occasion a disruption of narrative rhythm.

Beckett and Medicine

Both Beckett's dismissal of the asystolic heart of 'Der Einsame' and the arrhythmic narrative of *Murphy* can productively be read in conjunction with his long-standing fascination with medicine,

and, more specifically, with his interest in medical accounts of defective cardiac circulation. This can be traced from his first independently published piece, the poem 'Whoroscope' (1930), which alludes to Descartes's refutation of the work of the physician William Harvey – 'dear bloodswirling Harvey' – a seventeenth-century pioneer of cardiovascular medicine who, as Maude observes, 'in 1628 announced his theory of the circulation of the blood, based on experimentation, comparative anatomy and calculation' (*CP*, 39; Maude 2008a, 282), to the convulsive textual arrhythmias of the late prose piece *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1982), whose narrative and syntax oscillates in a '[s]low systole diastole' that resembles the '[r]hythm of a laboured heart' (*NO*, 66).¹² In the 'Whoroscope' notebook that Beckett kept between 1932 and 1938, he recorded a series of medical statistics relating to the circulation of the blood, noting that the average human body is 'equivalent in length to 200,000 tissue cells, or 2 million ordinary microbes' and that our blood typically consists of '30,000 milliards of red globules & 50 milliards of white' (UoR MS 3000, 41v, qtd. in Maude 2009, 124-5).¹³ More significantly, throughout the texts of the early 1930s, Beckett's protagonists frequently suffer from cardiac ailments that appear to mirror his own heart palpitations. After informing MacGreevy in a letter of 24 February 1931 that he had recently visited a physician because 'my bitch of a heart was keeping me awake' (*LI*, 69), for instance, the phrase was adapted and recycled in the characterisation of Belacqua in *Dream*, whose 'bitch of a heart knocks hell out of his bosom three or four nights in the week' (*D*, 73). In the *Dream* notebook that he kept between 1931-2, he jotted down a similar, albeit spiritual, complaint from *Ecclesiastes* 2:23: 'His heart taketh not rest in the night' (*DN*, 571). In contrast, the poem 'Enueg II' draws attention to the marked disturbances of rhythm that occur in cardiovascular complaints, to the syncopation of arrhythmia, by playing with the etymology of 'congress', which combines the Latin prefix 'com-' (together), 'gradi' (walk) and 'gradus' (a step), in its depiction of a tired heart stuttering out of step: 'the old heart the old heart / breaking outside congress' (*CP*, 19-20).

¹² See Samuel Beckett, 'Whoroscope': 'blood / Oh Harvey beloved / how shall the red and the white, the many in the few / (dear bloodswirling Harvey) / eddy through that cracked beater' (*CP*, 42-3). For a discussion of the manner in which these lines are indebted to J.P. Mahaffy's *Descartes* (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1880), see Francis Doherty, 'Mahaffy's Whoroscope', in *Journal of Beckett Studies* 2:1 (1992), 37.

¹³ For a discussion of the dating of the 'Whoroscope' notebook, see: Frederick N. Smith, 'Dating the Whoroscope Notebook', *JOBS* 3:1, 1993, Pilling essay in 'Ideal Core of the Onion' & Geert Lernout, 'James Joyce, Fritz Mauthner and Samuel Beckett' in *In Principle, Beckett is Joyce* ed. Friedhelm Rathjen'.

Accounting for the veritable cornucopia of cardiac ailments that appear in the early work, critics have frequently resorted to a biographical approach by tracing them to the Beckett's own physiological ailments, with Matthew Feldman claiming that the 'descriptions of Murphy's fluttering heart read very much like Beckett's own contemporaneous letters' (2006, 84). Such approaches often proceed, however, without necessarily acknowledging the extent to which these texts' ambivalent relationship with medical discourse destabilises and disputes the aetiological and diagnostic tendencies inherent within a biographical reading.¹⁴ For whilst Beckett's texts frequently resort to medical accounts to depict a plethora of physiological ailments, these same complaints are repeatedly accompanied by anxious caveats and narrative intrusions, which disrupt the principles of causation and classification inherent within medical discourse. In the short story 'A Case in a Thousand' (1934), for example, the narrator informs us that Dr Nye suffers from an arrhythmic heart that coughs and splutters like a dilapidated internal combustion engine, yet which defies the aetiological impulses of the physician: 'it knocked and misfired for no reason known to the medical profession' (*CSP*, 18-19). In a recent article on medicine and the composition of pain in Beckett's oeuvre, Peter Fifield has suggested that the representation of pain is persistently 'undercut, dispersed and disputed' (2012, 118), yet this argument should, in fact, be extended to the authority of medical discourse itself. These texts may depict a litany of physiological complaints, yet ultimately, these same complaints remain resistant to diagnosis, impossible to attribute to a specific cause; their examination of the 'whole misery', to quote the poem 'Ooftish' (1938), remains perpetually disrupted: 'diagnosed misdiagnosed undiagnosed' (*CP*, 16).

This ambivalent relationship with medicine is readily apparent in *Murphy*, yet while critics have devoted a substantial amount of attention to the novel's resistance to the 'textbook attitude' and 'complacent scientific conceptualism' of psychiatry, a resistance embodied in the Teutonic moniker of the Medical Superintendent of the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, Dr Killiecrankie, which has the distinctly non-therapeutic connotation of 'killing the sick' (Ger. *krank* [ill]), rather less attention has been paid the significance of medicine. There is, as far as I am aware, only one exception to this rule,

¹⁴ For another biographical reading of these cardio-vascular ailments, see Ackerley 2010a: 34.

for Hugh Culik claims that the names of a number of the characters allude to ‘well-known physicians’ whose surnames have ‘become eponyms for different operations, instruments, procedures, signs, methods, or tests’, although it often takes a great deal of ingenuity for to the relate these apparently synecdochic symbols to the text (Culik 1979, 91-92). At no stage, however, does Culik acknowledge *Murphy*’s ambivalent treatment of medical discourse, an ambivalence exemplified in a lengthy description of the fictitious ailment that blights a minor character, the hack medium, Rosie Dew:

Duck’s disease is a distressing pathological condition in which the thighs are suppressed and the buttock’s spring directly from behind the knees, aptly described in Steiss’s nosonomy as Panpygoptosis. Happily its incidence is small and confined, as the popular name suggests, to the weaker vessel, a bias of Nature bitterly lamented by the celebrated Dr Busby and other less pedantic notables. It is non-contagious (though some observers have held the contrary), non-infectious, non-heritable, painless and intractable. Its aetiology remains obscure to all but the psychopathological wholehogs, who have shown it to be simply another embodiment of the neurotic *Non me rebus sed mihi res*.

(*M*, 58)

The clinical register of this passage typifies what David Houston Jones has termed Beckett’s ‘ambivalent but far-reaching fascination with scientific metalanguage’ (Jones 2009, 120), for the narrator adopts a pseudo-scientific language (‘nosonomy’, ‘Panpygoptosis’) and specific turns of phrase (‘the weaker vessel’) that parody the linguistic conventions of a Victorian medical text-book. A pun as flaccid as Rosie Dew’s buttocks underlies this fictitious pathology of a disease that can only be classified through recourse to this specialist terminology, namely, that all doctors are ‘quacks’ or pedlars of false cures, with the former deriving from a sixteenth-century Dutch term, ‘*quacksalver*’, which denotes ‘one who quacks (brags) about the virtue of his salves’ (*OED*).

The medical language employed to describe this ‘distressing’ condition seems out of step with its symptoms, for the principal symptom of ‘Panpygoptosis’ is relatively benign, with C.J. Ackerley observing that this neologism might be loosely translated as ‘all bottom sagging’, a compound of the Greek ‘*pan*’ (all), ‘*pygo*’ (rump) and ‘*ptosis*’ (falling) (2010a, 108).¹⁵ This might help to explain why the restriction of ‘Duck’s disease’ to women is lamented by Dr Busby, a teacher at Westminster

¹⁵ Pilling notes that ‘ptosis’ is employed in ‘A Wet Night’ as a ‘medical term for the slackening or loosening of an internal organ [...] or *viscera* in the trunk of the body, or, by extension, of the buttocks’ (2010, 162).

School whose penchant for whipping boys' bottoms is described in Cooper's *Flagellation and the Flagellants* and recorded in the *Dream* notebook (Cooper 1887, 430-1; *DN*, 369). In addition to this, a fictitious text-book entitled 'Steiss's nosonomy' combines a vulgar Teutonism for buttock with a 'corruption of "anatomy" and "nosology" (the classification of diseases)' (Ackerley 2010a, 109). The potential causes of Panpygoptosis have only been postulated by the 'psychopathological wholehogs' who seems to get rather carried away (in the colloquial sense of 'going the whole hog') in their classification of these bulging buttocks as a symptom of neurosis. They are, in fact, subsequently derided in the French translation as ardent zealots: 'fanatiques de la psychopathologie' (Beckett 1947, 88). More specifically, as Sylvie Debevic Henning first noted, their diagnosis draws upon a Latin phrase '*Non me rebus sed mihi res*' (Lat. Not me to things, but things to me) from Horace's *Epistles*, which, as Feldman observes in his study of Beckett's psychology notes, derives from Alfred Adler's *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology* (1924), where it is employed in a passage discussing the neurotic's hostile interaction with his environment (Henning 1988, 47; Feldman 2006, 113). We might struggle to concur with J.D. O'Hara, who reads this axiom as a precursor of 'Murphy's neurotic decision that his psyche is a prior and deterministic system [and] the stars merely a reflection of it', precisely because the text's ambivalent, if not downright hostile, discourse with medicine, psychiatry and psychoanalysis anticipates, challenges and undermines critical attempts to classify its characters through the terminology of these same discourses (O'Hara 1997, 66).

Beckett and the Pathetic Fallacy

In the short story 'Lightning Calculation', which was unsuccessfully sent to the editors of *Lovat Dickson's Magazine* and *Life and Letters* shortly before the composition of *Murphy* in January 1935 (*L I*, 243, 247), the characterisation of the protagonist draws upon medical accounts of cardiovascular symptoms, but these symptoms are destabilised by an artistic subtext which implies that they may be psychological rather than physiological in origin.¹⁶ This two-page unpublished typescript revolves around the 'low spirits' of a figure called Quigley (a name later given to Murphy's Dutch uncle) and

¹⁶ In *Damned to Fame*, James Knowlson notes that the manuscript of *Murphy*, which remains in private hands, is dated 20 August 1935 (1996, 203).

details his struggles with ‘the dilemma in which he found himself, namely, how to perachieve his book, The Pathetic Fallacy from Avercamp to Campendonk, without reneging on his infatuation with the work of Hercules Segers’ (UoR MS 2902, 1).¹⁷ Given that the story alludes to five different artists – Hendrick Avercamp (1585-1634), Hercules Seghers (1589-1638), Aelbert Cuyp (1620-1691), Meindert Hobbema (1638-1709) and Heinrich Kampendonck (1889-1957) – and that Beckett appears to have shared Quigley’s ‘infatuation’ with Seghers, later describing him as a ‘[v]ery modern talent’ in the *German Diaries* after seeing a number of coloured engravings in the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden (qtd. in Nixon 2011, 159), critics have predominantly read this short story in relation to Beckett’s own interest in the visual arts, which led him to unsuccessfully apply for the post of assistant curator at the National Gallery in London in 1933 (Knowlson 1996, 137). Knowlson, for instance, contrasts Quigley’s project with Beckett’s awareness of the disjunction between the portrayal of landscape in seventeenth-century Dutch art and the work of Paul Cézanne, which he discussed in correspondence with MacGreevy in September 1934. While in the canvases of a variety of Dutch artists including Jan van Goyen, Hendrick Avercamp, the Ruysdaels and Meindert Hobbema, Beckett claims that landscape is anthropomorphised, elevated to the emotions of the human subject, he praises Cézanne as ‘the first to see landscape & state it as material of a strictly peculiar order, incommensurable with all human expressions whatsoever’ (*L I*, 222). Knowlson argues that while Beckett remained fascinated by Dutch and Flemish landscape paintings, ‘he soon became aware of how deeply “animised” [...] these landscapes were’, citing Jacob van Ruysdael’s *Entrance to the Forest* (c.1655) as ‘an example of how the world of nature has been distorted (or rather falsely humanised) by an artist who cannot resist imposing his own human feelings upon it’ (2009, 33). In contrast, Cézanne presents an ‘[a]tomistic landscape with no velleities of vitalism, landscape with personality à la rigueur, but personality in its own terms’, which remains uncultivated and unruffled ‘by the kind attentions of the Reliability Joneses’ (*L I*, 222-23); the latter comment conflating the landscape architect Capability Brown (1716-1783) with the architect Inigo Jones (1573-1652).

¹⁷ ‘Lightning Calculation’, UoR MS 2902/1. In this short typescript, Knowlson notes that in terms of Hercules Seghers, Beckett is ‘using the alternative spelling of the painter’s name’ (2009, 30). In addition to this, Ackerley draws attention to the fact that Quigley’s project appears to have been anticipated by the ‘Postscript’ to R.H. Wilenski’s *An Introduction to Dutch Painting*, which Beckett read in the early 1930s (2010a, 168).

Beckett's praise for Cézanne is, of course, indebted to John Ruskin's 'Of the Pathetic Fallacy' in the third volume of *Modern Painters* (1856).¹⁸ According to Ruskin, the pathetic fallacy is primarily an emotional affliction: 'the sign of a morbid state of mind' and a 'comparatively weak one' (Ruskin 1903, 218). The English critic focuses on the discrepancy between 'the ordinary, proper and true appearances of things to us; and the extraordinary, or false appearances, when we are under the influence of emotion or contemplative fancy', where the latter are 'entirely unconnected with any real power or character in the object, and only imputed to it by us' (204). These are occasioned by unruly emotions, a 'violent' or 'excited state of the feelings' that makes us 'more or less irrational', producing a sense of 'falseness in all our impressions of external things'. Ruskin argues, therefore, that the temperament admitting the pathetic fallacy is typically that of 'a mind and body in some sort too weak to deal fully with what is before them and upon; borne away, or over-clouded, or over-dazzled by emotion' (208). At the start of 'Lightning Calculation', Quigley awakes to find an overcast 'sky like curdled milk in pale blue tea', but as he takes his manuscript onto the balcony, his violent reaction to the external world suggests that his interest in the pathetic fallacy is more emotional than academic:

The golden Cuyp sky which he now evoked, in order to make sure that it contained the flight of birds so important to his thesis, did not present itself with sufficient detail to put his mind at ease. Quigley was furious. He glared angrily across the street at the laundry attached to St. Stephen's Hospital, where his sweetheart was employed.

(UoR MS 2902, 1)

It is difficult to agree with Cohn's claim that Quigley 'seems to be free' of Ruskin's fallacy, or Pilling's suggestion that despite the 'comic potential' of his thesis, 'Lightning Calculation' essentially treats its protagonist in a 'kindly fashion' (Cohn 2001, 70; Pilling 1997, 133); Quigley's overwrought and incongruous reaction to this overcast sky, which fails to summon a 'flock of birds' at his every beck and call, only serves to parody the intrusion of the human inherent within the pathetic fallacy.

¹⁸ In *Dream*, when Belacqua has 'his head cocked [...] like Mr Ruskin in the Sistine' (*D*, 16), Pilling observes that Beckett is '[p]resumably thinking of a famous description of Michelangelo's ceiling in 'Of Imagination Penetrative', *Modern Painters*, II' (Pilling 2004, 45).

Just as Ruskin attributed the anthropomorphism of the pathetic fallacy to excessive emotions, a number of narrative details suggest that Quigley's 'low spirits' might be psychological in origin, including a cardiovascular ailment that pre-empts Murphy's later complaint. Firstly, it is perhaps significant that Quigley's violent emotions arise immediately after he wakes, for as Nixon observes, Beckett refers to an article by the Swiss psychologist, Édouard Claparède 'on sleep as reflex defence action' in an unpublished letter to Levanthal from May 1934, asking 'his friend to return the issue of the periodical *Minotaure* in which it had appeared' (qtd. in Nixon 2011, 41).¹⁹ Secondly, although Quigley attributes his melancholic emotions to his difficulties with his sweetheart and his thesis, he itemises another four potential causes, including that of his 'father's death', while we are told that Quigley suffers from 'pains in his chest which he was convinced were the prologue to angina pectoris, from which his father had died and Stalin was said to suffer, so that he [...] lived in constant apprehension of being convulsed' (UoR MS 2902, 1). Six months earlier, Beckett's father had collapsed and died of a heart attack, yet this second item draws upon clinical and psychoanalytic accounts of cardiac ailments, obliquely intimating that Quigley could be suffering from an unspecified nervous condition (Knowlson 1996, 170). Firstly, in a list of 'common neurotic manifestations' that Beckett recorded from Ernest Jones's *Treatment of the Neuroses* (1923), he noted the predominance of 'pseudo-angina & other cardiac syndromes' (TCD MS 10971/7/21). Secondly, in Osler's *Principles and Practice of Modern Medicine*, the medical textbook which, as we have seen in the opening chapter, Beckett took notes from in the *Dream* notebook, part of a chapter devoted to 'Diseases of the Nervous System' seeks recourse to psychopathology in its account of the classification, symptoms, prognosis and treatment of the 'Neuroses of the Heart'. In particular, Osler differentiates between 'true angina' and 'pseudo-angina', claiming that the former is a rare disease 'characterised by paroxysms of agonising pain in the region of the heart' that occurs in conjunction with the cardiovascular changes that accompany arterio-sclerosis, hypertrophy, increased arterial tension or aortic insufficiency (1895, 690). As these paroxysms can be precipitated by 'emotional excitement' or 'intense mental emotion', Osler notes that the diagnosis of 'true angina' cannot be founded upon these attacks, which frequently occur in 'hysterical or pseudo-angina'. To distinguish

¹⁹ The article in question is Claparède's 'Le sommeil, réaction du défense, *Minotaure* 3/4 (1934): 22-24.

between them, Osler cites the French cardiologist Henri Huchard's tabulation of the differences between organic and hysterical angina, where the former is associated with arterio-sclerosis, while the 'periodical and nocturnal' attacks of the latter are typically 'associated with nervous symptoms' (692-3). With this knowledge of Beckett's reading in medicine and psychology to hand, the critic could be tempted to classify Quigley as either neurotic or hysterical, but after he itemises his ailments, the narrator issues an anxious caveat, dispersing such aetiological impulses: 'These were the chief reasons he found for being in low spirits, and of course as far removed from the true as, say, the complexion in Addison's disease from the suprarenal bodies' (UoR MS 2902, 1). The 'true' reason for Quigley's melancholy is never explained, for the principles of causation and classification that underpin medical discourses are discredited through the very language of this discourse, encouraging the reader away to thumb a medical dictionary to discover that Addison's disease is a chronic endocrine disorder that progressively enervates the adrenal glands, changing the complexion of the suprarenal bodies.

Quigley's 'low spirits' might therefore be thought to resonate with the more severe plight of the Hindu polyhistor to whom his project is bequeathed in *Murphy*, with the latter complaining of 'sensations' that ultimately 'drive him to the gas-oven' (*M*, 110), but the former's emotional turmoil ultimately undermines the validity of the epiphanic, or rather, mock-epiphanic, conclusion of 'Lightning Calculation'. As the story develops, the protagonist walks to the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square to rectify his concerns about paintings by Cuyp and Hobbema, only to detour to a 'Lyons teashop' where he buys a packet of assorted biscuits. Just as Murphy later contemplates the different permutations in which he might eat his biscuits in Hyde Park, Quigley realises that if he were to forgo his preference for the ginger biscuit, which he usually leaves until last, there could potentially be one hundred and twenty different combinations in which to finish his meal. Without warning, the latter experiences 'an abrupt and delicious change of mood', becoming 'flooded with happiness' and feeling a 'bound upwards in his self-esteem'. Swearing to never again limit these permutations by succumbing to his 'paltry infatuation', the story concludes with an apparent epiphany: 'It was as though his whole being were renewed' (UoR MS 2902, 2). Quigley's pathetic fallacy and his cardiovascular ailment were, however, also marked by an 'abrupt', if slightly less

‘delicious’ change of mood, which implies that this closing epiphany is not so much a ‘sudden spiritual manifestation’ in the Joycean sense, but an evanescent moment of pleasure that seems wholly disproportionate to its occasion (UoR MS 2902, 2; Joyce 1963, 212-3).

Resort to Harmony

If cardiovascular complaints play a pivotal, albeit ambiguous, role in the characterisation of Quigley, these symptoms ultimately remain at the level of characterisation, whereas *Murphy* turns to the origins of Western medicine in pre-Socratic philosophy to draw an extensive comparison between arrhythmic heart conditions and the principle of variation that underpins its narrative. Juxtaposing the ‘irrational heart’ of the protagonist of *Murphy*, whose arrhythmic oscillations defy clinical analysis to the extent that ‘no physician could get to the root of it’ (*M*, 6), with the idiopathic, arrested heart of his Pythagorean mentor, Neary, this arrhythmic narrative appears to be written against the foundations of modern medicine in Pythagorean philosophy which, as Beckett discovered in a number of passages in Archibald Alexander’s *Short History of Philosophy* (1907), John Burnet’s *Greek Philosophy, Part I: Thales to Plato* (1914) and Wilhelm Windelband’s *A History of Philosophy* (1893), postulated a link between health, harmony and medicine. Instead, both the characterisation of Murphy and the narrative draw upon clinical accounts of two separate cardiac conditions, which are normally mutually exclusive, but which are marked both by, as we have seen, what Osler terms the ‘most extreme disturbance of rhythm’ (1895, 684). As this particular section proceeds, it focuses upon Beckett’s reading in both pre-Socratic and late nineteenth-century medicine to examine the extent to which Murphy and Neary’s cardiac complaints provide an analogue for two different models of narrative rhythm, with *Murphy* privileging the syncopated, arrhythmic heart of the former.

In the opening scene of the novel, we find Murphy tightly tied to a rocking-chair by seven scarves, so that ‘[o]nly the most local movements were possible’ (*M*, 5); an image whose apparent immobility might be located alongside Beckett’s own readings in psychology and psychoanalysis, undertaken during his period of psychotherapy with W.R. Bion at the Tavistock Clinic in London between January 1934 and December 1935. In Otto Rank’s *The Trauma of Birth* (1929), which

Beckett took extensive notes upon, Rank suggests that ‘every pleasure has as its final aim the re-establishment of the intrauterine primal pleasure’, before noting that many ‘masochistic phantasies’ such as the ‘regularly occurring state of being bound’ attempt ‘a partial reinstatement of the intrauterine pleasurable condition of immobility’ (Rank 1973, 17, 34; emphasis in original). Somewhat paradoxically, Murphy attempts to achieve this immobility through a rhythmic to-and-fro, through the lullaby of berceuse, which ‘gave his body pleasure’, ‘appeased his body’ and ‘set him free in his mind’ (*M*, 6), in a movement that Deleuze has termed ‘a propulsive refrain that tends to its own end’ (Deleuze 1995, 11). For Deleuze, ‘[t]he energy of this image is dissipative’, ‘itself the means of having done’, but when read in conjunction with Rank’s text, there seems to be an intrinsic tension between Murphy’s desire for immobility and the rocking-chair’s rhythmic to-and-fro, especially since Rank links children’s ‘rhythmic games of movement (swinging, hopping, etc.)’ to the intrauterine situation, arguing that they ‘simply repeat the rhythm felt in the embryonic situation’ (1994, 11; Rank 1973, 22-23).

In the first chapter, Murphy’s emphasis upon the concordant intervals of the rocking-chair is juxtaposed with his previous period of study at an academy in Cork under the tutelage of his former mentor, Neary. We are told that Neary has developed the ‘rare faculty’ of being able to ‘stop his heart’ after ‘years of application somewhere north of the Nerbudda’; an aside which leads Jean-Michel Rabaté to compare him with Beckett’s analyst, Wilfred Bion, who was born in India (Rabaté 1996, 25). Murphy’s motivation for studying at Neary’s academy appears, then, to be primarily therapeutic, for he attempts to ‘invest’ his syncopated, arrhythmic heart with ‘a little of what Neary, at that time a Pythagorean, called the Apmonia’:

For Murphy had such an irrational heart that no physician could get to the root of it. Inspected, palpated, auscultated, percussed, radiographed and cardiographed, it was all that a heart should be. Buttoned up and left to perform, it was like Petrushka in his box. One moment in such labour that it seemed on the point of seizing, the next in such ebullition that it seemed on the point of bursting. It was the mediation between these extremes that Neary called the Apmonia. When he got tired of calling it the Apmonia he called it the Isonomy. When he got sick of the sound of Isonomy he called it the Attunement. But he might call it what he liked, into Murphy’s heart it would not enter. Neary could not blend the opposites in Murphy’s heart.

(*M*, 6)

Neary's asystolic heart clearly resembles the 'ossified tower' of Rilke's 'Der Einsame', but while this might seem like a surrealistic detail, as Ackerley observes (despite not having access to Beckett's reading of Osler): 'the condition is not unknown, and is called *bradycardia*', which can be 'either *idiopathic* (controlled) or *essential* (congenital)' (2010a, 31-32). Cardiac rhythm is, of course, self-regulating, but while the tempo of our heart-beat is predominantly controlled by hormonal and chemical releases from the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, the close relationship between our cardiovascular and respiratory systems means that it can be regulated through sustained expiration, as, for instance, in the breathing exercises of yoga. This might help to clarify one of the more peculiar details in *Murphy*: after leaving Neary's academy, Murphy informs a fellow student that he plans to buy a 'Drinker artificial respiration machine', a medical ventilator or iron lung that was predominantly used in the treatment of polio, which befits his role as an 'old suspirant' who is 'fed up with breathing' (*M*, 32-34). Ackerley notes that during treatment the patient's body would be enclosed within a metal tank, where 'artificial respiration [was] provided by alternating negative and positive pressure'; a medical treatment that echoes Neary's attempts to mediate between the opposites of Murphy's heart (2010a, 73).

Left to its own devices, Murphy's arrhythmic heart oscillates between arrest and activity like the staccato movements of the puppet in the second part of Stravinsky's ballet *Petrushka* (1911): 'One moment in such labour that it seemed on the point of seizing, the next in such ebullition that it seemed on the point of bursting' (*M*, 6).²⁰ Whereas both Ackerley and Feldman suggest that Murphy's peculiar cardiovascular condition is based upon Beckett's own heart palpitations, the extent of Beckett's knowledge of medical accounts pertaining to heart disease has hitherto remained unrecognised. In Osler's *Principles and Practice of Modern Medicine*, for instance, he could have encountered descriptions of a wide range of circulatory diseases including Angina, Aortic Insufficiency, Aortic Stenosis, Endocarditis, Mitral Incompetency and Pericarditis, yet the French translation of *Murphy* obliquely intimates that Beckett's interest may have predominantly resided in a sub-section of Osler's text entitled 'Neuroses of the Heart'. For although in the third chapter of the

²⁰ James Knowlson notes that Beckett saw a number of ballets while staying in London, including two separate productions of *Petrushka*, a Polish production with Léon Woizikowsky and a superior production by Léonide Massine and the Ballet Russe (Knowlson 1996, 193-4).

English version the narrator informs us that Celia discovered the protagonist trapped under his rocking-chair following a ‘heart-attack’ (*M*, 21), the French text modifies this, hinting that his complaint may be more psychological than physiological, as Murphy ‘réveilla dans l’étai d’une crise cardiaque, qui strictement parlant n’en était pas une’, before subsequently alluding to ‘ses fausses crises cardiaques’ (Beckett 1947, 33).²¹

Apart from these tantalising asides, no further explanation is provided, as the text provokes, but ultimately stymies, the reader’s attempts to diagnose the cause of this ailment. It is, however, perhaps significant that Osler notes that heart palpitations are predominantly ‘a purely nervous phenomenon’ and ‘seldom associated with organic disease’, whilst arrhythmia can also frequently be attributed to ‘psychical influences’ (1895, 684-6). More specifically, Osler details the causes, symptoms, prognosis and treatment of two specific types of arrhythmia: brachycardia and tachycardia, both of which stem from psychological origins, or what the physician terms the ‘increased excitability of the nervous system’ (687-9, 684). In the former, the pulse rarely falls below twenty beats per minute, although Osler notes that cases have been recorded in which it has sunk as low as seven, whereas in the latter, an otherwise healthy individual can have a pulse of more than one hundred beats per minute, while in ‘*paroxysmal tachycardia*’ the heart’s rhythm is characterised by ‘spells of heart hurry’ that can exceed two hundred beats per minute’ (688-9). Medically speaking, Murphy’s irregular heart oscillates between brachycardia and tachycardia, providing it with a syncopated quality that, as we will see, functions as a metonym for the narrative’s arrhythmic variation. Hermeneutically, this situation is further complicated by the faint literary echoes contained within this arrhythmic heart; John Bolin contrasts it with the ‘breathless claims’ of the protagonist of Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774) to possess ‘a singularly unquiet heart’, while in *Proust* Beckett refers to *Les Intermittences du Cœur* as ‘perhaps the greatest passage that Proust ever wrote’ (Bolin 2007, 108; *PTD*, 25). This rhythm of activity and fatigue, tranquillity and turmoil resonates most clearly, however, with Giacomo Leopardi’s poem ‘*A Se Stesso*’ (It. To Himself), which Beckett typed out as an undergraduate at Trinity, before elliptically quoting a couple of lines from this poem in *Dream* that

²¹ For a discussion of the differences between the French and English versions of *Murphy*, see Anthony Jones, ‘The French *Murphy*: From “Rare Bird” to “Cancre,”’ *Journal of Beckett Studies* 6 (Autumn 1980): 37-50.

prefigure Murphy's arrhythmic heart: '*Or posar... Assai palpitasti*' (It. The heart too tired, having beaten enough) (*D*, 63).

Against this disruptive rhythm, Murphy's heart is juxtaposed with Neary's Pythagorean medical terminology, which emphasises the links between health, balance and attunement. Both Ackerley and Feldman trace this terminology to Beckett's reading on the pre-Socratics, with the latter arguing, for instance, that the majority of Neary's technical phrases can be found in 'Beckett's thirteen pages of notes on Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans', while his asystolic heart represents 'a sign of health and virtue in Pythagorean cosmology' (Feldman 2006, 68-69). Burnet's text discusses the Pythagoreans' interest in the field of medicine and their deep affinities with the ancient medical school at Kroton, which was founded by the physician Alkmaion in the fifth century B.C. Comparing the Pythagorean school's experiments in medicine and music, Burnet notes that just as they postulated their theory of the 'doctrine of the limit' by expressing the 'concordant intervals' of the musical scale in 'numerical ratios' – a theory which led them to argue that a musical Mean could be 'found in a "blend"' (Gk. *κράσις*) of opposite notes – medicine was also thought to deal with 'opposites, such as the hot and the cold, the wet and the dry', with the physician tasked with producing 'a proper "blend"' (Gk. *κράσις*) of these in the human body' (Burnet 1914, 48-50). In addition to this, Burnet draws attention to the affinities between Pythagoreanism and the theories of Alkmaion, who suggested that health was either an 'attunement' (Gk. *ἀρμονία*) or an 'isonomy' (Gk. *ἰσονομῖη*) depending on a 'due blend of opposites', whereas disease was attributed to 'the undue predominance of one or the other' (1914, 50).²² Neary's 'apmonia' is, then, almost akin to our modern sense of harmony, although Burnet cautions against such neat identifications; technically speaking, there was 'no such thing as harmony in classical Greek music' as the Greek word for "harmony" (Gk. *ἀρμονία*) is closer to our sense of the perfect intervals of an octave, denoting both 'tuning' and 'scale' (1914, 45). This musical analogy provides the origin for our modern sense of medicinal tonics, for as Simmias claims in

²² Cf. TCD MS 10967/21: 'health was 'isonomy' of opposites in the body, disease undue predominance of one or other'. In the 1950s, Beckett would parody such medical accounts of balance in an abandoned play, which features a soliloquising female who recalls questioning a physician regarding the efficacy of her injections (UoR MS 1227/7/16/3). Mary Bryden notes that 'his replies merely point to his affiliation with a medical epistemology which raises more questions than it answers', but the 'displacement of male medical authority is compounded when the woman ascertains for herself that her equal dosage of two medicaments with directly contrary purposes will amount to a maintenance of the status quo' (1993: 134)

passage in Plato's *Phaedo*: 'the Pythagoreans held the body to be strung like an instrument to a certain pitch, hot and cold, wet and dry taking the place of high and low in music', so that, 'according to this view, health is just being in tune, and disease arises from undue tension or relaxation of the springs' (1914, 50). By refusing to be reconciled into concordant intervals, the convulsive spasms of Murphy's arrhythmic heart appear to be the epitome of poor health. These clonic, disruptive muscular contractions could hardly be further removed from the harmonised tonic of a finely tuned instrument, with Murphy's heart-beats remaining, in Osler's medical terminology, either 'unequal in volume or force, or follow[ing] each other at unequal distances' (1895, 685). Neary might be able to control the timing of his own heart rate, but Murphy's arrhythmic heart remains disorganised and irruptive, out of sync with his own cognition, as Neary emerging from the opening exchange rather heavily scathed, a failed physician who cannot nurse his patient back to health.

Admitting that he has failed to bring these unruly convulsions within the domain of the autonomous nervous system, Neary terminates their conversation within an allusion to Descartes's interest in anatomy: 'your conarium has shrunk to nothing' (*M*, 8). The conarium is another name for the pineal gland, which leads Ackerley to ascribe this erudite comment to a Cartesian mind-body dualism inherent within the protagonist, since for Descartes, the conarium represents the 'place in the human body where body and soul have commerce, with the mingling of animal and metaphysical spirits' (Ackerley 2010a, 40). In J.P. Mahaffy's *Descartes* (1880), the principal source of information for Beckett's poem 'Whoroscope', however, the conarium is discussed in relation to the Flemish philosopher's mechanical theory of the formation of the body in *On the Formation of the Foetus* (1664) and *On Man* (1664). Rejecting contemporary accounts which claimed that the soul unconsciously 'controlled the organs of the body', including 'the beating of the heart', Descartes postulates that our bodies are formed by a process of 'fermentation in generation', with heart and expansion leading to the formation of the heart, the brain and the rest of our vital organs. Adapting Galen's concept of natural and vital spirits, Descartes claimed that energy and motion were produced by animal spirits in the conarium, which, in turn, receives impressions and 'directs motions' (Mahaffy 1880, 173-7). By admitting that Murphy's conarium has 'shrunk to nothing', Neary admits that he has been unable to regulate the protagonist's cardiac rhythm into what Osler terms 'a simple to-and-fro

diastolic and systolic' (1895, 619). Before it might occasion anything as philosophical as the 'surrender to the thongs of [the] self', which Beckett subsequently discussed in an entry in his *German Diaries* (qtd. in Knowlson 1996, 247), the rhythmical rocking of Murphy's chair appears to have a more prosaic, palliative function, as the protagonist attempts to regulate his cardiac arrhythmia, only for another rhythm, that of a monotonous telephone call, to cut into his efforts, stuttering his heart out of sync.

A similar, palliative function appears to underpin Murphy's fluctuating faith in the prognostications of Suk's horoscope, the 'Thema Coeli', whose delineations echo the protagonist's medical condition. For whereas in its earliest manifestations in the 'Whoroscope' notebook, the narrative is conceived in terms of a protagonist, 'X', and a horoscope, 'H', with the latter beginning as 'any old oracle', before slowly acquiring the 'authority of fatality' and becoming 'a force to be obeyed', in the published text the horoscope garners a certain amount of authority for Murphy as a potential treatment for his irregular heart (UoR MS 3000, 1r). While critics have frequently read Suk's horoscope as, in the words of Steven Connor, a 'disguised and travestied form of psychoanalysis', with Ackerley drawing attention to the fact that the psychologist, Carl Jung, whose third Tavistock lecture Beckett attended in October 1935, 'insisted upon his patients having their horoscopes cast', before noting that Bion also 'took a keen interest in them', the 'Thema Coeli' can also be thought to masquerade as a form of medical discourse (Connor 2008, 20; Ackerley 2010a, 61). After describing the '[i]ntense love nature' of its subject, Suk's horoscope warns that 'when sensuality rules there is danger of [f]its', which becomes 'garde aux convulsions' in the French translation, while Murphy is also advised that 'when Health is below par', he should 'avoid drugs and resort to Harmony' (Beckett 1947, 35; *M*, 22-23). Osler text may link arrhythmia directly to the use of narcotic stimulants, but the astrologer's divinations are, of course, undercut by the fact that the narrator has already revealed that Murphy's 'heart attacks' fail to materialise when he spends time with his lover, Celia (*M*, 21). By resorting to harmony, Murphy's arrhythmic heart is advised to seek another form of apmonia, yet while the warnings to 'guard against Bright's disease and Grave's disease' (23) to respectively denote the 'granular degeneration of the kidneys to fat' and 'exophthalmic goitre, a thyroid disease [...] characterised by bulging eyes, fatigue and emotional instability', Osler's textbook notes that dilatation

of the heart and tachycardia are recurrent symptoms in both diseases (1895, 751-2, 784). Finally, Murphy's lucky colour is 'lemon', the fruit prescribed by Paracelsus as a treatment for heart affections on the rather dubious basis that lemons are 'heart-shaped'; a detail which Beckett could have encountered in a footnote to Inge's *Christian Mysticism*, which he read in the early 1930s.²³ By presenting these scraps of medical discourse in a veiled form, *Murphy* suggests that the wisdom of the physician, just like that of the psychiatrist, is 'scarcely superior to the quackery of the haruspicator' (Connor 2008, 20).

All these demented particulars

Through another of Neary's students, Wylie, *Murphy* postulates a theory of desire that parallels the filling and emptying of the atriums and ventricles during the systolic-diastolic motions of the heart, but as the narrative unfolds, these contractions and expansions are formally enacted in a series of textual arrhythmias, with the text oscillating between a narrative of overdetermined plenitude and underdetermined lack. As we shall see in this section, instead of a Pythagorean 'blend' of, or a smoothly attuned mediation between these cardiovascular contractions, *Murphy* draws upon the work of another pre-Socratic philosopher, Empedocles, who was 'famed for his skill in medicine' and provided the earliest formulation of a 'theory of flux and reflux of blood from and to the heart' (Alexander 1922, 33; Burnet 1914, 73). After Neary has something of a breakdown in chapter four, which leads him to head-butt the buttocks of a statue of the Irish mythological figure of Cuchulain in Dublin's General Post Office, Wylie consoles his mentor over his unrequited love for Miss Counihan (a former lover of Murphy), by admitting that there is no relief for human suffering: 'the syndrome known as life is too diffuse to admit of palliation. For every symptom that is eased, another is made worse. The horse leech's daughter is a closed system. Her quantum of wantum cannot vary' (*M*, 36). Central to Wylie's argument is the insatiable desire of the 'horse-leech's daughter' of *Proverbs* 30:15, which he employs to suggest that the quantity of desire within an individual remains fixed, although this desire is merely displaced from one object to another: 'Humanity is a well with two buckets [...]

²³ Cf. W.R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (London: Methuen, 1899), 273.

one going down to be filled, the other coming up to be emptied' (37). Beckett may have drawn this image, as Pilling notes, from Malevole's speech on the subject of fortune in John Marston's play *The Malcontent* (1604), but Wylie's theory has close affinities with the experiments of the pre-Socratic philosopher and physiologist, Empedocles (Pilling 2006b, 11). After Neary's altercation with the statue of Cuchulain, the narrator obliquely alludes to Empedocles's philosophy as he describes the Civic Guard's successful dispersal of the gathering crowd, who obey the injunction to 'move on' with 'the single diastole-systole which is all the law requires' (*M*, 29).

Responding to Parmenides's hypothesis that reality was a spherical, immovable plenum, Empedocles sought to account for both permanence and change by suggesting that reality was produced by the combination and separation of different proportions of four roots – earth, water, air and fire (Alexander 1922, 34). As Windelband observes, however, the philosopher 'could not assign independent motion to these material elements which experience only changing states of motion and mechanical mixings' and therefore was 'obliged to seek a *cause of motion* independent of the four elements' (Windelband 1901, 40). As an early exponent of pluralism, Empedocles envisages that these elements would 'not only unite with one another in birth and generation but also fall asunder in death', before postulating two moving causes, which he terms 'Love' and 'Hate', with the former denoting the attraction of different kinds of matter and the latter their separation (Alexander 1922, 35; Burnet 1914, 73). In this respect, Burnet (who terms the latter 'Strife' instead of 'Hate') links the philosopher's conception of these roots as distinct bodies to his theory of respiration and experiments with the *klepsydra*:

We start with something like the sphere of Parmenides, in which the four elements are mingled in a sort of solution by Love, while Strife surrounds the sphere on the outside. When Strife begins to enter the Sphere, Love is driven towards its centre and the four elements are gradually separated from one another [...] Empedocles also held, however, that respiration depended on the systole and diastole of the heart, and therefore we find that, as soon as Strife has penetrated to the lowest (or most central) part of the sphere, and Love is confined to the very middle of it, the reverse process begins. Love expands and Strife is driven outwards, passing out the Sphere once more in proportion as Love occupies more and more of it, just as air is expelled from the *klepsydra* [a type of water-clock] when water enters it.

(1914, 72-73; cf. TCD MS 10967/30)

Empedocles believed that reality alternates between these forces of ‘Love’ and ‘Hate’ as the ‘life of the world follows a circular course’ (Alexander 1922, 35), but Burnet argues that his discoveries as a physiologist were greater than his work as a philosopher, since this physiological analogy represents the earliest formulation of a ‘theory of the flux and reflux of blood from and to the heart’ (1914, 73). Indeed, Alexander notes that Empedocles was ‘famed for his skill in medicine’ (1922, 33), while Burnet declares that the philosopher’s speculations are marked by a ‘physiologist interest’ that befits his status as ‘the founder of the Sicilian school of medicine’ (1914, 71). More specifically, Burnet argues that Empedocles’s experiments with the *klepsydra* are indicative of a Greek science that ‘did not rest content with mere observation’, but to proceeded to devise experiments of ‘a quite modern character’ (1914, 10). Wylie’s theory of the two buckets might be thought to postulate a model of desire that corresponds to the dilatation and contraction of the heart, wherein desire represents a lack that need filling, but once this lack is filled, it only serves to create another ‘aching void’ (*M*, 37). If Neary’s dilemma is, to quote Mary Bryden, that of a ‘desire for the attainable followed by disgust for the attained’, then this disgust occasions a new desire, a new lack that needs filling, in a cycle of perpetual need that resonates with the fact that his name is an anagram of ‘yearn’ (Bryden 1993, 42; Ackerley 2010a, 31).

There are a number of examples of this systolic-diastolic model of desire in *Murphy*, most striking of which are the displacement of Neary’s affections from Miss Dwyer to Miss Counihan, from Miss Counihan to Murphy, or Celia’s ambivalent response to the protagonist’s successful application for a job at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat. Initially, Murphy’s integration into the workforce is the main object of her desire, but, as Rabaté notes, ‘symptomatically, she loses interest in the object of her desire by displacing the loss onto another type of mourning’, grieving over the suicide of the Old Boy (1996, 29). Significantly, after missing the agitated pacing to-and-fro of the Old Boy’s footfalls, Celia relocates to his room and reclines in the rocking-chair, where she experiences a different type of silence: ‘The silence not of vacuum but of plenum, not of breath taken but of quiet air’ (*M*, 86). A fundamental lack has, then, given way to an ample plenitude, with the adaptation of a line from Keats’s ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ implying that Celia is not so much ‘half in

love with easeful Death' (Keats 2009, 54), but that she finds a new lease of life in Murphy's quietist attitude. The text's persistent emphasis upon character's pacing back and forth, or rocking to-and-fro, draws the reader's attention to the manner in which much of its narrative structure depends upon Wylie's systolic-diastolic model of desire, enacting a similar movement between its characters.

In chapter six, the protracted disquisition on the subject of 'Murphy's mind', the protagonist attempts to transcend this systolic-diastolic conception of desire in the 'third zone' of his mind. Analysing the protagonist's 'naïve romanticism', Bolin draws attention to the epigraph accompanying the chapter, '*Amor intellectualis quo Murphy se ipsum amat*' (Lat. the intellectual love with which Murphy loves himself), a comic appropriation of Spinoza's axiom relating to the 'self-sufficiency' of the love which God bears himself, labelling this 'an all-important *Amor* which intimates that the crucial "dissonance" in the novel does not concern a Cartesian division between the mind and the body, but, as the first chapter puts it, the "opposites in Murphy's heart"' (2007, 108). As a number of critics have noted, Murphy's conception of his mind as a hermetically sealed sphere is ironically framed between opening remarks that undermine the validity of his speculations, with the narrator revealing that this chapter relates, not to 'the apparatus as it really was', but to 'what it felt and pictured itself to be' (*M*, 63), and, what Ruby Cohn terms a 'final pre-emptory silence' that 'caution[s] against taking Murphy's mind too seriously': 'This painful duty having now been discharged, no further bulletins will be issued' (2001, 57; *M*, 66). Murphy pictures his mind as separated into three separate zones: firstly, the light, with its 'forms without parallel', where 'the elements of physical experience [were] available for a new arrangement'; secondly, the half-light, with its 'forms without parallel', where the 'pleasure was contemplation'; and thirdly, the dark, 'a flux of forms, a perpetual coming together and falling asunder of forms', which consists of 'neither elements nor states, nothing but forms becoming and crumbling into the fragments of a new becoming, without love or hate or any intelligible principle of change' (*M*, 65-6). In light of this fragmentation, Michael Mooney argues that Murphy's third zone is indebted to the atomic theory of Democritus, and, in particular, the Greek philosopher's denial of 'two earlier solutions to the problem of motion for his atoms', including that of Empedocles's conception of 'love' and 'hate' as 'principles for the animation of matter' (1982,

225). Accordingly, Murphy's retreat to this 'third zone' can be thought of as another attempt obviate both the vacillating movement of his arrhythmic heart and an Empedoclean theory of desire predicated upon the systolic-diastolic motion of the heart; rather than oscillating between lack and plenitude, the protagonist stresses the void or nothing as an appropriate subject of desire.

This preoccupation with arrhythmia is, however, more than a thematic concern: an oscillation between emptying and filling, lack and plenitude, is formally enacted as the text attempts to dictate its own pace, producing a series of narrative arrhythmias that oscillate between a slow flurry of 'demented particulars' (*M*, 12) and a rapid omission of such details. In the second chapter, Celia's paternal grandfather, Mr Kelly, plays a crucial role in drawing the reader's attention to the fluctuating tempo of her narrative, with Pilling arguing that he represents either an 'editor *manqué*' or 'an *alter ego* of Beckett himself' (1997, 139). After providing a meticulous account of her first meeting with Murphy, which includes cartographically precise details of place (the meeting occurred at the junction of 'Edith Grove, Cremorne Street and Stadium Street' in West London) and movement (Murphy's attention followed a vertical movement from horoscope to Celia, Celia to sky, and back again), Mr Kelly implores Celia to be 'less beastly circumstantial', before complaining about her proclivity for 'these demented particulars' (*M*, 12). Both Ackerley and van Hulle have linked this preoccupation with over-determined narrative particulars to Beckett's interest in the 'nominalist irony' of Fritz Mauthner's *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* (1901-2), on which he took substantial notes in 1938, yet these remarks bear affinities with Beckett's own comments on what he deemed to be the overtly periphrastic narratives of a number of authors throughout his correspondence of the late 1920s and early 1930s. As early as the summer of 1929, for instance, Beckett revealed that he found the first volume of Proust's 'Du Côté de chez Swann' 'strangely uneven', strewn with passages that are both 'offensively fastidious' and 'artificial', before comparing the French writer's profuse loquacity to a bout of diarrhoea, a 'maudlin false teeth gobble-gobble discharge from a colic-afflicted belly' (*L I*, 11-12). After reading Nancy Cunard's collection of poems *Parallax* (1925) a year later, he made a similar complaint, admitting that it contained 'some fine things', but that these moments were obscured by 'a lot of padding', whilst in the same letter, he anxiously detects the same problem in

Racine's *Esther* (1689): 'What is wrong with me? I find chevilles everywhere, and I never did before in Racine?' (25-26). Around this time, the *Dream* notebook registers the difficulties that Beckett encountered in his translation of Arthur Rimbaud's poem 'Le Bateau ivre' (1932), with one entry noting: '[t]ranslating Rimbaud I had great trouble mitigating the chevilles' (*DN*, 1075). Closer to the composition of *Murphy*, Beckett appears to have grown frustrated with what he saw as the superfluous nature of the first part of Goethe's *Faust* (1808), objecting in a letter to MacGreevy of 7 August 1936 that '[t]here seems to be a surprising amount of irrelevance for the work of a lifetime [...] I think he was the kind that couldn't bear to shorten anything' (*L I*, 366). Whilst touring Germany in 1936, Beckett recorded a particularly apposite phrase for these over-determined narratives, depicting them as a kind of affliction, a form of '*Detailkrankheit*' (Ger. 'Detail illness') (UoR MS 3000, 35r), yet two years earlier, he appears to have begun to appreciate the artistic potential of these circumlocutions in his review of Mörike's novella *Mozart on the Way to Prague* (1934). The review opens by acknowledging that this is a "fragment of imaginative composition" short and not at all to the point', before commending it for its brevity, 'but at least short, which is nowadays so rare a quality in a literary work that one cannot refrain from commending this book for having contrived, in 20,000 words instead of 200,000 words, to exhaust the inessential' (*DIS*, 61). As Laura Salisbury notes, if one must prevaricate around an 'inessential' subject-matter, Beckett's review implies that 'it is only good manners to get it over with quickly' (2012, 55). Examining the comic tension in this review between an over-determination and under-determination of elements, Salisbury draws attention to the fact that the critical voice implicates itself 'within an economy of excess', as Beckett 'explains the book's critical inefficiencies through a process of long-windedly "exhaust[ing] the inessential' (55). There is, however, an implied distinction at work here, as Beckett's 'insistently stuttering rhythm that forces the sentence into a lovingly crafted formal hyperbole' appears to be 'intentional', fashioning 'the appearance of a controlled excess of rigour that is not without critical and comic effect' (56).

In a similar manner, the arrhythmic narrative of *Murphy* might be thought to oscillate between the brachycardia of Mr Kelly's 'demented particulars' (*M*, 12) and a tachycardic dismissal of such a

preoccupation with narrative minutiae. Accordingly, the omniscient narrator repeatedly introduces a number of the characters' narratives by drawing attention to their pace, or rather, to their slowness, to their lack of pace, as three different accounts are 'expurgated, accelerated, improved and reduced' (11, 31, 70). The omission of narrative particulars that accompanies this refrain is, however, too quick for the telling, for when Celia brings her story to an abrupt close, '[f]rom that time forward [...] they were indispensable the one to the other', Mr Kelly beseeches her to slow down, to provide more details: 'don't skip about like that, will you? You walked away happily arm-in-arm. What happened then?' (13). Celia's narrative is, like Murphy's arrhythmic heart, too fast and too slow, peculiarly empty and abnormally full, which allows it to serve a metonymic function in a text peculiarly marked by a number of narrative discrepancies and fluctuations of rhythm; as Andrew Gibson observes, there is 'a principle of variation' throughout this narrative that 'gives it an unpredictable movement, irregular and arrhythmic' (Gibson 2000, 95). For Gibson, this variation is part of the modernist logic of *Murphy*, where the narrative is founded in a textual economy that challenges 'those of the market, of exchange value, of investments and returns, from credit and debit and the rest'. Drawing parallels with Roland Barthes' notion of a 'scriptible economy' and Georges Bataille's theory of a general economy predicated upon expenditure rather than growth, Gibson notes that *Murphy* is a text that 'on numerous occasions and in a very conscious way, wastes its own investments' (92). With this in mind, the 'inhuman irregularity' of Murphy's daily return from the peregrinations of the 'jobpath' appear to provide a further insight into the text's resistance to regulated rhythm and tempo. Although the protagonist ironically attributes this to an 'anxiety to cultivate the sense of time as money which he had heard was highly prized in business circles', the narrator reveals that, actually, he 'began to return in such good time that he arrived in Brewery Road with hours to spare', even loitering with 'his key in the door waiting for the clock in the market hour to chime' (*M*, 43-46). For Gibson, Murphy's 'inhuman regularity' is indicative of the text's preoccupation with procrastination, indicative of a counter-modernist logic which wastes one of late capitalism's key assets, namely, time. There is, however, a problem with this economic reading, for Murphy does not merely waste time, as he also seems caught up in a capitalist logic that spends it too quickly; his dawdling is, strictly speaking, a

direct result of his earlier haste. The protagonist is never really ‘on time’, for like his arrhythmic heart, his daily peregrinations are always too quick or too slow.

The narrative of *Murphy* does not merely exhibit what James Acheson has termed a ‘ludicrous surfeit of details’ (Acheson 1979, 23), but rather, it oscillates between a profuse surfeit and a preposterous lack. Only Ruby Cohn and Gibson have drawn attention to this oscillation, with the former arguing that whilst the narrator ‘shows an affinity’ for these ‘demented particulars’, by ‘bludgeoning’ the reader ‘with the names of [...] incidental characters’ and ‘street names in various parts of London, along with the dates of events, and the positions of the sun and the moon’, the narrative frequently ‘withholds information, such as the location of Murphy’s seventh scarf and the crucial identity of whoever flushed Murphy’s toilet-radiator’ (2001, 76, 79). At times, to quote Pilling, the narrator appears to adopt ‘a quasi-Joycean care in describing real locations in a realistic way’ (Pilling 1992, 15), but at other times, these realistic details are particularly striking in their absence. When Cooper notes the number of Celia and Murphy’s address on Brewery Road, for instance, this is never disclosed to the reader, a point which Ackerley calls ‘a curious denial of realism in a novel which ostentatiously flaunts such detail’ (2010a, 172). Another case in point is the ‘shocking thing’ that happens at the end of chapter five, where the question of what exactly this relates to is temporally displaced, withheld until the beginning of chapter eight, where the landlady, Miss Carridge, produces an exhaustive, albeit fictitious account of the Old Boy’s suicide:

“He gets out his razor to shave, as he always did regular about noon”. A lie. The old boy shaved once a week and then the last thing at night. “That I do know, because I found the brush on the dresser with a squeeze of paste on top”. A lie. “He goes to put up the tube before he lathers, he walks across the room with the razor in his hand, screwing the cap on the tube. He drops the cap, he throws the tube on the bed and goes down on the floor. I found the tube on the bed and the cap under the bed”. Lies. “He goes crawling about the floor, with the razor open in his hand, when all of a sudden he has a seizure [...] “He falls on his face with the razor under him, zzzeeppp!” she reinforced the onomatopoeia with dumb-show, “what more do you want?”

(*M*, 84).

A lack of narrative disclosure leads, then, to a surfeit of disclosure; the tachycardia of the ‘shocking thing’ gives way to the brachycardia of Miss Carridge’s fictitious account. There may, however, be a literary antecedent for this fluctuating rhythm: in a letter to MacGreevy of 8 October 1932, Beckett revealed that he was ‘enchanted’ with Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* (1742), explaining that he admired the novel’s ‘short chapters’ and Fielding’s manner of ‘giving away of the show *pari passu* [hand-in-hand] with the show, as when he executes a purely professional apostrophe to Vanity and then observes that something had to be done to spin out a chapter that otherwise would have been too short’ (*L I*, 129). For whereas Pilling compares the ‘despotic manner’ and ‘muscular insight into human vices, follies and weaknesses’ of the narrator of *Joseph Andrews* with the narrator of *Murphy*, the former is intensely preoccupied with the pace of his narrative, frequently remarking upon his attempts to ‘lengthen out a short chapter’ or summarising another as ‘short [...] but very full of matter’ (Fielding 1977, 62, 307). What *Joseph Andrews* and *Murphy* share is a preoccupation with an irregular distribution of their narrative materials, although the latter remains far more anxious about the question of whether it is providing the reader with too much or too little information, instead of the right amount.

Murphy’s pivotal encounter in chapter eleven with Mr Endon, a schizophrenic patient at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, revolves around a similar preoccupation with defective circulation and irregular timing. At the start of the chapter, we are told that Murphy had spent ‘many fruitless hours in the chair’, as this failure to reconcile his heart rate with the concordant intervals of a systolic-diastolic to-and-fro foreshadows the abandonment of his duties on the nightshift in Skinner’s House. During his nightly rounds, Murphy is tasked with enforcing the timing of this institution, visiting patients at ‘regular intervals of not more than twenty minutes’ to switch on the light in each cell and ensure that each patient does not require attention or had not committed suicide (*M*, 132). The concordant intervals of this disciplinary regime are, however, disrupted by the game of chess that Murphy plays with Mr Endon; whereas we are told that a ‘virgin’ denotes a round finished early in the lexicon of the nurses, their chess game leads to a flurry of them: ‘Every ten minutes he left the cell, pressed the indicator with heartfelt conviction and did a round. Every ten minutes and sometimes even sooner, for

never in the history of the MMM had there been such a run of virgins and Irish virgins as on this Murphy's maiden night' (135). Partially attracted by the fact that Mr Endon's preferred method of suicide is 'apnoea' (105), that is, a suspension of breathing that mirrors the protagonist's aforementioned plan to buy a 'Drinker artificial respiration machine' as he is 'fed up with breathing' (32), Murphy attempts to emulate the schizophrenic's circular movement of his pieces, which Hugh Kenner terms a 'pretty little rite of symmetry' where each black piece is returned to its original square' (1996, 68). As Mr Endon fails to engage with Murphy's white pieces, however, the protagonist attempts to surrender all his pawns to establish a connection between them, which leads to a distribution of pieces that Kenner labels 'utter chaos' (69). The protagonist's disordered moves are, in fact, echoed in the arrhythmic playing of this games, which oscillates between turmoil and tranquillity each times Murphy departs to fulfil his duties: 'Sometimes an entire pause would pass without any change having been made in the position; and at other times the board would be in an uproar, a torrent of moves' (*M*, 135-6). After Murphy quits the game, he experiences the very absence of Neary's earlier Pythagorean and Gestaltist theories of pattern and organisation, picturing the patient as a disorganised 'vivid blur, Neary's big blooming buzzing confusion or ground, mercifully free of figure' (138).

Mr Endon's moves may appear to be relatively harmonious, but as Murphy succumbs to a sort of rapturous, transcendental Nothingness, the patient escapes from his cell, pressing the light-switches and indicators of the institution in a series of different permutations that 'seemed haphazard but was in fact determined by an amental pattern as precise as any of those that governed his chess' (138). The next morning, the irregular distribution of these visits proves indecipherable to the medical supervisor, Bom, who upon analysing a switchboard that informs him that 'the hypomaniac had been visited at regular intervals of ten minutes from 8 pm till shortly after 4am, then for nearly an hour not at all, then six times in the space of one minute, then no more', decides to attribute this arrhythmic pattern to the fact that 'Murphy had gone mad' (139). Irregularity is, then, closely tied to irrationality, in a text which pays particular attention to both the mathematical figure of the surd (a number that cannot be expressed as a repeating or terminating decimal) and the pre-Socratic story of Hippasos, who, as

Neary notes, was ‘[d]rowned in a puddle [...] for having divulged the incommensurability of side and diagonal’ (31). Ackerley notes that the Pythagoreans had ‘a fear of such irrationality’ that seemed to confound the very principle of harmony and [...] universal order’ (2010a, 93); a fear which Beckett would later draw upon in ‘Les Deux Besoins’ (1938) and ‘Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit’ (1949). Central to this scene, however, are the parallels between such arrhythmic patterns and defective forms of circulation and exchange; for Connor reads the encounter with Endon as ‘a knowing refusal of the possibility of transference in psychoanalysis’, arguing that the figure of the schizophrenic ‘represents a principle of unanalysability and unrepresentability’ and a ‘refusal of the communicability posited in analysis’ (2008, 21), whereas Bolin observes that while Murphy might love Endon with ‘the same love he bears himself’, the schizophrenic ‘fails to provide Murphy with the short-circuited of love requited’ (2007, 110). Endon’s name, a transliteration of the Greek word for ‘within’, only serves to highlight his inviolable remoteness, drawing our attention to absence of exchange between the schizophrenic and the protagonist. At the end of the chapter, Murphy attempts to dispel this arrhythmic pattern by returning to the palliative comforts of the rocking-chair, ‘dimly intending to have a short rock and then, if he felt any better, to dress and go’ (141), but a gas explosion ultimately provides the peace and freedom that the lullaby of the *berceuse* never could: ‘The gas went on in the wc, excellent gas, superfine chaos. Soon his body was quiet’ (142). In the mortuary scene that follows, the coroner appears to endorse a more regular form of circulation, commenting on the beauty of the denouement provided for the protagonist’s life by a birthmark on his bottom: ‘How beautiful in a way [...] birthmark, deathmark, I mean, rounding off the life somehow, don’t you think, full circle’ (150), but Neary’s subsequent revelation only serves to re-assert the text’s emphasis on arrhythmia and irrationality, as he discards his Pythagorean and Gestaltist training to admit: ‘Life is all rather irregular’ (152).

Much of the poignant symbolism of the final chapter reinforces this formal and thematic preoccupation with arrhythmia, as the kites flown in Hyde Park vacillating in the wind between turmoil and tranquillity. At the start of this chapter, we are told that it is a ‘mild, clear, sunless day’ with ‘sudden gentle eddies of rotting leaves’ and ‘branches still against the still sky’, but after Mr

Kelly launches his kite, the weather takes a tumultuous turn: ‘The leaves began to lift and scatter, the higher branches to complain, the sky broke and curdled over flecks of skim blue, the pine of smoke toppled into the east and vanished, the pond was suddenly a little panic of grey and white, of water and gulls and sails’ (156). To account for these abrupt convulsions, the narrator personifies Time itself as having ‘suddenly lost patience’, or, perhaps most significantly in light of the extent to which *Murphy* draws upon Osler’s medical account of the neuroses of the heart, as having suffered ‘an anxiety attack’ (156). The wind shifts arrhythmically from tranquillity to turmoil, while a comparably syncopated rhythm can be discerned in the propulsion of Mr Kelly’s chair and the winding and unwinding of his kite. When Celia releases her grandfather, his ‘arms flashed back and forth, faster and faster as the chair gathered speed, until he was rocking crazily along at a good 12 mph’, before bringing himself ‘smoothly to rest’ (155), with the narrative explicitly encouraging us to read this motion as an analogue of Murphy’s rocking-chair, noting that Mr Kelly was ‘as fond of his chair in his own way as Murphy had been of his’ (155). In addition to this, as the kite unwinds it appears to adopt its own staccato rhythm, with the cord worming ‘slowly off the winch – out, back a little, stop; out, back a little, stop’, as Mr Kelly releases it by having intermittently ‘let out a wild rush of line’, before carefully unwinding the final few yards: ‘without recoil or stop, gingerly, the last few feet’ (157). In the closing images of the novel, the tandem-kite of a young child comes crashing ‘shakily down from the turmoil’, while Mr Kelly’s winch springs from his fingers, snapping the string, causing the kite to ‘jerk upward in a wild whirl’ and vanish in the dusk (157-8). This broken string might be thought to represent a final failure of a rhythmic systole-diastole, for, in an echo of the ‘tired heart’ of Leopardi’s *A se stesso*, Celia exhaustedly pushes Mr Kelly’s chair uphill: ‘The levers were the tired heart’. The ranger’s repeated cries of ‘All out’ coincide with a final diastolic movement, an emptying of the narrative content that draws the text to a close (158).

As we have seen, *Murphy*’s convulsive narrative of overdetermined plenitude and underdetermined lack can constructively be read in conjunction with Beckett’s reading in pre-Socratic and modern medicine. In particular, its arrhythmic narrative refutes Pythagorean conceptions of medicine that depicted health as a form of attunement, that is, a blend or harmonic balancing of

elements. Instead, the novel's fluctuating rhythm bears a closer resemblance to the systolic-diastolic movement of blood to and from the heart first postulated by Empedocles, but this trope is developed through recourse to Osler's description of two specific types of arrhythmia frequently found in nervous conditions, as *Murphy* oscillates between a clogged and distended bradycardic narrative and a faster, tachycardic one.

CHAPTER THREE

‘Want of Stomach’: Exhaustion, Linguistic Constipation and *Watt*

Quand on s’arrête à la façon par exemple dont sont formés et proférés les mots, elles ne résistent guère nos phrases au désastre de leur décor baveux. C’est plus compliqué et plus pénible que la défécation notre effort mécanique de la conversation.

– Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, 336-7

Confronted with a patient exhibiting an acute case of alveolar pyorrhoea, Ferdinand Bardamu, the semi-autobiographical protagonist of Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (1932), ruminates upon the corporeal nature of our linguistic processes, upon the manner in which the production of language is inextricably bound to our buccal secretions of slaver and slobber. While Ferdinand’s remarks anticipate *The Unnamable*’s evocation of ‘a vast cretinous mouth [...] extruding indefatigably (with a noise of wet kisses and washing in a tub) the words that obstruct it’ (*T*, 394) or the logorrhoea of *Not I*, an earlier parallel can be detected in the exhaustive, obsessional language of *Watt*, where anality and orality are juxtaposed through the recurrent trope of constipation. By the time Beckett began to write *Watt* in February 1941 he had become well acquainted with Céline’s work, for although he informed Thomas MacGreevy in a letter of 23 April 1933 that he had merely ‘heard of *Voyage au bout de la nuit* and admired the title’ (*L I*, 152), he subsequently praised Céline’s debut novel in conversation with Peggy Guggenheim (Bair 1990, 292).²⁴ At the start of his six-month journey through Nazi Germany, Beckett also read Céline’s *Mort à Credit* (1936), which he found ‘superbly overwritten’ and ‘very Rabelais[ian] (in technique)’ (*GD*, 1 October 1936, qtd. in Knowlson

²⁴ John Pilling notes that ‘[h]aving failed to find the much better-known *Voyage au bout de la nuit* in the Dublin bookshops in the months after its Paris publication in late 1932 [...] any interest Beckett retained in Céline could obviously only be prosecuted on the continent’ (Pilling 2004, 42). Almost twenty years later, Beckett recommended Céline’s novel in a letter to Pamela Mitchell of 19 August 1954 (*L II*, 493).

1996, 231), before recording a couple of notes from *Bagatelles pour un massacre* (1937) in the *Whoroscope* notebook shortly after its publication in late December 1937.²⁵ Earlier that summer, he thanked George Reavey for sending a copy of the diatribe *Mea Culpa* in an unpublished letter of 15 June 1937 (Pilling 2004, 42, 44), before informing MacGreevy that he had unsuccessfully proposed a joint study of André Gide and either ‘a Céline or [André] Malraux to eke out the Proust’ to Chatto & Windus in the early 1930s (*L I*, 462); a comment which certainly attests to Beckett’s interest in Céline, but should perhaps be treated with a degree of scepticism, not least because the publication of Beckett’s monograph pre-dates that of Céline’s debut novel. As Helen Astbury and Jean-Michel Rabaté have noted, there are deep affinities between the colloquial French idiom adopted in Céline’s texts and Beckett’s post-war prose, yet such affinities should be read not merely as a site of convergence, but simultaneously as a site of demarcation, a boundary that draws them together yet pulls them apart. To write *after* Céline is, then, necessarily, to write both *with* and *against* him, and this concurrent process of convergence and divergence can be traced to some of the places where Beckett and Céline’s work might be thought to be in closest proximity, namely, in their interest in abjection, domesticity and medicine.

In Julia Kristeva’s seminal *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), Céline plays the leading role in a cast of modern authors (including Dostoevsky, Lautréamont, Proust, Artaud, Kafka and Bataille) whose work ‘is rooted in the abject it utters and by the same token purifies’, in a process that calls the autonomous subject into question. For Kristeva, the abject denotes an ambiguous, liminal space, which draws the subject to ‘the border of my condition as a living being’ where “‘subject” and “other” push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again – inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable’ (Kristeva 1982, 18). In doing so, abjection reveals a fundamentally Lacanian lack, for if objects such as ‘refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live’, the abject ultimately comes to

²⁵ Arguing that Beckett could hardly have failed to acknowledge Céline’s transition from ‘*Voyage and Mort à Crédit* to pamphleteering and anti-Semitic rhetoric’, Pilling suggests that the subsequent entries taken from Jean-Paul Sartre’s *L’Imagination* (1936) reveal an ‘implicit narrative’ of a ‘turning away (perhaps in distaste) from Céline – who was nevertheless to remain a powerful influence stylistically and expressively – towards much more abstruse, but perhaps much more consolingly abstract, matters of permanent philosophic interest’ (Pilling 2004, 43-44).

symbolise a 'recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language or desire is founded'. In this respect, abjection 'beseches, worries and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced' for '[a]pprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened it rejects', leading to a 'vortex of summons and repulsion' that disrupts the autonomy of the subject and occasions both a rejection, and a reconfiguration of, language (1-5). If Céline represents a 'privileged example' in Kristeva's discussion of abjection, however, a fact which Kristeva herself attributes to the manner in which his nihilistic coarseness refuses to 'spare a single sphere', Beckett's work remains conspicuous in its absence (217). We might be tempted to ascribe this absence to the proximity of abjection in Beckett and Céline, especially in light of the fact that Kristeva had earlier aligned Beckett's work with a failed Oedipality, a denial of female difference and an obstinate refusal to relinquish the third person through the act of writing (Kristeva 1980, 148-58). What Kristeva says of Proust is, however, perhaps equally true of the Beckett of *Watt*, for there remains 'something domesticated' about abjection in this particular work (1982, 20). Céline may, then, have associated his own artistic practice with a deeply misogynistic rejection of domesticity and hygiene through the figure of Ferdinand, a physician who, when faced with the disgust of his former lover Musyne, claims that '[l]es femmes ont des natures de domestiques. Mais elle imagine peut-être seulement cette répulsion cette qu'elle ne l'éprouve; c'est l'espèce de consolation qui me demeure. Je lui suggère peut-être seulement qui je suis immonde. Je suis peut-être un artiste dans ce genre-là' (Céline 1932, 74), but Beckett's interest in anality, domesticity and social codes of propriety is an altogether more complex affair.

As this third chapter proceeds, it briefly examines Beckett's repudiation of domesticity in *Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (first published in *transition forty-nine*, no. 5 in December 1949), before turning to analyse the recurrent trope of linguistic constipation in *Watt* in relation to Beckett's encounter with the Freudian theory of the anal erotic in his reading of Ernest Jones's *Papers on Psycho-analysis* (1923) and Karin Stephen's *Psychoanalysis and Medicine: A Study of the Wish to Fall Ill* (1933). Turning to examine the narrative's accretive, syndetic permutations and its congested rhythm of distension and delay, the chapter draws attention to the novel's allusion to a discussion of habit and rhythm in Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), whilst analysing its invocation of

a number of passages from a section in Osler's *Principles and Practice of Modern Medicine* entitled 'Diseases of the Digestive System', including sub-sections on 'Intestinal Obstruction' and 'Constipation (Costiveness)'. Finally, the chapter considers the correlation between Osler's description of the extent to which these intestinal blockages might be ascribed to dietary deficiencies and Beckett's growing sense of the inadequacy of language through a brief discussion of the poem 'Cascando' (1936).

Beckett's Bad Housekeeping

Given his oeuvre's recurrent emphasis upon ill-disciplined bodies and undomesticated spaces, to speak of Beckett's interest in domesticity and codes of propriety might seem to be something of a surprising claim, particularly in light of the *Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*, where the figure of B aligns the Dutch painter Bram van Velde's 'fidelity to failure' with a rejection of domesticity and the material comforts of home. In the final dialogue, van Velde is not merely presented as the first to acknowledge the 'acute and increasing anxiety of the relation' between the artist and his occasion, but as 'the first to admit that to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, *good housekeeping*, living' (*PTD*, 124-5; emphasis mine). Drawing attention to this apparently throwaway remark might be a deeply problematic process, not least because of the manner in which the self-effacing rhetoric of the dialogues undermines the authority of B's critical pronouncements. In this respect, Rupert Wood observes that Beckett's later discursive writings are persistently marked by an attempt to destabilise the critical voice through a 'continuously self-deconstructing and self-consciously fictive residue of philosophizing', which leads to 'a steady ironisation of the critical perspective' and 'an undermining of the possibility of saying anything serious about art' (1994, 2, 8).

However, the repudiation of 'good housekeeping' benefits from closer scrutiny for a number of reasons. Firstly, when read alongside Beckett's sustained encounter with the work of the French critic Maurice Blanchot, this offhand remark appears to provide a further insight into the self-effacing

rhetoric of the dialogues themselves, particularly since it echoes a passage in Blanchot's preface to *Lautréamont et Sade* (1949), entitled 'What is the Purpose of Criticism?'. If, however, as Shane Weller has recently argued, questions of 'debt, legacy and affinity' have previously remained 'bound up with one another in a complicated and even paradoxical manner' in the relationship between these two major figures of French post-war literature, with the question of Beckett's acquaintance with Blanchot's work prior to the writing of *L'Innommable* (1955) previously remaining unproven (2007, 23), the publication of Beckett's correspondence with Georges Duthuit allows us to locate their relationship on firmer ground. We now know, for instance, that Beckett encountered Blanchot's work as early as October 1948, when he thanked Duthuit for an unspecified article, before translating passages from *Lautréamont et Sade* (1949) for prospective publication in *transition* in the spring of 1951 (*L II*, 107, 232). This encounter is reflected, as Peter Fifield notes, on the last page of the first *Textes pour rien* notebook, whose final text dates from July 1951, where 'Beckett makes a note from [Georges] Bataille's preface to [Sade's] *Justine* (1950), "Le Soleil Noir" in which Bataille draws insights from Blanchot's *Lautréamont et Sade*' (Fifield 2010, 113). Beckett may, however, have encountered this text in the brief period between its publication and the composition of the dialogues. Blanchot's preface defines critical discourse in terms of its 'penchant for self-effacement' and its concomitant refusal to domesticate the unspoken, indefinable reality of the literary work:

Critical discourse has this peculiar characteristic: the more it exerts, develops, and establishes itself, the more it must obliterate itself [...]. And this movement towards self-effacement is not simply done at the discretion of the servant who, after fulfilling his role and tidying up the house, disappears: it is the very meaning of its execution, which has proscribed in its realization that it eclipse itself.

(Blanchot 2004, 2)

The self-effacing gestures that B performs throughout the dialogues, such as when he speaks of van Velde's artistic predicament only to subsequently retract his remarks, admitting that although he spoke of such a predicament, 'I should not have done so' (*PTD*, 126), are formally tied to a rejection of domestication that bears a marked resemblance to Blanchot's earlier delineation of the function of literary criticism.

This resistance to domesticity in the *Three Dialogues* cannot, however, solely be ascribed to his encounter with the work of the French literary critic, as Beckett previously spoke of his frustration with the atmosphere of ‘good housekeeping’ at his family home of Cooldrinagh in the affluent suburb of Foxrock in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy of 23 August 1937, shortly before the wedding of his brother Frank:

Watching the presents come along has been painful. The awful unconscious social [c]ynicism that knows that what the relationship comes down to in the end is gong & tea-trolleys, that without them there is no “together”. Till it seems almost a law of marriage that the human personal element should be smothered out of existence from the word go, reduced to a mere occasion for good housekeeping & home chat.

(L I, 537)

Just over a week earlier, he lamented the preponderance of such ‘impediments of detached domesticities’ in a letter to his aunt Cissie Sinclair, before expressing his exasperation at the manner in which women readily accepted their role in this domestic sphere, becoming ‘welded together with gongs and tea-trolleys’ (535). In light of this correspondence, the contradictory logic of *Three Dialogues* appears to recommend a renunciation of an artistic form of ‘good housekeeping’ that allows a painter to neatly identify his subject with the objects of the material world in accordance with the ‘pathetic antithesis poverty-possession’, yet simultaneously reject a political, materialist analysis of the intrinsically bourgeois nature of all art: ‘The realisation that art has always been bourgeois, though it may dull our pain before the achievements of the socially progressive, is finally of scant interest’ (*PTD*, 123-4). Neither Beckett’s correspondence nor his acquaintance with Blanchot can, however, fully account for the preoccupation with domesticity in *Watt*, which appears to be founded as a defective, distended rhythm linked to the trope of linguistic constipation, which appears to stem from Beckett’s readings in the Freudian theory of the anal erotic.

From Arsene to Clov, Lucky to Moll, Beckett’s work is marked by a preponderance of servants, but nowhere is this preoccupation with domesticity more formally integrated than in *Watt*. Upon arriving at his enigmatic master’s household, the titular protagonist encounters his immediate

predecessor, Arsene, who 'irrupts into the novel from out of nowhere' (Pilling 1996, 61), to deliver a protracted 'short statement' of some twenty-five pages, wherein he, in turn, describes the behaviour of Mary, one of Knott's series of 'increeping and outbouncing house- and parlour maids' (W, 37-49). Arsene explains how, one morning, Mary settled down before an unspecified 'task' only to neglect her duty, preferring instead to quietly eat a succession of 'onions and peppermints' until 'little by little the reason for her presence [...] faded from her mind' and 'the duster, whose burden up to now she had so bravely born, fell from her fingers, to the dust, where having at once assumed the colour (grey) of its surroundings, it disappeared until the following Spring' (W, 49-50). In this fashion, we are told that Mary loses an average of 'twenty-six or twenty-seven splendid woollen dusters' per month, but instead of reading this passage as a symbolic rejection of the domestic order, we might locate it alongside Beckett's own readings in psychology and psychoanalysis, undertaken during his period of psychotherapy with W.R. Bion at the Tavistock Clinic in London between January 1934 and December 1935, in order to provide an insight into this distended, procrastinating rhythm of a domestic order in abeyance.

For while reading extensively in the literature of psychoanalysis, Beckett became acquainted with the Freudian theory of anal eroticism, taking notes from chapters on 'Anal erotic Character Traits' in Ernest Jones's *Papers on Psycho-analysis* and 'The Excretory Stage' in Karin Stephen's *Psychoanalysis and Medicine: A Study of the Wish to Fall Ill*. Although Jones's chapter is predominantly based upon Freud's brief essay on 'Character and Anal Eroticism' (1908), as Shane Weller notes, it 'fleshes out Freud's thoughts on the subject in various important ways and contains key elements that are not to be found in Freud's essay' (2010a, 139). For instance, re-iterating Freud's assertion that a regular combination of the three cardinal character traits of 'orderliness, parsimoniousness, and obstinacy' are often 'prominent in people who were formerly anal erotics', that is, those individuals who previously experienced a 'subsidiary pleasure from defecating' in childhood (Freud 1959, 169), Jones draws attention to a number of objects and tasks that symbolise defecation in the unconscious. Amongst these symbols are those everyday tasks which are 'intrinsically disagreeable or tedious', while '[a] typical sub-group is the kind of task that Americans aptly term

‘chores’, boring routine duties like tidying drawers, cleaning out a cupboard, filling in a diary, or writing up a daily report’, whereas tasks which concern ‘objects that are unconscious symbols for excretory products’, such as those involving ‘any form of dust or dirt’ also fall into this category (Jones 1923, 684-5). In Freud’s paper, ‘orderliness’ conveys both ‘the notion of bodily cleanliness’ and ‘conscientiousness in carrying out small duties’, since it is bound up with ‘a reaction-formation against an interest in what is unclean and disturbing and should not be part of the body’, with the German *ordentlich* denoting ‘such English terms as “correct”, “tidy”, “cleanly”, “trustworthy”, as well as “regular”, “decent” and “proper” (Freud 1959, 169, 172-3).

Accordingly, Jones highlights the anal erotic tendency to alternate between ‘inhibitory procrastination and feverish concentration’ (1923, 685), turning directly to the question of domesticity to observe that ‘a housewife afflicted with a marked anal complex will keep postponing the doing of a necessary duty, such as the cleaning out and tidying a lumber room until finally she is seized with a passionate energy for the task, to which everything else is subordinated’, before alluding to the Teutonic moniker for this anecdotal domestic malady: ‘The lady afflicted with what the Germans call a *Hausfraupsychose* will often find it difficult to attend regularly to the routine tasks of house work, and may neglect and postpone them until the unconsciously accumulated energy bursts forth in an orgy of cleaning activity’ (685-6). Mary’s discarded duster stands, then, as a symbol of distension and delay, although it is worth noting that these dusters are subsequently relocated during a period of spring cleaning, which suggests that they symbolise a suspended domestic order. This, in turn, might help to explain why Mary eats an alternating succession of onions and peppermints, in an oscillating rhythm where order and disorder are intimately bound together, successively depending upon and reproducing one another, as she successively stains and freshens up her breath, in a process where the foul invokes the fragrant, and vice versa.

On the one hand, Beckett’s characterisation of Mary reflects the deeply essentialist and exuberant misogyny of much of his early work, where women are repeatedly associated with grotesque corporeality, with voracious physical and sexual appetites (Bryden 1993, 30). For Susan Brienza, Mary emerges as ‘the most disgusting woman in Beckett’s canon’, ‘a horrifying reversal of

one ideal of feminine beauty', whose biblical name is deeply ironic given the manner in which, '[r]ather than upholding cleanliness, godliness, purity, or spirituality', she 'embodies the extreme opposite of putative female behaviour, in particular, dainty and sparse eating' (Brienza 1992, 99). Perhaps the only positive we can draw from this is that Beckett's characterisation of Mary does, at least, refuse to endorse the conclusion of Arthur Schopenhauer's essay '*Über die Weiber*' (Ger. On Women) in *Parerga and Paralipomena* (1851), which he mentioned in a letter to Joseph Hone of 3 July 1937 (*L I*, 509). In that piece, Schopenhauer suggests that 'what there ought to be is housewives and girls who hope to become housewives and who are therefore educated, not in arrogant haughtiness, but in domesticity and submissiveness' (Schopenhauer 1970, 87). We might struggle to read Mary as a subversive figure challenging a patriarchal hegemony that restricted women to the home, but the abandonment of her task and duster does, albeit only temporarily, cast Shane Weller's suspicion that Beckett 'came under the spell of Schopenhauer at his most misogynistic' into some doubt (2005, 149).

On the other hand, the fact that the contents of her overflowing mouth are strewn 'all over this ill-fated interior' (*W*, 53), hints that Mary might be thought to exhibit a number of anal erotic tendencies. In addition to her apparent predilection for dust and dirt, which Freud would perhaps read as a collapsed reaction-formation, Mary's voracious appetite could be thought to denote a marked instance of anal eroticism, as both Jones and Stephen comment upon the fact that 'food' represents a copro-symbol', that is, a substitute for the act of defecation in the unconscious (Jones 1923, 692; Stephen 1933, 133). In light of her procrastination, Arsene also insinuates that Mary may be suffering from constipation, a digestive form of distension and delay, for he informs us that she spent a greater part of her time in the servants' toilets than 'seemed compatible with a satisfactory, or even tolerable, condition of the digestive apparatus' (*W*, 50, 53). In this respect, while Beckett's reading notes record Jones's identification of procrastination as a key trait of the anal erotic, 'Such people are very given to procrastination; they delay and postpone what they may have to do until the eleventh hour or even the twelfth hour', the psychologist also notes that this habit 'may lead to chronic constipation in later life' (TCD MS 10971/8/18-19; Jones 1923, 681). It may be significant that Mary's lavatory appears to be

transformed from a ‘cabinet d’aisance’ into a ‘cabinet de malaisance’, a pun which Beckett himself noted in a letter to George Reavey of 27 October 1937 (*L I*, 556).

While Arsene’s valedictory ‘short statement’ has frequently been read as a cautionary episode, as what Raymond Federman terms an unequivocal ‘warning against the deceptive Knott world’ (1965, 102) rather less attention has been paid to the extent to which Arsene addresses the dangers of excessive anality. On closer inspection, the ‘hint of anal excretion’ that Laura Salisbury detects within his name does appear to specifically link Arsene with the anal erotic: what has hitherto remained unrecognised is the fact that Karin Stephen’s chapter on the ‘Excretory Stage’ describes a patient who ‘had fantasies of arson – punning on the word when it occurred to him as if it were spelt “arse on”’ (Salisbury 2008, 163; Stephen 1933, 146). Now, after experiencing a ‘little slip’ that critics have frequently ascribed to Zeno’s *sortites* puzzle (which Beckett would later employ at the start of *Endgame*), that of ‘millions of little things moving all together out of their old place’, Arsene describes his linguistic difficulties with the tobacco-pipe: ‘At the same time my tobacco-pipe, since I was not eating a banana, ceased so completely from the solace to which I was inured, that I took it from my mouth to make sure it was not a thermometer, or an epileptic’s dental wedge’ (*W*, 41-42). Although Arsene’s ‘change’ is impossible to paraphrase, as Phil Baker observes, there can be little doubt that ‘orality plays a major part’ (Baker 1997, 22). Here the oral phase is juxtaposed, however, with the excretory, for this linguistic blockage coincides with a physiological ailment, or, more specifically, an intestinal obstruction, with Arsene recalling his ‘recent costiveness and want of stomach’ (*W*, 41-42).

Arsene implies that his linguistic impasse might be considered, therefore, in corporeal terms, where the accumulation of dejected words leads to a form of linguistic constipation. That Arsene’s ‘little slip’ might specifically be thought to represent an intestinal ailment is supported by the fact that Osler’s subsection on ‘Intestinal Obstruction’ describes ‘Intussusception’, one of the major causes of these digestive obstructions, as a condition whereby ‘one portion of the intestine *slips* into an adjacent portion’ (1895, 444; emphasis mine). When Arsene speaks of ‘existence off the ladder’ (*W*, 42), a peculiar aside which has variously been attributed to the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein or read as

an obscure Welsh joke, there may also be an oblique medical subtext at work. Osler observes that in the symptoms of intestinal obstruction, the coils of the small intestine become distended, forming a peculiar pattern when the bowel convulses:

John Wyllie has recently called attention to the great value in diagnosis of the “patterns of abdominal tumidity”. In obstruction of the lower end of the large intestine not only may the horseshoe of the colon stand out plainly, when the bowel is in rigid spasm, but even the pouches of the gut may be seen. When the caecum or lower end of the ileum is obstructed the tumidity is in the lower central region, and during the spasm the coils of the small bowel may stand out prominently, one above the other, either obliquely or transversely placed – the so-called “ladder pattern”.

(1895, 448)

Instead of foregoing the ‘danger in the neatness of identifications’ (*DIS*, 19), perhaps a few words of caution need to be sounded here. Firstly, without Mark Nixon’s discovery of Beckett’s encounter with Osler’s text, the reader could never have been expected to link Arsene’s allusion to the ‘ladder’ to this peculiar medical ailment. Secondly, *Watt* does not neatly suggest that Arsene exhibits this symptom, as he falls off the ladder, destabilising this reader’s attempt to link his linguistic obstruction with an intestinal one.

When Arsene turns to describe the nature of this ‘change’, however, he admits that it would be easy to employ a strictly linear, systematic method: ‘[t]hese are questions from which, with patience, it would be an easy matter to extract the next in order, and so descend, so mount, rung by rung, until the night was over’, but he refuses to do so: ‘[u]nfortunately I have information of a practical nature to impart’ (*W*, 43). This information appears to consist, in fact, in the very rejection of such strict linearity, for the unregulated and disorderly nature of Arsene’s speech appears to be part of its message. The ‘disparity’ between ‘promise and performance’ thus highlights a lack of narrative control (Pilling 1996, 41), which is readily apparent about two-thirds of the way through the speech, as Arsene promises that ‘now I shall finish and you will hear my voice no more’, only to continue for a further eight pages (*W*, 54). Both the parable of Mary and Arsene’s description of his linguistic

difficulties appear, then, to provide Watt with an oblique caution about the dangers of excessive anality. This caution explicitly links the protagonist with Mary, and therefore with Knott's series of anal erotic servants, as when Arsene addresses Watt as 'Jane' (54). Perhaps more significantly, however, Jones and Stephens' description of the anal erotic tendency to procrastinate and the manner in which this habit can develop into the sort of distended, digestive ailments that Osler describes, provides an appropriate paradigm for our analysis of the structure and rhythm of *Watt*.

For the reader confronting *Watt* for the first time, Mary's discarded duster might seem to symbolise a textual resistance to external forms of regulation and control that is enacted in text's fragmented and rather anarchic structure, which led T.M. Ragg of Routledge to dismiss it as 'too wild and unintelligible for the most part to stand any chance of successful publication' (Knowlson 1996, 342). Thus, an extended prologue and a set of remarkably obscure addenda are adjoined to the central narrative of Watt's service in Mr. Knott's household, whose 'calm surface', as John Pilling remarks, 'is further undermined by three passages [Arsene's short statement, the story of the Lynch family and the Louit interpolation] that seem to grow out of proportion to the rest of the book' (Pilling 1996, 40). In conjunction with these extensive digressions, Beckett employs a number of footnotes, hiatuses, questions marks and a frustratingly exhaustive series of combinations and permutations, all of which seem to accentuate the text's fragmentary and incoherent status. These bewildering narrative procedures have arguably, however, had a disproportionate impact upon the reception of *Watt* within Beckett studies: Pilling, for example, claims that it is 'definitely fragmentary'; for J.M. Coetzee it represents 'an uneven and somewhat anarchic work'; while Ackerley argues that the text is 'full of holes – gaps and hiatuses, lacunae, deliberate errors and contradictions' (Pilling 1996, 40; Coetzee 1972, 472; Ackerley 2010b, 175). This pervasive approach does appear to be endorsed by Beckett's own correspondence on at least two separate occasions: in a letter to George Reavey of 14 May 1947, he declared *Watt* to be 'an unsatisfactory book, written in dribs and drabs' (*L* II, 55), while in another letter to Gottfried Büttner of 12 April 1978, he claimed it was 'written as it came, without pre-established plan' (Büttner 1984, 5-6). Such assertions fail to account, however, for the text's corporeal rhythm, for *Watt*'s accretive, syndetic permutations and its congested rhythm of distension and delay.

Going Slowly and Intestinal Impotence

Examining the pace of Beckett's prose, Steven Connor has labelled Beckett 'perhaps the most important inaugurator of a mode of aesthetic defection from speed', who 'looks for ways of turning from speed or promptness, or punctuality' to become a writer of 'insensible elapse'. In doing so, Connor distinguishes between the conditions of 'going slowly' and 'slow going' in Beckett's writing, arguing that the former does not merely 'connote care, attentiveness and a fullness of response, a refusal to be rushed past or deflected from one's purpose', but that it lies 'at the heart of that process of delaying, holding back from immediate gratification, which is at the foundation of selfhood and of culture; the toleration of frustration in the interests of a greater yield of pleasure or value' (Connor 1998, 153-4). Whilst Connor's predominant focus is upon the condition of 'slow going', that dissipative sense of time where 'there can be no convergence of the one who undergoes and the one who perceives the time of elapsing', his discussion of 'going slowly', of '[t]he extreme sense of measure, the inhuman measuredness of much of Beckett's work, its quality of calculated slowness' resonates with the distension and delay inherent within anal eroticism (155). A similar preoccupation can be detected in *Watt*, via the ancillary figure of Arthur, who juxtaposes a methodical sense of measure with a more haphazard approach. For, like the 'demented particulars' in *Murphy* (*M*, 11), in part three Arthur interrupts his narration of the episode describing the examination of Louit's dubious dissertation on 'The Mathematical Intuitions of the Visicelts' to apologise for his own profusion of narrative particulars:

Details, Mr. Graves, details I detest, details I despise, as much as you, a gardener, do. When you sow your peas, when you sow your beans, when you sow your potatoes, when you sow your carrots, your turnips, your parsnips and other root vegetables, do you do so with punctilio? No, but rapidly you open a trench, a rough and ready line, not quite straight, not yet quite crooked, or a series of holes, at intervals that do not offend, or offend only for a moment, while the holes are still open, your tired old eye, and let fall the seed, absent in mind, as the priest dust, or ashes, into the grave, and cover it with earth, with the edge of your boot in all probability, knowing that if the seed is to prosper and multiply, ten-fold, fifteen-fold, twenty-fold, twenty-five-fold, thirty-fold, thirty-five-fold, forty-fold, forty-five-fold, and even fifty-fold, it will do so, and that if it is not, it will not.

(*W*, 180)

In a recent essay, Elizabeth Barry has spoken of the operation of ‘the discourse of social judgement’ in Beckett’s writings, arguing that as Watt remains ‘socially excluded, without property or propriety’, he can speak ‘with propriety about very little’ since ‘authority and good taste are denied to those who have no social standing’ (Barry 2006, 33). In a similar manner, Ann Beer associates the text’s ‘reversal of bourgeois norms (such as the “waste not want not” ethics that leads to the dog-and-Lynch saga, and the necessary routine for meals that has rigidified into the serving of a single concoction fourteen times a week at exact hours)’ to Beckett’s ‘rejection of upper middle-class life in Foxrock’ (Beer 1985, 46).

These sociological approaches might perhaps be developed to acknowledge the extent to which Arthur’s concept of ‘punctilio’ does not merely denote a ‘strict observance of or insistence upon minutiae of action or conduct’, but a form of narrative etiquette predicated upon a precise sense of measurement and control. This precise sense of care and attention has, however, now been abandoned by Mr. Graves (and, by extension, by Arthur) in favour of his ‘present freedom’ where ‘all you need is seed, earth, excrement, water and stick’ (*W*, 181). Analysing this haphazard methodology, Ackerley notes the parallels between Arthur’s speech and the biblical parable of the ‘sower of the seed’ of *Matthew* 13:1-9 (2010b, 166), yet while the biblical subtext implies a cultivation of faith, a call to attentively prepare spiritual ground in order for the word of God to take root and flourish, Arthur’s current approach seems the very antithesis of care, attention and measurement. With this in mind, it is undoubtedly significant that Karin Stephen turns to this parable while discussing the manner in which symbolic expressions are disrupted in obsessional thought. Whereas ‘in an ordinary parable we know what we mean by our symbol, the obsessional patient does not know’, which leaves him in ‘the position of someone who felt an apparently senseless compulsion to go scattering seeds without in the least realising that what he really wanted was to preach the word of God’ (Stephen 1933, 47).

The corporeal nature of this haphazard approach becomes even more apparent as Arthur extols the virtues of a medication called ‘Bando’, from the French *bander* (to have an erection) to Mr

Graves during a delicate discussion of the latter's problems with erectile dysfunction, wherein the former reveals that he had previously suffered from a specific digestive ailment:

I tried it, Mr. Graves, and it changed my whole outlook on life. From being a moody, listless, constipated man, covered with squames, shunned by my fellows, my breath fetid and my appetite depraved (for years I had eaten nothing but high fat rashers), I became, after four years of Bando, vivacious, restless, a popular nudist, regular in my daily health, almost a father and a lover of boiled potatoes. Bando. Spelt as pronounced.

(W, 168)

When read alongside Beckett's psychology notes, Arthur's allusion to what the *Dream* notebook refers to as the 'tribulations of my intestines' (DN, 964) encourages us to associate his previously punctilious approach with obsessional, anal erotic behaviour. The care and attention inherent within Arthur's behaviour resembles, in this respect, the anal erotic deferral of pleasure, where, as Ernest Jones notes, the infant frequently post-pones the act of defecation to intensify its subsequent gratification:

The sensations vary in intensity with the strength of the stimulus, a fact frequently exploited by infants, who will at times obstinately postpone the act of defecation so as to heighten the pleasurable sensation when it occurs, thus forming a habit which may lead to chronic constipation in later life.

(Jones 1923, 681)

Beckett duly noted the observation that 'children have been known even to go to the length of squatting down and supporting the anal orifice with the heel so as to keep back the stool to the last possible moment – and then performing it with intense concentration' (Jones 1923, 683; TCD MS 10971/8/18). Although the links between constipation and sexual impotence are not readily apparent, Karin Stephen's chapter on 'The Excretory Stage' briefly refers to the work of the psychologist Karl Abraham, who termed the inhibition of bowel function a form of 'intestinal impotence':

In connection with the sexualisation of the infantile anal interests by regression, Dr Karl Abraham points out how, if the urge of adult sexuality had been displaced from the genital to the anal zone, patients may deplore the inhibition of the bowel function just as though it were “genital impotence”. In thinking of the person who is hypochondrical about his motions, he says, “One is tempted to speak of an “intestinal impotence!”

(Stephen 1933, 129-30)

Arthur’s accumulation of narrative details might be thought to inaugurate Beckett’s professed interest in an art of impotence, and, in this respect, the central issue appears to be one of control, especially given that Beckett recorded Jones’s description of the links between constipation and the anal erotic’s ‘[m]ania for proving capacity for self-control (sphincters)’ (Jones 1923, 690; TCD MS 10971/8/19). This emphasis upon control helps to account for the miraculous properties of Bando in the French version, where Arthur is transformed into the ‘maître de mes selles’ (Beckett 2007, 176). Arthur’s past digestive troubles and poor personal hygiene are, as we will see, clearly analogous to Watt’s physiological condition in Mr Knott’s house, but although the protagonist’s systematising processes have frequently been read as a cerebral excursion into what Hugh Kenner terms a ‘mental world where logic mimes the possibility of order’, these processes are as much physiological as they are mental (Kenner 1968, 23). The revelation about Watt’s personal hygiene is, however, delayed, held back until part four, where the narrator (Sam) finally reveals that the protagonist was ‘a man of some bodily cleanliness’, before detailing the protagonist’s adherence to a strict regime of physical regulation that extends to the periodicity of his bodily emissions. Sam notes that Watt ‘hourly passed an urgent water’, before alluding to his ‘weekly stool’ and his ‘biannual equinoctial nocturnal emission in vacuo’ (*W*, 232), i.e., that he experiences wet dreams twice yearly, on the nights of the equinox.²⁶

Beckett’s emphasis upon Watt’s quotidian bodily functions reflects the *German Diaries* that he kept between 1936-37 which, as Mark Nixon notes, pay particular ‘attention to the habits of everyday life’, even recording ‘matters of personal hygiene and frequency of bowel movements’ in an echo of the journals and autobiographical works of Samuel Johnson and Jean-Jacques Rousseau

²⁶ Ackerley argues that the phrase ‘nocturnal emission in vacuo’ denotes an act of masturbation, but, technically speaking, this refers to an involuntary ejaculation (Ackerley 2010b, 198).

(Nixon 2011, 28). Such a focus upon what Mikhail Bakhtin would later term the ‘material lower bodily stratum’ could be traced to Beckett’s interest in Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (c. 1532- c.1564), from which he transcribed a number of notes in late September 1935, but perhaps a more significant influence was the work of the French author, Jules Renard (Bakhtin 1984, 395; cf. TCD MS 10969/27-38). Deirdre Bair, for example, draws attention to Beckett’s admiration for Renard’s depiction of these quotidian ‘natural functions’, before claiming that he informed his friend, Georges Pelorson, that Renard ‘always speaks so well about chewing and pissing and that kind of thing’ (Bair 1990, 124-5). Beckett had, of course, recorded a few phrases from Renard’s *Journals* in the *Dream* notebook in the spring of 1931 (*DN*, 30-4), before transcribing a number of passages that deal with Renard’s minute observations of everyday life at the start of his trip to Germany. As Nixon observes, he appears to have appreciated the sort of ‘unflinching attention to himself and his surroundings’ that culminates in the final entry of Renard’s *Journal* from the ‘Sick Man’s Diary’, which records decline of the author’s body and an act of enuresis: ‘Last time I wanted to get up. Dead weight. A leg hangs outside. Then a trickle runs down my leg. I allow it to reach my heel before I make up my mind. It will dry in the sheets’ (Nixon 2011, 24; Renard 1964, 248). Returning to Renard’s work in Dresden, an entry in Beckett’s diaries finds him reading ‘a Journal & [Voltaire’s] *Candide*’, an experience which he declared ‘a breath of air in the dungeon’ (*GD*, 7 February 1937), before alluding to Renard in a postcard to Georges Reavey a week later (*L I*, 442). If methodical speech patterns were to be persistently equated with excessively regulated bodily functions in *Watt*, where an accumulation of narrative details coincides with a sense of linguistic blockage akin to constipation, then Renard would exert a profound influence upon an entry in the addenda, where Arthur’s haphazard methods are explicitly tied to his present inability to control his bodily functions, to a form of narrative incontinence. Thus in a single addendum, Arthur converses with an old man in the garden who recalls their childhood together and how ‘You was always wetting your trousers’, to which Arthur replies, ‘I wets them still’ (*W*, 253); a comment which resonates with an entry in the *Dream* notebook taken from Renard’s *Journal* of 3rd February 1891: ‘Je suis un révolté, moi, avec un petit air de vieillard qui vient de faire pipi sans trop souffrir’ (*DN*, 215). Arthur’s constipation appears

to have relapsed into an obverse state, where his bodily functions resist any form of regulation or control, thus refusing to be domesticated.

During the extensive interpolation of the Louit episode, this haphazard methodology extends to the rhythm of everyday speech, and, what is more, is ostensibly written against a scientific paradigm of habit that Beckett encountered in Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), which he described as 'badly written catlap' (i.e. weak tea, only fit for a cat to drink) in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy of 4 August 1932 (*L I*, 111). Here, a member of the examining committee, Mr O'Meldon, is interrupted during his deliberations:

Any more questions, before I go home to bed, said Mr. Fitzwein. I was raising a point, said Mr. O'Meldon, when I was interrupted. Perhaps he could go on from where he left off, said Mr. Magershon. The point I was raising, said Mr. O'Meldon, when I was interrupted, is this, that of the two columns of figures here before me this afternoon, the one, or—. He has said this twice already, said Mr. MacStern. If not three times, said Mr. de Baker.

(*W*, 192-3)

Arthur presents us with the image of an aphasic impasse, with one of those everyday moments where thought and speech become clogged and obstructed, before another committee member urges Mr. O'Meldon to speed up:

Go on from where you left off, said Mr. Magershon, not from where you began. Or are you like Darwin's caterpillar? Darwin's what? said Mr. de Baker. Darwin's caterpillar? said Mr. Magershon. What was the matter with him? said Mr. MacStern. The matter with him was this, said Mr. Magershon, that when he was disturbed in the building of his hammock—. Are we here to discuss caterpillars? said Mr. O'Meldon.

(193)

Alluded to in *Murphy* and the short story 'Echo's Bones', this parable is derived from the eighth chapter of *The Origin of Species* on the subject of 'Instinct', which Darwin compares to habit and repetition. As Ackerley notes, the English scientist provides the example of a caterpillar who was

‘interrupted in building its “hammock” [...] and [when] returned to it or another at a similar point would normally complete the work’, but when relocated to one at a more advanced stage, the caterpillar ‘would get confused and attempt to start not from the point given but from where it had left off’ (Ackerley 2010b, 170). It is, however, worth quoting Darwin, who draws the reader’s attention to the linear rhythm of instinctual behaviour by comparing it to a person reciting a song or repeating something from memory:

Several other points of resemblance between instincts and habits could be pointed out. As in repeating a well-known song, so in instincts, one action follows another by *a sort of rhythm*; if a person be interrupted in a song, or in repeating anything by rote, he is generally forced to go back to recover the habitual train of thought: so P. Huber found it was with a caterpillar, which makes a very complicated hammock; for if he took a caterpillar which had completed its hammock up to, say, the sixth stage of construction, and put it into a hammock completed up only to the third stage, the caterpillar simply re-performed the fourth, fifth, and sixth stages of construction. If, however, a caterpillar were taken out of a hammock made up, for instance, to the third stage, and were put into one finished up to the sixth stage, so that much of its work was already done for it, far from feeling the benefit of this, it was much embarrassed, and, in order to complete its hammock, seemed forced to start from the third stage, where it had left off, and thus tried to complete the already finished work.

(Darwin 1988, 150; emphasis mine)

Beckett’s long-standing preoccupation with habit is readily apparent in his facetious dismissal of Rebecca West’s essay *The Strange Necessity* (1928) in ‘Dante... Bruno.Vico..Joyce’ (1929); whereas West compared the act of reading with the behaviourist experiments of Ivan Pavlov’s *Conditioned Reflexes* (1923), Beckett derides her ‘continuous process of intellectual salivation’ and ‘rapid skimming and absorption of the scant cream of sense’, before urging her to ‘assert a more noteworthy control over her salivary glands than is possible for Monsieur Pavlov’s unfortunate dogs’ (*DIS*, 26). Habit also plays a crucial role in Beckett’s monograph on *Proust* (1930), where it connotes ‘a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities’ and serves as ‘the guarantee of a dull inviolability’, the ‘ballast that chains the dog to his vomit’ (*PTD*, 8). Beckett may have dismissed *The Origin of Species*, but Darwin’s delineation of the extent to which habitual patterns of speech have a linear ‘sort of rhythm’ in which ‘one action follows the other’ plays a crucial role in the characterisation of Watt, who despite his

‘scant regard’ for enunciation, grammar, punctuation, spelling and syntax, recites his jumbled speech like a parrot in part three: ‘Watt spoke as one speaking to dictation, or reciting, parrot-like, a text, by long repetition become familiar’ (W, 154)

The question we should perhaps posit, then, is whether *Watt* merely satirises the linear rhythm of habitual speech patterns and endorses Arthur’s haphazard approach? On the one hand, the text’s non-linear narrative, where Watt ‘told the beginning of his story, not first, but second, so not fourth, but third, now he told its end’ (214), appears to affirm such an approach, which has led Angela Moorjani to argue that ‘since no beginning, end, or continuity can be assigned to the text, only a non-linear reading is able to account for the novel’s horizontal and vertical repetitions and discontinuities’ (Moorjani 1982, 26). For this reader, however, much of the difficulty of *Watt* consists in the laborious, obstinate linearity of Watt’s linguistic processes and mental permutations, which obstruct the reader’s passage through the text, forcing us to slow down and experience the extreme sense of delay and measure that typifies his thoughts.

These laborious tendencies can be related to the earlier allusion to ‘Darwin’s caterpillar’ in the unpublished short story, ‘Echo’s Bones’, a story which Beckett had envisaged as the ‘recessional’ conclusion to *More Pricks Than Kicks*, only for it to be rejected by Charles Prentice of Chatto & Windus (Ackerley & Gontarski 2004, 159). Towards the end of this peculiar post-obit scenario, Belacqua holds a bizarre tête-à-tête with a drunken groundsman, Mick Doyle, while the latter exhumes the former’s grave, only for the protagonist to suffer from a brief moment of aphasia, before sighing: ‘I’ll have to be like the embarrassed caterpillar and go back to my origins’. As Doyle fails to ‘smoke the reference’, Belacqua takes a moment to clarify things, explaining that the caterpillar ‘was working away at his hammock [...] and not doing a bit of harm to man or beast, when up comes old Monkeybrand bursting with labour-saving devices. The caterpillar was far from feeling any benefit’ (B389/122, 23). When read in conjunction with the aforementioned passage on ‘Instinct’ in *The Origin of Species*, ‘monkeybrand’ might seem to refer to Pierre Huber, the Swiss entomologist who relocated the caterpillar to a later stage in the construction of its ‘complicated hammock’, but as Ackerley notes, ‘[m]onkeybrand was a soap, for washing pans, according to their slogan, “For bright

and happy reflections” (Darwin 1988, 150; Ackerley 2010b, 170). Throughout Victorian Britain, advertising campaigns extolled the virtues of this miraculous soap, which promised to bring an end to arduous scouring, with one advert assuring the viewer that monkeybrand meant ‘No dust, no dirt, no labour’, while another campaign featured a monkey perched on the handlebars of a swiftly flying bicycle with the caption at the bottom reading: ‘Rapid and easy’ (McClintock 2005, 512). The implication, then, is that the methodical, linear rhythm of Darwin’s caterpillar is not merely slow, difficult and laborious, but that it leads to a linguistic surfeit, to what the narrator of the first part of *Molloy* will later term ‘a wealth of filthy circumstance’ (*T*, 63), where words seem to congeal and accumulate, obstructing the reader’s passage through the text. Locating Watt’s linguistic and mental impasses alongside this passage from ‘Echo’s Bones’ encourages us to reflect upon our reading habits, to re-evaluate our temptation to skip over these textual obstructions, for Beckett had previously suggested that ‘[t]he creature of habit turns away from the object that cannot be made to correspond with one or other of his intellectual prejudices, that resists the propositions of his team of syntheses, organised by Habit on *labour-saving* principles’ (*PTD*, 23; emphasis mine).

‘Ne’er Misset Thou Thy Morning W.C.’

If Arsene and Arthur’s speeches represent an implicit warning about the dangers of Watt’s obsessive anality, these cautionary episodes encourage us to reassess his earlier encounter with Dum Spiro, the editor of the Catholic monthly, *Crux*; an encounter where linguistic excess and spiritual lack are obliquely linked to bodily functions. Spiro’s name derives, as Ackerley and Pilling note, either from the classical tag ‘*dum spiro spero*’ (Lat. while I breathe, I hope) usually attributed to Cicero, or from a phrase which Beckett encountered in Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), ‘*parvus sum nullus sum altum nec spiro nec spero*’ (Lat. I am a little nobody, I neither deeply breathe nor hope) (*DN*, 721) (Ackerley 2010b, 43; Pilling 1992, 104). This truncated appellation concomitantly draws the reader’s attention to the excessive nature of Spiro’s exhalations, encouraging us, like Dante’s damned, to abandon all hope. Accompanying this hint of linguistic excess are Spiro’s attempts to remedy a spiritual lack through his remarkable tract, ‘*A Spiritual Syringe for the Costive in Devotion*’

(*W*, 26), yet this cure for the constipated faithful becomes even more explicit in the French translation, where it appears as ‘*Un Clysoir [sic – clystère] Spirituel pour les Constipés en Devotion*’ (Beckett 2007, 29). With this in mind, Ackerley links Spiro’s title to the ‘slight consonantal adjustment’ of St John of the Cross’s poem *Dark Night of the Soul* in Beckett’s *Dream* notebook, where it is amended via Inge’s *Christian Mysticism* (1899) to ‘The Dark Shite of the Hole’ (*DN*, 101), before emerging in that novel’s vision of a ‘hypostatical clysterpipe’ that might occasion a ‘Great Dereliction’ comparable to that of St Teresa, a dereliction which coincides with a ‘period of post-evacuative depression’ (Ackerley 2010b, 45; *D*, 185).²⁷ Given his profuse loquacity on a wide variety of Church doctrine, however, Spiro has no such need for this ecclesiastical enema, as he responds to three questions from a reader: ‘at length, quoting from Saint Bonaventura, Peter Lombard, Alexander of Hales, Sanchez, Suarez, Henno, Soto, Diana, Concina and Dens, for he was a man of leisure’ (*W*, 27). Spiro’s speech might, in fact, be read as a precursor of the logorrhoea of Lucky in *Waiting for Godot* (1954) or Mouth in *Not I*, for like those of his literary descendants, his words rapidly veer from one subject to another, without providing any causal links between them.

If Spiro’s vocal incontinence comes to symbolise a lack of narratological control, Watt’s response to this incoherent rambling is altogether more predictable, for after innocuously introducing himself with ‘My name is Spiro’, Watt extrapolates a principle of organisation at work: ‘Here then was a sensible man at last. He began with the essential and then, working on, would deal with the less important matters, one after another, in an orderly way’ (25). We immediately begin to realise, however, that there is something awry with Watt’s notion that Spiro speaks in a linear, orderly manner, particularly when the latter explains that his Christian name is an ‘anagram of Mud’ (25), explicitly linking him to a potent symbol of dirt and disorder. Highlighting the absence of narrative connections between Spiro’s theological topics of conversation, J.M. Coetzee turns to the *Watt* notebooks, asking what might link the author of ‘The Chartered Account’s Saturday Night’ who lives in Lourdes with the fate of a rat that eats a consecrated wafer, before explaining that whereas in the first *Watt* notebook ‘these three data are related’, as the drafts were revised their connections were

²⁷ The title of Spiro’s ecclesiastic pamphlet also echoes a phrase which Beckett recorded in the *Dream* notebook from Renard’s *Journal*: ‘Son âme prend du ventre’ (*DN*, 229).

expunged. Accordingly, Coetzee labels Spiro's speech a 'collage of rejectamenta', whose comic effect depends upon the 'loosening of the narrative relations that occurred in the first draft' (Coetzee 1972, 474).

The lyrics of this discarded song, for example, resonate with and reproduce the published text's preoccupation with bodily and textual forms of regulation. Drafted in the first notebook, where 'We' (the original narrator) sings the lyrics to Quin (the precursor of Mr Knott), 'The Chartered Accountant's Saturday Night, or, Two Voices are There', details the thoughts of the 'unhappy accountant' Martin Ignatius MacKenzie, who staggers home over the 'herbaceous waste of Salisbury', only to hear a voice attempting to locate the source of his melancholy: 'MacKenzie, in this world where all are my merry / Why is't that thou alone art far from gay?' In the second verse, however, this internal voice refuses to acknowledge a potential link between MacKenzie's melancholy and his over-zealous anality:

Thou ailest not, as far as one can see,
 Thine appetite is good, thy nights are sound,
 Ne'er missest thou thy morning W.C.,
 Thy sexual life is normal, smooth and round.

(Beckett, *Watt* notebook 3, 62, qtd. in Ackerley 2010b, 47-48)

The revelation that MacKenzie never misses his 'morning W.C.' establishes him as a doppelgänger of Watt, who, as we have seen, employs a strict system of physical regulation that extends to the very timing of his bodily emissions, but in both cases, the regulated tempo and slow measure of the ledger appear to intrinsically tied to their exhaustive, retentive acts of enumeration. After two further verses, MacKenzie's voice assures him, in an extraordinary anticipation of Krapp's difficulties with the 'sour cud and iron stool' (*CDW*, 22), that while '[o]ften leaden is the ledger, and long the score, / And bitter the compute', nonetheless, he should adopt the phrase 'Summo, ergo, sum' (Lat. *I add, therefore, I am*) as his mantra (Beckett, *Watt* notebook 3, 62, qtd. in Ackerley 2010b, 47-48). Read alongside this discarded song, Spiro's comments appear to provide Watt with yet another warning about the dangers

of anality, costiveness and retention. Although Watt's semantic difficulties with the pot are predominantly linguistic rather than spiritual, they nevertheless coincide with an intestinal ailment, with the suspicion that he was 'in poor health, owing to the efforts of his body to adjust to an unfamiliar milieu' and 'grew pale and constipated' (W, 80). In contrast, Spiro dismisses the overt decorum of a theological axiom pertaining to the question of which hand to wipe the posterior with, '[p]odex non destra sed sinistra' (Lat. the anus not with the right but the left) as mere 'pettiness' (26). In addition to this, there is a peculiar variation between the English and French versions; in the former Spiro explains that he does not allow his 'neo-John-Thomist' faith to 'stand in the way of my promiscuities' (26), whereas in the latter he refuses to allow himself 'être gêné dans mes histoires de cul' (Beckett 2007, 29). Watt, however, pays little attention to this admonition because of 'other voices, singing, crying, stating, murmuring, things unintelligible, in his ear', which, in the first of the text's recurrent enumerations, he attempts to preserve in an apparently exhaustive, overtly retentive series of potential combinations:

Now these voices, sometimes they sang only, and sometimes they cried only, and sometimes they stated only, and sometimes they murmured only, and sometimes they sang and cried, and sometimes they sang and stated, and sometimes they sang and murmured, and sometimes they cried and stated, and sometimes they cried and murmured, and sometimes they stated and murmured, and sometimes they sang and cried and stated, and sometimes they sang and cried and murmured, and sometimes they cried and stated and murmured, and sometimes they sang and cried and stated and murmured, all together, at the same time.

(W, 27)

In this respect, Watt's actions appear to be the obverse of one of Theodor Adorno's unpublished notes on *L'Innommable*, for whereas Adorno terms that novel's persistent negativity a form of 'absolute discardment, because there is hope only where nothing is retained' (2010, 178), Watt's accretive sequence seems like a process of 'absolute retention' where hope only resides 'where nothing is discarded'. Yet whilst this apparently exhaustive sequence might appear to retain all the possible combinations of these voices, as John Mood first noted, Watt incorporates only fourteen of the fifteen

possible combinations, omitting the instances in which ‘sometimes they sang and stated and murmured’ (Mood 1971, 258).

After alighting from the train, Watt is accosted by Lady McCann before collapsing into a ditch, where he hears a ‘threne’ sung by the indifferent voices of a ‘mixed choir’ (W, 32). In a similar vein to MacKenzie’s patriotic poem, the early drafts of this passage explicitly link the act of enumeration with a strictly regimented form of physical hygiene and a regulated tempo, albeit within a musical form. The published version of the first verse of the threne, as Ackerley has acknowledged, represents something of a vestigial trace of an earlier episode in the typescript, where the narrator (at this stage named Johnny Watt) visits Quin’s establishment and converses with Arsene, with their meeting due to be immortalised in a book entitled *A Clean Old Man*. Ackerley explains, for example, that the numbers of the first verse, ‘fifty two point two eight five seven one four’ (33) represent ‘the days in a leap year divided by seven to give the number of weeks’ which ‘reflects the numbers of days in the year 2080, the date [...] of the likely publication of Arsene’s book, *A Clean Old Man*’. Yet while, as Heath Lees observes, the published version of the threne has ‘a disorganised, rumbling-and-grunting bass, with inexplicable interjections of a blasphemous or coarse nature’ (Lees 1984, 13), in the typescript the music is more detailed: ‘in C major heard by Watt (who hears a tone [sic] flat), the conductor still a principality, four beats to the bar, and the tempo defined as: *Mesto quasi arrabbiato. Marcatissima la misura* (It. sad, almost angry, mark the extreme regularity of the tempo)’ (Beckett, *Watt* notebook 3, 115, qtd. in Ackerley 2010b, 55). This explicit link between enumeration, cleanliness and a strictly regulated tempo is almost impossible to discern within the published version of the threne, but when located alongside Beckett’s psychology notes, it helps to suggest that both the slow measure of the protagonist’s accretive, syndetic permutations and the text’s congested rhythm of distension and delay resonate with the constipation and procrastination exhibited by the anal erotic. This strictly regulated tempo clearly parallels Watt’s linguistic difficulties in Mr. Knott’s household, but, more importantly, provides an insight into the manner in which the methodical, linear rhythm of Watt’s thoughts accumulate into a form of literary excess, into a textual waste.

Cascando and the Stale Churn of Words

While Leslie Hill has drawn attention to the ‘exhaustive, repetitive and obsessional’ language of *Watt* (1990, 20), this linguistic exhaustion can productively be read in relation to the various depictions of food in the novel. Watt might, as we are later told, know ‘nothing about physics’ (*W*, 127), but on a number of occasions his domestic duties echo Beckett’s own interest in contemporary physics, particularly in terms of his attempts to counter the entropic ‘mingling’ of heterogeneous elements. The protagonist’s negentropic endeavours are, for example, readily apparent in his preparation of Knott’s meals, where a wide variety of foodstuffs, liquids and medicines are:

well mixed together in the famous pot and boiled for four hours, until the consistence of a mess, or poss, was obtained, and all the good things to eat, and all the good things to drink, and all the good things to take for the good of the health were inextricably mingled and transformed into a single good thing that was neither food, not drink, nor physic, but quite a new good thing.

(*W*, 84)

That Beckett should refer to this dish as having the homogenous consistency of a ‘mess’, that is, of a mixture of soft foodstuffs, as in the ‘Mess of mutton & garlic’ which he recorded from J.G. Lockhart’s *History of Napoleon Bonaparte* (1829) in the *Dream* notebook (*DN*, 60), or of a ‘poss’, an abbreviated form of posset, which as Ackerley observes, denotes ‘a drink made by the blending of ingredients’, is particularly significant, for on the verso of the early drafts, Beckett wrote ‘Poincaré’ in capital letters, as if to acknowledge the entropic mingling of heterogeneous molecules in this closed system (Ackerley 2010b, 105). Analysing the extent to which these ingredients ‘lose all culinary identity’, Hill argues that the ‘poss’ represents ‘a concoction in which all differences are erased’, before linking this negation of difference with Watt’s semantic difficulties with the pot: ‘Words posit as the basis of their intelligibility the system of differences that articulates them as differences. When that system is no longer attached to a stable paternity [...] then there is no longer any reliable term of reference’ (Hill 1990, 27, 29). If this concoction appears to tend towards uniformity and sameness, it mingles and accumulates into a more coagulated state.

Throughout the description of Knott's 'mess', however, the entropic 'mingling' of these ingredients is contrasted with Watt's classifying impulses. We are told, for instance, that Watt never deviates from the exact measurements contained within the recipe of this dish, producing what the typescript refers to as an 'invariable Eintopf' (Ackerley 2010b, 103-4):

For he knew, *as though he had been told*, that the receipt of this dish had never varied, since its establishment, long long before, and that the choice, the dosage and the quantities of the elements employed had been calculated, with the most minute exactness, to afford Mr. Knott, in a course of fourteen full meals, that is to say, seven full luncheons, and seven full dinners, the maximum of pleasure compatible with the protraction of his health.

(W, 85; emphasis mine)

The conjunction 'though' transfers these instructions from reality to the imagination, where the protagonist deduces that it fell to him 'to weigh, to measure and to count, with the utmost exactness, the ingredients that composed this dish' (85). Watt's exact measurement of these volumes is also nullified by the fact that, as he mixes these ingredients, 'tears would fall, tears of mental fatigue, from his face, into the pot, from his chest, and out from under his arm, beads of moisture, provoked by his exertions, into the pot', thus transforming the dish into a rather more variable hotpot (85). On a number of occasions, in fact, Beckett highlights the ineffectiveness of Watt's attempts to classify heterogeneous elements in order to overcome the 'mingling' inherent within the second law of thermodynamics. At the start of part two, for instance, Sam describes the disposal of the first and second-floor slops, noting that although Watt is instructed to empty Mr Knott's slops on a variety of plants in the garden according to their season, in contrast, when it comes to the 'second floor slops', he assumes that 'their commixture with those of the first-floor, if not formally forbidden, was not encouraged' (W, 65). The status of these slops as waste, as the very negation of value, only serves to parody Watt's classifying impulses, which appear to be predicated on the assumption that there remains some intrinsic value in Knott's slops, a value which would be diluted once mingled with those of his servants.

Watt's classifying impulses ultimately lead not to a decisive act of differentiation, but to an exhaustive accumulation of sameness, which is formally enacted in his extensive linguistic combinations. In his final essay, Gilles Deleuze explicitly identifies Beckett as a writer preoccupied with exhaustion and fatigue, for whereas the tired individual 'never realise[s] all of the possible', the 'exhausted exhausts all the possible', and, in the process, 'exhausts himself in exhausting the possible, and vice versa' (Deleuze 1995, 3). 'The realization of the possible', Deleuze argues, 'always proceeds by exclusion' which 'presupposes preferences and goals', whereas 'exhaustion is without any aim whatsoever', the 'logical conclusion of [...] ateleology' (3-4). With this in mind, Deleuze claims that Beckett's 'great contribution to logic' lies in his acknowledgment that 'exhaustion (exhaustivity) does not occur without a certain physiological exhaustion', before referring to *langage I*, that 'disjunctive, abrupt, jerky' language where 'enumeration replaces propositions' and 'combinatorial relations replace syntactical relations' through a 'language of names' (6). We might, in fact, go further than Deleuze in terms of identifying the physiological nature of this linguistic exhaustion, for as we have seen, during Watt's infamous encounter with the pot, the narrator reveals that he 'grew pale and constipated' (W, 80). In this particular instance, the protagonist's linguistic difficulties coincide with a collapse of the semantic differences that allow us to differentiate one word from another, leading to an aporetic impasse:

Looking at a pot, for example, or thinking of a pot, at one of Mr. Knott's pots, of one of Mr. Knott's pots, it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, pot. Well, perhaps not quite in vain, but very nearly. For it was not a pot, the more he looked, the more he reflected, the more he felt sure of that, that it was not a pot at all. It resembled a pot, it was almost a pot, but it was not a pot of which one could say, Pot, pot, and be comforted.

(78)

While numerous critics have noted Watt's need of 'semantic succour', his desire to be 'pacified', 'comforted', 'tranquilised', to make a 'pillow of old words' (117, 123, 81, 82), this coincides with the suspicion that he was in 'poor health' and his hopes that Erskine might alleviate his troubles, so that 'his health [would be] restored, and things appear, and himself appear, in their ancient guise, and

consent to be named, with the time-honoured names' (81). It seems significant that Watt's semantic difficulties arise over a 'pot', which could be either a receptacle for food or excrement, particularly in light of Beckett's own sense of the growing inadequacy of words in the poem 'Cascando' (1936). Arising from his unrequited feelings for Elizabeth Stockton, 'Cascando' first appeared in the *Dublin Magazine* (October-December 1936), but was substantially revised by Beckett in a German version in the Clare Street notebook. Towards the end of the English version, the persona speaks of curdled and stale words:

the churn of stale words in the heart again
 love love love thud of the old plunger
 pestling the unalterable
 whey of words

(*CP*, 25-28)

'Cascando' provides the first intimation that words are becoming more and more indigestible, the first intimation of what, speaking of the trilogy, Fifield astutely refers to as a form of 'linguistic excrement', 'a language so many times chewed, swallowed and digested in permutation and paradox that it no longer contains anything of nutritional worth' (Fifield 2009, 57). Analysing the German version, Thomas Hunkeler notes that Beckett alters 'saying again' in the English version with a single '*Sie wiederholen*' (Ger. they repeat), followed by a reference to '*Die alten Worte*' (Ger. the old words) and '*Die schalen Worte*' (Ger. the stale words)' (Hunkeler 2000, 35-36, qtd. in Nixon 2011, 112). In the German version, the stale words churn repetitiously, providing the reader with little sustenance, instead producing a linguistic deficit akin to the dietary ailments that, as we will see, Osler attributes as a major cause of intestinal ailments.

This convergence of linguistic and digestive ailments provides us with an insight into Watt's accretive, yet marked defective peristaltic rhythm, with the reading proceeding, like the procession in *How It Is*, 'in convulsive jerks and spasms like shit in the guts' (*HII*, 124). Of particular significance, in this respect, is what Connor refers to as Beckett's discovery of 'the extraordinary capacities of the comma', which 'creates a kind of counterpoint between the sheer going on of the sentence, with no

awareness of its likely end, and the interruptions, resumptions and folding over that the comma gives' (Connor 1998, 159). As the text proceeds, these retentive linguistic impasses become more extensive, as the complexity of Watt's paradigms increases, so that, by the end of his time in Mr. Knott's household, the reader encounters seventy-two different permutations of the master's movements and eighty-one pertaining to his appearance, with a brief sample of the former listed below:

Here he stood. Here he sat. Here he knelt. Here he lay. Here he moved, to and fro, from the door to the window, from the window to the door; from the window to the door [...] from the bed to the window; from the fire to the window, from the window to the bed; from the bed to the window, from the window to the fire; from the bed to the door, from the door to the fire; from the fire to the door, from the door to the bed.

(W, 203-4)

Here the convulsive syntax is characterised by jerks and obstructions, laboriously moving on, one step at a time, but this is less a journey of discovery (Büttner 1984, 141), than an accumulation of sameness that eradicates difference, a textual excess that engenders a symbolic lack. Towards the conclusion of the short essay 'Les Deux Besoins', Beckett might appear to reject any resemblance between the 'procès créateur' and 'ces convulsions de vermisseau enragé', but what the critical voice ultimately negates, is not an art 'propulsé en spasms', but an art 'propulsé en spasmes *de jugement vers une pourriture d'élection*', because 'ce sont les conclusions qui manquent et non pas les prémisses' (DIS, 57; emphasis mine). The peristaltic convulsions occasioned by these sphincters of punctuation ultimately enact a constipated textual blockage, where Watt continually strives to expel the right word, but can only produce a retentive waste that is never fully discharged; just as Connor has argued of nausea, constipation designates 'not the vigorously decisive, and divisive, act of excreting', but the repetitious, 'unresolved desire for expulsion' (Connor 2009, 62). Locating 'Cascando' alongside this association between costiveness and Watt's linguistic tribulations helps, in fact, to justify the recondite tag that Watt fosters upon the obscure figure he witnesses outside the station in part four, for after observing that figure's shackled gait, Watt expels a peculiar phrase: '[he] felt them suddenly glow in the dark place, and go out, the words, *The only cure is diet*' (W, 225). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Osler's medical textbook recommends that in acute cases of constipation and

intestinal obstruction ‘the diet must be carefully regulated’ (1895, 453), for just as Watt only drinks milk, the Canadian physician notes that the aetiology of constipation has frequently been attributed to both suckling and artificial milk: ‘Deficiency of fat in the milk is believed by some writers to be the cause’ (1895, 452).

The protagonist’s retentive anality may occasion a profound disturbance of textual rhythm through the linguistic trope of constipation, but as the novel draws to a close, this excretory model is superseded by the obstetric, as blockage gives way to expulsion.²⁸ Watt’s experiences at the station correspond, then, with the excretory and uterine subtexts that underpin the novel’s fragmented opening scenes, for if, in the words of Hill, the various episodes of Hackett’s maternal neglect, Larry’s birth and Watt’s expulsion from the tram ‘dramatise birth as an act of fantasmatic anal expulsion’ (Hill 1990, 32), Watt’s ejection from the waiting-room is similarly envisaged as a form of ‘riddance’ (*W*, 13), as a severing of intrauterine primal pleasure. While a number of entries in the *German Diaries* suggest that Beckett loosely modelled this episode upon a traumatic night that he spent in a ‘third class waiting room’ during a trip to Nuremberg in 1931 (*GD*, 1 March 1937), such a biographical impetus ultimately gives way, as this material is transformed via Otto Rank’s *The Trauma of Birth* (1929). The presence of an intra-uterine subtext in *Watt* has been well-documented, for in his study of the psychology notes, Matthew Feldman draws attention to the affinities between the notes that Beckett took from Rank’s discussion of a ‘typical form of anxiety-dream’ and the protagonist’s regressive proclivity for sitting ‘with his back to the engine’ of the train (*W*, 25):

Dream of travelling: such details as missing the train, packing & not being ready, losing luggage, etc, so painfully realised in the dream, can be understood only when one interprets the departure as meaning separation from the mother, & the luggage as symbolising the womb, which as we know is replaced by all kinds of vehicles. Forward movement in the dream is to be interpreted as regressive. Cp. disinclination of many persons to travel with their backs to the engine, & sortir les pieds en devant.

(TCD MS 10971/8, 35, qtd. in Feldman 2006, 31)

²⁸ In *The Wish to Fall Ill*, Stephen discusses two separate case studies where patients associated the act of birth with defecation. Firstly, she refers to a Miss M who suffered from ‘acute constipation’ and unconsciously linked the retained faeces with pregnancy, proving ‘unwilling to let go the faeces which she kept inside her by obstinate constipation’, with ‘the product as equivalent to a baby’. Secondly, Mr J suffers from ‘violent attacks of diarrhoea’, but interpreted this as ‘at least partly a symbolic miscarriage, and a normal motion, of which he was always proud, as a successful birth’ (Stephen 1933, 130-5).

In addition to the protagonist's infantile association with weaning, readily apparent in his lactophilic tendency to drink 'nothing but milk', Ackerley observes that his recurrent dreams of 'dives from dreadful heights into rocky waters' (*W*, 21, 221) parallels another passage in Rank, where Beckett noted the Freudian implications of 'Dreams of plunging into water [which] telescopes the birth trauma (plunge) & the regressive tendency' (TCD 10971/8/34, qtd. in Ackerley 2010b, 190). More specifically, while Rank suggests that 'the anxiety at birth forms the basis of every anxiety or fear' and that 'every pleasure has as its final aim the re-establishment of the intrauterine primal pleasure' (Rank 1973, 17), the psychoanalyst provides an example of:

the typical case of infantile anxiety which occurs when a child is left alone *in a dark room* [...] This situation reminds the child, who still is close to the experience of the primal trauma, of the womb situation – with the important difference that the child is now consciously separated from the mother, whose womb is only “symbolically” replaced by the dark room or warm bed.

(Rank 1973, 11-12)

Analysing the symbolic parallels between the waiting room and the intrauterine situation, Gottfried Büttner highlights Watt's adoption of a distinctly embryonic position, drooping 'sigmoidal in its midst' (*W*, 233), before arguing that a chair fastened to the floor represents 'the placenta' and that the room's unpleasant smell signifies the womb's proximity to the excretory organs, in accordance with Rank's description of the foetus's position '*inter faeces et urinas*' (Büttner 1984, 136-7; Rank 1973, 18). Ackerley also notes the affinities between the vagina and the room's enigmatic whispering female voice, with its 'thin lips sticking and unsticking' (*W*, 233), whose conversation with Watt implies an 'umbilical mother-foetus relation' (Ackerley 2010b, 198). This act of parturition appears to occasion a melancholy state in the protagonist, for after Mr Gorman and Mr Nixon open the waiting-room door, Watt recites a truncated fragment of Hölderlin's poem 'Mnemosyne', before quoting a few lines on the subject of the 'sullen silent sot' who 'always musing [...] never thinks' from George Farquhar's 1707 play *The Beaux' Stratagem* (*W*, 239). More significant, however, is the fact that the waiting room is termed a place where 'even the nicest degrees of strange and usual could not be

affirmed with propriety', especially since Watt's expulsion is not without its grotesque by-products; when Mr. Gorman and Mr. Nixon rouse him with a bucket of slimy water, they accidentally cut his face, so: 'Blood now profused the slime' (*W*, 233, 241). This process of parturition is frequently read as what Ackerley terms a 'dying into another state' (Ackerley 2010b, 203), namely, that of the peculiar figure of part three, but Mr. Nolan's subsequent description of Watt as a 'long wet dream' (*W*, 246) only serves to pre-empt the addenda's preoccupation with textual by-products, with residua and waste.

Flaunting its status as abject, expelled material, deliberately cast out from the main body of the text in a final act of revulsion, the addenda represents the most explicit example of a poetics of waste in an oeuvre which is obsessed with the notion of textual surplus, with 'disjecta membra', 'residua', 'precipitates', 'sanies' and 'odds and ends'. In legal and publishing terminology, an addendum denotes an item that is added to a text or document, typically to rectify omissions, but as Jacques Derrida notes in *Of Grammatology* (1976), such supplementary logic involves a dual process of accretion and substitution, where the supplement simultaneously adds to, and substitutes itself for, a particular lack within the body of the text. Derrida argues that supplementation is cohabited by a logic of lack and excess, since 'the supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude', yet at the same time, 'the supplement supplements. It only adds to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void' (Derrida 1998, 144-5, qtd. in Caselli 2006, 89). This paradoxical logic of lack and excess is reflected in the footnote appended to the addenda, which informs the reader that '[t]he following precious and illuminating material should be carefully studied', but that 'fatigue' and 'disgust' have 'prevented its incorporation' (*W*, 247). On the one hand, the addenda is presented, however ironically, as 'precious', as valuable material that gestures towards an intrinsic, albeit unspecified, lack within the body of the text which this supplement could potentially resolve, in a process that Caselli terms 'a deferral of the promise of full meaning' that 'mirrors the endless oscillation of openness and closure and excess and deficiency of the rest of the text' (2006, 90). On the other hand, if this material really were that valuable, the reader could be forgiven for thinking that it should have been incorporated into the text

rather than discarded (the French version speaks of material that has been ‘exilés du corps de l’ouvrage’), no matter how great the writer’s ‘fatigue’ or ‘disgust’ (Beckett 2007, 259). Assessing this footnote, Caselli claims that it ‘cannot be ironically dismissed’, with the addenda subsequently reduced to ‘a pile of discarded, meaningless material’, as such a reading would ‘rely on the assumption that in another, ideal world there could be addenda able to restore plenitude’. Instead, Caselli suggests that addenda should be treated as ‘illuminating’ because ‘it echoes what the rest of the text does: it refuses to be incorporated into an idea of fullness; it reflects on how the idea of fullness and lack are reciprocally implicated; and it questions this relationship’ (2006, 90).

The sheer quantity of entries might be thought, however, to highlight the extent to which this material is both valuable and redundant, since it draws the reader’s attention to the processes of selection inherent within the act of reading itself. Of particular significance, in this respect, is the manner in which a number of these entries foreground a distinctly obstetric model. The first addendum, for instance, alludes to the natal bed of Mrs Quin’s repeated acts of labour in the first *Watt* notebook, where she dies during the birth of her twelfth child, with ‘her married life’ resembling ‘one long drawsheet’ (*W*, 247). In addition to this, two further fragments reiterate a persistent theme in Beckett’s work, namely, that of the embryonic soul, ‘never been properly born’ and ‘the foetal soul is full grown’ (Cangiamila’s *Sacred Embryology* and Pope Benedict XIV’s *De Synodo Diocesana*, Bk. 7, Chap. 4, Sect. 6); a theme which, as Ackerley notes, can be variously traced to Beckett’s allusion Calderon’s *La vida es sueño* in *Proust* or his subsequent attendance at Carl Jung’s third Tavistock lecture, where Jung spoke of a young female analysand who had ‘never been born’ (Ackerley 2010b, 181). Analysing the extent to which these two particular entries emphasise ‘the theme of unbornness’, Moorjani reads them as a reproduction of the ‘disunion of things from their origins’ that she traces throughout the novel (Moorjani 1982, 86), but perhaps more significant is the beginning of another addendum, which gestures towards the post-partum expulsions that accompany the act of parturition: ‘*faede hunc mundum intravi, anxius vixi, perturbatus egredior, causa causarum miserere mei*’ (Lat. in filth I entered this world, anxious I lived, troubled I go out of it, cause of causes have mercy on me). Attributed in the *Whoroscope* notebook to be the dying words of Aristotle, this fragment functions as

a *mise-en-abyme* of the addenda itself, for if *Watt* repeatedly envisages the act of birth as a violent expulsion or ejection, the addenda represent a particular abject, grisly form of textual afterbirth.

Ten years earlier, Beckett referred to the Socratic notion of the similarities between philosophy and midwifery (i.e. the former assists the thinker in giving birth to thoughts), praising Ezra Pound's collection of essays *Make It New* (1934) for its 'Spartan maieutics' (*DIS*, 79), but the addenda's preoccupation with post-partum matter encourages us to envisage the reader as a midwife involved not merely with the intrapartum process of giving birth to thought, but with the post-natal process of cleaning up during the third stage of labour. A similar poetics of waste is, in fact, foregrounded in at least five further fragments, one of which alludes to the deliberate expulsion of waste material from the body, 'Watt snites' (i.e. picks his nose), while further two entries link Watt to 'an injection of stale pus' and Arthur to repeated acts of incontinence. In addition to this, worldly existence is equated with excrement in the parody of a phrase from Goethe's *Faust*, '*die Erde hat mich wieder*' (Ger. the earth has me again), for whereas Faust rejects the idea of suicide and reaffirms his commitment to life after hearing a choir of angels and disciples, Beckett's fragment merely proclaims: '*die merde hat mich wieder*' (Ger. the shit has me again) (*W*, 248, 255, 253, 251). Finally, Art Conn O'Connery's portrait of a figure in Erskine's room depicts a distinctly abject, unhygienic subject, whose quest for musical harmony is juxtaposed with his physical disorder:

Mr. O'Connery's love of significant detail appeared further in treatment of toenails, of remarkable luxuriance and caked with what seemed to be dirt. Feet also could have done with a wash, legs not what you could call fresh and sweet, buttocks and belly cried for a hipbath at least, chest in disgusting condition, neck positively filthy, and seeds might have been scattered in ears with every prospect of early germination.

(*W*, 251-2)

Given the predominance of waste in the addenda, which Caselli claims reproduces the main body of the text as an 'endlessly pleasurable excorporation', this paratextual material encourage us to consider the affinities between the acts of reading and tidying; both involve the organisation (and removal) of

certain pieces of material, an act of selection that might give each fragment a certain prominence, or pride of place (Caselli 2006, 94). Finally, however, these thirty-seven entries resist our attempts to domesticate them; a fact which is compounded in the French edition, where the order of the entries is revised, while four further entries are deleted. With this in mind, the French version of the final entry, 'No Symbols where none intended' (*W*, 255) explicitly associates the selective, or rather, extractive processes inherent within any act of reading with disgust and revulsion, since 'honni soit qui symboles y voit' might be loosely translated as 'revulsion to he, who symbols may see' (Beckett 2007, 268).

While Gilles Deleuze has drawn attention to the 'disjunctive', 'abrupt' and jerky' language of *Watt*, its accretive, syndetic permutations and congested rhythm of distension and delay should be read in the light of the novel's recurrent trope of constipation. This, in turn, can be linked to Beckett's own reading in psychoanalysis and medicine, yet perhaps more significant is a growing realisation that the inadequacy of language might constitute a form of dietary deficiency.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘Relapse again into a wealth of filthy circumstance’: Peristalsis, Rumination and *Molloy*

There is in movement a rich simplicity that stirs us! The painter is change, changed by his painting into what he is. No learnt lesson. No arguments either, invoking succour and defeat: *sow-udder syntax*, gutter prose, Billy-in-the-bowl connected discourse, etc.

– Georges Duthuit, *The Fauvist Painters*, 20

Abjection and propriety are implausible bedfellows. In *Molloy* (1947), the first of Beckett’s post-war trilogy of novels, the opening words of Jacques Moran to his son in the novel’s second part, ‘I called to him not to dirty himself’, sit awkwardly alongside, say, the eponymous narrator’s cloacal theory of birth or the compulsive enumeration of his flatulence (*T*, 96). Yet while Beckett’s proclivity for the oozings and protrusions of abject bodies has not escaped the attention of commentators working on his mature prose, rather less attention has been paid to a corresponding discourse of propriety. The exception to this rule is Thomas Trezise’s *Into the Breach* (1992), which argues that Beckett’s radical destabilisation of existential-humanist notions of subjectivity and the attendant ‘problem of the first person’ are consistently thematised throughout the trilogy ‘in terms of “propriété”’ (Trezise 1992, 43). Trezise employs the French ‘propriété’ rather than the English ‘propriety’ because ‘it encompasses a larger number of meanings derived from the Latin *proprius*’, with its principal meanings in French connoting: ‘(1) property as right; (2) property as that which is possessed; (3) property as distinctive quality or attribute; (4) appropriateness, suitability, correctness’ (43, n.15). This semantic field extends to include ‘properness of sense’, but Trezise observes that it also ‘related etymologically to “propre” in the sense of “capable”’ and to ““propriété” as “cleanliness””; a ‘notion not irrelevant to the understanding of obscenity, scatological and other, in the trilogy’ (43, n.15). Accordingly, Trezise argues that the retrospective self-portrait of Moran in the second half of this diptych, a puritanical,

quasi-detective figure who places extraordinary emphasis upon his bourgeois possessions and the regulation of his domestic life ‘presents an entirely convincing prototype of the *petit propriétaire*, for whom to have and to be are no less than synonymous’ (43).

At the start of the first part of *Molloy*’s bifurcated narrative structure, we meet the decrepit, eponymous narrator, who now resides ‘in my mother’s room. It’s I who live there now. I don’t know how I got there. Perhaps in an ambulance, certainly in a vehicle of some kind. I was helped. I’d never have got there alone’ (*T*, 7). Molloy appears to be writing some kind of report, as he informs us that every week, a strange man arrives who ‘gives me money and takes away the pages’, returning the previous week’s sheets ‘marked with signs I don’t understand’ (3). These pages, in fact, appear to constitute the ensuing narrative of the first part of the novel, because we soon realise that the opening paragraph is temporally displaced, written after the conclusion of Molloy’s journey, with the rest of the text consisting of a single paragraph lasting ninety pages that charts the trials, tribulations, and eventual failure of Molloy’s quest to locate his remarkably abject mother, whom he remembers: ‘Veiled with hair, wrinkles, filth and slobber’ (16). Appropriately for one who proclaims himself ‘no enemy of the commonplace’, this apparently Oedipal quest seems mired in abjection from the very start; his very movement figured as a perpetual ‘change of muck’ from ‘one heap to another’ (40). Speculating upon the circumstances that led him to supplant his mother, for instance, he wonders whether she is dead, before remarking: ‘In any case I have her room. I sleep in her bed. I piss and shit in her pot’ (3). Whilst obsessively detailing the movements of two figures named A and C, he reflects upon the intestinal motions of A’s dog, ‘Constipation is a sign of good health in pomeranians’, before revealing his obligation to speak of his mother, of: ‘her who brought me into the world, through the hole in her arse if my memory is correct. First taste of the shit’ (8, 13).

Setting out on his bicycle from his dwelling ‘somewhere between the mud and the scum’ (11), Molloy soon reaches the ramparts of a town, where he is arrested for a violation of public decency, before spending the night on a canal bank. Shortly afterwards, he accidentally runs over a dog, only to be rescued from the clutches of a baying mob by its owner, named either Sophie or Lousse, who invites him to stay with her. Whilst asleep at Lousse’s house, Molloy’s filthy body is cleansed,

shaved, and perfumed, and after a brief liaison, which he compares to a previous affair with an androgynous figure named Ruth or Edith, whom he met in a rubbish dump, Molloy abandons his bicycle and flees Lousse's house on his crutches. He shelters during the day from townsfolk baying for 'order, beauty and justice' (67) before resuming his quest for his mother, which leads him to the seaside, where he contemplates a peculiar problem concerning the systematisation of the sucking stones that stave off his hunger. As the condition of his healthy leg worsens, Molloy continues through a swamp, and then a forest, where his physical condition deteriorates in a process which Georges Bataille would later term a 'frantic progress towards ruin' (Bataille 2003, 66). Crawling across a moor, the first part ends with Molloy hearing a mysterious gong and 'a voice telling [him] not to fret, that help was coming', before collapsing into a ditch: 'Molloy could stay, where he happened to be' (91). Maurice Blanchot would subsequently claim that this 'principle of disintegration' was not solely 'confined to the instability of the wanderer' but ultimately engendered the second part of the novel, for it demanded that: 'Molloy be mirrored, doubled, that he became *another*, the detective Moran' (Blanchot 2003b, 214).

In the second part of the novel, a quasi-detective figure named Jacques Moran, who belongs to a mysterious organisation of agents and messengers, is sent on a parallel quest to find Molloy by an authority figure named Youdi. In stark contrast to Molloy, Moran appears to be a model of bourgeois authority and respectability: he attends church, leads a 'tidy life tending his bees and chickens' (Seaver 2003, 89), and persistently reprimands his son for his 'detestable and unhygienic habit[s]' (*T*, 97). Whereas Molloy subtitles his narrative 'Life without a chambermaid' (58), for instance, Moran employs a servant named Martha to maintain his household. Yet, despite his apparent emphasis upon cleanliness and propriety, Moran frequently exhibits a counter-drive to impropriety, reverting to 'bad habits ingrained beyond remedy' that betray his 'lack of breeding' (98-99). At the start of part two, we find Moran relaxing in his garden on the Sabbath, before a messenger called Gaber interrupts his solitude to order him and his son to find Molloy. Having missed mass, Moran heads to the presbytery where Father Ambrose administers communion to him, before returning home to admonish his son, Jacques Jnr., for insolently transferring his 'rare and valuable stamps' into an album of duplicates

after he had forbidden it. After confronting his son, Moran reviews his knowledge of Molloy and the Molloy country, persistently procrastinating and deferring the task at hand, until he eventually reveals his ignorance of his quarry, speculating, for instance, whether Molloy may in fact be named Mollose, before admitting that: 'Between the Molloy I stalked within me and the true Molloy [...] the resemblance cannot have been great' (117, 119). His suppositions are, however, interrupted by a gong for dinner, where Martha informs him that Jacques Jnr. is suffering from a digestive complaint, yet rather than delay their journey any further, Moran administers an enema to his son before they set off into the night 'having consulted neither map nor time-table, considered neither itinerary nor halts' (163, 129).

Moran's narrative also takes the form of a report that switches from elaborate digressions to remarkable omissions, and, after refusing to relate 'the various adventures which befell us, me and my son, together and singly, before we came to the Molloy country' (137), Moran reveals that he has begun to hear an internal voice which will become increasingly significant as the narrative unfolds. Resting one night, Moran awakes with a sharp pain in his knee, which forces him to send his son to the town of Hole to buy a bicycle, yet while awaiting his son's return, Moran undergoes a period of psychological and physical debilitation akin to Molloy's in part one: 'a crumbling, frenzied collapsing of all that had always protected me from all I was condemned to be' (155). After Moran brutally murders a stranger who had the temerity to approach his shelter, Jacques Jnr. returns with a bicycle and the pair travel to Molloy's environs of Ballyba, but during the following night they have a 'violent scene' and his son abandons him. At this juncture, Gaber appears and instructs Moran to return home, and during his journey through the winter, his physical condition deteriorates as he begins to listen to the internal voice 'giving me orders' (178). Upon arriving home, he finds his house deserted and his beloved bees dead, yet during his journey he has undergone a remarkable transformation, discarding his patriarchal authority and bourgeois trappings. He decides to 'clear out', but first decides to listen to the voice urging him to write up Youdi's report: 'Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The Rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining' (184). As two of these sentences are the opening words of part two, 'it is midnight. The

rain is beating on the windows' (92), the reader infers that the preceding narrative actually constitutes this fictitious account to Youdi.

Given the emphasis placed on propriety at the start of part two of *Molloy*, this fourth chapter begins by re-evaluating the characterisation of Moran in relation to both Sigmund Freud's delineation of the traits of 'orderliness, parsimony and obstinacy' in his short essay 'Character and Anal Eroticism' (1908) and Ernest Jones's development of Freud's position in *Papers on Psycho-analysis* (1923). Turning to a discarded passage from the third *Molloy* notebook, which details the abundant wealth of the coprophagic economy of Ballyba, the chapter considers the extent to which this retentive economy was at one stage imbricated in debates surrounding Swift's work that took place during the Anglo-Irish trade war of the 1930s, yet argues that the more pressing concern behind this depiction of material wealth was the deprivation of post-war France. After reading this excision as an index of the manner in which the realm of the political is discarded, yet leaves an apophastic remainder in the trilogy, the chapter considers the extent to which Moran's narrative can be thought to denote a relinquishing of the anal-sadistic phase. Rather than reading the first part of *Molloy* as a chronological development of Moran's narrative, however, the chapter turns to consider Beckett's interest in the work of the Marquis de Sade, and, in particular, his later translation of Maurice Blanchot's essay 'Le Raison de Sade' in *Lautréamont et Sade* (1949), where Blanchot speaks of the manner in which Sade's 'theoretical ideas set free the irrational forces with which they are bound up', plunging his narrative into 'the obscurity of undigested ideas and experiences that cannot be given shape' (Blanchot 1995, 57-58). Finally, the chapter turns to the novel's opening imagery of ruminating cows and constipated Pomeranians to consider the fluctuating pace of its narrative, which oscillates between what Molloy terms a profusion of details 'dashed off in loathing' and a 'wealth of filthy circumstance' (*T*, 63), perpetually relapsing from one state to the other.

Jacques Moran and the Anal Sadistic Phase

To speak of the second part of *Molloy* in relation to Beckett's own readings in psychoanalysis, readings which, as we have seen in the previous chapters, were undertaken during his period of

psychotherapy with W.R. Bion at the Tavistock Clinic in London between January 1934 and December 1935, is to place this chapter within a rich history of psychoanalytic interpretations of the text. As early as March 1954, for instance, the Irish critic Thomas Hogan suggested that Moran and Molloy might be read as an allegory of the Ego and the Id, while numerous critics have sought to examine the manner in which both halves of the novel ‘develop aspects of the Oedipal paradigm’ (Hogan 1954, 58; Baker 1997, xii).²⁹ In contrast, J.D. O’Hara sought to equate the novel’s two halves with Jungian and Freudian models, arguing that whilst: ‘Molloy is primarily a Jungian ego – consciousness related to its collective unconscious and especially its maternal anima, Moran is a Freudian ego related to an id, a super-ego and the external world’ (1997, 48). More convincingly, Pilling has suggested that Moran’s wry remark upon the ‘fatal pleasure principle’ (*T*, 102) and Beckett’s playful, anagrammatic scrambling of the libido into the character of the Obidil suggest that he is ‘not prepared to swallow Freud wholesale’ and that, ultimately, ‘no Freudian or Jungian key will unlock *Molloy*’ (Pilling 1976, 130). As we have already seen, however, whilst reading extensively in the literature of psychoanalysis, Beckett became acquainted with the Freudian theory of anal eroticism, taking notes from a chapter on ‘Anal erotic Character Traits’ in Ernest Jones’s *Papers on Psychoanalysis* (1923) and Karin Stephen’s *Psychoanalysis and Medicine: A Study of the Wish to Fall Ill* (1933). Over a decade later he would draw, at least in part, from Jones’s delineation of the anal-sadistic phase in his characterisation of Jacques Moran at the beginning of part two of *Molloy*.

In terms of this Freudian theory, Phil Baker devotes an entire chapter to anal eroticism in his *Beckett and the Mythology of Psychoanalysis* (1997), arguing that Beckett’s persistent focus upon the excremental lies ‘within the mythology of ambient Freudianism’, yet without access to Beckett’s psychology notes, Baker wonders just ‘how knowing this anality is in Beckett’ (Baker 1997, 62). These notes reveal, however, that Beckett was well-acquainted with Freud’s theory, which has recently led Shane Weller to argue: ‘Among the various elements of Freudian psychoanalytic theory with which Beckett became acquainted in the mid-1930s, the theory of anal eroticism would come to

²⁹ For further examples, see Barbara Shapiro, ‘Towards a Psychoanalytic Reading of Beckett’s *Molloy*’, *Literature and Psychology*, Part I, no. 2, 1969, 71-86 & part II, no. 3-4, 1969, 15-30; Raymond T. Riva, ‘Beckett and Freud’, *Criticism* 12, 1970, 120-132.

exert a particularly strong influence on his art' (Weller 2010a, 136). Despite this encounter, however, Beckett's letters and early fiction from the 1920s and 1930s reveal that his 'preoccupation with the excremental precedes [his] readings in psychoanalysis' (137).

As we have seen in the first chapter, the 'general coprotechnics' of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* open with Belacqua's autoerotic climax coinciding with a 'Gush of mard' that issues from some flagellated horse's buttocks, whilst in 'TWO' the narrator curtly dismisses Jean du Chas as suffering from an 'anal complex' (*D*, 159, 3, 142). This interest in the excremental frequently manifests itself in a series of puns throughout Beckett's early work. For example, the epigraph taken from a poem by Leopardi which accompanies Beckett's monograph on *Proust* (1931), '*E fango è il mondo*' (It. And the world is mud), appears to have been selected precisely for its world/muck axis (Calder 1967, 8). In the *Dream* notebook, the spiritual crisis of St John of the Cross's *Dark Night of the Soul* is transformed into 'The Dark Shite of the Hole', while the 'Whoroscope' notebook finds E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View* (1908) transformed into a 'lav with a view' (UoR MS 3000, 30r). In 'Home Olga', the 1932 acrostic poem written for Joyce, Ireland's emerald isle is verbally defaced, becoming the 'haemorrhoidal isle', whilst in *Murphy* the 'infinite riches in a little room' of Christopher Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* metamorphoses into 'infinite riches in a w.c.' (*M*, 218). As we have seen in the previous chapter, in the addenda to *Watt* the cry of Goethe's *Faust* '*die Erde hat mich wieder*' (Ger. the earth has me now) becomes '*die Merde hat mich wieder*' (Ger. the shit has me now) (*W*, 219), whilst in *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon's riposte to Vladimir revolves around the excremental Vaucluse/Merdeclause, Macon/Cackon, Nappa/Crappa pairings in three different stage versions. The notion of words as a form of linguistic excrement, where blocked creative impasses are followed by uncontrollable logorrhoeic outpourings can, in fact, be detected throughout Beckett's correspondence of the late 1920s and 1930s.

In the summer of 1929, Beckett informed Thomas MacGreevy that he was contemplating Proust's *A la Recherche du temps perdu* 'at stool for 16 volumes'; a year later he referred to poems selected for publication in *The European Caravan* as 'three turds from my central lavatory', before commenting upon his difficulties with the 'Proustian arse-hole'; whilst a letter of 7 September 1931 to

Samuel Putnam alludes to his monograph on the French writer as ‘my Proust turd’ (*L I*, 12, 42-3, 86). In May 1933, having written five of the short stories that would later comprise *More Pricks than Kicks*, he informed MacGreevy that: ‘I don’t think I could possibly invite a publisher to wipe his arse with less than half a dozen’, whilst a letter of 9 January 1937 pithily observed that: ‘T. Eliot is toilet spelt backwards’ (*L I*, 157, 421). The starkest evidence of Beckett’s conception of literature as a form of linguistic excrement occurs, however, in a letter to Mary Manning Howe regarding the publication of *Murphy*. Upon receiving notification of the recommendation by Ferris Greenslet, an editor at Houghton Mifflin, that a third of the novel should be cut, Beckett informed Manning Howe that:

Reavey wrote enclosing a letter from Greenslet and hindrance. I am exhorted to ablate 33.3 recurring to all eternity of my work. I have thought of a better plan. Take every 500th word, punctuate carefully and publish a poem in prose in the Paris Daily Mail. Then the rest separately and privately, with a forewarning from Geoffrey, as the ravings of a schizoid, or serially, in translation, in the Zeitschrift für Kitsch. My next work shall be on rice paper wound about a spool, with a perforated line every six inches and on sale in Boots. The length of each chapter will be carefully calculated to suit with the average free motion. And with every copy a free sample of some laxative to promote sales. The Beckett Bowel Books, Jesus in farto. Issued in imperishable tissue. Thistle-down end papers. All edges disinfected. 1000 wipes of clean fun. Also in Braille for anal pruritics. All Sturm and no Drang.

(*L I*, 382-3)

The vitriolic tone of this letter reveals a deep antipathy towards Greenslet’s apparent devaluation of *Murphy*, with Beckett envisaging his next project as suitable only for toilet paper, but by the time he came to write *Molloy* a stark reversal had taken place, thanks in part to his acquaintance with Jones’s writings.

Jones’s chapter on ‘Anal Erotic Character Traits’ is predominantly based upon Freud’s brief essay on ‘Character and Anal Eroticism’ (1908), wherein Freud claims that conspicuous amongst ‘people who were formerly anal erotics’, that is, who as infants derived a ‘subsidiary pleasure from defaecating’, are the character traits of ‘orderliness, parsimony, and obstinacy’ (Freud 1959, 169-70). Freud proceeds to argue that these traits are the product of a reaction-formation coinciding with the depletion of the infantile ‘sexual constitution in which the erotogenicity of the anal zone is exceptionally strong’, before analysing the association between excrement and money. As Weller

observes, however, ‘while Jones follows Freud’s lead, his chapter fleshes out Freud’s thoughts on the subject in various important ways and contains key elements that are not to be found in Freud’s essay’ (2010, 139). In fact, many of these additional details are discernible at the start of part two of *Molloy*, where it is possible to trace much of the characterisation of Jacques Moran to Beckett’s encounter with the psychoanalyst whom he playfully labelled ‘Erogenous Jones’ (TCD MS 10971/8/1). Despite this, however, an attentive reading of the novel would necessarily remain reluctant to classify Moran as suffering from developed anal eroticism, particularly as he appears to represent a more transitional case, whose counter-drive towards mess might be seen as a regression towards infantile anal eroticism.

Jones’s chapter opens with a discussion of Freud’s delineation of the ‘cardinal triad of anal erotic character traits’ of ‘orderliness, parsimony, and obstinacy’, which Beckett duly notes (Jones 681, cf. TCD MS 10971/8/18), and all of which are discernible in his characterisation of Moran at the start of part two. In relation to the first of these, Jones observes that ‘The chief reaction-formation shewn in conjunction with the ‘retaining’ tendency is the character trait of orderliness’, before noting that: ‘It is evidently an extension of cleanliness, on the obverse principle to the saying that ‘dirt is matter in the wrong place’ (Jones 1923, 698-99). Such an emphasis upon hygiene is readily apparent in Moran’s attempts to regulate his son’s physical behaviour: in preparation for Mass, he instructs Jacques Jnr. to ‘go and wash himself’; before lunch he orders him to ‘wash his hands’; whilst later in the text, Moran informs us: ‘I have a horror of waste’ (97, 101, 163). Jones observes that in marked instances of anal eroticism, orderliness often verges upon a ‘definite neurotic symptom’, leading to a ‘restless and uncontrollable passion for constantly arranging the various details of a room until everything is tidy, symmetrical, and in exactly its right place’. Weller has noted that this passage appears to motivate Clov’s ‘dream of order’ in *Endgame*, particularly since Jones remarks that: ‘Such people are extremely intolerant of any disorder; they are bound to clear away any waste paper or other objects ‘left lying about’. Everything must be put in its proper place’ (Weller 2010a 139-40; Jones 1923, 698). In a similar manner, before setting off, Moran sets about ‘tidying up, putting back my clothes in the wardrobe and my hats in the boxes from which I had taken them the better to make my

choice, locking the various drawers' (130). The locking of these drawers only serves to emphasise the retaining aspect of his character and this, in fact, is one of the two instincts that Jones argues motivates severe cases of anal eroticism: 'the instincts to possess and to create or produce respectively' (Jones 1923, 695). Yet, if Moran exhibits this anal erotic mania for making everything 'tidy, symmetrical, and in exactly its right place', such obsessive behaviour is parodied in part one, where Molloy remarks upon his own 'mania for symmetry' having not tidied a room, but kicked the charcoal-burner in the ribs from both sides.

When read in conjunction with Jones's chapter, specific instances of Moran's mania for cleanliness and hygiene seem to appear in a new light, but one should remain reluctant about simply categorizing Moran as anal erotic. Afflicted with toothache, for instance, Jacques Jnr. draws a small glass from his pocket to examine the 'inside of his mouth, prising away his upper lip with his finger', only to be rebuked by Moran: 'Stop messing about with your mouth! (*T*, 107). This relatively innocuous moment can be traced to Jones's response to Isidor Isaak Sadger's description of the anal erotic aversion to dirt accumulating on external objects, where Jones claims that: 'the anal erotic reaction often extends to the *inside* of the body, there being a conviction that everything inside is inherently filthy; I have known such people be unwilling even to insert a finger into their own mouths' (Jones 1923, 701). Moran's abhorrence of internal dirt is readily apparent in his decision to administer his constipated son with an enema, but earlier in part one, he is surprisingly tolerant of Jacques Jnr.'s unsanitary habit:

Jacques went away grumbling with his finger in his mouth, a detestable and unhygienic habit, but preferable, all things considered, to that of the finger in the nose, in my opinion. If putting his finger in his mouth prevented my son from putting it in his nose, or elsewhere, he was right to do it, in a sense.

(*T*, 97)

Although presented as an act of expediency, Moran's preference for Jacques putting his finger into his mouth instead of any other orifice would seem to suggest that there is some distance between Beckett's characterisation and Jones's delineation of the anal erotic character.

This might be explained by turning to Jones's description of the irritability displayed in severe instances of anal eroticism, which suggests that Moran represents a more transitional case. Jones observes that 'Undue sensitiveness to interference is very characteristic of this type', before stating that when 'these hated intrusions and interferences nevertheless take place, the subject's reaction to them is one of resentment, increasing on occasion to anger or even outbursts of rage' (Jones 1923, 683). At the beginning of part two, for example, Moran cantankerously declares that Gaber had 'journeyed from afar, on purpose to disturb me' (*T*, 96). Shortly afterwards, when Jacques Jnr. interrupts his sleep, Moran's response is closely aligned to the irritability and narcissism which Jones argues is frequently present in anal eroticism: 'Now if there is one thing I abhor, it is someone coming into my room, without knocking. I might just happen to be masturbating, before my cheval-glass' (106). Towards the end of his chapter, Jones turns to Shakespeare's Shylock and Balzac's Eugénie Grandet as examples of the 'exquisite tenderness that some members of this type are capable of, especially with children', before noting that '[a] curious accompaniment of this tenderness is a very pronounced tendency to domineer the loved (and possessed) object; such people are often very dictatorial or even tyrannical' (Jones 1923, 698). This passage obviously reminds us of Moran's numerous imperatives or displays of violence towards his son, such as when he beats him with an umbrella.

Turning to the work of Lou Andreas-Salomé, Jones links this irritability to pronounced sadism, which can be traced to the 'conflict between the infant and his environment over the matter of defecatory functioning', so that: 'Infantile anal eroticism that has been inadequately dealt with may be suspected in any one who is the victim of chronic irritability and bad temper' (688). On one occasion after disciplining his son, Moran hints that his own childhood experiences were typified by frequent instances of impropriety, which, although never specified, we might reasonably suspect to have been a period of unchecked infantile anal eroticism:

I myself had never been sufficiently chastened. Oh I had not been spoiled either, merely neglected. Whence bad habits ingrained beyond remedy and of which even the most

meticulous piety has never been able to break me. I hoped to spare my son this misfortune, by giving him a good clout from time to time.

(*T*, 98-99)

For despite persistently chastising his son for his improper physical behaviour, Moran frequently fails to regulate his own body, succumbing to the 'bad habits' that indicate his 'lack of breeding' (99). After Jacques Jnr. wipes his mouth with the back of his hand, for instance, he remarks that: 'there are nastier gestures. I speak from experience' (103). In addition to this, although he attempts to incline his son's mind 'towards that most fruitful of dispositions, horror of the body and its functions', in the same scene he makes lewd jokes, asking his son whether he knows 'which mouth' to put the thermometer in' (122). In fact, when read alongside Jones's chapter, Moran's peculiar assertion that he is a contemporary of the thousand year old 'dragon tree of Tenerife' appears to suggest that Beckett may have conceived of his physical deterioration during part two as a regression towards the infantile anal erotic stage, as Jones observes that anal erotic character traits are often present in 'elderly persons of either sex' when 'there is a tendency to regress towards a more infantile and less developed plane of sexuality' (Jones 1923, 688).

At this juncture, it is worth observing that Jacques Jnr.'s 'oniomania', that is, the 'rage for collecting', which Beckett first encountered in Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1895) and duly recorded in the *Dream* notebook (*DN*, 619) is, according to Jones, another facet of pronounced anal eroticism, which is intricately tied to the retaining tendency in the character trait of parsimony. Jones describes how acts of hoarding originate in the aforementioned infantile resentment of interference, since: 'Many infants feel it an injustice that what they have so interestedly produced should be at once taken away from them' (687). In particular, Jones notes that anal erotics 'get particularly agitated at the idea of something being taken away from them against their will', especially if this is one of the numerous copro-symbols which he claims 'symbolise faeces in the unconscious' (687). Later in the chapter, Jones declares:

The second aspect mentioned is the impulse to gather, collect, and hoard. All collectors are anal erotics, and the objects collected are nearly always typical copro-symbols: thus money,

coins (apart from current ones), stamps, eggs, butterflies – these two being associated with the idea of babies – books, and even worthless things like pins, old newspapers, etc.

(697)

In addition to this, Jacques Jnr. has an interest in botany, which corresponds to Jones's claim that 'flowers' are, like the eggs and butterflies quoted above, 'unconscious symbols for babies' (Jones 1923, 695). As well as his stamp collecting and botany, Beckett provides numerous hints that Jacques Jnr. might be developing the marked anal eroticism exhibited by his father. Jones observes, for instance, that Freud's *Eigensinn* (Ger. obstinacy) may 'attention a chronic attitude of defiance', with children being 'extremely disobedient' as there is a 'constant association between defiant disobedience and unmastered anal eroticism' (686-7). This, of course, links back to Jones's discussion of Andreas-Salomé's theory that sadism has a pronounced influence on 'the conflict between the infant and his environment over the matter of defecatory functioning', which manifests itself 'either as a tendency to angry outbursts or sullen fractiousness' (688). Moran notes, for instance, that when it comes to his son, 'prompt obedience was contrary to his habits' and after having his rarer stamps confiscated, Jacques Jnr. rises 'with a bound that knocked over his chair', before crying: 'Do what you like with them! I never want to see them again!' (*T*, 137, 113).

After sending his son to buy the second-hand bicycle, Moran believes that his son has pilfered his money which, as we will see, for Freud symbolises another copro-symbol in the psyche of the anal-erotic:

How much money did I give you, I said? He counted the notes. Four pounds ten, he said. Count them again, I said. He counted them again. Found pounds ten, he said. Give it to me, I said. He gave me the notes and I counted them. Four pounds ten. I gave you five, I said. He did not answer, he let the figures speak for themselves. Had he stolen ten shillings and hidden them on his person? Empty your pockets, I said.

(142)

In 'Character and Anal Eroticism' (1908), Freud notes the links between the trait of parsimony and the tendency for such individuals to hoard money, before relating this to a number of myths and superstitions found throughout Western civilisation:

Wherever the archaic mode of thought has prevailed or still prevails, in the older civilizations, in myths, fairy tales, superstitions, in unconscious thinking, in dreams and in neuroses – money has been brought into the closest connection with filth. It is well known that the gold which the devil presented his admirers changed into filth on his departure [...] The superstition is also well known that brings the discovery of treasure into association with defaecation, and everyone is familiar with the figure of the “gold-bug” (literally “excreter of ducats”). Indeed, even in the ancient Babylonian doctrine gold was regarded as the dung of hell.

(Freud 1959, 174)

Developing this argument, Jones refers to Sándor Ferenczi’s chapter on ‘The Octogenesis of the Interest in Money’ in *Contributions to Psycho-Analysis* (1916), which traces the stages wherein the child passes from an original interest in excrement to one in money. By summarizing Ferenczi’s argument, Jones notes that this tendency to hoard can be transferred onto pebbles, which allows us to link these comments to Molloy’s earlier attempts to retain and circulate his sucking stones:

Shortly put, they are as follows: transference of interest from the original substance to a similar one, which, however, is odourless – *i.e.*, mud-pies; from this to one that is dehydrated – *i.e.*, sand; from this to one of a harder consistence – *i.e.*, pebbles (some savages still barter in pebbles and there is still in German an expression ‘steinrich’, *i.e.*, stone-rich – to denote wealth); then come the artificial objects like marbles, buttons, jewels, etc., and finally the attractive coins themselves.

(Jones 1923, 694)

Perhaps more significantly, especially given the extent to which Moran spends almost half of his narrative procrastinating, indulging in the delights of ‘shilly-shally’ (*T*, 106), Jones also refers to Isidor Sadger’s short essay ‘Analerotik und Analcharakter’ (1910), which points out that the retaining tendency may subsequently be mirrored in later acts of procrastination: ‘Such people are very given to procrastination; they delay and post-pone what they may have to do until the eleventh or even the twelfth hour’ (Jones 1923, 683). Accordingly, Jones describes the typical behaviour of the anal-erotic:

A typical kind of behaviour when such a person is faced with the question of a possible undertaking – for instance, the preparations for a dinner-party, the writing of an article, etc. – is as follows: First there is a period of silent brooding, during which the plan is being slowly, and often only half-consciously, elaborated. At this time not only are they not to be hurried, which would only result in a flustered annoyance, but they keep postponing the preliminary

steps as long as it is at all possible, until the other participants despair of the performance being ever accomplished – at least in time.

(683-4)

Highlighting the fact that ‘Moran “wastes” no less than one half of the entire narrative in distraction from the task at hand’ and that ‘when he attempts to bring his ordinarily methodical mind to bear upon it, he methodically avoids the essence of the task itself’, Trezise reads this indecision as an act of Blanchovian *désœuvrement*: ‘His indecision, his *désœuvrement* or inaction; his powerlessness are attributable to a reversal of that reversal by virtue of which the end precedes, founds, conditions the beginning, by virtue of which closure or separation precedes, founds and conditions its own genesis’ (Trezise 1992, 48). Turning to Beckett’s notes on psychology, however, it seems that these acts of postponement are more closely entwined with the propriety that Trezise had earlier detected in Moran’s narrative. When Moran retreats to bed to contemplate and gather together everything he knows about the Molloy country, however, his thoughts are marked by an act of omission regarding a distinctly political, economic context; a context that not only reflects Beckett’s own compositional process, but helps us to reconsider the nature of the political in the trilogy.

‘Grâce aux excréments des citoyens’: Beckett, Swift and the Coprophagic Economy of Ballyba

On 15 February 1954 the editor and translator Hans Naumann wrote to Beckett expressing his admiration for *Molloy* (1951), before broaching a subject that has frequently provided an effective point of departure in the recent re-evaluation of Beckett’s writings within an Irish context: ‘would it be right to try to find in your work the presence of an Irish tradition [?]’ (L II, 465) Beckett’s response aptly illustrates his simultaneous engagement with and disengagement from this tradition. Two days later, he appeared to circumvent Naumann’s enquiry, insisting ‘[o]n Ireland [...] it is utterly impossible for me to speak with moderation’, whilst concurrently invoking the central image of W.B. Yeats’s play *At the Hawk’s Well* (1918): ‘I had no need to drink at the magic fountain to be able to bear living outside it’ (465). This lateral omission seems more paralytic than elliptical, for although both rhetorical terms share the same etymological root (Gk. *leipo* [to leave behind]), the former

sidesteps a given element, whereas the latter passes it by without mention.³⁰ To sidestep an obstacle is, of course, not merely to evade it, but to acknowledge *and* evade it; when Malone turns to the economic deliberations of Saposcat in *Malone Dies* (1956), his narrative constitutes a remarkably similar apophastic discourse, since it refers to, whilst claiming not to refer to, the matter in hand. Introducing Sapo's reflections on 'the market', Malone promises further details, but ultimately musters less than twenty words upon the subject, as he stammers through a series of aposiopetic sentences: 'In his country the problem – no, I can't do it. The peasants. His visits to. I can't' (*T*, 196). The French text, however, obliquely intimates that this passage represents more than just a deliberate eschewal of what, in his 1945 review of Thomas MacGreevy's monograph on Jack B. Yeats, Beckett termed the 'local accident' or 'local substance' (*DIS*, 97), as Malone stipulates that this national dilemma relates to 'le plan alimentaire' (Beckett 1951b, 35).

This juxtaposition of the economic and the alimentary is, in fact, a vestigial trace of the *Trilogy's* evolution, for it gestures towards a thirteen-page scatological passage excised from the third of four 'Molloy' notebooks, a passage that savagely parodies the economic protectionism adopted by Fianna Fáil during the Anglo-Irish Economic War of the 1930s. This variant might be read both alongside Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and against the Protestant, bourgeois appropriation of the economic writings of Swift and Bishop Berkeley in Ireland during the 1930s, which Beckett would have encountered in Joseph Hone and Mario M. Rossi's *Bishop Berkeley: His Life, Writings and Philosophy* (1931) and *Swift: or, The Egotist* (1934). Nevertheless, the more immediate context of Beckett's depiction of the prosperity of Ballyba was the material deprivation of post-war France, which he described in the non-fictional broadcast 'The Capital of the Ruins' (1946). Perhaps more significant than these historical contexts, however, is the extent to which the elision of this satirical passage functions as an index of a paraliptic politics. For if, as Peter Boxall argues, Beckett's 'negativity is bound up with a stubbornly residual referentiality' (Boxall 2002, 163), a paraliptic politics would denote a compositional process governed by a play of centripetal and

³⁰ For a discussion of paralipsis, see Genette 1980, 40, 52.

centrifugal forces, wherein a movement towards the political induces a subsequent retreat, as the inscription of a political writing occasions its own effacement.

Read in conjunction with Beckett's critical writings, this *Molloy* variant seems to occupy a peculiar position, for Beckett clearly articulates an aversion to satire in a review of Jack B. Yeats's *The Amaranthers* (1936), a review which lauds Yeats's novel for its divergence from *Gulliver's Travels*: 'There is no satire. Believers and make-believers, not Gullivers and Lilliputians; horses and men, not Houyhnhmns and Yahoos; imaginative fact, beyond the fair and the very fair' (*DIS*, 89-90). Instead, the review detects an 'Ariostesque' irony within Yeats's 'respect for the mobility and the autonomy of the imagined', which refuses to be constrained by the 'corsets' of 'reportage' (90). That Beckett should have equated Yeats with Ariosto is perhaps unsurprising, for in the summer of 1936 he imitated the disjunctive irony of the *Orlando Furioso* (1532) by writing a short German pastiche in the 'Clare Street' notebook (Knowlson 1996, 227). The differentiation between Ariosto's irony and Swift's satire was, however, indebted to his earlier encounter with John Addington Symonds's *Renaissance in Italy* (1881), which he read as an undergraduate at Trinity College Dublin. In a chapter on Ariosto's epic poem, Symonds classifies the Romantic poets of the Cinquecento in diametric opposition to the Satiric: the former creates a 'purely imaginary world' and 'deals with the figments of his fancy as though they were realities', whilst the latter 'attacks manners, customs, institutions, and persons without disguise' or 'under a thin veil of parable' (Symonds 1881, 3-6; cf. TCD Ms10962, 44r-46r). Accordingly, Symonds identifies Ariosto as an exemplar of the Romantic, who lacks 'Dante's anger or Swift's indignation', as his philosophy 'inclined him to watch the doings of humanity with a genial half-smile, an all-pervasive irony that had no sting in it' (1881, 3-6; cf. TCD Ms10962, 44r-46r). This appears to be the source of Beckett's assertion that Yeats's irony constitutes 'the profound *risolino* that does not destroy'; a phrase which is repeated in 'Henri-Hayden, homme peintre', where Hayden's canvases 'dégage un humour à peine perceptible [...] un *risolino* à l'Arioste' (*DIS* 89, 147). Ariosto's *risolino* also provides a literary antecedent for the 'smile' that illuminates the 'issueless predicament of existence' in 'The Capital of the Ruins', where the provision of medical supplies and the generosity of the French Ministry of Reconstruction in Saint-Lô pale in

comparison with the ‘smile deriding [...] the having and the not having, the giving and the taking, sickness and health’ (*CSP*, 277). These critical comments appear to suggest that Beckett held Ariosto’s disjunctive irony in higher regard than Swift’s politicised parody. Broadly speaking, this is the position adopted by John Pilling, who suggests that, by the time Beckett came to review *The Amaranthers*, he had realised that ‘he did not possess Swift’s [...] savage indignation’ and that ‘satire in any way in debt to [...] *Gulliver’s Travels* was a mode he personally had also gone beyond’ (Pilling 2011, 238). In contrast, Marjorie Perloff locates this apparent divergence from Swiftian satire within a wider modernist/post-modernist context, arguing that reading Beckett ‘under the sign of Swift’ allows us to ‘trace the way satire [...] has given way, in the twentieth-century, to a [...] free-floating irony’ (Perloff 2010, 19).

Beckett’s critical writings, however, exhibit both an aversion to, and a predilection for, Swiftian satire; in two critical pieces from the 1930s, he had sought recourse to *Gulliver’s Travels* to criticise contemporary Irish poetry and the cultural legislation of the Irish Free State. Firstly, reviewing MacGreevy’s *Poems* (1934), he puns on the title of Book III of Swift’s novel: ‘Balnibarbism has triumphed’ (*DIS*, 68). Rather than revealing a shared ‘sensitivity’ towards the ‘troubled history of English-Irish relations’ (Pilling 2011, 238), this allusion allows Beckett to rebuke contemporary Irish poetry for its preoccupation with ‘mere metre’, a judgement which resonates with the review’s eschewal of the local, as it invokes the poetry of Carducci, Dante, Goethe, Milton, Petrarch and Sidney (*DIS*, 68). The same allusion re-emerges in the essay ‘Censorship in the Saorstát’, where the Censorship of Publications Act of 1929 is derided as ‘a measure that the Grand Academy of Balnibarbi could hardly have improved on’ (*DIS*, 87). Emilie Morin observes that Ireland ‘becomes loaded with Swiftian overtones’ (Morin 2009, 44), as the government’s cultural legislation is equated with the hare-brained schemes of Swift’s Projectors at the Grand Academy of Lagado (the capital of Balnibarbi), where:

The Professors contrive new Rules and Methods of Agriculture and Building [...] whereby, as they undertake, one Man shall do the Work of ten; a Palace may be built in a Week; of Materials so durable as to last for ever without repairing [...] The only Inconvenience is, that

none of these Projects are yet brought to Perfection, and in the mean time the whole Country lies miserably waste.

(Swift 1996, 150)

Beckett persistently emphasises the futility of adopting a censorship project that ‘function[s] to no purpose’, as Ireland’s ‘characteristic agricultural community’ has ‘something better to do than read’ (*DIS*, 86). The Act’s third part, prescribing ‘restrictions on publications of reports of judicial proceedings’ is, for example, rendered redundant by the extensive coverage of industrial developments and the tariff war within the Irish press, where few column inches survive ‘the agitation of protective tariffs, subsidies, monopolies and quotas’ (87.) The ‘Register of Prohibited Publications’ appears counter-intuitive, because it provides a ‘free and permanent advertisement’ of the publications that have ‘annoyed the specialist in common sense’ (86-87). Amongst the industrial developments that ‘monopolise the headlines’, Morin observes:

[Beckett] singles out the sugar factories created in 1933 and 1934 in Tuam, Mallow and Thurles by the newly established *Comhlucht Siúicre Éireann*, the national sugar production company set up as part of large-scale attempts to curb dependence upon British imports. These factories followed from the Beet Sugar Act of 1925, which promoted the establishment of an agrarian, self-sufficient nation by introducing direct government subsidy into Irish sugar production.

(2009, 41-42)

The implication, therefore, is that the Censorship Act represents an extension of the isolationist policy of economic protectionism into the cultural field; as the essay draws to a close, Beckett lists some of the prohibited foreign authors, before concluding with a flourish of exaggerated *démesure*: ‘We now feed our pigs on sugarbeet pulp. It is all the same to them’ (*DIS*, 88).

The complex relationship between Beckett’s work and Swiftian satire has, however, frequently been mapped onto a teleological trajectory, whereby Beckett’s interest in Swift purportedly diminishes in the late 1930s, as ‘direct allusions to Swift largely disappear after *Murphy*’ (Ackerley & Gontarski 2004, 551). Beckett, however, alludes to Swift’s work in two unpublished letters from the

1950s, quoting the poem ‘On Time’ in correspondence with Mania Péron, before employing phrases from the *Journal to Stella* in a letter to Pamela Mitchell (Pilling 2006a, 116, 121). Yet despite these allusions, his most sustained encounter with Swift’s oeuvre undoubtedly occurred during the 1930s.³¹ After regaling MacGreevy on 5 January 1933 with the Swift anecdote that he would later employ in ‘Fingal’, he referred to Swift in three consecutive letters (Pilling 2011, 237), before alluding to *Gulliver’s Travels* in correspondence with Nancy Cunard (L I, 150, 189). In addition to this, Frederik N. Smith notes that the ‘Whoroscope’ notebook contains references to *The Bickerstaff Papers*, whilst *More Pricks than Kicks* and *Murphy* reveal Beckett’s intimate knowledge of *The Journal to Stella* and *A Tale of a Tub* (Smith 2002, 28). Pilling, in turn, observes that Beckett was familiar with ‘A Modest Proposal’, before stating that he had assisted Hone and Rossi with their collaborative biography, *Swift: or, The Egotist* (Pilling 2011, 238); almost twenty-five years later, Beckett remembered this project in a letter to Mary Hutchinson (Pilling 2006a, 41). With this in mind, Pilling tentatively suggests that aiding Hone and Rossi may have ‘played a part in Beckett exploring Irish matters’ but subsequently claims that ‘the only surviving evidence’ of this are ‘the ‘Cow’ notes and the notes towards the abandoned ‘Trueborn Jackeen’ project’ (Pilling 2011, 238). The most tangible evidence of this encounter is, in fact, the scatological variant excised from *Molloy*, which parodies Hone and Rossi’s appropriation of the economic writings of Swift and Berkeley during the Anglo-Irish Economic War.

Before departing on his journey to find Molloy, Jacques Moran reviews his scant knowledge of the ‘Molloy country’, which is restricted to the agriculture, name and topography of the village of Bally and its environs. This region is characterised by a lack of industrial development, with its inhabitants forging a living from the sale of turf, rosaries and assorted pieces of bric-à-brac (*T*, 134). Emilie Morin observes that this ‘seaside swamp’ is a ‘caricature of Dublin’, whose name ‘suggests a phonetic pun on *Baile Átha Cliath*’ (Morin 2009, 61-62). In two earlier drafts, however, Moran attributes the prosperity of Ballyba to its coprophagic economy, for in the third ‘Molloy’ notebook, he asks: ‘D’où Ballyba tirait donc ses richesses? Je vais vous le dire. Des selles de ses citoyens’ (SBC

³¹ For a discussion of influence of Swift on Beckett during the 1930s, see Smith 2002, 27-31; Morin 2009, 36-37; Pilling 2011, 237-9.

MS 4.7, 132). Moran's opening remarks are indicative of the 'notorious formal recalcitrance' which David Lloyd has detected within Beckett's work for the 'referential tendencies' of Irish studies (Lloyd 2010, 35), as he frames the passage as a final acknowledgement of the 'local substance' (*DIS*, 97). Moran explains that this is 'sans doute la dernière [fois]' that he will have 'l'occasion de m'abandonner à ma passion pour la chose régionale'. Detailing what he calls the 'folklore du sous-sol' (folklore of the sub-soil), Moran reveals that Bally is bordered by a market-garden for around half a mile, where potatoes, turnips and celeriac grow in 'luxuriance effrénée' (rampant lushness), producing thousands of tonnes for national and foreign markets. This agricultural productivity is achieved 'Grâce aux excréments des citoyens' (SBC MS 4.7, 132), which are recycled as fertiliser and spread upon the crops. Over the next thirteen pages, Moran details the administrative, cultural and societal practices employed to ensure that there is a plentiful supply of organic matter to maintain this system. This, then, accounts for the subtitle of this section, for whilst Sinéad Mooney has drawn attention to *First Love*'s 'nauseated account of Irish patriotism as anachronistic coprophilia' (Mooney 2005, 32), coprophagia denotes the consumption of excrement, deriving from the Greek *copros* (dung) and *phagein* (to eat).

Ballyba's coprophagic economy has distinct political ramifications, particularly when read against Hone and Rossi's re-evaluation of Swift and Berkeley during the 1930s. Despite noting the extent to which Swift's work is implicated in the 'economic, political and ethical problems of his time', their joint-study *Swift: or, The Egotist* attempts to 'reconstruct its subject from the contemporary point of view' (Hone & Rossi 1934a, 12-13). Hone and Rossi's principal concern lies in adumbrating a modern Irish Swift; with this in mind, they emphasise that Swift was 'a very skilful economist in advance of his time', before reading the *Drapier's Letters* (1734) as a precursor of the tariff system imposed on British imports by Fianna Fáil (1934a, 260). More significantly, they claim that *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufactures* (1720) 'anticipates, if not the creed, at the least the method of Sinn Féin (in its original acceptance) by almost two centuries', as Swift 'urge[s] upon his countrymen *the duty of cultivating their own garden*' (1934a, 260; my emphasis). Despite assisting Hone and Rossi with this project, Beckett's critical writings suggest that he would

have had serious misgivings about their attempts to cast Swift as an advocate of economic protectionism. Yet whilst Beckett mentions this biography in a letter to MacGreevy on 5 January 1933, later in this same letter, he alludes to Hone and Rossi's *Bishop Berkeley: His Life, Writings, and Philosophy* (1931), which contains a more substantial appraisal of Swift and Berkeley's economics (L I, 150). In this earlier text, Hone and Rossi argue that Berkeley's *The Querist* (1735-7) developed Swift's protectionism to its logical conclusion, by advocating an economic regionalism that pre-empted de Valera's vision of a self-sufficient Ireland. While 'pleading for the support of Irish industries', Berkeley challenges Swift's confrontational model of economic nationalism and exhorts the Irish 'to put themselves on some other method that will not affect English interests' (Hone & Rossi 1931, 201). Whereas Swift 'could only consider this peril with [the] irony' of 'A Modest Proposal', Berkeley developed Swift's protectionism to 'its last consequences', asking:

Whether one may not be allowed to conceive and suppose a society, generation or nation of human creatures, clad in woollen cloths and stuffs, eating good bread and beef and poultry [...] depending on no foreign imports either for food or raiment? [...] Whether Ireland be not as well qualified for such a state as any nation under the sun?

(201-2)

In light of Ireland's natural resources, Berkeley advocates restricting foreign imports to stimulate the domestic market: 'Place a 'wall of brass' around Ireland and new local values will be discovered and internal trade promoted' (202). Hone and Rossi argue that 'regionalism, no longer mere protectionism, is the essential feature of Berkeley's economics', which encourage an 'appreciation of the homely' and shift attention from the 'small nation to the village itself' (204). The reader is implicitly encouraged to contrast the economics of Berkeley and de Valera, yet in a 1934 article entitled 'Swift and Berkeley as National Economists', Hone explicitly links Berkeley's 'inward commerce' with Fianna Fáil's economic policy: 'Mr de Valera does not cite Berkeley, and yet how much of his and his party's economics are an echo from eighteenth-century Cloyne. What country, Berkeley asked, was as well qualified as Ireland for satisfying itself with a purely internal trade? (Hone 1934b, 422-3) Ultimately, however, Hone and Rossi argue that Berkeley's economic

regionalism was fundamentally flawed: ‘the whole scheme was quixotic’ and relied upon ‘an Ireland turned to Utopia’). In addition to this, Berkeley’s ‘wall of brass’ constitutes ‘a return to the closed economy’ (*Eigenwirtschaft*), which Sombert describes as the proper form of medieval life’ (Hone & Rossi 1934a, 202-3). Berkeley’s economic regionalism is dismissed, therefore, as the work of a ‘dreaming projector’ (249), but at the same time, their monograph repositions him as a progenitor of an Irish economic nationalism.

Returning to *Gulliver’s Travels*, then, allowed Beckett to contest this Protestant, bourgeois appropriation, whilst Swift’s excremental vision provided him with an opportunity to critique the internal trade of economic protectionism. Thus, Moran describes how a committee called the ‘Organisation Maraîchère’ (Market Garden Organisation) stringently regulate the production of faecal matter, setting bi-monthly quotas for each citizen. To discourage emigration, Ballyba’s inhabitants are required to financially compensate the O.M. for any deficit incurred whilst they are abroad; therefore, the only people who emigrate are some affluent families and ‘quelques anoérotiques’ (SBC MS 4.7, 132). Highlighting this passage, Laura Salisbury has recently turned to Freud’s theory of the anal erotic, reading the variant as a parody of ‘a smoothly functioning capitalist economy based on the uninterrupted passage of consumption and excrement’ (Salisbury 2012, 99-100). Yet whilst ‘a fantasy of pure circulation is clearly absorbed into the *Trilogy*’, Salisbury argues that its protagonists resist ‘incorporation into an economy of textual exchange and production’ (2012, 99-100). The prosperity of Ballyba is, however, the result of a more specific form of late capitalism, of economic protectionism rather than an unrestricted system of free trade. In fact, the variant obliquely intimates that Ballyba’s coprophagic economy exhibits the parsimonious tendencies that, as we have already seen, Freud identified as one of the cardinal traits of the anal erotic. When read against the material deprivation of post-war France, Ballyba’s riches appear to be the product of an overtly retentive political economy, which accumulates wealth whilst remaining largely unaware of the economic distress on the Continent. This argument is further strengthened when we consider ‘The Capital of the Ruins’, which as Morin observes, demonstrates ‘a powerful awareness of the contrast between the relative affluence of Dublin and the economic distress of France’ (2009, 52). Beckett describes the material conditions

of the Hospital of the Irish Red Cross in Saint-Lô, whose prefabricated huts are lined with linoleum, but only where ‘the exigencies of hygiene are greatest’, whilst the operating theatre is ‘sheeted in aluminium of aeronautic origin’. The majority of the out-patients suffer from ‘scabies and other diseases of the skin’ caused by ‘malnutrition or an ill-advised diet’ (*CSP*, 275-6). Ballyba’s prosperity serves, then, as an indictment of Ireland’s retentive economic policy, which accumulates material resources whilst its European neighbours struggle to find clean sources of drinking water.

Disputes with the O.M. are resolved by a mysterious figure called the Obidil, who is elected in an orgiastic frenzy following the death of his predecessor, on the proviso that ‘il devait gagner incontinent’ (SBC MS 4.7, 136). This incontinent election recalls the ritual succession of a new favourite within each Yahoo herd in *Gulliver’s Travels*. When the incumbent is discarded, ‘his Successor, at the Head of all the *Yahoos* in that District, Young and Old, Male and Female, come in a Body, and discharge their Excrements upon his from Head to Foot’ (Swift 1996, 221-2; emphasis in original). As the variant unfolds, the reader is encouraged to draw further comparisons with Swift’s novel. The research conducted by the O.M. ‘sur l’influence du métier sur les selles’, once again, recalls the Grand Academy of Lagado, where an Ancient Projector performs similar research into faecal matter: ‘His Employment from his first coming into the Academy was an Operation to reduce human Excrement to its original Food, by separating the several parts’ (152). At first glance, Ballyba’s prosperity seems to be the antithesis of Swift’s Lagado, but Moran details the economic hardship inflicted upon those inhabitants who cannot meet their annual quota and are given punitive fines. In turn, Moran discusses an individual named Colbert, who produced up to seven stools a day and sold his excess on the black market. By selling at the official price and refusing ‘d’exploiter les légères constipations’, Colbert ‘était adoré de tous les pauvre gens’, who call for his beatification. Due to Moran’s lack of knowledge about Ballyba, he envisages the region with trepidation: ‘Je me voyais, comme dans un cauchemar, poursuivant Molloy à travers des monceaux de fèces’ (SBC MS 4.7, 136). To alleviate these concerns, he recalls the writings of a figure named Kottmann, in what is clearly a pun on the German *Kott* (shit), who produced one of the ‘quelques témoignages d’étrangers’. Kottmann reports that he had recommended ‘bain[s] fécal’ for the alleviation of ‘maladies mentales’,

but the O.M. rejected his proposal, on the grounds that ‘les corps des baigneurs seraient une source de pollution’ (SBC MS 4.7, 136). On the one hand, this medicinal use of excrement resembles the Houyhnhmns’ treatment of Yahoo diseases in Swift’s *Travels*, where ‘the Cure prescribed is a mixture of *their own Dung and Urine* forcibly put down the *Yahoo’s* throat’ (Swift 1996, 221; emphasis in original). On the other hand, Kottmann’s account contains ‘passages lyriques sur l’attrait (Riez) de Ballyba et sur les mérites de ses habitants’ (SBC MS 4.7, 136) that seem to recall Beckett’s own disdain for Mario M. Rossi’s *Viaggio in Irlanda* (1932), which he described in a letter to MacGreevy on 19 September 1936:

Lady Gregory he apostrophises at length with opulent curves as coextensive with the ‘spirit’ of Ireland. Glendalough is a ‘*luogo dolce*’ [It. sweet place]. Walter Starkie is the finest product of Trinity humanism [...] & Gogarty is the all round man of the Quattrocentro [...] In fact the work of a professor.

(L I, 370)

Moran observes that disinterested accounts of Ballyba are few and far between, before abruptly terminating the variant with the remark that concludes his review of the ‘Molloy country’ in the published text: ‘That then is a part of what I thought I knew about Ballyba when I left home’ (*T*, 135).

Beckett retained a slightly modified version of this variant in the typescript of *Molloy*, where it was omitted following the advice of his close friend, the translator Mania Péron, who, as Morin observes, appears to have ‘disapproved of Beckett’s explicit attacks upon Irish political conservatism’ (Morin 2009, 88-99). As Péron annotated the typescript, Morin notes that she suppressed Beckett’s earlier allusions to the persecution of Huguenots in Ireland and replaced references to France with ‘dans les pays évolués’ (88-89). More importantly, she recommended that Beckett exclude the variant in its entirety, amending Moran’s opening remarks to read: ‘D’où Ballyba tirait-il donc sa richesse [‘son opulence’]? Je vais vous le dire [‘Non, je ne dirai rien’]’ (CLC MS 17.6, 14). Morin plausibly suggests that Péron may have suppressed ‘Beckett’s aggressive tone due to the likely bewilderment that such directionless hostility might have caused a French audience’ (2009, 89). Accordingly, Beckett suppressed the scatological variant: ‘What then was the source of Ballyba’s prosperity? I’ll

tell you. No, I'll tell you nothing. Nothing' (*T*, 135). The elision of this variant bears witness to a paralytic politics, wherein an overtly political writing gives way to what *The Unnamable* will subsequently term an 'ephetic' (*T*, 293) suspension of judgment, as Beckett appears to have realised that his satirical depiction of Irish economic policy required a more measured approach. What remains, then, of this compositional process? Morin has theorised the presence of Irish material within Beckett's manuscripts by turning to Theodor Adorno's perspective on Beckett's historicity, and, in particular, Adorno's assertion that *Endgame* (1957) is marked by an 'an act of omission, [whereby] that which is omitted survives through its exclusion' (qtd. in Morin 2009, 129). The framework of a paralytic politics suggests, however, that a political Beckett might begin to emerge in light of the 'double awareness' that he would later praise in the paintings of Avigdor Arikha, through 'a grasp of the past and the problems that beset continuance' that was 'at once transcended and implicit in [the] work' (Thomson and Coppel 2005, 8). On the one hand, *Molloy* constitutes something of a departure from Swift, yet, at the same time, Beckett's elision of this Swiftian variant itself represents a kind of political gesture, which paradoxically allows Swift's work to resonate throughout the text.

The language of a restrictive economic discourse is strikingly foregrounded, yet subsequently abandoned, for instance, in Molloy's description of his sucking-stones. The French text introduces his extensive digression in terms of profit and accumulation: 'Je profitai de ce séjour pour m'approvisionner en pierres à sucer' (Beckett 1951a, 92). Yet whilst the English text is less explicit, speaking of accumulating a 'store of sucking-stones' (*T*, 69) both versions intimately tie Molloy's dilemma to questions of circulation, distribution and retention, which echo Hone and Rossi's appropriation of the economic writings of Swift and Berkeley. Molloy explains, for example, that he 'distributed' the stones 'equally between my four pockets' (69), before laboriously describing the clockwise circulation of these stones between his mouth and pockets. After shuffling the stones and moving four at a time, Molloy acknowledges that this 'came to exactly the same thing as [...] circulation one by one', before admitting: 'I had to look elsewhere than the mode of circulation' (70). In the English text, his solution is to sacrifice the opaque 'principle of trim' (1955, 71), whereas in the French text he explicitly negates an overtly retentive political economy, by forgoing 'le principe de

l'arrimage' (1951a, 95). More significantly, this decision appears to provide an insight into the form of *Molloy*, into a textual economy predicated upon expenditure rather than retention, where words are wilfully spent and figured as excess waste. Molloy admits that 'deep down I didn't give a fiddler's curse' about retaining 'a little store', so that, in the end, he 'threw away all the stones but one' which he 'soon lost, or threw away, or gave away, or swallowed' (*T*, 75). Molloy's extensive digression on his sucking-stones finally emerges as a futile investment, where words are wilfully spent without profit or return, aside from allowing him to 'blacken a few more pages' (68). In this respect, it is significant that Andrew Gibson has read *Murphy*, not merely as 'une critique ironique de l'économie de modernisme', but as a novel that 'à maintes reprises et d'une façon très consciente, gaspille ses propres investissements' (Gibson 2000, 88, 90). We might struggle to concur, however, with Gibson's assertion that Beckett's *Trilogy* turns away from the economics of the market to embrace what Alain Badiou has termed 'une logique ascétique du philosophie classique' (Gibson, 92).

The prosodic rhythm of the *Trilogy* might, then, be figured in terms of a textual economy that alternates between austerity and profligacy, between accumulation and dissipation, where, in the words of Molloy, 'verbal profusion turn[s] out to be penury' (*T*, 32) and vice versa. After all, as Beckett declared in a letter to Jacoba van Velde on 12 April 1958: 'There are two moments worthwhile in writing, the one when you start and the other when you throw it in the waste-paper basket' (qtd in Knowlson 1996, 446). We cannot, however, fully account for this linguistic profligacy without acknowledging the historical conditions that governed its production; foremost of which is Beckett's pointed response to the Protestant, bourgeois appropriation of the economic writings of Swift and Bishop Berkeley during the 1930s. Ultimately, Swift's work is 'at once transcended and implicit' (Thomas & Coppel 2006, 8) throughout *Molloy*, signifying by its absence.

Sade, Blanchot and the Obscurity of Undigested Ideas

In the first part of *Molloy*, the eponymous protagonist's ruination, failing body, and lack of personal hygiene could be thought to represent a regression to an earlier stage of anal eroticism. Shane Weller

has recently argued that the notes taken from this chapter played a crucial role in the composition of *Endgame* (1957), helping to shape ‘not only many details in the play but also its overall form’ since ‘the anal erotic tendency to switch from procrastination to action – a tendency that Beckett notes (TCD MS 10971/8/19) – is reproduced in the very structure and rhythm of that play’ (Weller 2010a, 135, 141). It is tempting to pursue a similar line of enquiry with *Molloy*, one which would equate the novel’s bifurcated structure – it is split into two corresponding parts of equal length – with Jones’s description of the infantile anal erotic and developed anal-sadistic phases; the former with Molloy in part one and the latter with Moran in part two. Molloy’s cloacal theory of birth is, for instance, a feature that can be traced to Beckett’s encounter with Jones’s chapter on ‘Anal erotic Character Traits’, where he noted Jones’s discussion of the: ‘Infantile cloacal theory of birth (vagina & anus one passage in pre-mammalian animals’ (TCD MS 10971/9/19). Such a reading would, however, prove unsatisfactory in a number of respects. Firstly, it would fail to account for the manner in which Beckett’s characterisation resists such acts of psychoanalytical classification, for Molloy and Moran might more accurately be read as transitional cases on the verge of migrating *between* the infantile anal erotic and developed anal-sadistic phases. Secondly, it would fail to acknowledge the extent to which mess and cleanliness are intimately bound together in *Molloy*, depending upon and successively producing one another. And finally, it would fail to account for the novel’s peristaltic rhythm, which vacillates between obstructed, creative impasses and unregulated verbal flow. Rather than a novelisation of the psychoanalytic theory of the anal erotic, these features might more appositely be read alongside a feature of Beckett’s work that is certainly not unrelated to anal-eroticism, that is, his interest in the work of the Marquis de Sade.

In recent studies, however, the first part of *Molloy* has been persistently equated with poststructuralist theories of abjection, and, in particular, the work of the French theorist, Julia Kristeva. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), Kristeva broaches the prospective relationship between abjection and propriety through an index of attraction and revulsion, a ‘vortex of summons and repulsion’ that places the subject haunted by abjection ‘literally beside himself’ (Kristeva 1982, 1). In her influential reading, the abject not only dominates their relationship (if indeed, it constitutes a relationship at all), but also our *a posteriori* analysis of it, with propriety

playing a much more ancillary role. For while her concept of *corps propre* (rendered rather inelegantly in the English translation as ‘one’s own clean and proper body’) draws upon the polysemic Latin *propius*, denoting ‘one’s own’, ‘characteristic’, and/or ‘proper’, in addition to the more recently acquired meaning of ‘clean’ (viii), for Kristeva it is the abject that continually arouses our fascination. Abjection ‘beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects’ (1). However, as the abject is ‘not my correlative’, that is, reducible to neither subject nor object, it does not allow the subject to adopt ‘a more or less detached or autonomous position’ in relation to it. From its site of radical exclusion, ‘the abject does not cease challenging its master’, drawing the subject ‘toward the place where meaning collapses’, towards the ‘border of my condition as a living being’ (Kristeva 1982, 1-3).

Kristeva’s writings on abjection have exerted a significant influence upon the recent re-evaluation of embodiment, corporeality, and phenomenology within Beckett studies. In this respect, it is perhaps unsurprising that critics have paid particular attention to *Molloy*, as whilst the early French reception of the novel tended to locate it within the dominant mode of existentialism, such reviews frequently inaugurated abject readings of the text that pre-date Kristeva’s work. In his 17 May 1951 review, Bataille, for example, explicitly compared the novel’s ‘wonderful sordidness’ with his own abandoned work, *W.C.*, declaring Molloy ‘an ancient accumulation of filth’ and ‘an enterprise [...] that has ended in shipwreck’ (Bataille 2003, 60). Yet, despite the review’s autobiographical tone, Bataille was not alone in emphasising the importance of abjection and scatology in the novel. Maurice Nadeau, albeit more reluctantly, spoke of Molloy’s pronouncements upon man’s place in the ‘muck’ as a ‘formula which defies decency [...] of which my pen refuses to spell out all the terms’ (Nadeau 2003, 57); Bernaud Pingaud proclaimed Beckett’s protagonist a ‘deeply credible picture of degradation’, arguing that ‘[h]e is what would appear in man if all his human, logical, rational, polished and decent attributes were erased at a stroke’ (Pingau 2003, 73); whilst across the Channel, Philip Toynbee disparagingly claimed that in his depiction of this ‘very scatological tramp’, Beckett

had carried 'his despair and disgust to the ultimate limits of expression – indeed beyond them' (Toynbee 2003, 80).

In many ways, the recent turn towards embodiment within Beckett studies should be seen as a continuation of these early reviews, albeit one framed and developed through the prism of Kristeva's work. Kristin Czarnecki, for example, has claimed that Beckett's 'self-reflexive narratives expose the revulsion of being that is inherent in abjection' before observing that: 'The principal elements of abjection – the mother, body, language, and narrative – comprise Molloy's experience' (Czarnecki 2008, 52, 59, 53). More attentively, Ulrika Maude has argued that abjection ties the Beckettian subject to the material world. Maude highlights the fact that the characters of the Trilogy 'are not offended and repulsed by their own faeces' before asserting that: 'The incorporation of the abject into Beckett's work as that which-is-not-other collapses the distinction between the spiritual and the material [...] it demolishes clear lines of demarcation between the subject and its world' (Maude 2009, 99, 136). On the one hand, Maude aligns the abject passages of the Trilogy with Kristeva's work:

If the exclusion of waste and (superfluous) matter is an integral part of the construction of subjectivity, then the lapsing motility and failing body in Beckett, no longer respecting these divisions, bring the characters to the border of their condition as autonomous beings, to the threshold of a place where the subject is not.

(2008b, 165)

On the other hand, she argues that the scatological focus upon the material lower bodily stratum places the Trilogy within a grotesque tradition, and, in particular, alongside the writing of François Rabelais, as read through the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. Maude observes, however, that there is a clear distinction to be made here, for whilst 'adopting the tradition's penchant for the base body, Beckett leaves behind its triumphant, affirmative overtones' (Maude 2009, 136). This absence might tell us something about the singularity of abjection within Beckett's oeuvre, where, time and again, the reader is confronted with abject forms distinctly lacking in the revolutionary potential of Bakhtin's carnivalesque. In fact, throughout his narrative, Molloy exhibits a counter-drive towards cleanliness

and propriety that is rarely acknowledged within Beckett studies, even ‘oozing with obsequiousness’ in the process (*T*, 67).

In this respect, the narrative’s vacillating movement between lack and surplus, or between what Molloy observes to be a form of ‘verbal profusion’ or ‘penury’, where the narrative always seems to ‘say either too much or too little’ (*T*, 32), can be linked to Beckett’s interest in both the work, and the reception of the work, of the Marquis de Sade. This interest in Sade can, as we will, in turn be linked to what Peter Boxall has termed the ‘difficult, knotted, and peristaltic texture’ of his mature prose (Boxall 2002, 160). In this respect, it is perhaps unsurprising that many of the most attentive readings of the Trilogy have sought to examine its peculiarly embodied linguistic processes. As we will see in the chapter on *The Unnamable*, Steven Connor has read this ‘extraordinary corporeality’ alongside W.R. Bion’s 1959 essay ‘Attacks on Linking’, drawing upon that essay’s Kleinian model of projective identification to argue that the Trilogy’s ‘drama of utterance’ is ‘embodied in terms of violent alternations of incorporation and emission’ (Connor 2008, 23). Turning to the question of motility, both Robin Lee and Ulrika Maude have equated the Trilogy’s laborious narrative movement with its characters’ physical debilitation, in which ‘linguistic deviation’ accompanies and parallels ‘the characters’ physical deterioration in the text’ (Lee 1976, 216; Maude 2008b, 155). In contrast, Peter Fifield astutely claims that Beckett’s excremental conception of the linguistic process reflects his well-documented distrust of language, where the ruminating narratives of the trilogy consist of ‘language so many times chewed, swallowed and digested in permutation and paradox’ (Fifield 2009, 57), so that little remains worth swallowing. Yet whilst these subtle readings offer numerous points of departure for an analysis of the linguistic process in *Molloy*, such approaches have tended to focus upon the hermeneutic challenges that this materiality poses, without always evaluating its formal implications.

It seems significant, in this respect, that during the early 1950s, Beckett translated passages from Maurice Blanchot’s *Lautréamont et Sade* (1949) for prospective publication in *transition* in the spring of 1951, before making ‘a note from Bataille’s preface to [Sade’s] *Justine* (1950), ‘Le Soleil Noir’, in first *Textes pour rien* notebook of July 1951, where ‘Bataille draws insights from Blanchot’s

Lautréamont et Sade' (Fifield, 2010, 113). In a letter to Georges Duthuit of 3 January 1951, Beckett noted that Blanchot's essay contained '[s]ome excellent ideas, or rather starting points for ideas, and a fair bit of verbiage, to be read quickly, not as a translator does' (L I, 219). What emerges from Blanchot's study, claims Beckett, is 'a truly gigantic Sade, jealous of Satan and of his eternal torments, and confronting nature more than human-kind' (219). Beckett's interest in Sade, of course, dates back to the early 1930s, when he read Praz's *The Romantic Agony*, before being invited by Jack Kahane to translate *Les 120 journées de Sodome* into English. In Praz's text, for example, the Italian writer claims that Sade's work is inextricably bound up with its destructive tendencies, which tend to reduce the human to matter: 'The Marquis de Sade empties his world of all psychological content except the pleasures of the destruction and transgression, and moves in an opaque atmosphere of mere matter' (Praz 1933, 104). A similar argument is, in fact, expressed at one point in Blanchot's essay, where the French critic turns to discuss the extent to which Sade's reason is tied to irrationality;

Here we have the first of Sade's singularities. At every moment his theoretical ideas set free the irrational forces with which they are bound up. These forces both excite and upset the thought by an impetus of a kind that causes the thought first to resist and then to yield, to try again for mastery, to gain an ascendancy, but only by liberating other dark forces by which once again the ideas are carried away, side-tracked and perverted. The result is that all that is said is clear but seems to be at the mercy of something that has not been said [...] In the end, everything has been brought to light, everything has been expressed, but equally everything has once more been plunged into the obscurity of *undigested ideas* and experiences that cannot be given shape.

(Blanchot 2004, 75-6; my emphasis)

This almost reads like a definition of the perverse logic of Beckett's trilogy, but here I want to suggest that Blanchot's emphasis upon the production of 'undigested ideas' in Sade's work may find a parallel in, if not proving to be a 'starting point' for, the rhythm of *Molloy*. I am not claiming here that Beckett had read Blanchot's essay before writing the text, although that certainly remains possible, but rather that both writers are interested in the indigestibility of their narrative materials.

For Ann Banfield, Beckett's resistance to language represents an attack on his 'mother tongue' akin to that of James Joyce, with both writers adapting Dante's 'figure of the language-milk'

to suggest that ‘in the Irish case, once swallowed, it is hard to stomach, for theirs is a surrogate mother tongue’ (Banfield 2003, 8-9). This leads her to suggest that in Beckett’s work, the ‘language-milk taken in against the will’ is transformed into ‘an excrement’ (2003, 9). As Steven Connor argues, however, it is ‘hard believe that Beckett’s lactose intolerance could have been lulled at the breast by the lilt of Erse, Bantu, or any other candidate mother-tongue’ (Connor 2009, 66). There may, however, be a sense in *Molloy* that language itself remains indigestible, particularly in light of the passage from Beckett’s unattributed English translation of Georges Duthuit’s *The Fauvist Painters* (1951), which forms the epigraph to this chapter. In this particular instance, the translation refers to ‘Billy-in-the-bowl’, a figure who appears in *The Unnamable* (*T*, 317), which helps us to attribute the passage in question to Beckett: ‘The painter is change, changed by his painting into what he is. No learnt lesson. No arguments either, invoking succour and defeat: *sow-udder syntax*, gutter prose, Billy-in-the-bowl connected discourse, etc.’ (Duthuit 1950, 20). What, we are justified in asking, is a ‘sow-udder syntax’? After all, sows don’t have udders, they have nipples. And we don’t tend to drink pigs milk, we usually drink cow’s milk, which is seen as both more hygienic and more nutritious. Now, it remains difficult to say exactly what Beckett might mean by a ‘*sow-udder syntax*’, but I think we all get the point here, it is a syntax that appears to be some of abominable hybrid, produced by a cross-breed of a cow and a pig, that would not only prove to be the antithesis of nutrition, but completely indigestible. In turn, I want to close this chapter by suggesting that the notion of an indigestible syntax, or at least, an indigestible rhythm, might lie at the heart of *Molloy*.

According to the South African novelist Patrick Bowles, who collaborated on the English translation of *Molloy* with Beckett, during the compositional process Beckett paid scrupulous attention to the pace and rhythm of the novel’s syntax. Bowles reports that: ‘[o]ccasionally Beckett would throw the cat amongst the chickens by saying, “Give it a bit of rhythm”. That could mean recasting an entire paragraph. One could not just inject a drumbeat into one phrase alone. It had to play its part in the paragraph’ (Bowles 1994, 24). The fact that Bowles refers to these injunctions as sporadic ones does not, however, suggest that the strict rhythm of a drum-beat played an integral part in *Molloy*, but rather, that a strict rhythm occasionally provided a principle of variation for its

syncopated rhythm, which oscillates between sluggish, protracted impasses and rapid, uncontrollable verbal outpourings. Such an argument is further strengthened when read against the numerous occasions in which Molloy and Moran self-referentially allude to the peristaltic rhythm of their own narratives. Whilst describing the movements of A and C, for instance, Molloy draws the reader's attention to the intestinal motions of a little dog accompanying A:

A little dog followed him, a Pomeranian I think, but I don't think so. I wasn't sure at the time and I'm still not sure, though I've hardly thought about it. The little dog followed wretchedly after the fashion of pomeranians, stopping, turning in slow circles, giving up and then, a little further on, beginning all over again. Constipation is a sign of good health in Pomeranians.
(*T*, 8)

As Molloy's narrative unfolds, what Christopher Ricks has termed his 'Struldbuggian sentences' (Ricks 1993, 26), begin to falter, peter out, and abruptly shift to another narrative strand, with the reader sensing that there may be more to this remark than first meets the eye. There are, in fact, numerous examples of what we might refer to as Molloy's syntactical constipation, that is, moments in which his very thoughts become clogged and obstructed, with his sentences culminating in blocked impasses. To provide just one example, whilst discussing the deteriorating condition of his legs, Molloy remarks that: 'one was shortening don't forget, whereas the other, though stiffening, was not yet shortening, or so far behind its fellow that to all intents and purposes, intents and purposes, I'm lost, no matter' (*T*, 77). Yet, although it may be tempting to label Molloy's syntax as constipated, Beckett's psychology notes provide a clearer insight into its vacillating rhythm. For whilst reading Jones's discussion of the association between infantile retention and the constipation exhibited in marked instances of anal eroticism, Beckett noted the infantile habit of 'obstructively postponing the act of defaecation' and the subsequent example of children who 'go to the length of squatting down and supporting the anal orifice with the heel so as to keep back the stool to the last possible moment – and then performing it with intense concentration'. As we shall see, this relapsing movement from retention to emission provides a more accurate model for the novel's vacillating rhythm.

Shortly after leaving Lousse's house, Molloy laboriously details his reasons for approaching a stranger, and, in doing so, offers a more overt description of the oscillating rhythm of his narrative:

I apologise for these details, in a moment we'll go faster, much faster. And then perhaps relapse again into a wealth of filthy circumstance. But which in its turn again will give way to vast frescoes, dashed off with loathing. Homo mensura can't do without staffage.

(*T*, 63)

Examining this passage, Patrick McCarthy has recently claimed that this potential relapse into a 'wealth of filthy circumstance' is typical of Molloy's 'inability to control the narration of a life that has in some ways already ended' (McCarthy). Yet, whilst questions of control and mastery are certainly at issue here, a close examination of Molloy's narrative would appear to suggest that this process is rather more complicated. In fact, Molloy provides an oblique insight into this rhythm by designating his narrative in terms which oscillate between the methodical and the unmethodical, referring to it as both a 'ledger', that is, a calculated, precise record of events, and as the more emotional, uncontrolled outpourings of a 'diary' (*T*, 61, 68). The most obvious example of this is Molloy's narration of the sucking stones episode, which, it should be remembered, is introduced as a piece of narratological staffage: 'in order to blacken a few more pages may I say I spent some time at the seaside, without incident' (*T*, 68). If this episode was without incident, we might ask, what is it doing in the novel? And, if its sole purpose is to blacken a few more pages, why hasn't it been cut by the copy editor who annotates Molloy's pages? On the other hand, Moran's narrative can appear to be marked by a pronounced absence of narrative particulars, as, for example, when fails to describe his adventures in the Molloy country: 'I have no intention of relating the various adventures which befell us, me and my son, together and singly, before we came to the Molloy country. It would be tedious' (*T*, 137). A similar lack can be detected when he murders the strange figure who asks him for some bread: 'a little later, perhaps a long time later, I found him stretched on the ground, his head in a pulp. I am sorry I cannot indicate more clearly how this result was obtained, it would have been something worth reading' (158). Throughout *Molloy*, then, there is a sense that the narrative proves to be indigestible because it shifts from gluttony to starvation, either piling too much food on the reader's

plate, or barely providing any food at all. If Moran believes all that '[a]ll language seemed to me an excess of language' (*T*, 121), this seems to lead to him to starve the reader of narrative details, but Molloy's words on the subject perhaps provide a stronger model of the oscillating rhythm of the narrative of *Molloy*:

For I always say either too much or too little, which is a terrible thing for a man with a passion for truth like mine. And I shall not abandon this subject, to which I shall probably never have the occasion to return, with such a storm blowing up, without making this curious observation, that it often happened to me, before I gave up speaking for good, to think I had said too little when in fact I had said too much and in fact to have said too little when I thought I had said too much. I mean that on reflection, in the long run rather, my verbal profusion turned out to be penury, and inversely.

(Molloy, 32)

Molloy's 'sow-udder syntax' finally proves indigestible, not because it originates in either a sow or an udder, but because it combines the two, proving both tasty and disgusting, too nutritious and not nutritious enough.

In this fourth chapter, we have seen the extent to which the characterisation of Moran in the second part of *Molloy* can be associated with the Freudian theory of the anal erotic, but while this psychoanalytical theory posits an overtly retentive textual economy, Beckett's interest in economic retention can also be traced to debates surrounding the reception of Jonathan Swift's work during the Anglo-Irish trade war of the 1930s. The full significance of Beckett's interest in the Freudian theory of the anal erotic can only be adequately theorised, however, when read in conjunction with his predilection for the work of the Marquis de Sade. In this respect, Beckett's oblique allusion to a 'sow-udder syntax' in his translation of Georges Duthuit's *The Fauvist Painters* finds an intriguing parallel in Blanchot's theory that Sade's texts led to the obscurity of 'undigested ideas', whereas the narrative of *Molloy* appears to shift from gluttony to starvation, always providing the reader with too much or too little by way of nutrition.

CHAPTER FIVE

‘Throes are the only trouble’: Dilation, Parturition and *Malone Dies*

Birth was the death of him.

– Samuel Beckett, *A Piece of Monologue*, CDW, 425

Throughout Beckett’s work, living is inextricably bound up with dying. ‘In the midst of life’, *The Book of Common Prayer* tells us, ‘we are in death’. There are, however, no such complacent certainties in Beckett’s texts. ‘Death’, the protagonist of *Molloy* informs us, ‘is a condition I have never been able to conceive to my satisfaction’ (*T*, 68). Or, as the German philosopher Theodor Adorno remarked in his posthumously published notes on *L’Innommable*, ‘death’ is an ‘unattainable goal’ (Adorno 2010, 174). Dying, on the other hand, is a different matter. The Proustian subject, Beckett declares in his monograph on the French writer, ‘has died – and perhaps many times – on the way’ (*PTD*, 3). ‘Living’, Adorno notes, ‘is dying because it is a not-being-able to die’ (2010, 174). Despite this, there are four pages of entries on ‘Death’ in *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett* (2004), but not a single entry on dying. Most striking of these former entries is the peculiar claim that the second novel of Beckett’s post-war trilogy, *Malone Dies* (1954-5), is a ‘postmortem tale’ (Ackerley & Gontarski 2004, 127). Leslie Hill, however, is not so sure. Instead, Hill draws attention to the ‘use of the verb’ in the novel’s title, asking whether the present tense *meurt* might ‘denote an action which is incomplete or incomplete’, or, in other words, ‘does Malone die?’ (1990, 55-6). Or, to put it another way, ‘[d]oes “Malone dies” mean that he is (still) dying or that he is (at last) dead?’ (56). Is there a final separation of the subject from existence? Or is the subject, albeit faintly, still bound to existence?

Malone Dies focuses on a first-person narrator, who remains unnamed until roughly half way through the novel and who opens his story by telling us that he hopes to survive ‘St. John the Baptist’s Day’, to ‘pant on’ to the Transfiguration, if not the Assumption (*T*, 179). As the narrative unfurls, the narrator informs us of his plans to tell ‘four stories’ on an equal number of different themes, ‘[o]ne about a man, another about a woman, a third about a thing, and finally one about an animal, a bird probably’ (181), only for this plan to unravel as he admits that he cannot die without producing an inventory. Instead, Malone proposes to tell us of his present state, of three stories and an inventory, all of which he manages to do, except for the inventory. The present state finds Malone in either a hospital or an asylum, where each day a hand appears through the door to minister to his bodily needs, to offer sustenance and take away his chamber pot. In his first story, Malone speaks of Saposcat’s life amongst his petit-bourgeois family, and, later on, of his time spent with a farming family called the Lamberts, although Malone frequently interrupts this story with stories from his present state and a range of disparaging comments about his own narration. At one stage, Malone gets fed up with Sapo and discards him for a figure named Macmann, whose story includes tales of a horse and his journey through the rain, only for Malone to interrupt again, by evaluating the nature of his inventory and his possessions. By now, however, Malone discards the subjective pronoun and his story converges with that of Macmann, who is a patient in a mental asylum, where he has a protracted relationship with a grotesque figure named Moll, before being tended by a deranged, violent figure named Lemuel. Finally, during an excursion to Dalkey Island with a local visitor named Lady Pedal, Lemuel murders her attendants, with the narrative dissolving as Malone’s pencil wears down and the group of inmates travel out to sea.

There is, however, no clear sense of whether Malone dies. Instead of merely discarding this question, this chapter argues that we might consider it in relation to the first page of Beckett’s novel, where the protagonist claims that ‘[t]hroes are the only trouble’ (*T*, 179). A ‘throe’ is ‘a violent spasm or pang’, one that ‘convulses the body, limbs, or face’, both an affective ‘spasm of feeling’ and a cognitive ‘agony of mind’, which either precedes or accompanies ‘the “bringing forth” of something (*OED*). A ‘throe’ might be thought, then, to encompass both the act of living and the act of dying, to

carry with it the act of writhing found in the Old English *þrawan* (to twist, to turn), or that sense of affliction found in the another Old English term, *þrea* (pang, evil, threat). If a ‘throes’ represents a spasm of pain, as in throes of passion, throes of ecstasy, or throes of death, there is, however, another form of convulsion operating in *Malone Dies*, where the narrative proceeds through both ‘throes’ and an irrepressible ‘sense of dilation’ (*T*, 235). To dilate is to ‘make wider or larger’, to ‘cause to expand’, as in the vaginal dilation preceding childbirth, but it also means ‘to speak or write at great length on a subject’ (*OED*). As this penultimate chapter unfolds, it considers the role that entropy might play in Malone’s attempts to separate his self from his creations by turning to an image found in Beckett’s reading in contemporary physics and consider how that is inflected in the novel through the imagery of scattering and sweeping. Secondly, the chapter turns to Beckett’s reading in modern medicine and psychoanalysis to link Malone’s encounter with an autonomic parrot to the convulsions of epilepsy, which Otto Rank’s *The Trauma of Birth* claimed ‘reproduce the act of birth’ (Rank 1973, 71; TCD MS10971/8/34). In doing so, the chapter argues that Malone’s convulsive narrative trajectory of dilation and throes can productively be read in terms of the links between neurological disorders and convulsive writing. This, in turn, appears to enact either a protracted death-bed struggle or a prolonged period of labour as the narrative proceeds, with the reader toiling amongst a dilating, overdetermined narrative marked by an ‘excess of circumstance’ (*T*, 197), which induces a series of violent throes that are enacted in Malone’s own disgusted, writhing turns away from his stories. Finally, the chapter turns to an image taken from Part II of Goethe’s *Faust* to consider the role of ingestion and excretion in the creation and destruction of Malone’s stories, before closing with an examination of the tropes of voiding, vomiting and phantom births in relation to the novel’s dissipative conclusion.

Separation and Maxwell’s Demon

At the start of his narrative, Malone decides that he will remain distinct from his stories, that they will not resemble his present state; however, as the narrative proceeds, these same stories frequently allude to tropes of separation that might be read, albeit rather obliquely, in conjunction with Beckett’s

sustained engagement with contemporary physics. After recording the pre-Socratic origins of the concept of the atom in his Philosophy notes, Beckett transcribed a number of passages in the *Whoroscope* notebook from Henri Poincaré's *La Valeur de la Science* (1902), including the French mathematician's account of a famous thought experiment postulated by James Clerk Maxwell.³² In *Theory of Heat* (1871), Maxwell devised an experiment that might reverse the irreversible process of entropy, thereby annulling the second law of thermodynamics, which supposes that 'it is impossible in a system enclosed in an envelope which permits neither change of volume nor passage of heat, and in which both the temperature and the pressures are everywhere the same, to produce any inequality of temperature or pressure without the expenditure of work' (Maxwell 1902, 338). Or rather, that entropy will inevitably increase in a closed thermodynamic system as differences in the pressure, speed and temperature of heterogeneous molecules equilibrate into what Laura Salisbury has termed 'a homogenous mixture denuded of local concentrations of order' (Salisbury 2010, 362). Envisaging a vessel divided into two chambers, which are in turn connected by a small hole, Maxwell posits an imaginary being or demon 'whose faculties are so sharpened that he can follow every molecule in its course', thereby managing variations in temperature by sorting the molecules according to their velocity:

Now let us suppose that such a vessel is divided into two portions, A and B, by a division in which there is a small hole, and that a being, who can see the individual molecules, opens and closes this hole, so as to allow only the swifter molecules to pass from A to B, and only the slower ones to pass from B to A. He will thus, without expenditure of work, raise the temperature of that of B and lower that of A, in contradiction to the second law of thermodynamics.

(Maxwell 1902, 338)

By sorting these molecules, Maxwell's demon could hypothetically reverse the entropic tendency of heterogeneous molecules to equilibrate in a closed system, a fact which Beckett recorded in the *Whoroscope* notebook after transcribing a lengthy passage on Carnot's principle of the dissipation of energy:

³² Cf. Windelband 1901, 42-3.

The demon of Maxwell:

Si le monde tend vers l'uniformité, ce n'est pas parce que ses parties ultimes, d'abord dissemblables, tendent à devenir de moins en moins différentes, c'est parce que, se déplaçant au hasard, elles finissent par se mélanger. Pour un œil qui distinguerait tous les éléments, la variété resterait toujours aussi grande; chaque grain de cette poussière conserve son originalité et ne se modèle pas sur ses voisins; mais comme le mélange devient de plus en plus intime, nos sens grossiers n'aperçoivent plus que l'uniformité. Voilà pourquoi, p.e. [par exemple], les températures tendent à se niveler sans qu'il soit possible de revenir en arrière.

Qu'une goutte de vin tombe dans un verre d'eau etc... on aura beau agiter le vase, le vin et l'eau ne paraîtront plus pouvoir se séparer. Un grain d'orge dans un tas de blé... type du phénomène physique irréversible. (cf. Gibbs: Principles of Statistical Mechanics)

Le démon imaginaire de Maxwell, qui peut trier les molécules une à une, saurait bien contraindre le monde à revenir en arrière.

(UoR MS 3000, 42; cf. Poincaré 1902, 214-15)

Assessing these extensive transcriptions, Ackerley notes that Beckett would later employ Poincaré's earlier description of the similarities between atoms and stars, 'astres infiniment petits, ce sont les atomes' to 'structure the beginning of the *Unnamable*', but Beckett's interest appears to have been piqued, as David Houston Jones observes, by the French mathematician's presentation of 'a new physics, born of the invalidation of previously established laws' (Ackerley 2004, 128; Jones 2009, 127).

Connor and Jones have located this interest in entropic decline alongside the scientific register of the late cylinder pieces, whereas Salisbury has read it in relation to *Watt*, arguing that Beckett's writing 'seems more in tune with the second law of thermodynamics than with the "imaginary" demon who could reverse time by instituting an effortless order' (2010, 368). Beckett's interest in Maxwell's demon can also be thought, however, to find a parallel in the separation inherent within a number of Malone's activities: including his act of telling stories, his plan to produce an inventory of his possessions and the tropes of separation within these stories themselves. The protagonist informs us that while waiting to die, 'I shall tell myself stories, if I can', but within these stories he plans to 'pay less heed to myself', instead sorting them into four different themes: '[o]ne about a man, another about a woman, a third about a thing and finally one about an animal, a bird probably' (*T*, 180-1). Shortly afterwards, however, Malone reveals another plan, to 'be another, *in myself, in another*' (*M*,

195), which, for Thomas Trezise, leads the ‘movement of the novel’ to resemble ‘an endlessly indecisive “va-et-vient” between these ‘ontological alternatives’ (Trezise 1992, 111). Not only does this plan fail to materialise, but Malone anxiously frets about his inability to retain these ontological distinctions, to remain separate from his stories: ‘I wonder if I am not talking yet again about myself. Shall I be incapable, to the end, of lying on any other subject’ (189). In a similar manner, he later rummages in his little heap of possessions, ‘sorting them out and drawing them over to me’, before discovering that they have become inextricably mingled with other objects he cannot remember, or which he has never seen before: ‘the presence of two or three objects I had quite forgotten and one of which at least, the bowl of a pipe, strikes no cord in my memory’ (196-7).

Despite Malone’s attempts to remain detached from his stories, this trope of a clean separation appears throughout them, perhaps most notably in the description of Mrs Lambert sorting some lentils in her kitchen, which bears a marked resemblance to the categorising of Maxwell’s demon: ‘She sat down, emptied out the lentils on the table and began to sort them. So that soon there were two heaps on the table, one big heap getting small and one small heap getting bigger’, yet this gives way to an entropic mingling: ‘suddenly with a furious gesture she swept the two together, annihilating thus in less than a second the work of two or three minutes’ (214). Such categorising processes are, in fact, later dismissed in the enigmatic essay, ‘Les Deux Besoins’, where Beckett invokes ‘le démon de Maxwell’ as a theoretical figure who might distinguish between the two needs from which modern art derives its impetus, the ‘[b]esoin d’avoir besoin’ and the ‘besoin dont on a besoin’, only to dismiss such a metaphysical approach: ‘Préférer l’un des testicules à l’autre, ce serait aller sur les platebandes de la métaphysique. A moins d’être le démon de Maxwell’ (*DIS*, 84). By musing on these lentils, Steven Connor helpfully suggests that ‘Malone might be considering his own narrative, and the difficulty of keeping it pure from the contamination of the self’ (Connor 1988, 76), while Leslie Hill observes that these neat distinctions collapse almost as soon as Malone enunciates his project, with the narrator fashioning Sapo/Macmann ‘in his own image’ (Hill 1990, 65). At this juncture, however, Malone issues an aside about Mrs Lambert’s abandoned task that seems remarkably close to the verbal throes which repeatedly interrupt the dilations of his own narrative: ‘To stop in the middle of a

tedious and perhaps futile task was something that Sapo could readily understand. For a great number of tasks are of this kind, without a doubt, and the only way to end them is to abandon them' (*T*, 214). These separating tendencies frequently collapse, however, due to the unruly nature of the body in these stories, which might also reflect the bedeviling problems that Malone encounters in trying to cleanly extricate himself from his creations. Take Saposcat, for instance, whose name plays across these connotations of purity and contamination, drawing upon the Latin *sapo* (soap) and Greek *scat* (dung), while his occupation as a street-sweeper encounters similar preoccupations:

[E]ven with such humble occupations as street-cleaning to which with hopefulness he had sometimes turned, on the off chance of his being a born scavenger, he did not succeed any better. And even he himself was compelled to admit that the place swept by him looked dirtier at his departure than on his arrival, as if a *demon* had driven him to collect, with the broom, shovel and barrow placed gratis at his disposal by the corporation, all the dirt and filth which chance had withdrawn from the sight of the tax-payer and add them thus recovered to those already visible and which he was employed to remove.

(*T*, 245; emphasis mine)

In contrast to the propensity of Maxwell's demon to sort a number of heterogeneous molecules, the hypothetical demon envisaged here undoes the classifying tendencies inherent within Sapo's act of sweeping. Intriguingly, when Malone earlier attempted to describe his 'absurd tribulations', the distinction between his self and his creations disperses through another image of scattering and sweeping, albeit one that he registers as a form of anal intrusion. Malone pictures himself as a puppet within an extensive series of puppets, who is manipulated by another being in the form of an intrusive hand:

And I must say that to me at least and for as long as I can remember the sensation is familiar of a blind and tired hand delving feebly in my particles and letting them trickle between its fingers. And sometimes, when all is quiet, I feel it plunged in me up to the elbow, but gentle, and as though sleeping. But soon it stirs, wakes, fondles, clutches, ransacks, ravages, avenging its failure to scatter me with one sweep.

(*T*, 225)

Drawing attention to the erotic overtones of this passage, Peter Boxall argues that ‘if Malone is a puppet here, then the unnamed narrator is the fisting hand of the puppeteer, plunged invasively, erotically, and lovingly in Malone’s body’, with the rectum figured as the location of a ‘poetic occupation’ whereby the hand simultaneously ‘fondles and ravages, [...] reassures and destroys’ (Boxall 2004, 127). The eroticism of this encounter serves to collapse the distinctions between self and other that Malone originally intended to maintain between himself and his creations, yet it also provides an artistic function akin to Malone’s own birth and death throes, through a destructive ‘intention to annihilate him’ and ‘its capacity to animate him’ (2004, 127). In this sense, Malone’s convulsive throes might be thought to develop the conclusion of Otto Rank’s *The Trauma of Birth* (1929), which Beckett read in the early 1930s, where the German psychologist turns to the myth of Prometheus, that ‘bold fire-bringer and creator of men’ (Rank 1973, 155), to consider how the role of the masculine artist in ancient Greek society took on a distinctly maternal function. Rank argues that the Greek artist emulates Prometheus, ‘creates human beings after his own image, that is, he brings forth his work in ever new, constantly repeated acts of birth, and in it brings forth himself amid the maternal pains of creation’ (156); yet, *Malone Dies* perpetually destabilises an artistic practice founded upon these convulsive throes, implying that they are just as likely to originate in death as in birth.

Birth, Epilepsy and Jackson’s Parrot

Analysing the links between Beckett’s writing and Korsakoff’s syndrome, a neurological disorder that is mentioned in *Murphy* (*M*, 96), which produces ‘psychological confusion’ and ‘amnesiac symptoms in long-term alcoholism’, Adam Piette has drawn attention to the extent to which the Korsakoff’s patient’s ‘tendency to confabulate’ can be read alongside the interjections of Malone’s narrative. Piette notes, for instance, that the Korsakoff’s patient’s attempts to recall a ‘prose passage is often characterised by the intrusion of episodes, objects, and individuals not included in the original story’ (Piette 1993, 42). Whereas Piette commendably refuses to neatly ascribe these symptoms to Beckett’s characters, arguing instead that Beckett’s work is ‘feeling the force-field of comparison between broken minds and broken writing’ (43), there is a sense in which the convulsive trajectory of

Malone's narrative of dilation and throe can be related to the links between neurological disorders and convulsive writing. This can be traced to Malone's encounter with an 'Israelite' named Jackson which revolves around the 'subject of conation' (*T*, 218), that is, the 'faculty of volition and desire' (*OED*). This figure owns a pink and grey squawking parrot, which repeatedly utters the first half of the scholastic dictum, *nihil in intellectu quod non prius in sensu* (Lat. There is nothing in the mind that was not first in the senses), but fails to get as far as what Malone terms the 'celebrated restriction', *quod non prius fuerat in sensu*. The joke, then, is that the parrot represents something of a thoughtless automaton, repeating that there is 'nothing in mind', to become what Steven Connor terms 'an embodiment of sense without understanding or will (and yet with the capacity for articulation)' (Connor 1982, 29). With this in mind, Salisbury argues that the parrot 'perhaps stages most clearly the uneasy relationship between a language proper to the intending mind and a material language pressed out and then absorbed (or not) according to reflex', and remains 'nailed to reproductions that are, in the end, nothing but matter, that have never been securely in the mind' (2012, 105). Beckett had, in fact, recorded this motto in the 'Whoroscope Notebook' from Wilhelm Windelband's *A History of Philosophy*, supplementing it with Locke's response to Leibniz's empiricism: *nisi ipse intellectus* (Lat. except the mind itself) (RUL MS 3000, 63; Windelband 1901, 464). This philosophical subtext is transposed into a series of squawks in a process where the production of language becomes increasingly automatic; words here 'are mindless, at least in terms of the human conception of mind, as avian matter speaks according to habituation rather than recognised linguistic intention' (Salisbury 2012, 105).

There also appears, however, to be a medical and psychoanalytical subtext underlying this passage, which implies that the squawking linguistic convulsions of Jackson's parrot might be akin to a specific form of epilepsy. In the section on 'Diseases of the Nervous System' in Osler's *Principles and Practice of Modern Medicine* which, as we have seen in the second chapter, Beckett drew upon in the writing of *Murphy*, the Canadian physician devotes a section to convulsions, tremors, spasms and tics, which includes a section on epilepsy. In doing so, he describes a form of 'cortical, symptomatic, or partial epilepsy' known as 'Jacksonian epilepsy', named after the English neurologist, John

Hughlings Jackson, who discovered in 1863 that the seizure originated in the primary motor cortex (Osler 1895, 1007). Whereas in the typical form of epilepsy that he labels ‘Grand Mal’ the patient experiences a sudden attack marked by an ‘abrupt loss of consciousness’, which leads to a series of tonic and clonic muscle spasms and a relaxation of the sphincters at the height of the attack, Jacksonian epilepsy is ‘distinguished from the ordinary epilepsy by the important fact that consciousness is retained’ (1007). This means that ‘[t]he patient is conscious throughout [the fit] and watches, often with interest, the march of the spasm’ (1007). More specifically in relation to the squawkings of Jackson’s parrot, it is worth noting that in the symptoms of the former, the ‘movements of the muscles of the tongue are very forcible and strong’, which means that a ‘frothy saliva, which may be blood-stained, escapes from the mouth’ (1005).

During the convulsions of both forms of epilepsy, Osler notes that ‘[t]he faeces and urine may be discharged involuntarily’ (1005), which might allow us to posit a link between the squawking convulsions of the parrot and Malone, for whilst describing his encounter with Jackson, Malone observes: ‘I can see him still, the fit of laughter past, wiping his eyes and mouth, and myself, with downcast eyes, pained by my wetted trousers and the little pool of urine at my feet’ (*T*, 218). This might also help to explain why Jackson confers the sobriquet ‘the merino’ on Malone: when the protagonist admits, ‘I don’t know why, perhaps because of the French expression’ (218), he appears to be alluding to the French phrase *laisser pisser le merinos*, which means ‘don’t react to provocation’, but can be literally translated as ‘let the merino piss’. Ulrika Maude has read Malone’s convulsive verbal tics, as evidenced by his non-reflexive speech patterns (‘Yes, that’s what I like about me, at least one of the things, that I can say, Up the Republic!, for example, or, Sweetheart!, for example, without having to wonder if I should not rather have cut my tongue out’, *T*, 236), alongside the neurological disorder of Tourette’s syndrome; however, these might additionally be thought of as epileptic, since Osler claims that ‘disturbances of speech’ and ‘sensory aphasia’ are sometimes present during an epileptic seizure (1895, 1006). While the onset of convulsions in ‘Grand Mal’ is marked by a sudden, localised sensation of *aura*, this is not the case in Jacksonian epilepsy, where ‘[t]he onset may be slow, and there may be time’, as in a case which Osler has himself reported, ‘for

the patient to place a pillow on the floor, so as to be as comfortable as possible during the attack' (1007). At one stage in his narration, Malone abruptly switches from the story of Macmann to his present state in a convulsive movement that appears to resemble the conscious onset of a Jacksonian fit:

And perhaps it is then he sees the heavens of the old dream, the heavens of the sea and of the earth too, and the spasms of the waves from the shore to shore all stirring to their tiniest stir, and the so different motion of men for example, who are not tied together, but free to come and go as they please. And they make full use of it and come and go, their great balls and sockets rattling and clacking like knackers, each on his way. And when one dies the others go on, as if nothing had happened.

I feel

I feel it's coming. How goes it, thanks, it's coming. I wanted to be quite sure before I noted it. Scrupulous to the last, finical to the fault, that's Malone, all over. I mean sure of the feeling that my hour is at hand.

(*T*, 234)

Here, the repetition of two phrases, 'I feel' and 'it's coming', almost seems like a sensory acknowledgment of the convulsive transition from one narrative level to another, but in order to justify the links I am making between epilepsy and narration in *Malone Dies*, we need to turn to another account of epilepsy that Beckett encountered in the early 1930s, namely, that found in Otto Rank's *The Trauma of Birth* (1929).

In his fourth chapter on 'Neurotic Reproduction', Otto Rank discusses the manner in which pronounced forms of psychoses are frequently associated with what he terms 'circular insanity' or 'cyclothymia' (Rank 1973, 61). Drawing upon the German psychiatrist Alfred Storch's paper '*Über den Katatonischen Anfall*' (Ger. On the Catatonic Attack) (1921), where Storch describes how he has frequently met with the idea of going through death and rebirth in his treatment of catatonic patients, Rank cites a passage where Storch argues that in such cases, 'the complex thoughts of patients often rush pell-mell into the ideas of birth and pregnancy, *giving birth and being born, being the mother and the child*' (Rank 1973, 69). Developing this line of argument, Rank turns to Viktor Tausk's paper entitled '*Über die Entstehung des Beeinflussungsapparates in der Schizophrenie*' (Ger. On the Origin

of the Influencing Machine in Schizophrenia) to argue that ‘psychotic states such as hallucinations, twilight and catatonic phases [...] become intelligible as far-reaching regressions to the foetal stage’, as Tausk examines how ‘the patient thinks he is influenced as a projection of one’s own genitalized body in the womb’ (69). This allows Rank to suggest that other psychotic symptoms can be directly linked to birth trauma and the intrauterine stage, before arguing that ‘[t]his is true of all seizures and attacks, especially the so-called *epileptic*, which in content and form betray the clearest reminiscences of parturition’ (71). Accordingly, in a passage which Beckett duly noted, Rank claims that ‘the *aura* preceding the great epileptic attack, with its feeling of blessedness described so wonderfully by Dostoievski, corresponds to the pre-natal libido gratification, whilst the convulsions themselves reproduce the act of birth’ (71; TCD MS10971/8/34). Whereas Malone informs us that he ‘loves to suck’ (*T*, 223), Tausk reads such proclivities in the final stage of progressive paralysis, which manifest themselves through a ‘suckling-reflex’, as a return to an infantile stage of development (Rank 1973, 70). There is, in fact, as Beckett had earlier claimed in ‘Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce’, a ‘great deal of the lifeless octogenarian in [this] unborn infant’ (*DIS*, 8). Julie Campbell notes that there is ‘an overriding sense of Malone’s regression to a childhood state’ (Campbell 2008, 438), as evidenced by the fact that he writes in a ‘big child’s exercise book’ (252) and refers to ‘the whole of second childishness’ (214).

At the start of his narrative, Malone informs us that he plans to be ‘neutral and inert’, that he plans to avoid the pangs of death or child-birth, for ‘[t]hroes are the only trouble. I must be on guard against the throes’ (*T*, 179-80). As the narrative unfolds, however, his stories begin to expand through an irrepressible ‘sense of dilation’ (*T*, 235) that slows the reader’s passage through the text. After describing some of the items that are present in his room, for instance, including a ‘little packet’ that may be either a ‘lock of hair’ or a ‘lack of rupees’, Malone laments the slow pace of his narrative, particularly in light of his impending death: ‘I told myself too that I must make better speed. True lives do not tolerate this excess of circumstance. It is there the demon lurks, like the gonococcus in the folds of the prostate. My time is limited’ (*T*, 197). As Malone’s stories begin to grow in length, however, Joseph Brooker has drawn attention to the extent to which this ‘excess of circumstance’

starts to feel tedious for the reader, who feels that ‘a minor matter is flowering into a concern in its own right’, but without a purpose or end in sight. Accordingly, Brooker argues that storytelling in *Malone Dies* is transformed into a source of boredom, where the lack of event and sequence prove tedious, producing not so much a ‘specific weariness’ but a ‘weariness with specificity as such’ (Brooker 2001, 32). We might think of Malone’s narrative, then, as either a prolonged death bed-struggle or a protracted period of labour, marked by a dilating sense of toil for the reader, which induces a series of violent throes that are enacted in Malone’s own writhing twists and turns away from his stories, but which ultimately never delivers the longed-for act of birth or death. Brooker shrewdly remarks that boredom:

[B]egins in stasis, inertia, and the tepid, yet the very continuation of these things, the very persistence of the eversame, is what drives the boree to suffering, to groans and howls, to a condition like pain – a pain of the mind rather than the body, maybe, save that we can hardly be sure of the realms between those realms in this text.

(2001, 35)

Given this expansive narration, Salisbury notes that Malone’s ‘stories, which might serve as a distraction from himself and thus hasten his end’, only end up producing ‘further throes’, becoming ‘the very thing which makes an ending impossible’ (2012, 164). We might envisage Malone’s convulsive narrator’s throes as a form of perpetual dying, that he, like the Proustian subject ‘has died – and perhaps many times – on the way’ (*PTD*, 3). Salisbury argues, however, that these throes are more anal than they are convulsive:

As Malone’s stories are delivered into the world according to an irresistible ‘sense of dilation’ and marked by the peculiarly Beckettian association of birth with anality, there is a beginning of a sense that bodily motions might produce matter that would only magnify the subject’s spatial occupation in the world, rather than enact any wasting away.

(164)

On the one hand, this dilation appears to produce a narrative of overdetermined plenitude, where a profuse amount of circumstantial details is conferred upon everyday objects. Take, for instance,

Malone's description of his exercise-book, a description which, after he has finished, Malone suggests might do away with dilation itself: 'Now I need not dilate on this exercise-book when it comes to the inventory, but merely say, Item, an exercise-book, perhaps giving the colour of the cover' (210). Two things stand out here. Firstly, the closing comment of this sentence appears to go against the grain of Malone's thoughts, for providing the 'colour of the cover' expands the sentence, epitomising the very thing that he is trying to denounce. Secondly, this renunciation of narrative dilation only occurs after a prolonged description of the materiality of the exercise-book, from its paper to its marginalia:

Knowing perfectly well I had no exercise-book I rummaged in my possessions in the hope of finding one. I was not disappointed, not surprised. If tomorrow I needed an old love-letter I would adopt the same method. It is ruled in squares. The first pages are covered with ciphers and other symbols and diagrams, with here and there a brief phrase. Calculations, I reckon. They seem to stop suddenly, prematurely at all events. As though discouraged. Perhaps it is astronomy, or astrology, I did not look closely. I drew a line, no, I did not even draw a line and I wrote, Soon I shall be quite dead at last, and so on, without even going on to the next page, which was blank.

(209-210)

On the other hand, the protagonist's violent death throes appear to be enacted in the disjunctive intermissions that disrupt his stories, as, for instance, when he interrupts the beginning of the story about Saposcat to deride his own narration: 'What tedium. And I call that playing' (189). Linking these self-reflexive comments to Malone's 'old aporetics' (188), Hill argues that 'after every defeat', the narrator is acutely aware of 'a fundamental lack of passage, rhetorical as well as bodily', which denies his play any success, as the narrative dissolves into an 'aporetic – constipatory – paralysis' (1990, 103, 64). If, as we have seen in the third chapter, *Watt* might be thought to formally enact such a constipatory paralysis, Malone's narrative often seems closer to a series of laboured contractions, where dilation does eventually occur, as a new narrative episode proceeds:

Sapo loved nature, took an interest.

This is awful.

Sapo loved nature, took an interest in animals and plants and willingly raised his eyes to the sky, day and night.

(*T*, 191)

Considering how antithetical this type of narration is to his avowed principle of play, he contemplates discarding the story of Sapo, only to reaffirm the importance of a narrative of violent interjections:

Already I forget what I have said. That is not how to play. Soon I shall not know where Sapo comes from, nor what he hopes. Perhaps I had better abandon this story and go on to the second, or even the third, the one about the stone. No, it would be the same thing. I must simply be on my guard, reflecting on what I have said before I go on and stopping, each time disaster threatens, to look at myself as I am. This is just what I wanted to avoid. But there seems to be no other solution. After that mud-bath I shall be better able to endure a world unsullied by my presence.

(*T*, 189)

The stories Malone tells tend to dilate, gradually increasing in detail, whilst his disjunctive interruptions appear to be the antithesis of the neutrality he espouses at the start of the novel: 'I will not weigh upon the balance any more, one way or the other. I shall be neutral and inert' (179). Instead, these interruptions seem like severe pangs or spasms, for after providing Sapo with 'eyes as pale and unwavering as a gull's', he has to seek relief by taking a 'little rest': 'I don't like those gull's eyes. They remind me of an old shipwreck, I forget which. I know it is a small thing. But I am easily frightened now. I know those little phrases that seem so innocuous and, once you let them in, pollute the whole of speech. *Nothing is more real than nothing*' (193, emphasis mine).

Want of a Homuncule

The oscillation between ingestion and excretion allows Malone to variously incorporate and discard his stories, whilst a later passage explicitly ties the birth and destruction of the other to the poles of the 'dish' and 'pot' through an allusion to Goethe's work. Shortly after losing his pencil for forty-eight hours, Malone envisages himself as a foetus 'clinging to the putrid mucus', where the window to the outside world 'seems to be my umbilicus' (224) which, to quote a later passage, sees him being given

'birth to into death' (260): 'Yes, an old foetus, that's what I am now, hoar and impotent, mother is done for, I've rotted her, she'll drop me with the help of gangrene, perhaps papa is at the party too, I'll land head-foremost mewling in the charnel-house, not that I'll mewl, not worth it' (224). Here, the dilation inherent within the telling of his stories appears to stem from the need for the other:

All the stories I've told myself, clinging to the putrid mucus, and swelling, swelling, saying, Got it at last, my legend. But why this sudden heat, has anything happened, anything changed? No, the answer is no, I shall never get born and therefore never get dead, and a good job too. And if I tell of me and of that other who is my little one, it is as always for want for love, well I'll be buggered, I wasn't expecting that, want of a homuncule, I can't stop.

(T, 226)

The allusion to the 'homuncule', as Dirk van Hulle has noted, derives from Beckett's notes on Goethe's play *Faust*, which he read in the summer of 1936 alongside *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, before typing out a copy of the poem 'Prometheus' (van Hulle 2006, 283). After filling two copybooks with excerpts from Robert's Petsch's introduction and fragments from *Faust I*, Beckett stopped reading in the middle of *Faust II*, with the last excerpt taken from 'the passage about the genesis of the homunculus' (van Hulle 2009, 167). In this scene, Mephistopheles' comments upon the creation of his creature, 'I can't stop' and 'not knowing what it is I do', indicate 'the idea of bringing about processes one cannot control', before concluding 'with a sarcastic remark on the way we become dependent on the creatures we make, a sneer Beckett did not fail to notice: *'Am Ende hängen wir doch ab / Von Kreaturen, die wir machten* (Ger. Eventually we depend on creatures we ourselves created)' (RUL MS 5005, 31, qtd. in van Hulle 2006, 291). Productively, van Hulle links this comment to a footnote in Otto Rank's *The Trauma of Birth* that refers to an article by the psychoanalyst Herbert Silberer entitled 'Der Homunculus', first published in 1914 in the journal *Imago*, which 'takes the creation of the homunculus in Goethe's *Faust* as a starting point' (van Hulle 2009, 171). In this article, van Hulle explains:

Silberer draws attention to the homunculus as a motif that links alchemy to fertility myths and to excrements, according to the following reasoning: the primary aim of alchemy is not the creation of a homunculus, but the production of gold, and many alchemists believed that the ingredients employed to produce gold had to fully decompose first in order to become fertile, so that the fertilization or insemination could take place and the gold could start growing.

(171)

This link between excrement and fertility places us squarely in the realm of the coprophagic economy of Ballyba that we examined in the previous chapter, yet in *Malone Dies*, the birth of a ‘homunculus’ subsequently leads to an act of ingestion: ‘Yes, a little creature, I shall try and make a little creature, to hold in my arms, a little creature in my image, no matter what I say. And seeing what a poor thing I have made, or how like myself, I shall eat it’ (*T*, 226). If the homunculus denotes a figure created out of excrement in Silberer’s paper, then Malone’s act of ingestion soon occasions both the creation and destruction of another character, in accordance with his oscillation between the ‘[d]ish and pot, dish and pot’ (185), or with the scattering and sweeping motions of the hand that ‘fondles’ and ‘ravages’ Malone’s internal organs (225). Accordingly, Sapo is soon destroyed, transformed into Macmann: ‘For Sapo – no, I can’t call him that any more, and I even wonder how I was able to stomach such a name till now. So then, let me see, for Macmann, that’s not much better but there is no time to lose, for Macmann might be stark staring naked under this surtout’ (230).

Voiding, Vomiting and Phantom Births

Dilation and throes may be central to the reader’s experience of Malone’s narrative, but Leslie Hill notes that instead of an ‘ordered dialectical polarity of subject and object’, the narrative oscillates ‘to-and-fro across the text’ in a ‘series of bodily motions’, where the poles of ingestion and excretion are continually ‘counterbalancing, deferring [and] contradicting the other’ (1990, 78). Before Malone’s mention of this ‘dish’ and ‘pot’ polarity, however, there is a more oblique reference to an act of expulsion, as he reveals: ‘I shall never be hot nor cold any more, I shall be tepid, I shall die tepid, without enthusiasm’ (*T*, 180). In relation to this image, Connor observes that Malone is ‘presumably looking forward with pleasure to the fate promised in Revelation 3:16 for the lukewarm soul: ‘because

thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth' (qtd. in Connor 2008, 65-66). While the homuncule provides us with an image of Malone ingesting his creatures, this oblique allusion seems to find the narrator longing for death, for a higher authority to come along and expel him from existence. The movement between what Malone later calls his 'system of nutrition and elimination' appears to attempt, in fact, to drive the narrative forward, because it allows the narrator to potentially 'leav[e] this subject and enter upon another' (*T*, 220-1). As his body dissipates, however, Malone's control over what exactly he might excrete or expel deteriorates accordingly, either drying up or running the risk of becoming too excessive. Take the 'nozzle' of his penis, for instance, from which we are told that formerly 'clouds and gouts of sperm came streaming and splashing up into [his] face' in 'a continuous flow', whereas nowadays, it can only be expected to 'drip a little piss from time to time' (*T*, 235). Conversely, however, his anus seems to have taken on, in Salisbury's delightful phrase, 'such potential expanse and power that it could achieve an intercontinental incontinence': 'if my arse suddenly started to shit at the present moment, which God forbid, I firmly believe the lumps would fall out in Australia' (2008, 164; *T*, 235).

When Malone provides an extended description of his present state, his digestive system appears to go into overdrive, increasing the frequency of his peristaltic contractions, so that the regular polarity of ingestion and excretion is disrupted:

It is in vain I dispatch my table to the door, bring it back beside me, move it to and fro in the hope that the noise will be heard and correctly interpreted in the right quarters, the dish remains empty. One of the pots on the other hand remains full, and the other is filling slowly. If I ever succeed in filling it I shall empty them both out on the floor, but it is unlikely.
(*T*, 253)

The sense that both narrative and digestion are slowly slipping out his control is exacerbated by his memory of a 'little phial' amongst his possessions which remains unlabelled: 'Laxatives? Sedatives? I forget. To turn to them for calm and merely obtain diarrhoea, my, that would be annoying' (256). Malone admits, however, that recently he has 'stopped eating' and so 'produce[s] less waste' and 'eliminate[s] less' (253), a comment that can presumably be attributed to the fact that he has

temporarily stopped talking of Macmann. Despite this, the narrator can bring neither existence nor language to a final end, because providence seems intent on providing for such ‘impotent old men’: ‘And when they cannot swallow any more someone rams a tube down their gullet, or up their rectum, and fills them full of vitaminized pap, so as not to be accused of murder’ (*T*, 253-4). Whilst Malone dreams of dying of starvation, neither his appetite can be sated nor his thirst slaked, in contrast to a political prisoner, the ‘Lord Mayor of Cork’, who ‘lasted for ages, but he was young, and then he had political convictions, human ones too probably, just plain human convictions’ (275). As Eoin O’Brien observes, this is an allusion to Terence MacSwiney, who ‘went on hunger strike’ in August 1919 to ‘draw attention to Ireland’s claim to independence’ and died in a Brixton jail ‘after seventy-three days without food’ (O’Brien 1993, 67). This political act is, however, hardly memorialised, with the narrator deriding the extent of MacSwiney’s hunger strike: ‘he allowed himself a sip of water from time to time, sweetened probably’ (*T*, 275). Towards the end of the novel, Malone appears to reverse the dish and pot dichotomy that might allow him to respectively destroy with the oral or create with the anal. When he decides to kill Moll, this is achieved through a phantom pregnancy, which causes her to emit foul smells, to lose her hair and to convulsively retch up her being: ‘Turning away, so that her lover should only see her convulsive back, she vomited at length on the floor’ (266). The convulsive throes of labour become, to quote Leslie Hill, ‘a botched expulsion of undigested matter’ (1990, 92).

While at the start of Malone’s narrative it is relatively simple to associate expulsion with birth and ingestion with destruction, this sense of parturition and annihilation collapses as he abandons the first person pronoun towards the end of the narrative. When Lemuel murders Maurice and Ernest in the final pages, the prose adopts a halting syntax full of fragmentary clauses, but although this coincides with ‘gurgles of outflow’ (289) that might seem like an act of birth, the final lines seem to acknowledge a relinquishing of the violence of authorial control, if not a clear act of death:

or with it or with his hammer or with his stick or with his
 fist or in thought in dream I mean never he will never
 or with his pencil or with his stick or
 or light light I mean

never there he will never
never anything
there
any more

(289)

What seems to be expressed, then, is a final absence akin to the novel's original title of *L'Absent*, but whereas Otto Rank's text praises Freud for calling 'our attention to the child's negative idea of death', which is expressed in the fact that the child 'treats a dead person as one temporarily absent' (Rank 1973, 23-24), this radically ambiguous terminus precludes the neat equation of the 'never more' with death.

If Malone's convulsive narrative trajectory is marked by a series of dilations and throes, this chapter has suggested that Beckett's novel draws a marked parallel between neurological disorders and convulsive writing through the symptoms of epilepsy. Turning to Otto Rank's *The Trauma of Birth* allowed Beckett, not only to produce a convulsive narrative that would reproduce the contractions and dilations of child-birth, but to develop Rank's imagery, into a convulsive trajectory that refuses to clearly attribute its throes to either a protracted death-bed struggle or a prolonged period of labour.

CHAPTER SIX

‘There go the impurities’: Contamination, Respiration and *The Unnamable*

[S]o given am I to thinking with my breath.

– Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing VII*, CSP, 94

In his posthumously published notes on the final novel of Beckett’s post-war trilogy *The Unnamable* (1957-58), the German philosopher Theodor Adorno draws attention to that text’s recurrent tropes of contamination, repulsion and waste. Having begun to read Beckett’s works in the early 1950s, before writing an essay on *Endgame* that was first published at the end of his second volume of *Notes to Literature* (1961), Adorno read *L’Innommable* in 1962 in the first edition of Elmar Tophoven’s German translation – *Der Namenlose* (1959) – making extensive notes in preparation for an essay that never materialised. Despite the high esteem in which Adorno appears to have held Beckett’s novel, however, Shane Weller has recently observed that references to *The Unnamable* are relatively few and far between in Adorno’s published works. Weller notes, for instance, that in the essay ‘Titles’ (1962), Adorno claims that the novel’s title ‘not only fits its subject matter but also embodies the truth about the namelessness of contemporary literature’ (Adorno 1992, 4), whereas the essay ‘Commitment’ (1962) argues that, alongside Kafka’s prose, Beckett’s plays and his ‘truly monstrous novel *The Unnamable*’ make ‘officially committed works look like pantomime’ (Adorno 2002, 191; Weller 2010b, 181-2). In addition to this, in the paralyponema to his posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), Adorno observes that ‘[t]he Beckettian zero point – the last straw for a howling philosophy of culture – is, like the atom, infinitely full’, before linking his work to the ‘threat of a false destruction of culture’ and suggesting that ‘[t]he “*Il faut continuer*”, the conclusion of Beckett’s *The Unnamable*, condenses this antinomy to its essence: that externally art appears impossible while immanently it must be pursued’ (Adorno 1997, 320).

In each of these instances, however, Weller remarks that ‘one gets little sense of the specificity of *The Unnamable*, of what it is that led Adorno to single it out from Beckett’s other post-war works’ (2010b, 182), yet the same can hardly be said of Adorno’s notes and marginalia. Following his earlier essay on *Endgame*, Adorno labels *The Unnamable* a ‘parody of the philosophy of the remainder’ (2010, 170), which the former had defined as those ‘residual philosophies’ that ‘would like to bank the true and the immutable after removing temporal contingency’ (2003, 1120). Whereas his earlier notes made in preparation for the essay on *Endgame* claim that Beckett takes the theological dictum of *Genesis* 3:19, ‘unto dust thou shalt return’, to its logical conclusion in a process where ‘filth, the most intimate, chamber pot, piss, pills are the universal as remainder’, *The Unnamable* occasions a radical reduction of the subject: ‘The sovereign *ego cogitans* is transformed by the *dubitation* into its opposite’ (2010, 170, 173). This constriction transforms everything that exists (including the subject) into ‘a negative quality, into *less* than nothing (filth and stump are less than a remnant)’ (173). Accordingly, Adorno describes Beckett’s writing by means of verb, equating *The Unnamable*’s negativity with an act of ‘absolute discardment, because there is hope only where nothing is retained’, while his final note focuses upon Beckett’s subtractive aesthetic, remarking that this work should be thought of as one denoting ‘not abstraction but subtraction’ (178). In an earlier entry, however, the German philosopher links this radical reduction of the subject to ‘filth [*Dreck*]’, and to the ‘[d]isgusting’, ‘decaying’ imagery of Naturalism and Rimbaud, before enjoining himself to ‘[s]upply a theory of the repellent’ (173, 177).

Adorno’s reading of *The Unnamable* is a historically mediated one, albeit one that refuses to ‘offer any alternative to the horror of modernity’, instead articulating a resistance to that world ‘*in the negative*’ (Weller 2010b, 192). In contrast, the novel’s vision of the ‘repellent’ can be read as one that destabilises and disperses Jean-Paul Sartre’s treatment of language in *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* (1947). In this text, the French philosopher and writer simultaneously aligns his notion of *littérature engagée* with the rejection of a poetic, non-utilitarian language and a ‘cleansing’ (*nettoyage*) and ‘curing’ (*guérison*) of language (Sartre 1950, 210). As this final chapter unfolds, it opens by discussing Sartre’s treatment of language, before turning to consider the recurrent tropes of

contamination, emesis and respiration in *The Unnamable*. In doing so, it reads the speaker's interest in respiration alongside Ernest Jones's description of the anal erotic symptom of the 'flatus complex', where the individual displays a preoccupation with internal hygiene that manifests itself through 'a passionate interest in the subject of breath control' (Jones 1923, 702). With this in mind, the chapter briefly detours to evaluate the extent to which the short, terse dramaticule *Breath* (1969), written by Beckett whilst he was suffering from a lung abscess, might be thought to stage the Freudian theory of the anal erotic. Soiled by words that are forcefully introjected into its orifices by the voice of the other, which is variously identified as Basil, Mahood, '[m]y master', 'a whole college of tyrants', 'your Lordship', 'these maniacs' or 'my purveyors' (*T*, 312, 312, 315, 329, 354), the speaker's preoccupation with purification collapses, as, to quote Laura Salisbury, 'words contaminate the body into which they are violently forced, infecting the subject so that it vomits and brings up a monstrosity that can never be the longed-for thing itself – a means of expressing the self alone – but will always be some kind of regurgitated other' (2012, 165). Instead, the radical reduction of the subject coincides with a perpetual condition of dyspepsia and emesis, where the speaker's excorporation of language seems almost like a defensive mechanism against language itself. This endless ingestion and excretion of language operates, in fact, at the level of syntax through a rhetorical form which the chapter describes as an etiolated epanorthosis, whose self-cancellations can be linked to Beckett's interest in the symptoms of obsessional neurosis, as *The Unnamable's* acts of syntactical discardment accrete into the resistant materiality of textual waste.

Sartre, Language and Purification

The first wave of existentialist-humanist approaches in Beckett studies repeatedly located Beckett and Sartre's work together under the rubric of French existentialist phenomenology through the themes of anguish, absurdity, choice and freedom; however, as Connor has recently noted, for the past twenty years, Sartre has remained conspicuous by his absence. 'The extent to which Sartre's form of existentialist philosophy dominated the field', argues Connor, 'can be measured by the [recent] negative imprint of his absence', for 'Sartre was so ubiquitous that only a massive and sustained act of

philosophical cleansing could scour him so completely from the field of intellectual reference' (Connor 2009, 56). Aside from Connor's recent essay on nausea in both writers, however, there have been a couple of notable exceptions to this rule: in *Beckett and the Problem of Irishness* (2009), Emilie Morin sets the parameters of her reappraisal of Beckett's handling of the Irish subject in relation to the questions of autonomy, responsibility, engagement and disengagement that emerged in debates between Adorno's 'Commitment' and Sartre's *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*. While Beckett's work remains antithetical to the 'Sartrean notion of commitment', Morin argues that it maintains a 'residual degree of engagement with an Irish historical predicament by way of a *disengagement* from it', before analysing *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot* in relation to the primitivism of the Irish Literary Revival through Sartre's concept of 'scarcity' (Morin 2009, 4, 17). Slightly further back, although Thomas Trezise's *Into the Breach* (1992) predominantly rejects the notion that subjectivity in Beckett's writing might be read under the auspices of existential humanism and phenomenology, instead suggesting that his 'prose signals the exhaustion or failure of subjectivity itself', his conclusion seems slightly more amenable to the question of Beckett's relationship with Sartre. Trezise admits that this failure of subjectivity could be thought of as a response to Sartrean phenomenology, as Beckett 'defines the "subject of literature" in terms of a general economy of signification that conditions and exceeds the universe of phenomenology' (Trezise 1992, 5, 160). Significantly, Trezise quotes a passage from Sartre's text where the French writer aligns his notion of *littérature engagée* with a purification of language (1992, 162), although he does not relate it to the vexed question of contamination in *The Unnamable*. If Beckett criticism appears to be tentatively returning to Sartre, this chapter represents another small step in that direction.

For Sartre, the concept of committed literature is restricted to prose rather than music, painting, poetry or sculpture, since the former functions solely at the level of content: 'the writer deals with meanings [...] The empire of signs is prose; poetry is on the side of painting, sculpture and music' (1950, 4). In contrast to the utilitarian nature of prose, where words are 'conceived as a kind of instrument', Sartre claims that poetry represents a domain which blindly 'serves' language, since '[p]oets are men who refuse to *utilize* language' (4-5). Rather than the 'monstrous couplings' that

might destroy the 'word', an act exemplified by the phrase 'horses of butter' from Georges Bataille's *Inner Experience* (1943), the poet 'considers words as things and not as signs' (5); a reflection of the external world whose self-extension appears to mirror the groping prods of Malone's stick:

For the poet, language is a structure of the external world. The speaker is *in a situation* in language; he is invested with words. They are prolongations of his meanings, his pincers, his antennae, his spectacles. He manoeuvres them from within; he feels them as if they were his body; he is surrounded by a verbal body which he is hardly aware of and which extends his action upon the world. The poet is outside language.

(6, emphasis in the original)

For the poet, then, language connotes the issue of bodily projection that Sartre discusses in his chapter on 'The Body' in *Being and Nothingness* (1943); the poet considers words 'as if they were his body', as if this verbal body were an extension of his own, rather than a sign that might 'throw him out of himself into the midst of things' (6). In contrast, Sartre argues, prose is fundamentally utilitarian: 'I would readily define the prose-writer as a man who *makes use* of words' (emphasis in the original). As such, the prose-writer recognises that words 'are first of all not objects but designations for objects':

Prose is first of all an attitude of the mind. As Valéry would say, there is prose when the word passes across our gaze as the glass across the sun. When one is in danger or in difficulty one grabs any instrument. When the danger is past, one does not even remember whether it was a hammer or a stick; moreover, one never knew; all one needed was a prolongation of one's body, a means of extending one's hand to the highest branch. It was a sixth finger, a third leg, in short, a pure function which was assimilation

(10-11)

Analysing a number of passages in *Being and Nothingness* that collapse the neat distinction between the body and the world, and, in particular, one where Sartre claims that 'my body always extends across the tool which it utilizes: it is at the end of the telescope which shows me the stars; it is on the chair, in the whole house' (Sartre 1984, 325), Connor relates such imagery to the speaker of *The*

Unnamable, who longs to elucidate his circumstances by plying a ‘stick or pole’ into the air: ‘I would dart it, like a javelin, straight before me and know, by the sound made, whether that which hems me round, and blots out my world, is the old void or a plenum’ (Connor 2009, 59; *T*, 302). With this in mind, Connor claims that the experience of ‘being able to project physically’ represents a ‘kind of Sartrean project’, a ‘surpassing of the condition of helplessness’, so that ‘where for Merleau-Ponty, embodiment can be spoken of as a condition, for Sartre, bodily existence is never anything but a project of striving’ (2009, 59-60).

It is this sense of bodily striving that this section will try to keep in view, both in terms of Sartre’s sense of necessity of cleansing the instrument of language and in the parodic reprisal of this conjunction between contamination, purgation and writing in *The Unnamable*. For Sartre, both language and writing are essentially communicative, but throughout his text this pragmatic process of communication is complicated by the contamination and pollution of language. The writer’s ‘function is to deliver messages to his readers’, but in doing so, he suffers from an anxiety surrounding the notion of contamination, as he knows that ‘he speaks for freedoms which are swallowed up, masked, and unavailable; and his own freedom is not so pure; he has to clean it’ (1950, 17, 49). Since freedom is tied to concrete negativity, that is, to the writer’s ability to reject a certain aspect of the world, this negativity runs the risk of becoming stained by its own denial, as ‘it is not a matter of the abstract power of saying no, but of a concrete negativity which retains within itself (and is completely coloured by) what it denies’ (51-52). If this image speaks of a fear of pollution, it is, in fact, consistent with the rest of Sartre’s treatise, where the tropes of digestion, disgust and taste are endlessly recycled in his survey of French literature. In the seventeenth century, for instance, the reader may have ‘exercised a certain function of censorship which was called *taste*’, but he belonged to a ‘parasitical *élite*’ for whom writing consisted of little more than a form of social blood-letting, where satirical pamphlets and comedies re-inscribed the status quo, producing ‘the cleansings and purges necessary for its health’ (69). When the ‘bourgeois writer’ later became divorced from this *élite*, he conceived of ‘progress’ as ‘a vast movement of assimilation’, an interminable process of alimentation where ‘ideas assimilated each other and so did minds’. Accordingly, the writer no longer attempted ‘to restore the

strangeness and opacity of the world', but to 'dissolve it into elementary subjective impressions', to cut it up into bite-sized chunks that 'made it easier to digest' (87). In contrast, in the nineteenth-century the French writer had to offer ablutions and penitence to the public, promising 'to give all sorts of guarantees and lead an exemplary life in order to cleanse oneself in the eyes of the bourgeois of the sin of writing, for literature is, in essence, heresy' (191).

In this respect, Sartre invokes the 'great tradition' of the late eighteenth century, where Voltaire and the Encyclopaedists focused on 'separating by analysis that which specifically belongs to each notion from what tradition or the mystifications of the oppressor have added to it' (206). Writing is envisaged, then, as a purification of language, which would purge words of the contaminating influences attributed to them by a hegemonic political force: '[s]ince the matter and the tool of the writer are language, it is normal for writers to think of cleansing their instrument' (207). The problem for the writer situated in post-war France, however, is the sheer propensity of contaminants, as Sartre claims that 'we are living in a century of propaganda', where 'five or six enemy camps want to wrest the key-notions from each other because these are what exert the most influence on the masses' (208). Beckett had, of course, registered a similar complaint about the political turmoil of France in 'Les Deux Besoins', but instead of presenting an engaged response, this cryptic essay praises the ancient Greek philosopher Hippias for refusing to be imbricated in the petty squabbles of the Pythagorean school. His divulgement of the incommensurability of the side and diagonal may have led Hippias to be 'lynché par la meute d'adeptes affamés, vierges et furibonds dans un égout public', but as the critical voice pithily notes, he died in a stern refusal of the political: 'Il n'était ni fasciste ni communiste' (*DIS*, 56). Finally, however, Sartre aligns committed literature with a recuperative treatment of language, which aims to 're-establish language in its dignity' through an 'analytical cleansing' that rids words of 'their adventitious meaning'. Sartre writes:

The function of a writer is to call a spade a spade. If words are sick, it is up to us to cure them. Instead of that, many writers live off this sickness. In many cases modern literature is a cancer of words. It is perfectly all right to write 'horse of butter' but in a sense it amounts to doing the same thing as those who speak of a fascist United States or a Stalinist national socialism.

(1950, 210-11)

While Sartre's definition of literature is both purgative and cathartic, it finds a parodic reprisal in *The Unnamable*, where an unnamed being perceives a voice and attempts to determine whether that voice belongs to itself or to a series of 'vice-existers' (*T*, 289), variously named Basil, Mahood and Worm. The unnamable tries to determine whether this voice is spewed out of its own mouth, whether that which is being excreted is in fact himself, 'I wonder if I couldn't sneak out by the fundament, one morning with the French breakfast' (335), or whether it voided out of the mouth of the other: '[w]here do these words come from that pour out of my mouth' (373). At other times, the stories and words it excretes appear to be the product of an act of violent introjection, where 'they' insist on 'ramming a set of words down your gullet' (327). These doubts and oscillations lead to an interminable incorporation and excorporation of words, to both a fantasy of purification and a more abiding sense of contamination, with the latter gaining ascendancy as we are presented with what Peter Boxall has termed the 'repuke puke puked from the mouthless mouth of the absent narrator' (2004, 126), which, to quote Adorno, makes Sartre's vision of a purification of language 'look like pantomime' (Adorno 2002, 191).

The Respiratory Type

Now, for Adorno, Beckett and Kafka's prose challenges Sartre's notion of commitment by 'arousing the fear which existentialism merely talks about', 'dismantling appearance' and challenging the concept of literature itself, exploding 'from within the art which committed proclamation subjugates from without' (2002, 191), but *The Unnamable* can also be thought to destabilise and disperse Sartre's version of the literary via its preoccupation with purification and contamination. That Beckett himself thought of *L'Innommable* as a form of pollution is evident in a letter of 10 April 1951 to Jérôme Lindon, his publisher at Les Éditions de Minuit, which compares the sheets of the manuscript to a set of dirty linen: 'Comme je vous l'ai dit, c'est à ce dernier travail que je tiens le plus, quoiqu'il m'ait mis *dans de sales draps*. J'essaie de m'en sortir. Mais je ne m'en sors pas' (*L* I, 234 ; emphasis

mine).³³ If the sheer materiality of writing leaves the writer feeling soiled, a similar concern can be detected in *Malone Dies*, where the protagonist exhibits a marked aversion to the incorporation of those ‘little phrases’ which, once admitted, ‘pollute the whole of speech’ (*T*, 193). In *The Unnamable*, however, Sartre’s purification of language appears to be figured through the trope of respiration. Either telling or being told the story of Mahood, who may or may not be coterminous with the unnamable, at one point the narrative voice switches to the first person to describe how the trunk and head of Mahood rests in a jar outside a restaurant near the shambles and its relationship with the woman who looks after him, Marguerite/Madeleine. Due to his ‘roguish character’, which means that he has frequently escaped the jar in the middle of the night, his tossing and writhing is now restricted by a ‘collar’ that encircles his neck:

There is only really one thing that worries me, and that is the prospect of being throttled if I should ever happen to shorten further. Asphyxia! I who was always the respiratory type, witness this thorax still mine, together with the abdomen. I who murmured, each time I breathed in, Here comes more oxygen, and each time I breathed out, there go the impurities, the blood is bright red again.

(*T*, 335)

What the speaker fears, in this instant, is less the act of choking or gagging *per se*, than a constriction of the windpipe that would both prevent the smooth passage of oxygen molecules down the trachea, disrupting the periodicity of the respiratory system. Examining ‘Beckett’s atmospheres’, Connor has highlighted the ‘strong sense of the materiality of air’ throughout his work, suggesting that it is suspended between ‘the dream of an air of infinite lightness’ and ‘a heavier, more oppressive kind of air that, while it makes breathing possible, is itself an impediment to breathing’ (2006, 53). By inhaling oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide we humans are, of course, all ‘respiratory types’, but in placing particular emphasis upon the exhalation of ‘impurities’, this passage appears to envisage the respiratory system as a site of sanitisation, that appears to be in accordance with its earlier statement ‘first dirty, then make clean’ (*T*, 302). The need for an endless purification of the body appears to

³³ This phrase is rather sanitised in the English translation in the second volume of Beckett’s letters: ‘it has left me in a sorry state’ (*L II*, 234).

stem from a process of pollution or putrefaction that occurs within the body, transforming oxygen into carbon dioxide, or language into vomit and excrement. Pertinent here is the fact that Mahood's describes his 'organs of digestion and excretion' as 'not wholly inactive' (336), for what remains of his body is literally trapped in its own waste, as Marguerite/Madeleine takes his excretions from the jar to manure the lettuces on which he is fed, in what Mary Bryden rightly terms 'a perpetual and macabre nutrient cycle' (Bryden 1993, 50).

Perhaps more significant, in this respect, is Beckett's encounter with a peculiar symptom exhibited by the anal erotic in Ernest Jones's *Papers on Psychoanalysis*. Revising Isidor Sadger's short essay 'Analerotik und Analcharakter' (1910) – which contends that whereas an 'intense dislike of dirt on the body' typically denotes a 'masturbation complex', the anal erotic manifests itself in 'an aversion from dirt in regard to external objects' such as clothing or furniture – Jones argues that such reaction-formations often extend 'to the *inside* of the body', as the anal erotic is frequently marked by 'a conviction that everything inside is inherently filthy' (Jones 1923, 701). Jones notes, for instance, the 'exaggerated disgust and aversion' that is often displayed in relation to the 'idea of contaminating or spoiling', before drawing attention to the 'flatus complex' that appears to originate in the infant's predilection for 'intestinal gas', for belching or farting (702). In these symptoms, the anal erotic exhibits 'an intense aversion for already-breathed air, with a fanaticism for fresh air, a passionate interest in the subject of breath control, and the conviction that breathing exercises afford a panacea for mental and bodily ills' (703). In the longest transcription from Jones's text, Beckett noted the manner in which this symptom could extend to both 'gross inhibitions' of speech such as stuttering and to the 'finest details of syntax and grammar', recording the example of:

A man, [who was] habitually reticent in speech, cherished the ambition, largely carried out, of being able so to construct his clauses, on a very German model, as to expel all he might have to say in one massive but superbly finished sentence that could be flung out & the whole matter done with.

(703; cf. TCD MS 10971/8/19)

The dream of bringing an end to speech is, as Leslie Hill has noted, the ‘object towards which the narrator appears to be struggling’, a sort of ‘magic formula’ that would ‘allow the narrator to remain in silence and peace’, yet this ultimately never materialises, for the end of speech ‘cannot be separated from the movement of speech itself’, cannot be separated from the materiality of language or ‘embodied fully in the act of speaking’ (1990, 81-82).

The act of purification inherent within this anal erotic symptom gestures towards *The Unnamable*’s preoccupation with the trope of contamination, but it also allows us to re-evaluate the symbolism of the short dramaticule *Breath* (1969), a durational stage tableau lasting only thirty-five seconds, comprised of debris and refuse, variations in lighting and an ‘amplified recording’ of a cycle of respiration (CDW, 371). *Breath* opens with a ‘faint light’ on a stage ‘littered with miscellaneous rubbish’ for five seconds, before being interrupted by a ‘brief cry’ that leads to ‘inspiration’ and an intensification of light for a further ten seconds. This is held in silence for five seconds, before being succeeded by ‘[e]xpiration’ and a reduction of light for ten more seconds, with the play closing with the same ‘cry as before’, before being held in silence for a final five seconds (CDW, 371). The symbolic function of this breathing in *Breath* has rarely been questioned, with critics such as Ruby Cohn and Shimon Levy reading it as an analogue of the human condition; the opening vagitus is an act of birth, the closing cry a ‘death rattle’ and the detritus strewn across the stage ‘represent what man will leave behind when he dies: a heap of garbage’ (Levy 2002, 60, 49). Accordingly, Cohn links the play to questions of mortality, and, in particular, Beckett’s cancellation of a ‘second operation on his palate’ and his concerns about the forthcoming ‘operations on his eyes’ (Cohn 2001, 298); a reading supported by the fact that he linked *Breath* to one of the first versions of his ‘Long after Chamfort’ in a letter to John Kobler of 21 April 1969:

I realised when too late to repent that that it is not unconnected with
 On entre, on crie,
 Et c’est la vie.
 On crie, on sort,
 Et c’est la mort.

(qtd. in Knowlson 1996, 565-6)

A year earlier, however, he revealed in another letter to Kobler that he had been suffering from a respiratory ailment since early May 1968, as an abscess on his lung was restricting his breathing (Pilling 2006b, 179). *Breath* may, then, be linked to Beckett's own respiratory problems, but the miscellaneous rubbish and the strict periodicity of its breathing appear to stage the issues of contamination and purification that he found in Jones's description of the 'passionate interest in the subject of breath control' in the 'flatus complex' (1923, 703). These medical and psychoanalytic subtexts, in fact, lend new meaning to two later visual adaptations of Beckett's work: in Damien Hirst's adaptation of *Breath* for the 2001 'Beckett on Film' project, the 'miscellaneous rubbish' is replaced by piles of medical waste, while in an installation by the Greek artist Niko Navridis entitled *First Love, a song and the yogi* (2007), the inhalations and exhalations from a recitation of Beckett's novella *First Love* (1972-3) is juxtaposed with those from a performance by the singer/songwriter Eleftheria Arvanitaki and those of a yoga master as he purifies his body through breathing exercises.³⁴ The fact that Beckett referred to *Breath* in conversation with Ruby Cohn as a 'farce in five acts' (Cohn 2001, 298) does not merely imply, however, that its staging of a relationship between breath control and rubbish would remain incomprehensible for its audience, but that these very acts of purification are themselves incomprehensible.

One of the problems with the flatus complex is the very materiality of air, for its predilection for fresh breath implies that the contents of the external world are necessarily cleaner or purer than those of the body. For the unnamable, it may be 'ozone that matters, in the beginning, yes indeed, in the end too, it sterilises' (*T*, 369); however, this ultimately offers little comfort in a process where the rhythmic periodicity of inhalation and exhalation always seems to be disrupted: 'there's no air here, air is to make you choke [...] A great gulp of stinking air and off we go, we'll be back in a second. Forward!' (*T*, 368, 370). Words here are more like foreign objects, transforming the act of inhalation into what Salisbury terms, a gagging on 'clichés of Romantic inspiration as self-expression': 'ah misery, will I never stop wanting a life for myself... I've tried, lashed to the stake, blindfold, gagged

³⁴ This second piece was drawn to my attention in an unpublished paper by Christina Grammatikopoulou (University of Barcelona), entitled 'From Theatre to Visual Arts: Transformations of Beckett's *Breath*' at the UCD 'Samuel Beckett and the State of Ireland conference', 12 July 2012.

to the gullet, you take the air, under the elms in se, murmuring Shelley' (Salisbury 2012, 89; *T*, 397). At the same time, however, the unnamable seems to be condemned to an interminable process of laboured breathing that can neither inhale the right words nor ever come to an end; if Maurice Blanchot's review drew attention to the manner in which 'when it does not speak, it is still speaking, when it ceases, it perseveres' (Blanchot 2003a, 210), every new word seems to be equated with 'the next belch' (*T*, 380). If, in the words of Connor, 'Beckett's characters desire and aspire to the condition of expiry' (2006, 54), always, as the narrator of the eighth *Texts for Nothing* puts it, 'painting towards the grand apnoea' (*CSP*, 98), then the apnoea is never finally reached, as every exhalation necessarily occasions a new inhalation:

Then the breath fails, the end begins, you go silent, it's the end, short-lived, you begin again, you had forgotten, there's someone there, someone talking to you [...] there was never anyone but you, talking to you about you, the breath fails, it's nearly the end, the breath stops, it's the end, short-lived, I hear someone calling me, it begins again.

(*T*, 398)

The imperative to 'go on' becomes an imperative to keep on breathing: 'I can't go on in any case. But I must go on. So I'll go on. Air, air, I'll seek the air, air in time, the air of time, and in space, in my head, that's how I'll go on [...] I'll go silent, for want of air, then the voice will come back and I'll begin again' (*T*, 397). If breathing takes on the character of a reflexive compulsion, one that seems 'bound from the beginning to an obligation to express itself in a way that one could have done with all expression' (Salisbury 2012, 89), there can be no final, decisive act of expiry, only an obligation to keep on expiring, to keep on producing contaminated air that will subsequently be forced back into the body.

Contaminating Words, Contaminated Words

Mahood may envisage his respiratory cycle as a form of recycling that could purify his body through the inhalation of fresh air, or the ingestion of an unsullied matter from the world, but this vision of

incorporation is perpetually contaminated throughout *The Unnamable*, where the words which are forced into the narrating subject's mouth and other orifices are repeatedly figured as a noxious substance. Shortly after the start of the narrative, the voice repudiates the idea that it may have any sort of 'innate knowledge', before picturing itself being nourished by a group of 'delegates', who insist upon inculcating it with acquired knowledge:

Innate knowledge of my mother, for example, is that conceivable? Not for me. She was one of their favourite subjects, of conversation. They also gave me the low-down on God. They told me I depended on him, in the last analysis. They had it on reliable authority of his agents at Bally I forget what, this being the place, according to them, where the inestimable gift of life had been rammed down my gullet. But what they were most determined for me to swallow was my fellow-creatures. In this they were without mercy.

(T, 300)

The question of what, or exactly how much, may have been assimilated in this process is one that the text leaves open to question, for while the unnamable attempts to purge himself of the memory of these lectures, some of this material gets retained:

I remember little or nothing of these lectures. I cannot have understood a great deal. But I seem to have retained certain descriptions, in spite of myself. They gave me courses on love, on intelligence, most precious, most precious. They also taught me to count and even to reason. Some of this rubbish has come in handy on occasions, I don't deny it [...] I still use it to scratch my arse with. Low types they must have been, their pockets full of poison and antidote.

(300)

The 'delegates' attempt to habituate or train the unnamable's body to swallow these lessons and cultural materials, but for Elizabeth Barry, the text presents a 'resistance to consumption' that collapses the 'hierarchical structure of taste' through its 'explicit and willed resistance to culture, authority and tradition' (Barry 2006, 31-2).

Barry claims, however, that ‘Beckett’s narrators are by temperament anorexic rather than bulimic’, that is, that they are more starved than consuming; a claim which sits uncomfortably with both *The Unnamable*’s recurrent depiction of speech as an excretion or spewing of thought and feeling, and with her later claim that, within this imaginative framework, writing seems to consist of ‘a purgation rather than a construction of the self’ (39). Instead, the unnamable longs to become an anorexic, longs to no longer have to deal with the matter of the world: ‘Dear incomprehension, it’s thanks to you I’ll be myself, in the end. Nothing will remain of all the lies they have glutted me with. And I’ll be myself at last, as a starveling belches his odourless wind, before the bliss of coma’ (*T*, 327). Towards the end of the narrative, the voice’s desire for a moment of silence is inextricably bound to one that would bring an end to this interminable ingesting and regurgitation of material: ‘Unless this time it’s the true silence, the one I’ll never have to break any more, when I won’t have to listen any more, when I can dribble in my corner’ (397). Earlier in the narrative, the voice equates this silence with thirst, with the desire for, rather than an act of, consumption, that would substitute a rather more watery substance for these chunky gobbets of vomit: ‘My speech-parched voice at rest would fill with spittle. I’d let it flow over and over, happy at last, dribbling with life, my pensum ended’ (*T*, 312), yet this forgotten ‘pensum’ soon migrates from an innocuous oral emission to an anal excretion: ‘But was I ever told? Squeeze, squeeze, not too hard, but squeeze a little longer, this is perhaps about you, and your goal at hand’ (312). In this movement, Barry argues, the metaphors of writing as an ‘excretion of waste’ or ‘sexual issue’ turn back upon Beckett’s narrators, ‘threaten[ing] their integrity as mind and body become leaky and uncertain containers’ (2006, 39).

Thus, the demarcation of the body from the external world collapses within *The Unnamable*, at least in part, through the issue of contamination, for as Salisbury notes, the voice ‘never articulates words that are its own but gags on the lexicon of others’ (2012, 165). Both the words it speaks, and its attempts to speak of a self are, at all times, bound up with the language of these ‘delegates’, ‘plastered with their rubbish’: ‘What I speak of, what I speak with, all comes from them. It’s all the same to me, but it’s no good, there’s no end to it. It’s of me now I must speak, even if I have to do it with their language’ (*T*, 327, 326). They ‘dictate this torrent of balls’, ‘stuff me full of groans that choke me’,

moulding the unnamable into a creature of habit, into a loquacious parrot, into what Connor has termed, ‘an embodiment of sense without understanding or will’ (Connor 1982, 29): ‘out it all pours unchanged, I have only to belch to be sure of hearing them, the same old sour teachings I can’t change a tittle of. A parrot, that’s what they’re up against, a parrot’ (*T*, 338). Accordingly, the unnamable’s attempts to speak of its selves are thwarted by their vociferations, only possible within their language, which leads it to reiterate Kant’s dictum from the *Critique of Pure Reason*: ‘*De nobis ipsis silemus* [Of myself I can say nothing], decidedly that should have been my motto’ (332). There remains, however, a lingering hope, albeit one that never materialises, that these repeated acts of vomiting might occasion a final, decisive voiding that would spew the essence of being: ‘I have to puke my heart out too, spew it up whole along with the rest of the vomit, it’s then at last I’ll look as if I mean what I’m saying [...] Well, don’t lose hope, keep your mouth open and your stomach turned, perhaps you’ll come out with it one of these days’ (338). In contrast, for Salisbury, the only hope resides in ‘the alimentary dysfunction perhaps caused by the constant application of emetics’ (2012, 165):

It’s a poor trick that consists in ramming a set of words down your gullet on the principle that you can’t bring them up without being branded as belonging to their breed. But I’ll fix their gibberish for them. I never understood a word of it in any case, not a word of the stories it spews, like gobbets in a vomit. My inability to absorb, my genius for forgetting, are more than they reckoned with.

(*T*, 328)

The regurgitation of these words leads almost to the branding of the body, to a stigmata of ownership, but as Salisbury astutely notes, there is also perhaps a sense in which it realises that ‘these force-fed words, this matter, are not completely at one with it’ (2012, 178).

This residual sense of differentiation leads to a conflict that revolves around the subject of contamination; a subject that Steven Connor has examined in light of the relationship between *The Unnamable* and the work which Beckett’s former psychotherapist, Wilfred Bion, produced upon psychotic patients in the 1950s. Although the extent of Bion’s own relationship with Beckett remains

difficult to fathom, Connor persuasively argues that their ‘careers interpret each other in significant ways’ (2008, 32). Drawing attention to Bion’s discussion of the problems pertaining to the treatment of psychotic patients in the papers ‘The Imagining Twin’ (1950) and ‘Attacks on Linking’ (1958), Connor highlights Bion’s interest in Melanie Klein’s theory of ‘projective identification’, which Bion defines as ‘a splitting off by the patient of part of his personality and a projection of it into the object where it becomes installed, sometimes as a persecutor, leaving the psyche from which it has been split off correspondingly impoverished’ (Bion 1967, 40, qtd. in Connor 2008, 16). In the former paper, for instance, Bion links Klein’s theory to a patient who created an ‘imaginary twin’ as an expression of his ‘inability to tolerate an object that was not entirely under his control’, with the twin allowing him ‘to deny a reality different from himself’ (Bion 1984, 19). The psychoanalyst traced this frustration to a severe bout of diarrhoea that the patient had suffering during a childhood illness, which manifested itself during analysis in a preoccupation with pollution:

The central theme of the analysis was contamination: he had to protect his head from his pillow by resting his head upon his hand; he could not shake hands; he felt that he contaminated the bath on which he relied to give him a feeling of cleanliness and that it contaminated him back again.

(Bion 1984, 4).

In contrast, ‘The Development of Schizophrenic Thought’ (1955) associates Klein’s theory with ‘the psychotic personality’s inability to introject’, which leads to a reversal of ‘projective identification’, as a patient succinctly describes his inability to assimilate interpretations or objects by comparing his intestine to a brain (40). In this instance, Bion records that ‘[w]hen I said he had swallowed something, he replied, “The intestine doesn’t swallow”’, before describing the extent to which the patient experiences a sense of persecution: ‘whether he feels he has had something put into him, or whether he feels he has introjected it, he feels the ingress as an assault, and a retaliation by the object for his violent intrusion into it’ (40-1).

In ‘Attacks on Linking’, Bion explicitly associates this sense of persecution with the analytic situation, where he acknowledges the difficulties of treating psychotic patients by referring to an occasion when a patient ‘had felt [...] that I evacuated them so quickly that the feelings were not modified but became more painful’ (103). This led to a violent reaction that the psychoanalyst subsequently refers to as a form of ‘evasion by evacuation’ (117), where a thought is transformed into a ‘bad object’, ‘fit only for evacuation’ (112). When faced with the analyst’s ‘hostile defensiveness’, with ‘my refusal to accept parts of his personality’, the patient ‘strove to force them on me with increased desperation and violence’ (117, 103-4). We find, of course, a similar situation in *The Unnamable*, where the speaker experiences the voices of these ‘college of tyrants’ as a violent assault, ‘I can’t stop it, I can’t prevent it, from tearing me, racking me, assailing me’ (*T*, 281) that contaminates his body. A residual sense of differentiation allows the speaker, however, to seek revenge upon his persecutors by contaminating them with words:

I’ll impute words to them that you wouldn’t throw to a dog, an ear, a mouth and in the middle a few rags of mind, I’ll get my own back, a few flitters of mind, they’ll see what it’s like, I’ll clap an eye at random in the thick of the mess, on the off chance something might stray in front of it, then I’ll let down my trousers and shit stories on them.

(*T*, 383)

In this respect, Connor reads the logorrhoea of the speaker through Bion’s terminology, as ‘the reflex of a process of unwilled introjection’ (2008, 25), as words contaminate the subject leading it to expel abject matter that can never express its true self, but which, in the words of Laura Salisbury, ‘will always be some kind of regurgitated other’ (2012, 165). Connor argues, however, that *The Unnamable* seems ‘to call for a theory that Bion was not to develop until the 1960s’, where he ‘came to see the drama of “linkage” and “inchoation” [...] in terms of a complex physical interplay of what he called the container and the contained’ (Connor 2008, 25). In Bion’s later works, projective identification came to be envisaged ‘in terms of the attempt to fit meaningless or malevolent contents into a container, the archetypal form of which is the mother’s breast, but which can also be fulfilled by the analyst, the analytic scene, or its language’ (25). In the ‘absence of such a container’, Connor

notes, ‘these ejected non-contents come to seem more and more toxic and persecutory’ (27). In the trilogy, however, this model of containment cannot hold, for the speaker of *The Unnamable* imagines itself transforming into a much more porous entity, a ‘network of fistulae’ (*T*, 356), while it is assailed by millions of sounds that pour ‘[i]n at one ear and incontinent out through the mouth, or the other ear, that’s possible too’ (357-8). Finally, Connor suggests that these ‘acts of aggressive disidentification’ arise within ‘a context of hostility towards language and interpretation’ where Beckett’s own ‘experience of psychoanalysis may have played an important part’ (2008, 37), yet the emphasis *The Unnamable* places upon a failed purification or separation of words suggests that Sartre’s vision of ‘cleansing’ and ‘curing’ language also had a role to play.

If language contaminates the body in this text, there is also a sense in which this might be envisaged as a more reciprocal process, where the body contaminates language through a process of putrefaction. At one stage in the narrative, this putrefaction of language appears to draw its imagery from medical accounts of poisons and toxins, for after the unnamable returns from his ‘world tour’, having left his leg behind ‘somewhere off the coast of Java’ with ‘its jungles red with rafflesia stinking of carrion’, he discovers that all of his family members have died: ‘carried off by sausage poisoning, in great agony’ (*T*, 321). Finding parallels between this passage and an excised section in the *Watt* notebooks, Ackerley notes that Quin’s siblings had also died of ‘sausage poisoning’, with Beckett playing with the etymology of ‘botulism’, which derives from the Latin *botulus* (“a sausage”) (2010a, 169). He argues, however, that this is ‘more than an inverted etymological jest’, for while the parasitical flower of the ‘rafflesia’ is compared to the degenerate poet in Max Nordau’s *Degeneration*, the German writer also alludes to ‘poisoned sausage’ in his concluding ‘diatribe against a ‘diseased society’ (Ackerley 2006, 169-70). If this allusion appears to place *The Unnamable* within the realms of Beckett’s response to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discourses of literary degeneracy that were examined in this thesis’s first chapter, however, then the reference to ‘periods of Ptomaine’ (320) gestures towards a more specifically medical context.

In Osler’s *Principles and Practice of Modern Medicine*, the physician’s tenth section on ‘Intoxications’ includes a sub-section on ‘Ptomaine Poisoning’, which describes how ‘[s]ausage

poisoning, which is known by the name of *botulism*’ can produce symptoms of ‘acute gastro-intestinal irritation’ (Osler 1895, 1069). These are caused, in fact, by the ingestion of poisons and toxins that originate in a process of decomposition and putrefaction: ‘In the bacterial decomposition of animal matters chemical compounds are formed, the putrefactive alkaloids, known as ptomaines and toxins, some of which are highly poisonous’ (1069). When the voice shifts from Mahood to the ‘unexpungable’ Worm, from one avatar to another in a vain attempt to establish its own identity, the unnamable attempts to re-establish what it had earlier avoided, that is, ‘the spirit of the system’ (*T*, 294), enjoining itself to ‘proceed with method’:

I shall transmit the words as received, by the ear, or roared through a trumpet into the arsehole, in all their purity, and in the same order, as far as possible. This infinitesimal lag, between arrival and departure, this trifling delay in evacuation, is all I have to worry about. The truth about me will boil forth at last, scalding, provided of course they don’t start stuttering again.

(*T*, 352)

Here words are violently introjected into the body through the form of a suppository, ‘roared through a trumpet into the arsehole’, but the chemical and biological processes of the gut seem to undo the unnamable’s attempts to transmit these words purely, for a few pages earlier he remarks, ‘[i]s it possible certain things change on their passage through me’ (348). In the context of Beckett’s wider work, however, the fact that these words are inserted by a ‘trumpet’ recalls his earlier poem ‘Malacoda’ (1934), which shortly after the death of his father, imagines an ‘undertaker’s man’ struggling to contain his flatulence: ‘felts his perineum mutes his signal / sighing up through the heavy air / must it be it must be’ (*CP*, 10-12). The title of this poem derives, as Ackerley and Gontarski observe, from Canto XX of Dante’s *Inferno*, where Scarmiglione and other devils threaten to throw Dante into a boiling pitch, only for Virgil to restrain their leader, Malacoda, who concludes the canto by replying to the gnashing of the devil’s teeth: “‘*Ed egli avea del cul fatto trombetta*” (It. And of his arse he made a trumpet)’ (Gontarski & Ackerley 2004, 340). Even if ‘pure’ words were to be ‘roared’ into the unnamable’s anus by a ‘trumpet’, it seems that his own unruly trumpet would

return them, at least transformed, if not completely contaminated or polluted, only managing to transmit them ‘in the same order, *as far as possible*’ (T, 352; emphasis mine). The infinitesimal interval that language spends in the intestine leads to its decomposition or putrefaction, in a process where the cleansing of language becomes impossible, precisely because that cleansing has to be achieved through bodily means.

It has become something of a commonplace to draw attention to the narrative’s reliance upon an incorporation and evacuation of the material world, but in this reading, the extent to which this process leads to an undifferentiated stream of words is perhaps more significant. At one point, the speaker ponders the question of ‘whether to fill up holes or let them fill up of themselves’, before acknowledging just how physical this process has become: ‘it’s like shit, there we have it at last, there is it at last, the right word, one only has to seek, seek in vain, to be sure of finding in the end, it’s a question of elimination’ (T, 368). To defecate is to purify the body, to separate ourselves from the waste we produce, but the unnamable describes this process not as one that empties, but as a filling of the blank spaces of text with undifferentiated matter, the production of ‘one long unintelligible flow’ (Barry 2006, 39). As every phrase is thrust aside, these discarded contents begin to merge into a sort of conglomerate waste, becoming almost impossible for the reader to extract some value from them. Elizabeth Barry seems right, then, to suggest that writing emerges in *The Unnamable* as ‘the elimination of distinction itself’, whereby language renounces its differential aspects, ‘instead imitating the body and its relentlessly base physical processes’ (39). Nothing, in this respect, could be more antithetical to Sartre’s project of ‘cleansing’ and ‘curing’ language which, by its very nature, could only ever differentiate between words, transforming them in a utilitarian project that relentlessly seeks to confer value upon them, rather than admit their inadequacy.

Etiolated Epanorthosis and Obsessional Neurosis

If the speaker of the unnamable envisages his ‘pensum’ (312) as an incessant task of elimination, this process can be linked to Beckett’s interest in the symptoms of obsessional neurosis. Now, as we have

seen in the first chapter, the corporeality of Beckett's early poetics might be linked to the compulsive, spontaneous obsessions of the degenerate mind, to the concept of the '*Zwangs-Vorstellung*' or 'coercive idea' that he recorded in the *Dream* notebook from Nordau's *Degeneration* (Nordau 1993, 18-19; *DN*, 614). Similarly, Shane Weller has recently read *The Unnamable* in relation to Beckett's interest in another psychological condition, arguing: 'there is much to suggest that the condition that seizes Beckett's attention most is in fact neither hysteria nor schizophrenia, but obsessional neurosis' (Weller 2009, 44-5). To support this claim, Weller quotes an entry from 2 February 1937 in Beckett's *German Diaries* after an evening spent with the art historian Will Grohmann, where he contrasted Grohmann's 'exactness of documentation' and 'authenticity of vocation' with:

The little trouble I give myself, this absurd diary with its lists of pictures, serves no purpose, is only the act of an obsessional neurotic. Counting pennies would do as well. An "open-mindedness" that is mindlessness, the sphincter of the mind limply for ever open, the mind past the power of closing itself *to everything but its own content*, or rather its own treatment of a content.

(qtd. in Weller 2009, 45)

In light of this entry and the notes that Beckett took from Ernest Jones's *Treatment of the Neuroses*, Weller argues that 'the "il faut continuer" of *L'Innommable* may be read not as an ethical imperative – be that ethics stoic or, as Alain Badiou argues, a fidelity to a truth procedure – but rather as the stating of a compulsion' akin to what one of Jones's patients describes 'as a "feeling of mustness"' (1920, 45). Given the unnamable's compulsion to speak, 'I am obliged to speak. I shall never be silent' (*T*, 294), Salisbury has also read the novel in relation to the links that Jones's essay forges between anal eroticism and obsessional neurosis, where the psychoanalyst describes how the anal erotic 'oscillates between the two conditions of not being able to think (when he wants to) and being obliged to act and think (when he doesn't want to)' (Jones 1920, 195, qtd. in Salisbury 2012, 89).

Thinking about *The Unnamable* alongside the symptoms of obsessional neuroses may, however, ultimately prove to be more productive at the level of prosody, particularly given that Beckett's famous pronouncements on the 'obligation to express' in *Three Dialogues with Georges*

Duthuit appears to bear a closer resemblance, as Gerald Bruns first noted, to Maurice Blanchot's formulation of the writer's predicament in the untitled foreword to *Faux Pas*, which heads the opening section entitled 'From anguish to language': 'The writer finds himself in the increasingly ludicrous condition of having nothing to write, of having no means with which to write, and of being constrained by the utter necessity of always writing it' (Bruns 1997, 20-1; Blanchot 2001, 11). In his essay 'Notes Upon A Case of Obsessional Neurosis' (1909), Freud defines obsessional neurosis against hysteria by drawing attention to the different methods that such patients employ to construct symptoms. Citing the example of a young man who removed a stone from a road to protect a lady's carriage, only to return it back again, Freud notes that '[c]ompulsive acts like this, in two successive stages, of which the second neutralises the first, are a typical occurrence in obsessional neuroses' whose 'true significance lies in their being a representation of a conflict between two opposing impulses of approximately equal strength' (Freud 1955, 192). This, in fact, allows us to differentiate between hysteria and obsessional neurosis, for whereas in the former 'a compromise is arrived at which enables both the opposing tendencies to find expression simultaneously', effectively killing two birds with one stone, in the latter 'each of the two opposing tendencies finds satisfaction singly, first one and then the other' (1955, 192).

Here Freud's comments find a parallel in Beckett's essay on Bram and Geer van Velde, 'La Peinture des van Velde, ou: le monde et le pantalon' (1945-6), which was first published in a double issue of *Cahiers d'art*. In that piece, Beckett emphasises the inadequacy of language in a remark that almost seems to regurgitate Freud's argument: 'chaque fois qu'on veut faire faire aux mots un véritable travail de transbordement, chaque fois qu'on veut leur faire exprimer autre chose que des mots, ils s'alignent de façon à s'annuler mutuellement' (*DIS*, 125). Significantly, however, there is something awry with the choice of words here, for although these words align themselves so that they cancel each other out, Beckett writes of trying to make words do a true act of 'transbordement', that is, a 'transshipment', rather than say, a transference or a transmission. This performative sentence gestures towards speaking of an act of transference between words, but it disperses that very notion of transference, choosing the wrong word to highlight the difficulties of making words express something other than words. This sense of words cancelling each other out is, of course, perhaps the

most conspicuous stylistic model in *The Unnamable*; as Melanie Foehn notes, although ‘Beckett disparages “Grammar and style” as inadequate in his 1937 letter to Axel Kaun (*DIS*, 171), his reliance on rhetoric was consistent throughout his life’ (Foehn 2013, 125). For Foehn, a number of specific aspects of prosody link Beckett’s mature work to that of Pascal’s *Pensées*, including both writers’ reliance upon ‘a regressive and combinatory mode of writing, through juxtaposition, repetition, ellipsis, aposiopesis [...] parataxis – ‘the placing of propositions or clauses one after another, without indicating by connecting words the relation (of coordination or subordination) between them’ and their recourse to paradox (2013, 127, 129). What we get throughout *The Unnamable*, in fact, is a form of negativity, where each assertion is subsequently retracted, denied or contradicted, that seems close to the rhetorical device of epanorthosis, that is, ‘a figure in which a word is recalled, in order to substitute a more correct or stronger term’ (*OED*), although we would have to characterise it as an etiolated epanorthosis, since these acts of cancelling each other out function in an obverse manner, positing something, contradicting it, discarding it, before often substituting what seems to be a less correct or weaker term. After contemplating a few general remarks in the opening stages of the novel, the voice wonders how to proceed: ‘By aporia pure and simple? Or by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later?’, before abruptly calling this former method into question: ‘I should mention before going any further, any further on, that I say aporia without knowing what it means’ (*T*, 293). The sense of an oscillating rhythm of affirmation and negation that might undo every statement crops up time and again: ‘Nothing ever troubles me. And yet I am troubled’ (295-6); ‘Having nothing to say [...] I have to speak’ (316); ‘I’m Worm, no, if I were Worm I wouldn’t know it, I wouldn’t say it, I wouldn’t say anything, I’d be Worm. But I don’t say anything, I don’t know anything, these voices are not mine, nor these thoughts’ (350); ‘I must feel something, yes, they say I feel something. I don’t know what it is, I don’t know what I feel’ (386). What the reader encounters is a process where all these interminable voices are ‘revised, corrected and then abandoned’ (338), but these corrections accumulate, producing a site of textual waste that refuses to be separated or distinguished, where the unnamable’s dictum ‘first dirty, then make clean’ (*T*, 302) endlessly repeats itself ad nauseam.

In the final novel of the trilogy, Jean-Paul Sartre's vision of a literary project that might sanitise language finds a parodic reprisal mediated through the trope of respiration. Instead, in *The Unnamable*, words contaminate bodies and bodies contaminate words in a relentless cycle of incorporation and evacuation that ultimately deprives language of its differential function. Finally, the endless ingestion and excretion of language operates at the level of syntax through an adapted rhetorical device of etiolated epanorthosis, whose self-cancellations might be aligned with Beckett's interest in obsessional neurosis, as these syntactical discardments accumulate into the resistant materiality of textual waste.

CONCLUSION

The syncopated rhythm and stuttering syntax of Beckett's prose works, with their repeated convulsions, disavowals and disjunctions, mark the furthest limits of a convulsive modernism. If the rapid medical, neurological and psychological advances of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century brought both a renewed anxiety and focus to the disorderly body in the work of physicians like Jean-Marie Charcot or Etienne-Jules Marey, these were mirrored by cultural discourses that sought to equate the body of literature with decadence and degeneracy. In a similar vein, the rapid advances in medical technologies led physicians to re-write the body, in Pound's words, to make it new, in a project whose similarities with artistic and literary modernism remain to be adequately theorised. Phenomenological approaches to the experience of the subject in Beckett's work have, in this respect, proved invaluable, but they have only just begun to consider the extent to which his work mirrors these concerns and debates. At the same time, however, phenomenology has frequently failed to acknowledge the extent to which his work remains imbricated in these cultural, medical and political debates, despite being marked by a deep ambivalence towards them. Neither has phenomenology adequately theorised how the overlap between Beckett's interest in a fleshy, corporeal body and the medical developments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century finds its realisation in the extraordinary formal experimentations that mark his work.

Turning to Beckett's response to medical figures as varied as Pierre Garnier or Max Nordau, or, stepping even further afield, to the origins of Western medicine in pre-Socratic philosophy, or Jean-Paul Sartre's call for a purification of literary language, has allowed this thesis, unlike the figure of B in *Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*, to turn tail, to loop back towards the formal preoccupations that dominated post-structuralist approaches to his work in the 1980s and 1990s. The true value of this thesis lies, however, in a more rigorous consideration of two particular aspects of corporeality in Beckett's work. Firstly, in the work of post-structuralist critics such as Leslie Hill, Beckett's embodied, corporeal poetics only really begin to be realised in the writing of the Trilogy

where, in Hill's words, 'the body [...] finally dissolves into a writing, a writing that functions as a body, as a rhythm, a texture, a fabric of traces and a discharge of affects' (1990, 120). The correlation between corporeality and writing, however, as this thesis has shown, be traced to the dehiscing narrative ruptures of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* or the brachycardic and tachycardic arrhythmias that dominate *Murphy*. Secondly, turning to produce a more extensive account of Beckett's encounter with psychiatry, psychoanalysis and modern medicine has allowed this thesis to read the corporeality of his linguistic and narrative processes in new and exciting ways. Undoubtedly, there remains much to be done, but throughout this thesis, the corporeality of Beckett's work has always remained a point of departure rather than a necessary terminus. To develop this thesis even further will be turn to produce an even more thorough understanding of the overlap between literary modernism, psychiatry, psychoanalysis and modern medicine, expanding out, dilating beyond Beckett's work, yet contracting back to consider it anew.

ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Samuel Beckett

- CDW* *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber, 2006.
- CP* *The Collected Poems of Samuel Beckett*. Ed. Seán Lawlor and John Pilling. London: Faber, 2012.
- CSP* *Collected Shorter Prose: 1945-1980*. London: Calder, 1984.
- D* *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. Ed. Eoin O'Brien and Edith Fournier. London: Calder, 1993.
- DN* *Beckett's Dream Notebook*. Ed. John Pilling. Reading: Beckett International Foundation, 1999.
- DIS* *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*. Ed. Ruby Cohn. London: Calder, 1983.
- HII* *How It Is*. London: Faber, 2009.
- L I* *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1929-1940*. Ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- L II* *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1941-1956*. Ed. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn and Lois More Overbeck. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- M* *Murphy*. London: Calder, 1993.
- MPTK* *More Pricks Than Kicks*. London: Calder, 1993.
- NO* *Nohow On*. New York: Grove Press, 1996.
- PTD* *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*. London: Calder, 1999.
- T* *Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*. London: Calder, 1994.
- W* *Watt*. London: Calder, 1976.

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