Introduction: Beckett's Autography

Samuel Beckett wrote *Molloy* near the beginning of an extremely productive period (1946–1950) that saw the creation of his most famous work, *En attendant Godot*, and of the trilogy comprising of *Molloy*, *Malone meurt* and *L'Innommable*, among other works, all written directly in French. It is a period of two turnings, one from his mother tongue to writing in a new language, the other from early work that left him unsatisfied to the prolonged exploration of impoverishment, impotence and ignorance (Knowlson 1997, 351-3).

Though thematically Beckettian, the works of this period are not characterised by the concise, fragmentary form or the sparse, geometric decor that is usually associated with the author. In 'Texte pour rien II', Beckett seemingly refers to the period of *Molloy*'s production as the 'temps de la faconde' (Beckett 1958, 124). Rare in French, *faconde* is usually rendered in English as *glibness* or *wordiness*; Beckett translates his phrase as 'when life was babble' (*TFN* 82). The phrase, in either language, is a thinly veiled denigration of what, to readers, are sentences of flowing symmetry that sing their discomforting poetry with harmony and grace.

Molloy is, as H. Porter Abbott incisively remarked, two novels masquerading as one (Abbott 1973, 99). The novel's two parts, its two travellers, their two quests complement and mirror each other teasingly in a scintillating example of what Marjorie Perloff has called the state of indeterminacy (Perloff 1981). A syzygy of characters, different yet one and the same. This two-part structure is already present in the French manuscript, but to what extent this implies that Beckett had this structure in mind when he started writing is a matter that will be discussed in the present volume of the BDMP.

The genetic analysis of *Molloy* is necessarily based on the material that is still extant. The structure of this book therefore follows the Swiss textual scholar Hans Zeller's basic distinction between '*Befund*' and '*Deutung*' (Zeller 1995), record and interpretation: a description of the available documents (manuscripts, notes, typescripts, pre-book publications, editions) and the analysis of the genesis. The aim of interpreting the record is to understand Beckett's work as both a product and a process. In discussing the genesis of the French *Molloy*, the critical vantage point is the notion of the 'autograph' as coined by H. Porter Abbott. In *Beckett Writing Beckett: The Author in the Autograph*, Abbott encourages his readers to see Beckett's writing in terms of 'continuing incompletion' (Abbott 1996, 20). In the

tradition of Augustine's *Confessions* and Wordsworth's *Prelude*, 'replacing storytelling with the radically discontinuous mode of the "spot of time"' (7), Beckett developed the notion of an 'art without end' (20). Although Abbott convincingly argues that Beckett takes the Joycean 'work in progress' to another level, turning his entire œuvre into a 'work forever in progress', a work that 'must go on' (20), Abbott does not study Beckett's autograph manuscripts. In this book, we argue that, in order to further examine Beckett's autography in detail, it may be useful to take his autograph manuscripts into account. This implies the question of the relation between 'autography', the 'autograph' and the 'autographic'.

The notion of autographic art was coined by Nelson Goodman in the chapter 'The Unfakable' in *Languages of Art* (1968): 'Let us speak of a work of art as *autographic* if and only if the distinction between original and forgery of it is significant; or better, if and only if even the most exact duplication of it does not thereby count as genuine. […] Thus painting is autographic, music nonautographic, or *allographic*' (113). Like music, literature is not autographic.

But if there is only one autograph manuscript of a work of literature, the uniqueness of that document does feature some of the characteristics of autographic art. Thus the French manuscript of *Molloy* can be regarded as 'the unfakable' in Goodman's terms. Unlike its other versions (the Minuit editions, the pre-book publications, the translations by Beckett himself), this particular document shows the traces of the physical writing of the work (*Molloy*) in its entirety, the initial process of putting into words. In that sense it is unique. It is different from all the other versions because it comes much closer to what Abbott calls 'diary fiction'. As Abbott notes, one of the conventions of diary fiction is the situation of the diarist being given paper and asked to fill it while in jail (as in Maxim Gorky's 'Karamora' or Max Frisch's *I'm Not Stiller*) or taking a rest-cure (as in John Updike's *A Month of Sundays*). In Beckett's *Molloy*, the protagonist is given paper and is supposed to fill it, but the convention of the setting is absent, which emphasizes 'the gratuitousness of the text and the mysterious compulsion to write that the author shares with his creature' (Abbott 1984, 20n10). Abbott also points out that *Molloy* is 'technically not diary fiction' (20n10), but if one takes a look at the autograph manuscript, there seems to be more that the author shares with his creature than in the published version. By including the dates and places of the writing sessions, the layers of cancellations and insertions,

frequent doodling and changing script, Beckett creates a unique document that approaches the *immediacy effect* of the diary and diary fiction. Of the three main functions of diary fiction as defined by Abbott – the mimetic functions (the illusion of the real), the thematic functions (isolation and self-reflection), and the temporal functions (immediacy, suspense and timelessness) – the manuscript emphasizes the immediacy of the temporal functions: it makes its readers aware of what Gérard Genette has called 'narration intercalée' (Genette 1972, 229), the division of the protagonist into both narrator and narrated, and the division of the narration into two events, the event recorded and the event of recording.

Since 'autography' is 'self-writing', it encompasses the notion of the 'self' without taking it for granted. The 'self' is not a pregiven. It is always in the process of being written. In that sense, we hope to show that a genetic analysis of this writing process can contribute to the study of *Molloy* by adding an autographic dimension.

In chapter 1, we present the physical record. The 'genetic dossier' for *Molloy* is incomplete. We have the autograph French manuscript in four notebooks but only a partial typescript in French, relating to a passage that was cut from a lost typescript, then nothing else until the published novel. The production of the English-language *Molloy* is somewhat better represented in quantity, though nearly all surviving versions are late drafts, lightly revised. There is no complete English-language manuscript because Patrick Bowles, who translated *Molloy* 'in collaboration with the author', lost nearly all the early versions of their work (see chapter 1.2.2). We have an autograph manuscript of only a short portion of the text, partial and complete typescripts, and pre-publication excerpts. In addition, chapter 1 provides detailed information about the publication history of *Molloy* and a broadcast of sections from the novel on the BBC Third Programme.

In spite of the imperfections in the record, the French manuscript is wonderfully rich. The four notebooks, held at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin (Texas), show numerous dates. Beckett dated his writing sessions much more systematically than he did later on, if one compares this document with, for example, the French manuscript of *L'Innommable* (see *BDMP2*). As a result, it is possible – to some extent – to see by how many words the manuscript grew on a particular day. We have tried to map this quantitative development. Beckett himself counted his words (see for

instance FN2, 72v, 101v and 124v). The dating is systematic[2] enough to suggest Beckett's resolve to 'produce' a quota of 'words' per day, and there is a logic to the mechanics of creativity as part of 'the obligation to express'. We try to capture these mechanics of creativity. The physical description revealing the circumstances of the writing and the pace of the manuscript's material development is the focus in section 1.1.1. It is an attempt to present the dynamics of the writing process from the perspective of the '*Befund*', the material as we found it, before moving on to the '*Deutung*', the interpretation of the French manuscript. Readers can either start at the beginning or jump ahead and follow the cross references leading back to chapter 1, if they so desire.

The autographic dimension, then, is the main subject in chapter 2, structured according to the chronology of the writing process, following the dates and paragraph breaks as indicated in the manuscript. This 'autographic' *Molloy* comes close to what Molloy imagines his readers will think of it: 'c'est un journal intime, ça va bientôt s'arrêter' (1951, 93) – 'Oh it's only a diary, it'll soon be over' (1955, 83; *Mo* 61). The intimacy of the private atmosphere to which this autographic 'journal intime' belongs is contrasted with the first version of the novel after the 'bon à tirer' moment, the moment Beckett decided the text was ready to lead a public life (the 1951 Minuit edition). Step by step, chapter 2 retraces the journey of the writing process, which almost coincides with the narrative sequence. It delineates the text's semantic development, its intra- and intertextual echoes and allusions, its text-generating word play and permutations, and measures the distance that separates it from the published novel.

Finally, chapter 3 retraces the movement from '*Befund*' to '*Deutung*' in the translation of *Molloy*. Based on the documentation described in chapter 1, section 3.1 explores the complicated circumstances of Beckett's collaboration with Patrick Bowles while sections 3.2 and 3.3 study the drafts of the translation, including the pre-book publications in magazines, and the transition from a monolingual to a bilingual work. Unlike for the French original, this part of the genetic analysis is limited by the fact that we generally have late versions for the English text, recording mostly minor and local revisions. However, the notion of autography also extends to the act of

2 Of course, we cannot exclude the possibility that he sometimes forgot to date a new writing session.

(self-)translation, which Beckett described to his 'co-author' Patrick Bowles as an attempt to '*write* the book again in another language – that is to say, *write* a new book' (qtd. in Bowles 1994, 27; emphasis added). As such, the act of writing and the act of (self-)translation or re-writing are both part of a larger and bilingual autographic project, in which the public 'product' and the private 'process' intersect in fascinating ways.