

**BECKETT, WITH SADE:**  
**SADEAN INTERTEXT AND AESTHETICS**  
**IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S WORKS**

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*À mes Parents,  
et à Frère.*



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## THESIS ABSTRACTS

### Short abstract

#### **Beckett, with Sade: Sadean intertext and aesthetics in Samuel Beckett's works**

Elsa Baroghel, New College  
D.Phil in Medieval and Modern Languages, Michaelmas Term 2018

This thesis is the first full-length study of the relevance of the Marquis de Sade to Samuel Beckett's works. While relatively little scholarship exists on this subject, the question of a Sadean presence in Beckett's *œuvre* has been drawing increasing critical attention since the publication of Beckett's correspondence (e.g. Pilling: 2014). This thesis combines empirical and interpretative critical approaches in order to reconstitute and reassess Beckett's reception of Sade and show that his debt to him is more important than previously thought.

The thesis identifies new evidence of Sadean intertext in Beckett's works, such as direct borrowings or references, and also retraces Beckett's indirect encounters with Sade's legacy via various secondary sources. Through a cross-examination of Sade's relevance to Beckett's documented aesthetic and intellectual preoccupations, in particular philosophy, psychology and literature, the thesis aims not simply at confirming Beckett's interest in Sade, but also at piecing together a more comprehensive picture of the reasons for that interest, demonstrating that this Sadean evidence can be used as a meaningful index for a study of the evolution of Beckett's style and aesthetics, as well as providing new insights into the intertextual dimension of his creative process.

The thesis highlights Beckett's and Sade's common conflicted (and conflicting) relationship with the concept of modernity, which they both at once embrace, resist and transcend, and asks how the two authors intersect and interact within the modern history of art and ideas. It shows that Beckett's reading of Sade was from the outset conscious of his intellectual and historical context, and that his knowledge and use of Sade have important implications for his reception of Enlightenment rationalism and psychoanalytic theory, as well as for his own reflection on the human condition in the modern age.

One major objective of this D.Phil is therefore to show that reading them alongside each other casts useful lights on the aesthetic, historical and intellectual implications of their respective works.



## Long abstract

### Beckett, with Sade: Sadean intertext and aesthetics in Samuel Beckett's works

Elsa Baroghel, New College  
D.Phil in Medieval and Modern Languages, Michaelmas Term 2018

This D.Phil thesis is the first full-length study of the relevance of the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) to the works of Samuel Beckett (1906-1989). Since the publication of his correspondence between 2009 and 2014, Beckett's interest in Sade has become more widely known; while relatively little scholarship exists on this subject, the question of a Sadean presence in Beckett's *œuvre* has been drawing increasing critical attention (e.g. Pilling: 2014). However, Sade's reputation as a pornographer tends to overshadow the complex intellectual implications of his thought and work; as a result, the relatively few critical studies that broach the subject of Beckett and Sade tend to do so as an aside within a wider discussion of such themes as sexuality and violence, or approach the Beckett-Sade connection from a strictly empirical angle, without seeking to engage with Sade's writings and thought as closely as Beckett himself once did. This potentially leads to reductive preconceptions as to why, and to what extent, Beckett was drawn to Sade and, crucially, about the significance of this for his own literary production. This thesis combines empirical and interpretative critical approaches in order to reconstitute and reassess Beckett's reception of Sade and show that his debt to the 'divine marquis' (L1: 622) is more important than previously thought.

Beckett first became acquainted with Sade through a number of secondary sources in the early 1930s. He went on to read *Les 120 journées de Sodome* in 1938 – declaring it to be 'one of the capital works of the 18<sup>th</sup> century' (L1: 604) – and seriously considered publisher Jack Kahane's offer of a contract for the very first English translation of the novel. Due to the controversial nature of the enterprise, Beckett eventually declined the contract, but remained interested in Sade and still hoped to publish his own critical writing on the Marquis. By the early 1950s, Beckett had read other major works by Sade such as *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795) and started working intensely on a compilation of translations and selected criticism in preparation for a special issue on Sade, to be published in his friend Georges Duthuit's journal *transition*. While *transition* went under before Beckett and Duthuit completed their volume, this project testifies to Beckett's enduring interest in Sade, which, as this thesis argues, would continue to impact his own works up until the end of his career.

The thesis identifies new evidence of Sadean intertext in Beckett's works, such as direct borrowings or references, and also retraces Beckett's indirect encounters with Sade's legacy via various secondary sources that he is known to have read and exploited in his own works. Through a cross-examination of Sade's relevance to Beckett's documented aesthetic and intellectual preoccupations, in particular philosophy, psychology and literature, the thesis aims not simply at confirming Beckett's interest in Sade, but also at piecing together a more comprehensive picture of the reasons for that interest, demonstrating that this Sadean evidence can be used as a meaningful index for a study of the evolution of Beckett's style and aesthetics, as well as providing new insights into the intertextual dimension of his creative process.

The thesis asks how the two authors intersect and interact within the modern history of art and ideas, paying close attention to the fact that Beckett's reading of Sade was from the outset conscious of his intellectual and historical context. Though Sade wrote most of his works in the eighteenth century, it was not until the early twentieth century that he slowly began to be rehabilitated as a literary figure by avant-garde intellectuals and daring publishers despite the censorship ban on his works. As this thesis demonstrates, it is significant that this was also the context in which Beckett started to develop as a writer and a thinker; indeed, his knowledge and use of Sade have important implications for his reception of Enlightenment rationalism and psychoanalytic theory, as well as for his own reflection on the human condition in the modern age. Sade and Beckett have in common a conflicted (and conflicting) relationship with the concept of modernity, which they both at once embrace, resist and transcend; one major objective of this research is therefore to show that reading them alongside each other casts useful lights on the aesthetic, historical and intellectual implications of their respective works.

In order to best accommodate the paradigmatic dimension of this enquiry into the evolution of Beckett's works, the thesis follows a chronological outline, corresponding to the common rough division of Beckett's career into his early works (up to the late 1940s), middle period (late 1940s to late 1950s) and later works (late 1950s to Beckett's death in 1989). Due to its focus on Beckett's creative process, this study examines Beckett's works primarily in the language in which they were first written, e.g. *Watt* in the original English, *Molloy* in the original French.

Chapter One begins with a retrospective of Beckett's earliest encounters with Sade's legacy in the 1930s through to the late 1940s, reviewing texts in which he came across mentions of Sade and/or 'sadism', such as Guillaume Apollinaire's *L'Œuvre du Marquis de Sade* (1909), Marcel Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913) and Mario Praz's *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica* (1930; translated as *The Romantic Agony* in

1933). It investigates the first manifestations of Beckett's interest in Sade in his literary and critical writings, analysing direct nominal references and representations of sadistic practices in these early works. This chapter then analyses Beckett's use of Sadean rhetoric as a parodic model for his own satire of Enlightenment (especially Kantian) rationalism and ethics, as well as mind-body dualism, arguing that Sade's anti-Cartesian relocation of epistemological 'truth' in the physical realm mirrors Beckett's own eroticisation of the mental realm, which, I argue, constitutes a solipsistic allegory of artistic creation. This leads to a comparative study of Beckett's and Sade's representations of the body, in particular as regards their respective uses of the aesthetics of disgust and sexual grotesquerie, as well as their scathing portrayals of the female body, allowing for a discussion of Beckettian (and Sadean) misogyny and its revival of the *contre-blason* genre once popular in sixteenth-century French poetry.

Chapter Two focuses on works written in the late 1940s and in the 1950s, and explores Beckett's reception of psychoanalytic theory as a terrain of interaction with Sade's legacy, drawing on Freud's appropriation of the vulgarised notion of sadism in his theories on the 'anal-sadistic phase' and 'anal-sadistic disorders'. This enquiry is grounded in the conceptual filiation drawn between Beckett's, Sade's and Freud's respective views on the relationship between desire and existential suffering, and Schopenhauer's philosophical pessimism – or, in Beckett's words, his 'intellectual justification of unhappiness – the greatest that has ever been attempted' (*LI*: 33). Anal-sadistic themes and patterns in Beckett's works, such as coprophilic practices and symbols, are analysed in the light of Beckett's unpublished and detailed notes taken in the early 1930s on the theory of anal sadism, as expounded by Freud disciple Ernest Jones in his *Papers on Psychoanalysis* (1912). The chapter then examines the relationship between anal-sadistic motifs and Beckett's portrayal of the dynamics of alterity; in particular, it discusses Beckett's treatment of mother-figures and its implications with regard to Freud's Oedipus complex, before looking at Beckett's (pseudo)couples, and also providing a brief study of the character of Moran in *Molloy* (1951) as a Beckettian anal-sadistic archetype.

Chapter Three provides a comparative case study of Beckett's *Comment c'est* (1961) and Sade's *120 journées*, in which I argue for a Sadean impact on the form, themes and aesthetics of Beckett's text. *Comment c'est* contains one of the few explicit mentions of the term 'sadism' in his works, and a close reading of both texts provides definitive evidence that this particular occurrence refers not merely to a vulgarised, generic notion of cruelty, but to Sade specifically, thus confirming the presence of a direct intertextual borrowing. Maurice Blanchot's essay 'La raison de Sade' (1949), which Beckett knew well, is used as critical framework to interpret the Sadean dimension of Beckett's last 'novel'.

Chapter Four focuses on the recurrent themes of torture and enslavement in Beckett's later works, such as *Pochade radiophonique* (late 1950s), *As the Story was Told* (1973), 'Assez' (1966) or *What Where* (1984), and looks at what the dynamics at play between the figure of the executioner and that of the victim accomplish in a textual and dramatic context. I begin by outlining the modalities of torture in these works and in Sade's, with particular emphasis on the repeated motif of torture and its systematic association with that of language extortion. I then examine Beckett's and Sade's torturer/victim relationships in the light of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic (which enjoyed renewed popularity from the 1930s onwards), arguing that Sade, who evades Hegel entirely, simultaneously underscores Beckett's caricatural subversion of the dialectic. Torture in Beckett and Sade is then considered from a linguistic perspective, showing that Georges Bataille's comments on language, silence and the Law in Sade also apply to the dynamics found in Beckett with compelling precision. In the last section of the discussion, I argue that Sade and Beckett intersect within what may be described as *noir* aesthetics – normally regarded as having originated in English-language literature in the late eighteenth century. I first discuss the resonances between Beckett, Sade and the works of Czech-German and Jewish writer Franz Kafka (1883-1924), in particular his short story *The Penal Colony* (1919), which explores the themes of torture and the death penalty in a totalitarian context. I then turn to Maurice Heine's 1933 essay 'Sade et le roman noir', which Beckett had read, and in which Heine presents Sade as the initiator of the gothic (later *noir*) tradition, in order to make a case for a possible reading of late Beckett as part of this tradition. In Beckett and Sade, the aesthetics of terror, which are central to *noir*, are systematically associated with the intuition of a fearsome constitutive element within the self that the text strives to bring to the fore while paradoxically resisting its emergence. The final part of this chapter therefore addresses representations of evil in Beckett, in which, I argue, he stages the concept of 'necessary evil' by drawing on Sade's intellectual justification of vice and on the aesthetics of Dante's *Inferno*, in an ironic reference to occasionalist – specifically Leibnizian – philosophy and metaphysics.

Reading Beckett with Sade illuminates connections between important concepts, patterns and motifs in his works and offers new avenues of interpretation for them. This thesis provides novel ways to make sense of Beckett's interest in Sade beyond his taste for the irreverent and the obscene, and explains what this Sadean presence accomplishes within the Beckettian *œuvre*. It also suggests that the coincidence between Sade's re-emergence in the twentieth century and Beckett's own development as a writer and thinker is symptomatic of the intellectual and political preoccupations that marked that century. As the epitome of Enlightenment rationalism gone 'mad', Sade's thought and language are inherently paradoxical, which in turn resonates

with Beckett's own poetics of aporia. The Conclusion to this thesis therefore focuses on Beckett's and Sade's poetics, particularly metadiscourse concerned with the act of looking, arguing that what unites the two authors most closely is the poetic centrality of the dynamics of introspection and imagination in their respective works.

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## REFERENCING SYSTEM AND ABBREVIATIONS USED

The author-date referencing system is used throughout, except for primary sources (i.e. works by Beckett and Sade), for which the following abbreviations are used:

### Works by Beckett:

<b>AtF:</b>	<i>All that Fall</i>
<b>CC:</b>	<i>Comment c'est</i>
<b>DBVC:</b>	'Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce'
<b>DN:</b>	<i>Beckett's Dream Notebook</i>
<b>Echo:</b>	<i>Echo's Bones</i>
<b>FdP:</b>	<i>Fin de partie</i>
<b>Godot:</b>	<i>En attendant Godot</i>
<b>HII:</b>	<i>How It Is</i>
<b>L1; L2; L3:</b>	<i>The Letters of Samuel Beckett, vols. 1, 2, 3.</i>
<b>Malone:</b>	<i>Malone meurt</i>
<b>MVMD:</b>	<i>Mal vu mal dit</i>
<b>Nohow:</b>	<i>Nohow On: Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho</i>
<b>Trilogy:</b>	<i>Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable</i>
<b>Nouvelles:</b>	<i>Nouvelles et textes pour rien</i>
<b>Poems:</b>	<i>Selected Poems 1930-1989</i>
<b>Proust:</b>	<i>Proust and Three Dialogues</i>
<b>Saorstat:</b>	'Censorship in the Saorstat'

### Works by Sade:

<b>120J:</b>	<i>Les 120 journées de Sodome</i>
<b>Aline:</b>	<i>Aline et Valcour</i>
<b>Dialogue:</b>	<i>Dialogue entre un prêtre et un moribond</i>
<b>Idées:</b>	<i>Idées sur les romans</i>
<b>NJ:</b>	<i>La Nouvelle Justine</i>
<b>PB:</b>	<i>Philosophie dans le boudoir</i>

**Beckett, with Sade:  
Sadean intertext and aesthetics in Samuel Beckett's works**

*La subversion la plus profonde (la contre-censure) ne consiste [...] pas forcément à dire ce qui choque l'opinion, la morale, la loi, la police, mais à inventer un discours paradoxal (pur de toute doxa): l'invention (et non la provocation) est un acte révolutionnaire: celui-ci ne peut s'accomplir que dans la fondation d'une nouvelle langue.*  
(Roland Barthes: 130)

**INTRODUCTION**

The richness and complexity of the intertextual dimension of Samuel Beckett's writings has long attracted sustained critical attention and has inspired important advances in the field over the past fifteen years. These include empirical and/or genetic studies concerned with archival material such as Beckett's drafts, manuscripts, and notes from his avid reading of the early 1930s (cf. Feldman), a review of the contents of Beckett's personal library (cf. Nixon and Van Hulle) and, of course, the publication of his correspondence in four consecutive volumes. Beckett is well known to have drawn phrases, motifs and other compositional elements from his eclectic readings in literature, philosophy, psychology and art criticism; however, few scholars have sought to relate themes of violence, sexuality, blasphemy and disgust in his works to his long-lasting interest in the Marquis de Sade, and there has been no full-length, systematised study on the subject until now, despite the

rich interpretative opportunities this opens with regard to Beckett's treatment of obscenity, metaphysics and desire, as well as to his reception of Enlightenment philosophy.

This thesis investigates Sade's relevance to Beckett through these connections, not only by identifying hidden references to the Marquis in the texts, but also by exploring aesthetic resonances between Sade and Beckett, as well as their complex interactions within the broader conceptual framework of French and Continental intellectual culture. This comparative approach engages with the ideas and literature of two centuries and explores the emerging contrasts between the rationalist and (post)modern worldviews. This approach allows me to show that empirical and interpretative methods are not mutually exclusive but can (and should) work together for critical accuracy and perspective, thus positioning myself within a long-standing critical debate in Beckett studies.

## **1. Contextualisation**

The Marquis de Sade was a French aristocrat born in 1740 and best known for the extremely violent, erotic and blasphemous quality of his prolific literary production, which, together with a number of crimes and offences committed throughout his life, earned him a total of twenty-seven years in prisons and asylums for the insane. The publication of *La Nouvelle Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu, suivi de l'histoire de Juliette, sa sœur*, the third version of his tirelessly

rewritten masterpiece, in 1799 (falsely dated 1797) caused him to be sentenced to life imprisonment at the Charenton asylum near Paris, where he died in 1814. His writings are among the most controversial bodies of work in Western literature and remained officially banned in France until 1957.

Despite the pressures of censorship, at the start of the twentieth century, a handful of intellectuals of various nationalities contributed to the slow and discreet dissemination of these works – some of which had been thought irretrievably lost, such as *Les 120 journées de Sodome*, which disappeared during the storming of the Bastille, where Sade was incarcerated at the time of the French Revolution in 1789. These texts began to re-emerge under various guises, often in limited or unsigned editions, presented as psycho-pathological case-studies or cited cautiously in secondary sources, in what Eric Marty has described as ‘un moment fondamental d’activisme éditorial grâce auquel, malgré la censure, les œuvres de Sade commencent à être rééditées, diffusées ou tout simplement découvertes’ (12).

In 1904, German psychiatrist Iwan Bloch published the *120 journées de Sodome* under the pseudonym Eugen Dühren; his foreword states that the aim of this publication is strictly scientific: ‘son but [...] est de mettre à la portée du savant un ouvrage dont l’importance n’est pas douteuse pour l’étude de l’origine et des formes de la Psychopathia sexualis’ (iv). Sade’s alleged scientific utility was indeed to be one of the main pretexts put forward as a justification for publication until the censorship ban on his works was lifted.

Besides Bloch's publication, literary-minded French intellectuals, such as Guillaume Apollinaire, also started taking an interest in Sade. In 1909, Apollinaire issued a limited edition of a selection of Sade's works, titled *L'Œuvre du Marquis de Sade*, with a foreword in which he described the *120 journées* as 'une classification rigoureusement scientifique de toutes les passions dans leur rapport avec l'instinct sexuel' (24). Apollinaire also predicted, with impressive accuracy, that the twentieth century would see Sade being recognised as a literary figure: 'Il semble que l'heure soit venue pour ces idées qui ont mûri dans l'atmosphère infâme des enfers de bibliothèques, et cet homme qui parut ne compter pour rien durant tout le dix-neuvième siècle pourrait bien dominer le vingtième' (27).

The main Sade pioneer, however, was writer and publisher Maurice Heine (1884-1940), who began a long enterprise of excavation and publication of Sade's works in the 1920s. Heine's editions, though 'official', had to be restricted to 'bibliophiles souscripteurs' (and therefore unavailable to the general public) in order to avoid censorship. Heine published the *120 journées* in three volumes between 1931 and 1935 and, as we shall see, this is likely to be the edition in which Beckett encountered Sade in the text for the first time only three years later. In 1956, Jean-Jacques Pauvert, a young publisher in Paris, was prosecuted for 'outrage aux bonnes mœurs' following his open and signed publication of a number of works by Sade in the late 1940s. During the trial, several prominent French intellectuals (Jean Paulhan, André Breton, Jean

Cocteau and Georges Bataille) testified in Pauvert's (and Sade's) favour, arguing that the works had qualities that counterbalanced their obscenity as well as emphasising their so-called psycho-medical value.<sup>1</sup>

While this effort to rehabilitate Sade's works as publishable texts did not begin until the turn of the twentieth century, the texts that the Marquis did manage to publish in his lifetime, together with his infamous reputation, meant that his legacy was channelled indirectly through a number of authors over the course of the nineteenth century:

[Sade's influence] extends beyond such authors as Swinburne and his Pre-Raphaelite coterie, Flaubert and the Goncourt Brotherhood; beyond Apollinaire, Guy de Maupassant, Baudelaire, André Breton, Gide, and Genet to Amiri Baraka. All these writers share with Sade a certain deviltry, iconoclasm, heresy, and unconventionality. They share the Baudelairean insistence that one must always return to Sade to observe mankind in its natural, passionate state and to understand the essential quality of evil. (Dieke: 163)

For early twentieth century commentators such as Mario Praz – to whom we will return in Chapter One – Sade's long shadow indeed shone darkly through some of the defining themes and aesthetics of the previous century, for instance Baudelaire's *ennui*, which 'is only the most generic aspect of the mal du siècle; its specific aspect is – sadism' (144).

After Sade's death, and particularly after the publication of Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), the neologism 'sadism'

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account of Pauvert's trial, see Harrison: 59-67. As Harrison notes, 'the extent to which all Sade's defendants gave the court what (they thought) it wanted, rather than what they themselves thought, should not be underestimated. Pauvert himself, looking back on the trial, wrote that all the arguments put forward by the defence had always seemed to him to be fundamentally irrelevant' (88).

gradually became a vulgarised, generic term referring to the gratuitous enjoyment of the sufferings of others, and thus acquired a lexical independence from specifically Sadean references; as Simone de Beauvoir puts it in *Faut-il brûler Sade?* (first published in *Les Temps modernes* in 1951): '[p]opulairement, sadisme signifie cruauté; fustigations, saignées, tortures, meurtres: le premier trait qui frappe dans l'œuvre de Sade c'est en effet celui que la tradition a associé à son nom' (36). This is still the definition in use today; the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines vulgarised sadism as the 'enthusiasm for inflicting pain, suffering or humiliation on others; spec. a psychological disorder characterized by sexual fantasies, urges, or behaviour involving the subjection of another person to pain, humiliation, bondage, etc'. ('sadism': in *OED Online*, April 2018).

This association between the notion of sadism and psychological disorders encapsulates some of the reasons behind Sade's relevance to and resonance with key intellectual and societal developments of the early twentieth century, such as the decline of religious faith and the advent of psychology as a scientific discipline; as Bataille wrote in his foreword to the restricted 1950 Soleil Noir edition of *Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu*: 'les instincts dénommés sadiques donnent [...] un moyen de rendre raison de certaines cruautés, alors que la religion n'en était que l'explication de fait, la raison dernière en demeurant inaccessible. [...] [E]n donnant la description magistrale de ces instincts, Sade contribua à la conscience que l'homme prend

lentement de lui-même' (viii-ix). In other words, Sade's exposition of violence and transgressive sexuality as inherent and central to the human condition was symptomatic of a gradual change which paved the way for modern reassessments of the inner workings of the human psyche. As Jacques Lacan observed in 1963, with Sade 'un déblaiement s'opère qui doit cheminer cent ans dans les profondeurs du goût pour que la voie de Freud soit praticable' (243).

As will be demonstrated throughout this thesis, it is significant that this was the intellectual climate in which Beckett began his development as a writer, favouring themes and aesthetics that, from the outset of his career, led him into similar struggles against censorship as those in which Sade's works were (still) concurrently engaged. Beckett's evident taste for 'scandalous' literature also points to Joyce as one of the earliest intermediaries between Beckett and Sade. To Joyce's own detractors, the parallel between his works and Sade's was certainly justified; as English critic Edmund Gosse wrote to French literature historian Louis Gillet in 1924: 'Mr Joyce is unable to publish or sell his books in England, on account of their obscenity. He therefore issues a "private" edition in Paris, and charges a huge price for each copy. He is a sort of Marquis de Sade, but does not write so well' (313). It is therefore hardly surprising that Beckett should have been drawn to Sade, who is widely regarded as the most scandalous author of the modern age.

## 2. Thesis overview and methodological remarks

The aim of this thesis, however, is not to restrict Sade's relevance to Beckett to their common aesthetic interest in the obscene or crude; rather, I argue that, beneath Sade's 'obscurity of surface' (*L1*: 607), Beckett found a world of discourses simultaneously nourished by and revolting against key philosophical and ideological traditions that had shaped the Enlightenment and resonated deeply with his own intellectual preoccupations in the late 1920s and early 1930s – and indeed throughout his life.

At the crossroads between philosophy, politics, pornography and poetry, Sade's sulphurous reputation sometimes undermines the intellectual dimension of his legacy; however, I want to show that Beckett was able to read Sade as a philosopher, in the same way that he found in Schopenhauer 'a philosopher that can be read like a poet' (*L1*: 550), 'not caring whether he [was] right or wrong or a good or worthless metaphysician' (*L1*: 33). Through a cross-study of Beckett and Sade, this thesis argues that each of them can be used to illuminate specific aspects of the other's *œuvre* as well as of their respective epochs.

My research therefore seeks to answer the following questions: what empirical evidence is there for an intertextual connection between Beckett and Sade, and what intertextual models could be used to describe and qualify this connection? How do the two authors intersect and interact within the modern

history of ideas, and what are the implications of these echoes and contrasts in the context of twentieth-century history and literature? What can Beckett's incorporation of Sadean motifs in his own literary and dramatic production tell us about his creative process? Finally, could Beckett's enduring Sadean 'streak' provide an index for a study of the evolution of his aesthetics over time?

The thesis follows a chronological outline, corresponding to the common rough division of Beckett's career into his early works (up to the late 1940s), middle period (late 1940s to late 1950s) and later works (late 1950s to Beckett's death in 1989). This outline allows for a practical overview of Sade's presence in Beckett's works, isolating salient themes within each period while addressing the evolution of Beckett's writing over time. While this chronological division is useful to the coherence of the general argument, I acknowledge the fluidity of Beckett's aesthetic development, meaning that some works, such as *Watt*, are relevant to more than one chapter. Due to the centrality of Beckett's creative process to my argument, as well as for the sake of concision and clarity, this thesis examines Beckett's works primarily in the language in which they were first written, e.g. *Watt* in the original English, *Molloy* in the original French. My discussion includes commentary on Beckett's self-translations where appropriate.

The first chapter, entitled 'A "kind of metaphysical ecstasy": (re)discovering Sade', retraces Beckett's earliest encounters with Sade's

literary legacy through a number of primary and secondary sources, as well as through Beckett's intimate knowledge of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. I investigate the first manifestations of Beckett's interest in Sade in his literary and critical writings, analysing direct nominal references and representations of sadistic practices in these early works. The second part of this chapter focuses on Beckett's use of Sadean rhetorics as a parodic model for his own satire of Enlightenment rationalism; I argue that reading Beckett with Sade casts useful lights on his (often humorous) reception of Kantian rationalism and ethics as well as Cartesian dualism. A third part focuses on representations of the body in Beckett and Sade, comparing and confronting their respective uses of the aesthetics of disgust and their grotesque depictions of sexuality, as well as their portrayals of the female body, allowing for a discussion of Beckettian (and Sadean) misogyny and its revival of the *contre-blason* genre once popular in sixteenth-century French poetry.

The second chapter, entitled "'Freudian blarney, Sodom and Begorrah': from Schopenhauer to Freud... with Sade", focuses on Beckett's 'middle period' and explores (mostly Freudian) psychology as a terrain of interaction between Beckett and Sade's legacy, by way of Freud's appropriation of the vulgarised notion of sadism to describe what he saw as a crucial phase in infantile development, which he dubbed the 'anal-sadistic phase' and which, when unresolved, purportedly leads to an 'anal-sadistic disorder' in later life. More broadly, however, Sade (and Schopenhauer) share

with psychoanalysis an ambition to expose and study the violent and unquenchable nature of desire. I therefore begin by exploring the filiation between Sade's and Freud's respective takes on desire and Schopenhauer's pessimism – or, in Beckett's words, 'intellectual justification of unhappiness' (L1: 33) – before establishing a necessary critical distance between Beckett's compositional use of psychoanalytic theory and his personal reception of the 'myth' of psychoanalysis. I go on to examine anal-sadistic themes and dynamics in Beckett's works, such as coprophilic practices and symbols, therein identifying Sadean and/or Freudian patterns and their aesthetic implications. The final part of this chapter examines anal-sadistic motifs and patterns in Beckettian interpersonal relationships; in particular, I discuss the mother-figure and the Oedipus complex, before looking at Beckett's (pseudo)couples, and also propose a brief study of the character of Moran in *Molloy* as a Beckettian anal-sadistic archetype.

The third chapter is a comparative case study of Beckett's *Comment c'est* and Sade's *120 journées*, in which I argue for a Sadean impact on the form, themes and aesthetics of Beckett's text. *Comment c'est* contains one of the few explicit mentions of the term 'sadism' in his works, and a close reading of both texts provides definitive evidence that this particular occurrence refers not merely to a vulgarised, generic notion of cruelty, but to Sade specifically, thus confirming the presence of a direct intertextual borrowing. Maurice

Blanchot's essay 'La raison de Sade', which Beckett knew well, is used as critical framework to interpret the Sadean dimension of Beckett's last 'novel'.

The fourth and final chapter of this thesis, entitled "'For good or ill / For good and ill": *bourreaux*, victims and the aesthetics of evil', focuses on the recurrent theme of torture in Beckett's later works and looks at what the dynamics at play between the figure of the executioner and that of the victim accomplish in a textual and dramatic context. I begin by outlining the modalities of torture in these works and in Sade's, with particular emphasis on the repeated motif of torture as a means to extort an unknown, unspeakable confession from an uncomprehending victim. I then examine Beckett's and Sade's torturer/victim relationships in the light of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic (which enjoyed renewed popularity from the 1930s onwards), arguing that Sade, who evades Hegel entirely, simultaneously underscores Beckett's caricatural subversion of the dialectic. Torture in Beckett and Sade is then considered from a linguistic perspective, showing that Bataille's comments on language, silence and the Law in Sade also apply to the dynamics found in Beckett with compelling precision. In the last section of the discussion, I argue that Sade and Beckett intersect within what may be described as *noir* aesthetics – normally regarded as having originated in English-language literature in the late eighteenth century. I first discuss the resonances between Beckett, Sade and the works of Franz Kafka, in particular his short story *The Penal Colony*, which explores torture and the death penalty

in a totalitarian context. I then turn to Maurice Heine's essay on Sade (which Beckett had read) as initiator of the gothic (later *noir*) tradition, and make a case for a possible reading of late Beckett as engaging related aesthetics of terror. This is followed by a study of representations of evil in Beckett, in which, I argue, he stages the concept of 'necessary evil' by drawing on Sade's intellectual justification of vice and on the aesthetics of Dante's *Inferno*, in an ironic reference to occasionalist – specifically Leibnizian – philosophy and metaphysics.

### 3. Existing scholarship on Beckett and Sade

When the present project began, relatively little scholarship on Beckett and Sade had been published. One of the first such papers was James Mays' 'Pons Asinorum: Form and Value in Beckett's Writing, with Some Comments on Kafka and de Sade' (1974), which offers an astute account of some formal parallels and contrasts between Beckett, Sade and Kafka – however, Mays' lack of access to Beckett's correspondence is clear from some of the conclusions drawn, including the idea that Sade gives a 'stupendous demonstration of writing which is not literature' (278); we shall see that Mays' opinion is radically opposed to Beckett's. In 1996, David Wheatley reviewed *How It Is* on the occasion of its third reprint by Calder, noting (rather sweepingly) that 'many affinities could be pointed out between Sade's grim primer in misery and the bestial world of *How It Is*' (230). Wheatley's 2003

essay, "'You Know the Story": Scatology and the Interrupted Laugh in Beckett, with Apologies to the Mau-Mau Sketch' also includes remarks on Sade and *How It Is*. Paul Kintzele's elegant piece 'PIM'S PROGRESS: The Trouble with Language in Beckett's *How It Is*' (2002) suggests that 'the physical torture described by both writers simply reenacts the relation of the body to the signifier that represents it' (300).

Jean-Michel Rabaté was the next important contributor to scholarship on Beckett and Sade, with a chapter entitled 'Watt/Sade: Beckett et l'humain à l'envers' in the collection *L'Inhumain* (2004), followed by further comments on Sade and *Watt* in 'Unbreakable B's: From Beckett and Badiou to the bitter end of affirmative ethics' (2005). Rabaté's pioneering studies have the merit of voicing an intuition of Sade's usefulness in analysing Kant's presence in *Watt*, as well as of suggesting a parallel between the exhaustive language of *Watt* and Sade's works. Rabaté has since reworked some of these points into 'Love and Lobsters: Beckett's meta-ethics' (2015) and his excellent book '*Think, Pig!*: Beckett at the Limit of the Human' (2016).

Shane Weller also published useful papers on the subject of Beckett and Sade, starting with his two essays, 'The Anethics of Desire: Beckett, Racine, Sade' (2008) and "'Orgy of False Being Life in Common": Beckett and the Politics of Death' (2009). The former draws a parallel between Beckett's reading of Racine as a 'non-moral statement' of desire (107) and his reading of Sade's *120 journées* as a 'dispassionate' statement of the passions in 1938. In

the 2009 essay, Weller astutely remarks that Sade's 'anti-Christian configuration of the relation between suffering and pleasure finds its way into Beckett's works' (41) and notes how fundamental solitude is to the Sadean and Beckettian individual. Also published in 2009, Graham Fraser's 'The Calligraphy of Desire: Barthes, Sade, and Beckett's *How It Is*' (2009), suggests a Sadean parallel with the perverse violence running through Beckett's 'novel', which he also looks at through Roland Barthes' reading of Sade.

In 2010, two papers on sadism in *Endgame/Fin de partie*, by Weller and myself respectively, were published in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* vol. 22. While my paper focused on narcissism and the role of sadism in the genesis of the play,<sup>2</sup> Weller's paper, like Phil Baker's chapter on 'Some Kind of Anal Complex' in *Samuel Beckett and the Mythology of Psychoanalysis* (1997), rightly suggests that Beckett's dramatisation of his 'explicit concern with the excremental' (137) is indebted to his knowledge of Freud's 'anal-sadistic complex', as explicated in his detailed notes on Ernest Jones' *Papers on Psychoanalysis* – as Weller points out (139), Baker did not have access to Beckett's notes when his book was published. Weller's and Baker's research therefore constitutes a useful point of departure for the second chapter of this thesis, which investigates anal-sadistic patterns in relation to Beckett's knowledge of Sade, with a focus on the Three Novels.

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<sup>2</sup> These themes will be developed in Chapter Two, parts of which draw on this article.

In 2011, Paul Stewart published *Sex and Aesthetics in Samuel Beckett's Work*, which contains a section on 'Sadism and Relation in *How It Is*', in which he weighs up the complex dynamics and implications of the concept of sadomasochism against Beckett's text. John Bolin's *Beckett and the Modern Novel* (2013) contains a chapter on *Malone Dies* and 'the art of incarceration', which includes a section titled 'The Sadean imagination'. This section offers a reading of sadism and Sadean patterns in Beckett's novel, in which, he argues, 'the act of composition is inextricable from a state of solitary incarceration' (160). In 2014, John Pilling published a chapter entitled 'Beckett/Sade: Texts for nothing'. Pilling's chapter consists largely in providing a factual/biographical summary of Beckett's documented Sadean interactions, though he does also suggest that Beckett 'remained interested in what could be made of Sade' (117) and that he may have been struck by Sade as 'a kind of limit case, an "impossible writer"' (122). However, as its title indicates, the piece overall betrays an attempt at undermining the significance of Sade in Beckett's works, construing Sade as 'not necessarily of any practical value to him in specific creative enterprises, but nevertheless illustrative of almost all Beckett's highly idiosyncratic notions [about writing]' (121); as this thesis shall demonstrate, the first of these two statements is highly debatable. Most recently, in *Beckett and the Language of Subjectivity* (2018), Derval Tubridy draws attention to Sade's usefulness in approaching Beckettian poetics, arguing that Maurice Blanchot's reading of Sade's language highlights the

Beckettian aporia between compulsion and 'an interdiction that obliges, controls and passes judgement on those who speak in his works' (111).

#### 4. Contribution of the thesis

While I am indebted to existing criticism for shaping the conditions for my own research, the present study departs from and contributes to it in the following ways.

The first respect in which it stands out from other works that broach the subject of Beckett and Sade is the fact that most of those do so in pursuit of other quarries; while I certainly agree that the Sadean presence in Beckett interrelates with many aesthetic, thematic and poetic concerns at the heart of his composing process, this also often introduces reductive or rigid conceptions of the Sadean *œuvre* itself. By approaching the Beckett-Sade pairing from philosophical, psychological and literary angles, I acknowledge the paradigmatic complexity of this Sadean material, not only within itself, but also with respect to its historical and intellectual ramifications. Sade is an inherently conflicted (and conflicting) figure within the intellectual history of modernity and the French Enlightenment, both of which he at once embraces and rejects, and my work draws a parallel with Beckett's similarly aporetic situation in the twentieth century with regard to modern and postmodern categorisations.

What this thesis also accomplishes is a methodological synthesis of interpretative and empirical approaches; while strictly empirical studies have led to remarkable advances in Beckett studies in recent times, from James Knowlson's biography to the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project,<sup>3</sup> this has also resulted in a certain overestimation of the critical possibilities that such radical empiricism necessarily opens. Simply put, for instance, it would be a mistake to deduce from the relatively small number of demonstrable, direct intertextual borrowings from or references to Sade/sadism in Beckett's texts that Beckett's encounters with Sade were of little significance. Similarly, it would be misleading to see in Beckett's aborted publication projects on Sade of the 1930s and 1950s nothing more than 'texts for nothing', if only because, as we shall see, Sadean motifs continue to appear up to Beckett's very last works.

Finally, the study of Sade's relevance to Beckett allows for a new assessment of the intertextual dimension of Beckett's works. There are few book-length studies that examine Beckett through the prism of a single author – the most notable being Daniela Caselli's work on Beckett and Dante (2005). J. D. O'Hara, for his part, takes issues against some attempts to interpret Beckett in this way – in this case, against Cartesian interpretations:

any discussion of the influence of Descartes or Mr X on Beckett is likely to be either simpleminded, if it implies that X's influence has reached Beckett

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<sup>3</sup> A digital archive of Beckett's manuscripts launched in 2011 by Mark Nixon and Dirk Van Hulle together with a book series of genetic studies of these works ([www.beckettarchive.org](http://www.beckettarchive.org)).

and shaped his work purely and without adulteration, or exasperatingly modified, temporized, complicated, and footnoted to death if it admits that Mr X must be understood in the light of J, S, and R, with  $\sqrt{2}$  always to be considered. For that reason the influence of a single person on Beckett is at once outdated and unworkable, and [...] we can see the subject disintegrate before us. (253)

Besides arguing for Sade's continued relevance to Beckett, one of the objectives of this thesis is to counter the view that any attempt at reconstituting Beckett's reception of a source throughout the evolution of his career is doomed to needless over-complication or interpretative shoehorning. The accuracy of O'Hara's remarks hinges entirely on what the term 'influence' is taken to mean; in the case of Sade, it is clear that the vagueness of the notion of influence is particularly unhelpful, being far too generic and imprecise to explain why Beckett was drawn to Sade or define the process by which Sadean motifs came to be incorporated into his writings. To speak of influence would involve a risk of conflating intertext with endorsement of certain (philosophical, poetic, etc.) values associated with the source text: as Pilling puts it, 'Beckett act[s] by way of Sade while not actually falling under his influence' (2014: 124). Furthermore, the notion of influence can imply a form of passivity that simply does not fit Beckett's reception of Sade; this thesis aims primarily at piecing together Beckett's reading (and use) of Sade rather than at merely negotiating in favour of a Sadean Beckett or a Beckettian Sade.

This study identifies four broad intertextual models in relation to Sade's presence in Beckett. Explicit or nominal references mention Sade or 'sadism' directly in the text, and occur mostly in the early works. Direct intertextual borrowings, though elusive and typically hidden, can be verifiably (empirically) linked to Beckett's reading of Sade; in characteristic Beckettian fashion, these include phrases or images used as compositional devices, akin to what Beckett once referred to as 'bits of pipe I happen to have with me' (Knowlson, 1983: 16). Another important model is one that encompasses parody and satire as well as irony and caricature; I shall argue for instance that Beckett saw in Sade an unwitting parody of rationalism and therefore purposely deploys Sadean motifs to engage an ironic dialogue with 'cette saloperie de logique' (quoted in Juliet: 72). The fourth intertextual category is delineated using a number of aesthetic grounds within which Beckett and Sade intersect.

Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates that Beckett ought to be considered as an heir to Sade, as well as an actor in the effort to rehabilitate Sade as a major figure in the history of modern French thought and literature.

CHAPTER ONE  
A 'KIND OF METAPHYSICAL ECSTASY': (RE)DISCOVERING SADE IN THE FIRST HALF  
OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

I. A nascent interest: early approaches to Sade

1. Biographical background and censorship

This section presents a biographical retrospective of Beckett's first documented encounters with Sade and the concept of sadism from the late 1920s. The intellectual context of these encounters is reviewed, with a focus on the role of censorship in Beckett's beginnings as a writer and Sade's rehabilitation as a literary figure.

The first tangible indications of Beckett's interest in Sade and sadism appear in the notes taken by his students during his short-lived teaching career at Trinity College, Dublin, not long after his return from a two-year lectureship at the *École Nationale Supérieure* in Paris in September 1930. According to Grace McKinley's notes, the themes of cruelty and desire in Racine's *Andromaque* prompted Beckett to make some analogies with sadism:

Andromaque is the most terrible and cruel play of Racine. [...] There is the madness of desire: with one using the other as a lever. The play is an explicit statement of Sadism: and even the mother complex which occupies us so much to-day [...]. There is the hate impulse applied to Andromaque and Hermione: There is every cruelty. (quoted in Knowlson, 2007: 307-08)

While these remarks mainly point to an awareness of the vulgarised concept of sadism, notes taken by another student, Leslie Daikon, contain a quotation on the topic of Sade seeking to ‘outrage nature’ (quoted in Pilling, 2014: 118), suggesting at the very least a rudimentary acquaintance with Sade’s philosophy. This invites the question of what might have awoken Beckett’s curiosity about Sade – who was far from a household name in his native Ireland – but also of what resources were available to him to find out more about the Marquis in those early days, and among these, which ones he did encounter.

Certainly, as Weller notes (2008: 108), the two years Beckett had just spent in Paris could have led him to come into contact with the Surrealists’ recent reappraisal (and appropriation<sup>4</sup>) of the Marquis’ legacy, although his interactions with them never went far beyond translating a few poems by André Breton and Paul Éluard for *This Quarter’s* Surrealist special issue (September 1932), ‘largely because [...] they were distinctly cool, if not actively hostile, to Joyce’s own “revolution of the word”’ (Knowlson, 1997: 107). Furthermore, while he still ‘shared in the thrilling atmosphere of experiment and innovation that surrounded Surrealism’ (Knowlson, 1997: 107),<sup>5</sup> it seems

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<sup>4</sup> André Breton famously said, in ‘Manifeste du Surréalisme’ (1924, reprinted in 1929 when Beckett was living in Paris): ‘Sade est surréaliste dans le sadisme’ (Breton, 1966: 12).

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed account of Beckett’s associations with the French Surrealists, see Fifield.

unlikely that he would have been drawn to their reading of Sade as an emblem of freedom.<sup>6</sup>

One of Beckett's first documented encounters with Sade was through his reading of a chapter from Mario Praz's *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica* (1930; translated as *The Romantic Agony* in 1933), a critical review of Sade's influence on the themes of eroticism and morbidity in subsequent Romantic literature. We shall see that, while there is ample evidence of Praz's usefulness to Beckett as a source of references and inspiration, it is worth pointing out that he might well have come across allusions to 'sadism' in Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the first volume of which John Pilling suggests he probably read for the first time in the summer of 1929 (2014: 17), and which he read again (twice) in its entirety during the summer of 1930 (Ackerley and Gontarski: 457) while working on his *Proust* monograph – and therefore most likely before he sought out Praz's book.<sup>7</sup> According to Pilling's introduction to the *Dream Notebook*, that summer is 'almost certainly' when he started a 'natural habit for someone of a scholastic bent to rely on: jotting entries in a notebook' (DN: 12). Beckett's *Dream Notebook* (the notes compiled from various sources in preparation for *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* in 1930-1931) suggests that Beckett did not

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<sup>6</sup> Breton also expressed the view that only in rare cases such as Sade's was homosexuality ('pédérastie') morally acceptable: 'Tout est permis par définition à un homme comme le Marquis de Sade, pour qui la liberté des mœurs a été une question de vie ou de mort' (1928: 33). For a detailed account of Sade's reception by the Surrealists, see Harrison (127-66).

<sup>7</sup> The original month of publication of the Praz is unclear.

read the Praz until around March 1931: on 25 January, he describes himself as 'phrase-hunting in St Augustine' (L1: 62) a month later, on 24 February, he is reading 'Journal intime de Jules Renard... Odd things' (L1: 69).<sup>8</sup> The notebook is consistent with this timeline, with the block of 28 Renard entries immediately following the 131 St Augustine entries. A mere 18 entries later, the Praz notes begin, which, together with Beckett's somewhat cryptic comment that he is reading 'odd things', seems to indicate that he discovered Praz well after his return to Ireland. The nature of Praz's subject-matter meant that Beckett was more likely to access the book in France – where censorship against foreign-language material was necessarily less severe – which he might have done on one of his visits to Paris, for instance in late March 1931 (cf. Knowlson, 1997: 127) exactly one month after his previous comment on Renard.

No later than 1932, the first overt references to Sade and his works (these references will be reviewed in more detail later on) appear in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, in which the narrator's incorrect mention of 'Sade's *Hundred Days*' (*Dream*: 179) instead of '*Hundred and Twenty Days*' betrays Beckett's own imprecise and cursory knowledge of the Sadean canon at the time. This error in the title of Sade's work is explicable by the fact that Praz does not mention *Les 120 journées de Sodome* at all in his book, which in turn

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<sup>8</sup> Pilling gives a different date of 29 February for this letter in his introduction to the 'Dream' notebook (*DN*: xvi) but there was no such date in 1931.

suggests that, as of 1932, *The Romantic Agony* was the only primary or secondary Sadean source that Beckett had been able to consult.<sup>9</sup> This was most likely still the case in 1934, by which time Beckett had nevertheless corrected his oversight (*MPTK*: 50) as he rewrote 'Dream' (which was proving unpublishable) into a series of short stories entitled *More Pricks than Kicks*, published in May by Chatto and Windus.

In September 1934, Beckett refers to Sade in a letter to Thomas McGreevy, at the end of a diatribe against an 'impertinent' tradition of 'anthropomorphisation' in art in general and in landscape painting in particular:

Could there be any more ludicrous rationalisation of the itch to animise than the état d'âme balls, banquets & parties. Or – after Xerxes beating the sea, the Lexicographer kicking the stone & the Penman under the bed during the thunder – any irritation more mièvre than that of Sade at the impossibilité d'outrager la nature. A. E.'s Gully would have thrilled him.  
(*LI*: 223)

As Pilling notes, 'Beckett was still quoting the same phrase that Leslie Daiken had copied out in his lecture notes, which suggests that he had not come closer to Sade in person (as it were) than he had some three years earlier' (2014: 118). Bolin's claim that 'by 1934 Beckett had read enough of the real thing to take issue with it' (159) is therefore imprecise. However, this quotation is significant because it provides an opportunity to approach

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<sup>9</sup> This apparently includes Guillaume Apollinaire's *L'Œuvre du Marquis de Sade* (1909), which does mention the *120 journées*, and which Beckett did acquire later on, since it was found in his personal library after his death (cf. Nixon and Van Hulle, 2013: 56-57).

Beckett through Sade as well as Sade through Beckett. Although it is not included in the *Dream Notebook*, Beckett plucked it from a passage where Praz exposes the inherent 'lamentable contradictions' (Praz: 108) in Sade's philosophy:

The sense of the infinite, banished from human relationships by the suppression of any spiritual meaning, takes refuge in a sort of cosmic satanism:

'C'est elle [la nature] que je voudrais pouvoir outrager. Je voudrais déranger ses plans, contrecarrer sa marche, arrêter le cours des astres, bouleverser les globes qui flottent dans l'espace, détruire ce qui la sert, protéger ce qui lui nuit, édifier ce qui l'irrite, l'insulter en un mot dans ses œuvres.'

In this there is a *reductio ad absurdum* of Sade's 'philosophy', since if it is admitted that Nature's aim is destruction and that no act of destruction can irritate or insult her (even Sade recognizes that 'l'impossibilité d'outrager la nature est selon moi le plus grand supplice de l'homme'), the supreme insult which can be laid upon her, and from which the sadist should legitimately derive the greatest pleasure of transgression, would be precisely – the practice of virtue! (105-06)

Another 1934 piece of writing by Beckett, a pamphlet-like essay entitled 'Censorship in the Saorstát', makes for a useful parallel between the two authors, whose works had a stake in the censorship 'wars' of the first half of the century (and beyond) – the Sade phenomenon having been delayed by well over a century after the Marquis' death in 1814. The irate tone of the essay illustrates Beckett's unwavering position against the worsening restrictions imposed by censorship laws, in particular the Irish Censorship Act of 1929, thanks to which, according to Beckett, 'any individual is now in theory entitled to lodge a complaint on his own bottom' (*Saorstát*: 86). He ends the essay with his own registered censorship number (i.e. 465 – earned for the

publication of *More Pricks than Kicks*), and adds, bitterly: 'We now feed our pigs on sugarbeet pulp. It's all the same to them' (88). This essay is not without evoking Sade's own vituperations against censorship in a pamphlet entitled *Idées sur les roman* (1799) over a century earlier, in which, having argued that the utility of the novel is to paint a '*tableau des mœurs séculaires*', he spits: '*voilà l'utilité des Romans; froids censeurs qui ne les aimez pas*' (*Idées*: 34-35).

The issue of censorship was to be central to the most significant encounter between Beckett and Sade's writing before 1950, when Jack Kahane, founder of the Obelisk Press in Paris, informed Beckett in early 1938 of his project to publish an English translation of *Les 120 journées de Sodome*, offering him a contract as the translator. Ten days later at most – he could conceivably have borrowed a copy of Maurice Heine's 1931-1935 limited edition from Kahane – Beckett had read most of the novel and was already discussing Sade with evident enthusiasm in his correspondence:

The surface is of an unheard of obscenity & not 1 in 100 will find literature in the pornography, or beneath the pornography, let alone one of the capital works of the 18th century, which it is for me. (*L1*: 604)

The following day, he wrote:

I have read 1st and 3rd vols. of French edition. The obscenity of surface is undecipherable. Nothing could be less pornographical. It fills me with a kind of metaphysical ecstasy. The composition is extraordinary, as rigorous as Dante's. If the dispassionate statement of 600 'passions' is Puritan and a complete absence of satire juvenalesque, then it is, as you say, puritanical & juvenalesque. You would loathe it whether or no. (*L1*: 607)

The phrase 'metaphysical ecstasy' likens reading Sade to a mystical experience and bears witness to Beckett's willingness to see the spiritual and aesthetic where most of his contemporaries only saw the low and the shocking. Beckett's 'metaphysical ecstasy' is not simply an expression of personal appreciation; it also takes the focus away from the indecency of the subject-matter (and therefore away from the moral debate surrounding Sade's re-emergence), back to the all-important question, not of what the work represents, but of what it is and what it does, much like in his 1929 plea in defence of Joyce's *Work in Progress*: 'His writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself* (DBVC: 27).

Despite his enthusiasm, Beckett, as a struggling young author, had reasons to fear for his reputation at the prospect of an association, not simply with Sade, but also with the Obelisk Press, 'proud defender of "difficult" literature in the face of prudish and litigious government' (Pearson: 2), whose niche specialisation had consisted in side-stepping censors in both France and Great Britain by publishing banned English-language material in France since 1929. Beckett found himself faced with a difficult choice between an enticing project for a much-needed fee and the prospect of being typecast as a pornographer before having had a chance to succeed as a writer:

I don't know if I shall do it. I think probably I shall. It would be in a limited ed. of 1000 copies. No attempt wd. be made to distribute in England or USA. But of course it would be known that I was the translator. I would not do it without signing my name to it. I know all

about the obloquy. What I don't know about is the practical effect on my own future freedom of literary action in England & USA. Would the fact of my being known as the translator, & the very literal translation, of 'the most utter filth' tend to spike me as a writer myself? Could I be banned & muzzled retrospectively? The preface is important, because it enables me to make my attitude clear. Alan Belinda & Nick are all against my doing it. Brian simply says he would not himself undertake it. (L1: 607-08)

Beckett's cautious insistence on the matter of the preface is in keeping with the attitude of the rare few who risked publishing Sade before the French ban on his works was lifted in 1957, understandably feeling the need to justify themselves and often publicly condemning a work they might have wished to defend, or else 'appealing to the notion of historical progress in morality and, perhaps most importantly, suggesting that Sade's work had scientific interest and value which exempted it from moral considerations' (Harrison: 128).

Beckett's interest in Kahane's suggestion increased as he familiarised himself with the *120 journées*,<sup>10</sup> and by 8 March he had accepted the offer in spite of his reservations. However, the Sade translation project never came to fruition. Kahane asked Beckett to postpone for a few months, to which Beckett replied that he '[couldn't] guarantee being of the same mind then, or having the time to spare' (L1: 610). By 20 June, there was '[n]o further news of Sade' (L1: 634). Though there is no letter to this effect, it is safe to assume that these few months were enough time for him to revert to his initial reticence and that he was the one who withdrew from the agreement. Jack Kahane died in

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<sup>10</sup> A letter to McGreevy from 11 February (most likely before Beckett read the book) shows much more reticence: 'Though I am interested in Sade & have been for a long time, I would really rather not' (L1: 605).

1939; his son Maurice Girodias, who revived Obelisk Press under the name of Olympia Press in 1953, remembers the Beckett/Sade episode in his memoirs:

Sam avait réfléchi, puis avait dit non. C'était un gagne-pain assuré pour un temps, certes, mais aussi un engagement artistico-philosophique trop dévorant qui eût risqué de le dévier de la voie qu'il essayait à grand mal de se frayer. Il était déjà assez difficile de côtoyer Joyce sans se laisser vider quotidiennement de sa substance. (Girodias: 225)

This is not to say that Beckett had entirely abandoned the idea of publishing on Sade, as literary critic if not as translator, or that his interest had withered. In May he had reported that Con Leventhal, who had taken up his old teaching job at Trinity, was 'hop[ing] to place an article by [him] on the divine marquise [sic] in *Hermathena* of all places' (L1: 622).<sup>11</sup> By then Beckett had settled in Paris permanently and was absorbed in research for Joyce, as he would continue to be until the beginnings of the Second World War and his forced flight to the South of France during the summer of 1940. This meant that, for over two full years, he had ample occasions to explore Paris libraries and encounter important publications by Sade pioneers such as Maurice Heine or Guillaume Apollinaire. It is not known whether the recent discovery of the *120 journées* inspired him to seek out other works by Sade during this period, or indeed whether the few available editions were simply too difficult to procure, but it is thought that it is around that time that Beckett acquired Apollinaire's *L'Œuvre du Marquis de Sade*, which provides a impressively

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<sup>11</sup> *Hermathena* is a philosophy review published by Trinity College, Dublin, since 1873. No such article by Beckett was published in the journal.

detailed overview of Sade's life and works (though, for obvious reasons, it obscures the more offensive passages). Pilling (2014: 117) suspects that Beckett must have acquired the book 'in the mid-to-late 1930s', and I will venture a further guess that he did so in 1938 in preparation for the Kahane translation, due to the strong similarity between his comment that 'not 1 in 100 will find literature in the pornography, or beneath the pornography' and Apollinaire's introductory remark that '[l]e lecteur qui aborde ces romans ne remarque souvent que la lettre qui est dégoûtante, et l'analyse ci-dessous n'en peut malheureusement pas livrer l'esprit' (18). Compared to Praz's *The Romantic Agony*, Apollinaire's publication was not so much analytical as it was strategic, or even political: the book is largely an attempt to defy censorship by getting conceivably publishable extracts from Sade's works and information about his life into press. In terms of advances in Sade's rehabilitation, the merits of the publication are unquestionable: as Beckett would remark in 1972, 'Apollinaire must have been the initiator of the Sade boom' (quoted in Nixon and Van Hulle: 56).

From the last months of 1942 to early 1945, Beckett was again on the run from Paris, this time from the Gestapo, following the demise of his resistance cell. This period, corresponding to most of the writing of *Watt*, was spent in hiding in the village of Roussillon, which, as Jean-Michel Rabaté points out, was within sight of the ruins of Sade's Château de Lacoste –

‘troublante proximité’ (Rabaté, 2004: 71). *Watt* remained unpublished for some years after the war, until Beckett was approached by Richard Seaver of the Merlin group, a group of young English-speaking expatriates in Paris who had been trying to put together an English-language literary magazine. Their project was born of their nostalgia for the buzzing intellectual scene that had made Paris the avant-garde capital of Europe in the interwar period. While their editorial line had a strong existentialist bend, they were also drawn to material that the toughening censorship laws in France (in particular the 1949 ‘loi 49-956 sur les publications destinées à la jeunesse’) would have made impossible to publish in French without being prosecuted – the irony was that, though Great Britain, Ireland and the United States were notoriously more prudish than France, French censors now had more prohibitive and restrictive powers than their counterparts.<sup>12</sup> The Merlin group’s agenda stood very close to that of Maurice Girodias’ new Olympia Press – ‘publier en France de la littérature en langue anglaise assez scandaleuse pour trouver facilement une clientèle auprès des touristes anglais et des innombrables troufions U.S. qui se morfondaient par divisions entières dans leurs camps de France et d’Allemagne’ (Girodias: 180), with which they soon became associated through their common interest in the Marquis de Sade. Aside from

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<sup>12</sup> On 16 July 1949, a law was passed to appoint a ‘Commission de surveillance et de contrôle des publications destinées à l’enfance et à l’adolescence’, which in practice meant that a vast majority of publications theoretically available to younger citizens was now at the mercy of the censors. See Girodias: 175-80.

*Watt*, among other things, Merlin were hoping to publish an English translation of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* by member Austryn Wainhouse, who, upon hearing about the Kahane/Beckett debacle five years earlier from Girodias, volunteered to take up the translation of the *120 journées de Sodome*, abandoned since Beckett turned it down.

Merlin finding themselves short of money, it was decided that they would edit *Watt* for publication by the Olympia Press; this meant that the novel's release would be overseen not by one, but two organisations known for their litigious production.<sup>13</sup> To add to this, *Watt* ended up being advertised in the same brochure as Wainhouse's translation of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, alongside other texts by Henry Miller and Apollinaire. As Knowlson – and Rabaté (2004: 72) – note: 'To someone who in the end had declined to translate the Marquis de Sade for Maurice Girodias' father in the 1930s because he did not wish to be too closely associated with a predominantly pornographic publishing house, Beckett may have been a little uncomfortable with this' (1997: 396). Displeased by the lack of professionalism of those he would come to refer to as the 'Merlin juveniles' (1997: 396), Beckett progressively took his distance from the group, but the Olympia/Merlin episode is an interesting example of the indirect ways in which the 'shadow of

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<sup>13</sup> Girodias' account provides a good indication of how provocative the stances of Olympia Press and Merlin really were, their target audience being equally the literary avant-garde and 'le marché de l'onanisme' (240): 'La raison d'être d'Olympia, n'était-ce pas de publier tout ce qu'on jugeait tabou en Angleterre et en Amérique? [...] [M]on programme initial, avec Sade, Bataille, Miller, Apollinaire et Beckett, apparaissait comme une déclaration de guerre totale – à la morale ordinaire et aussi aux vieilles religions de l'Occident.' (238-39).

the Divine Marquis'<sup>14</sup> managed to insinuate itself in the story of Beckett's early works.

## 2. Sade and sadism through Praz and Proust

This section looks at the ways Beckett's early direct and indirect interactions with Sade resonate with his interests and manifest in his first works. Three aesthetic terrains within which Beckett and Sade intersected in early days are investigated, namely sadism, homosexuality, and solitude.

The fact that Beckett was unlikely to have encountered Sade in the text before 1938 does not mean that his earlier writings cannot offer some insight into aspects of his aesthetics which already resonated with Sade's, or which anticipated his interest in them. As Paul Stewart rightly puts it: 'Beckett's novelistic career might be said to begin within, and to grow from, adolescent sexuality' (18). Indeed, if works like *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, *More Pricks than Kicks*, or even *Murphy*, provide little in terms of informed commentary on Sade's works themselves, we shall now see that their overarching concern for sexuality, together with a number of references either to Sade or 'sadism', clearly endows them with a Sadean streak. This erudite, oblique and often obscure approach is typical of Beckett's early years: as will be argued throughout this thesis, the more Beckett learnt about Sade, the less

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<sup>14</sup> Title of Praz's chapter on Sade (93-186).

overt and traceable the references became. The first two works, 'stinking of Joyce' in spite of Beckett's 'most earnest attempts to endow [them] with his own odours' (*L1*: 81) even have a certain stylistic fastidiousness and narrative claustrophobia about them that is not without equivalent in Sade.

Beckett's *Dream Notebook* speaks volumes about Beckett's delight in obscene and obscure references – which represent much more than the 28 Praz entries – and reveals a marked interest in the darker, pathological aspects of eroticism, from priapism to genital malformation, obsessive masturbation to corporal punishment. Among these, for instance, nearly 70 entries from *Flagellation and the Flagellants* (Bertram, 1887) an exhaustive review of corporal chastisement around the world and throughout history, which Beckett, according to Pilling, had obviously read cover to cover (1999: 48). This interest in torture is supplemented by at least 51 entries from Pierre Garnier's *Hygiène de la génération: Onanisme, seul et à deux, sous toutes ses formes et leurs conséquences*,<sup>15</sup> a science-oriented study of masturbation with the ambition of combatting the decline of fertility in late nineteenth-century France by denouncing solitary practices ('dévoiler tous les détails secrets, cachés, de ce mal individuel et social' (Garnier: 15). Garnier mentions Sade on three occasions (145; 299; 501) and the book clearly influenced the role of masturbation in *Dream*, Belacqua positing self-administered orgasm as 'the act that unites the body with the Idea' (Ackerley and Gontarski: 422): 'Adopting a

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<sup>15</sup> There were at least ten editions across the 1880s and 1890s.

fraudulent system of Platonic manualisation, chiroplatonism, he postulated the physical encounter and proved the physical intercourse' (*Dream*: 43).

Direct (nominal) references to Sade in Beckett's works are few, but not far between, since two out of three passages concerned can be found in *Dream* and one in *More Pricks*. In *Dream*, they feature first in a somewhat cynical, but quite poetic, attempt at encapsulating Belacqua's perspective on love and relationships:

The hyphen of passion between Shilly and Shally, the old bridge over the river. [...] That was the *modus vivendi*, poised between God and Devil, Justine and Juliette, at the dead point, in a tranquil living at the neutral point, a living dead to God-love and love-Devil [...]. For me [...] the one real thing is to be found in the relation: the dumbbell's bar, the silence between my eyes, between you and me, all the silences between you and me. I can only know the real poise at the crest of the relation rooted in the unreal postulates, God-Devil, Masoch-Sade (he<sup>16</sup> might have spared us that hoary old binary), Me-You, One-minus One. (27-28)

Belacqua is more interested in the empty space between the terms of a relation than in the terms themselves, which he also denounces as 'fake integrities'. His use of conventionalised or clichéd opposites such as God and the Devil, Justine and Juliette (borrowed from Praz<sup>17</sup>), or Masoch and Sade, does not refer to the entities in question so much as it caricatures them for rhetorical purposes, while perhaps also mocking Belacqua's itch to categorise, possess and define. Sade is therefore present as 'unreal postulate' himself, perhaps a symbol or metaphor, but hardly as a pointed commentary on his

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<sup>16</sup> This 'he' ostensibly refers to Belacqua, but may also be construed as an oblique reference to psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1866) in which he coins the terms 'sadism' and 'masochism', later reprised by Freud.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. entry 271 in the *Dream Notebook*: 'Justine or Juliette?' (38).

works; we therefore have a paradox whereby the nominal reference is emptied of its referentiality, becoming a signifier with an artificial, or synecdochic, signified. Whether or not this is intentional, it coincides with what we know of Beckett's then cursory knowledge of Sade and his style saturated with references and allusion, since Sade is subsequently used as an emblem of depraved, illicit literature:

Into the quiet pages of our cadenza bursts a nightmare harpy, Miss Dublin, a hell-cat. In she lands singing Havelock Ellis in a deep voice [...]. If only she could be bound and beaten and burnt, but not quick. Or, failing that, brayed gently in a mortar. Open upon her concave breast as on a lectern lies Portigliotti's *Penumbre Claustrali* bound in tawed caul. In her talons earnestly she clutches Sade's *Hundred Days* and the *Anterotica* of Aliosha G. Brignole-Sale, unopened, bound in shagreened caul. (*Dream*: 179-80)

Aside from Beckett's imprecision in the English title of the *120 journées*, this passage is noteworthy due to the company that Sade is made to keep: Havelock Ellis was a nineteenth century English physician, author of studies on sex and homosexuality; the other two are borrowed from Praz, Guiseppe Portigliotti, little-known Italian author of existential dramas (*Penumbre Claustrali*, translated as *Shadows from the Cloisters*) having also written on Brignole-Sale, a '17<sup>th</sup> century author of *Erotica & Mystica*' (*DN*: 36). This Sade, clustered together with a selection of controversial authors, is used as a prop or compositional artefact; this shows that, at that point, Beckett's interaction with Sade was limited to the 'phrase-hunting' displayed in the *Dream Notebook*.

Clearly, Sade is not the only object of caricature here; 'Miss Dublin' (who becomes 'the Frisca' in *More Pricks than Kicks*<sup>18</sup>) brutally materialises in the narration armed with volumes expected to make her appear more provocative and liberated than she really is. Considering how instrumental Beckett's reading of Praz was in composing this passage, the following remark from *The Romantic Agony* suddenly seems more than an amusing coincidence: 'About 1830, people were so convinced of the virulence of Sade's writings that Frédéric Soulié, in the *Mémoires du Diable* (1837), made Captain Félix put a copy of *Justine* into the hands of Henriette Buré, who had been shut up alone in a dungeon by her family, with the idea that reading it would drive her mad' (Praz: 128). This portrayal of characters ostentatiously flanked by Sade's novels as accessories becomes a trope in terms of the power that it confers to those novels and the effects this has on characterisation within the fiction – used as an emblem by the Frisca for attention, by Soulié's Captain Felix for destructive purposes. In *Dream* and *More Pricks*, this trope is all the more remarkable for its constituting an allegory, or fictional dramatisation, of Beckett's early use of Sade as a 'signpost' for the Obscene, that which is at once impossible to show and always yet to be revealed. In *Pourquoi le XXe siècle a-t-il pris Sade au sérieux?* (2011), Éric Marty assesses Sade's second life

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<sup>18</sup> 'Behold the Frisca, she visits talent in the Service Flats. In she lands, singing Havelock Ellis in a deep voice [...]. Open upon her concave breast as on a lectern lies Portigliotti's *Penombre Claustrali*, bound in tawed caul. In her talons earnestly she grasps Sade's *120 Days* and the *Anterotica* of Aliosha G. Brignole-Sale, unopened, bound in shagreened caul.' (MPTK: 50).

(as it were) in the evolution of the twentieth century: '[On doit] laisser la première partie du siècle au simple rêve d'une présence fantasmatique et parfois bouleversante de Sade, présence essentiellement poétique' (21)<sup>19</sup> – this applies well enough to Beckett's initial reception of Sade.

Of course, what Sade is also used for in this passage is social satire: 'Beckett dénonce la fausse audace des précieuses ridicules irlandaises: la Frica ressemble à un personnage proustien, à une madame Verdurin de l'érotisme' (Rabaté, 2004: 72). Proust may indeed be seen as an intermediary aesthetic terrain for Beckett and Sade to intersect within the early history of the Beckett canon. The Frica, a would-be sadist, pales in comparison with Proust's Mlle de Vinteuil, 'l'artiste du mal' (M. Proust: 152), whom the narrator of the *Recherche* repeatedly calls 'une sadique' in the 'Montjouvain' episode for daring her lesbian lover to spit on her recently deceased father's portrait: 'il n'y a guère que le sadisme qui donne un fondement dans la vie à l'esthétique du mélodrame' (152). This passage, which weaves together the notions of sadism and illicit sexuality, was well known to Beckett, who commented on it in his own monograph on Proust:

In a paroxysm of jealousy the narrator is back again at Montjouvain, the horrified spectator of these two Lesbians flavouring their pleasure in a sadistic act of desecration at the expense of Mr. Vinteuil himself, who has been dead some time. [...] The sea is a veil that cannot hide the horror of Montjouvain, the intolerable vision of sadistic lubricity and a photograph defiled. (*Proust*: 52-53)

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<sup>19</sup> These remarks are made to justify Marty's decision to forgo the early days of Sade's rehabilitation in his analysis.

This is most likely the very first use of the term 'sadism' in Beckett's writing, predating even his Trinity College lectures, and it is significant that it should be given a Proustian context, since sadistic (and masochistic) sexuality emerges as an important theme in the *Recherche*, for which the Montjouvain episode is the forerunner.<sup>20</sup> Praz writes: 'The cycle of [...] [Sade's] tortures is soon exhausted, because, as Proust remarks [...], nothing is more limited than pleasure and vice, and – to make a play upon words – it may be said that the vicious man moves always in the same vicious circles' (105). Arguing that Sade has his place in Modernity ('l'aventure moderne'), Marty writes: 'On lit du Sade dans des pages de Proust, et parfois même du Proust dans des pages de Sade' (21). Marty corroborates this observation using two passages from *La Nouvelle Justine*, and it is certainly possible to find further Sadean overtones in Proust as well; shortly before the Montjouvain episode, for instance, the narrator muses about the powers of imagination: 'mon imagination reprenant des forces au contact de ma sensualité, ma sensualité se répandant dans tous les domaines de mon imagination, mon désir n'avait plus de limites' (M. Proust: 145). The prominent Sadean elements here are the hyperbolic expression of 'limitless' desire and the fusion of sex and imagination within the same system, the one feeding into the other. Ebullient, relentless, superlative desire is of course commonplace in Sade, as with the duc de

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<sup>20</sup> See Kristeva's 'sadisme' entry in Annick Bouillaguet and B. G. Rogers: 894-96. See also Barthes: 139.

Blangis in *Les 120 journées de Sodome*, who becomes 'un tigre en fureur' when 'l'ivresse de la volupté le couronn[e]' and becomes, to use Beckett's description of Murphy, not 'rightly human' (47): 'des cris épouvantables, des blasphèmes atroces s'élançaient de sa poitrine gonflée, des flammes semblaient alors sortir de ses yeux, il écumait, il hennissait, on l'eût pris pour le dieu même de la lubricité' (120J: 25). For both Sade and Proust, therefore, imagination is the condition *sine qua non* of excitation – as shall be argued later on in this chapter, this also resonates with Beckett.

Through his references to Proust and Ellis, Beckett juxtaposes the notions of sadism and homosexuality. While there are many ways of approaching the motif of homosexuality in Beckett's works, it is worth noting that such juxtaposition recurs in *Murphy* with Bim and Ticklepenny's romance, the only relatively successful relationship in the book, ending in borderline-mawkish romantic bliss, with visions of the two characters 'sitting cheek by jowl on the dazzling granite step' (145) or 'wreathed together' (146) or sharing amorous glances in the morgue over Murphy's dead body: 'Bim and Ticklepenny raised their heads together, their eyes met in a look both tender and ardent, they were alive and well and had each other' (148). Ticklepenny initially took advantage of Bim's 'fancy for [him] not far short of love' (90) to obtain a position as a male nurse at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat ('MMM'), a mental 'sanatorium' where Bim works as a head nurse alongside his twin brother, 'head sister' Bom, 'younger twin and dead spit of

Bim' (95). The twins' iterative names blur the symbolical distinction between them; while Bom's sexual orientation is not stated, he is described as 'what is vulgarly called a sadist [who] encourage[s] what is vulgarly called sadism in his assistants' (133) – this is Beckett's first explicit reference to sadism in a work of literature.

In addition to the theme of homosexuality, Sade, Proust and Beckett can be connected through a common preoccupation with solitude; as Beckett writes in *Proust*:

[W]hen it is a case of human intercourse, we are faced with the problem of an object whose mobility is not merely a function of the subject's, but independent and personal: two separate and immanent dynamisms related by no system of synchronisation. So that whatever the object, our thirst for possession is, by definition, insatiable. (17)

This disenchanting view of human interactions, which echoes Sade's 'Toutes les créatures naissent isolées et sans aucun besoin les unes des autres' (*NJ*, t. 5: 312), owes much to the influence of Arthur Schopenhauer's pessimism (whom Beckett would have read in the summer of 1930, shortly before he started work on *Proust*). The two related ideas expressed in the above passage are, on the one hand, a statement of the fundamental impossibility for two individuals to fully know and understand each other and, on the other, of the equal impossibility for desire (Schopenhauer's 'will-to-live') to be

permanently satisfied<sup>21</sup> or stifled other than in death (or in the kind of nirvanic catatonia that so fascinates Murphy). Both principles have distinct resonances in Sade's philosophy, with the notable difference that, for Sade, neither 'that irremediable solitude to which every human being is condemned' (*Proust*: 63) nor the realisation that desire is tireless are cause for pessimism or existential misery, since strict self-interest and selfishness are prerequisites in the libertine ideology: 'Avons-nous jamais éprouvé une seule impulsion de la nature qui nous conseille de préférer les autres à nous, et chacun n'est-il pas pour soi dans le monde?' (*PB*: 100). This is further developed with regard to the concept of friendship, deemed illusory and purely utilitarian: '[G]ardons nos amis tant qu'ils nous servent; oublions-les dès que nous n'en tirons plus rien; ce n'est jamais que pour soi qu'il faut aimer les gens; les aimer pour eux-mêmes n'est qu'une duperie [...]' (*PB*: 145). This finds clear echoes in what Beckett perceived to be the necessary consequence of existential solitude, in particular his thoughts on friendship as inspired by the reading of Proust: 'Friendship implies an almost piteous acceptance of face values. Friendship is a social expedient, like upholstery or the distribution of garbage buckets' (*Proust*: 63). While this by no means reflects Beckett's personal views on friendship, it does bear a resemblance to

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Schopenhauer: 'The will can just as little through some satisfaction cease to will always afresh, as time can end or begin; for the will there is no permanent fulfillment which completely and for ever satisfies its cravings.' (Schopenhauer, 1966: 362).

his treatment of the friend/loved one as disposable commodity.<sup>22</sup> In Proust, read through a Beckettian lens, 'the exercise of friendship is tantamount to a sacrifice of that only real and incommunicable essence of oneself to the exigencies of a frightened habit whose confidence requires to be restored by a dose of attention' (65).

While this intuition of the 'incommunicable essence' of the self does not lead to murderous aspirations in the *Recherche*, it does occasionally in Beckett, and constantly in Sade. Sade is all too willing to see death (and, by extension, murder) as a phenomenon without consequence in the grand scheme of things, where destruction is indispensable to the 'natural' balance of the universe:

Oserez-vous dire à présent que [l'homme] plaît mieux à la nature que [l'animal]? Il faudrait prouver pour cela une chose impossible: [...] il faudrait prouver [qu'un] fainéant qui s'engraisse dans l'inaction et dans l'indolence est plus utile que le cheval, dont le service est si essentiel [...].  
(PB: 207)

It is unlikely that Beckett had had a chance to come across this passage before the writing of *Dream*, but there is considerable irony in his basing his earlier protagonist on the Dantean archetype of idleness and indolence: the figure of lute-maker Belacqua, sitting prostrate in the Antepurgatory, refusing to get up.<sup>23</sup> The recurrent topic of indolence in Beckett's early fiction provides another potential Sadean echo by way of Murphy, who responds to Celia's

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<sup>22</sup> This will be covered in depth in Chapter Two.

<sup>23</sup> Beckett's fascination with and subsequent fictionalisation of Belacqua was part of an exploration of his 'own complexities, without excusing them' (Ackerley and Gontarski: 47).

exasperated requests for him to get a job with offended refusal, on the grounds that his horoscope advises against new ventures – and generally, like Herman Melville’s *Bartleby*, because he prefers not to: ‘It was not his habit to make out cases for himself. An atheist chipping the deity was no more senseless than Murphy defending his course of inaction, as he did not require to be told’ (*Murphy*: 26). This choice of example is oddly reminiscent of Beckett’s go-to quote about Sade’s ‘mièvre’ indignation at the ‘impossibilité d’outrager la nature’, underlining in both instances the ‘senseless’ absurdity of the endeavour – one might even see the ‘atheist chipping the deity’ as a veiled caricature of Sade the man clamouring his atheism but paradoxically eager for any opportunity to transgress and outrage a residual idea of God.

### 3. The mad leading the mad: sadism in the asylum

This section examines the recurring motif of sadistic staff and practices in mental asylums in ‘Fingal’ (*More Pricks than Kicks*), *Murphy*, *Watt* and *Malone meurt* and argues that it may be seen as a Sadean one, by highlighting thematic and aesthetic resonances with Sade.

In *Murphy*, the token nominal references to the Sade of *Dream* and *More Pricks* disappear behind an interest in the vulgarised notion of sadism. As we have mentioned, this manifests as sadistic power-games in a favourite Beckett setting: the mental asylum. In fact, the thematic association between sadism

and asylums occurs as early as *More Pricks* and persists long after the writing of *Murphy*, appearing in every novel up to *Malone meurt* (1951, written 1947-1948), *Molloy* excluded. This motif banks on the conceit of putting a madman in charge of the mad, or a pervert in charge of the perverted; this is not without evoking Sade's role as improvised director of an experimental theatre company composed of inmates at the Charenton asylum in the early nineteenth century<sup>24</sup> – Beckett might well have known about this from Apollinaire's reproduction of letters by the Charenton staff at the time, complaining to the authorities about the general disruption caused by Sade's activities (cf. Apollinaire: 51-56). This also recalls the great irony of 'citoyen' Sade's short-lived appointment as 'commissaire' (later president) of the Assemblée générale des hospices de santé in the aftermath of the Revolution in 1792-1793 during a brief period of freedom (cf. Lely: 497-517). More importantly, this echoes what Marty describes as 'un épisode crucial d'*Histoire de Juliette* [qui] a précisément pour théâtre un asile de fous' (152). As in Beckett, Sade's fictional asylum is under the despotic rule of a notorious sadist, named Vespoli: 'Loin de vouloir guérir les malades, loin de vouloir objectiver leur folie comme "aliénation," Vespoli, véritable tortionnaire sadien, ajoute la folie à la folie, le délire au délire, dans une sorte de mise en abyme du projet sadien: l'hypothèse d'un asile de fous dirigé par un pervers' (Marty: 152). The passage in question is found in the ninth volume of *La*

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<sup>24</sup> See Lely: 640-52.

*Nouvelle Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu, suivi de l'histoire de Juliette, sa sœur* (1799, falsely dated 1797)<sup>25</sup> and follows Clairwil and Juliette's visit to the asylum where, under the King's protection, Vespoli freely subjects his inmates to daily atrocities. Vespoli delights in raping, torturing then murdering individuals who believe themselves to be either God, Jesus or Mary, all this under Juliette's appreciative gaze: 'j'avoue que je déchargerais bien délicieusement en te voyant assassiner le bon Dieu d'une main et sa bru de l'autre: il faut, si cela est, que pendant ce temps j'encule Jésus-Christ, dit l'infâme; nous l'avons, tout le paradis est dans cet enfer' (*NJ*, t. 9: 347-48).

In 'Fingal', the second short story in *More Pricks than Kicks*, Belacqua and his then girlfriend Winnie pay a visit to Winnie's friend Dr Sholto, the director of the remote Portrane Lunatic Asylum, while on a walk on the Irish coast. Belacqua soon excuses himself and abandons Winnie with Sholto, who, we are told, has 'madness and evil in his heart' (33) and whose antipathy towards him is palpable: 'In respect of Belacqua Sholto felt nothing but rancour' (32).

Sadism is more markedly present in the atmosphere of the MMM in *Murphy*, from the set of inflexible rules laid down to the staff 'in terms so strong as to be almost abusive' (132) to the 'shrouded instruments of recreation' (132) encountered by Murphy during his first shift – as Ackerley

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<sup>25</sup> 341-50. Ironically, it is for this publication of *Justine* that Sade was arrested once more in 1801 and eventually sentenced to life imprisonment at Charenton (cf. Lely: 625-27; 632).

notes, 'the expected collocation might be "instruments of torture" (2010a: 188). Like Murphy by the reluctant Bom, Juliette and her friends are given a tour of the asylum and also notice instruments meant for the recreation of some and the torture of others:

Ici les loges [où étaient enfermés les fous] environnaient une grande cour plantée de cyprès, dont le vert lugubre donnait, à cette enceinte, toute l'apparence d'un cimetière. Au milieu était une croix garnie de pointes d'un côté; c'était là-dessus que se garottaient les victimes de la scélératesse de Vespoli. Quatre geôliers, armés de gros bâtons ferrés, dont un seul coup eût tué un bœuf, nous escortaient avec attention. (*NJ*, t. 9: 344)

This description has a surprisingly similar ring to that of the MMM, down to the mixed connotations of the surrounding greenery, also associated simultaneously with life and death in *Murphy*: his idiosyncratic delight at finding himself in such proximity with the insane causes him to see 'a profusion of traveller's joy and self-clinging ampelopsis' in what he assumes is the nursery but turns out to be the mortuary (94-95). In *Juliette*, the crucifixion post in the courtyard conflates Christian imagery with notions of torture and public execution – themes and connotations which all match those found in *Murphy*: 'The wards consisted of two long corridors, intersecting to form a T, or more correctly a decapitated potence [...]. To adopt for a moment as a purely descriptive convenience the terms and orientation of church architecture, the layout of the wards was that of nave and transepts' (*Murphy*: 95-96). Bom, the declared 'sadist', is cruel to his staff and patients alike, constantly looking to 'discharge' his sadistic 'energy', which involves insisting

on patients being woken up every twenty minutes at night by 'light of such ferocity that the eyes of the sleeping and waking opened and closed respectively' (133).<sup>26</sup> Patients deemed 'resistive' or 'uncooperative' during the day are 'liable to get hell at night' (133). Like the Sadean man par excellence, Bom is unwilling (or unable) to channel his tyrannical instincts; his *modus operandi* echoes the theories on human behaviour laid out by the anonymous libertine author (probably Dolmancé himself) of the fictional pamphlet 'Français, encore un effort si vous voulez être Républicains' in *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*: 'l'homme aime à commander, à être obéi, à s'entourer d'esclaves contraints à le satisfaire; or, toutes les fois que vous ne donnerez pas à l'homme le moyen secret d'exhaler la dose de despotisme que la nature mit au fond de son cœur, il se rejettera pour l'exercer sur les objets qui l'entoureront' (PB: 186-87). Ticklepenny's account of his own treatment of the patients also attests to the sadistic practices of the MMM: 'I sit on them that will not eat, [...] jacking their jaws apart with the gag, spurning their tongues aside with the spatula, till the last tendish of drench is absorbed. I go round the cells with my shovel and bucket, I –' (Murphy: 52).

In *Watt*, the main character finds himself 'transferred' to an asylum (St John of God, the name of a real asylum near Foxcrock, Dublin) as a patient, where a friendship of sorts is formed with another patient, 'Sam', who

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<sup>26</sup> This motif prefigures the tyrannic lights of the later drama (*Play*) and fiction (*Imagination morte imaginez, Le dépeupleur*).

brutally takes over the narration in the first person. Together, they engage in sadistic behaviour directed not at the staff or other madmen, but at small animals, such as birds, which 'it was [their] delight to pursue 'with stones and clods of earth', in particular robins, which, 'thanks to their confidingness, [were] destroyed in great numbers', and whose eggs they 'ground into fragments, under [their] feet, with peculiar satisfaction'. Their 'particular friends', however, are the rats, who flock around them 'with every sign of confidence and affection' and be given to eat 'a nice fat frog, or a baby thrush. Or seizing suddenly a plump young rat [...] we would feed it to its mother, or its father, or its brother, or its sister, or to some less fortunate relative' (153). As with Bom in *Murphy*, Beckett's protagonists are here engaged in a form of indirect sadism whereby they inflict physical harm by proxy. This seems to be a very Beckettian take on sadism, an idea reinforced by the wish of the narrator of 'L'Expulsé' to harm children: 'Moi je les lyncherais avec délices, je ne dis pas que je mettrais la main à la pâte, non, je ne suis pas un violent, mais j'encouragerais les autres et je leur paierais la tournée quand ce serait fini' (*Nouvelles*: 22).

More than just a designated victim, the figure of the rat serves as a physical and conceptual terrain for experiments in transgression inscribed in an eminently Sadean enterprise of symbolical desecration. There is a sustained preoccupation in *Watt* with the symbolical value of what the rats

eat.<sup>27</sup> As Rabaté rightly comments, the Sadean dimension of the asylum passage lies in the fact that transgression is aimed at familial relationships: ‘rappelons comment Barthes cite la phrase de Sade qui lui semble résumer la grammaire du fantasme fondamental du Marquis: “Pour réunir l’inceste, l’adultère, la sodomie et le sacrilège, il encule sa fille mariée avec une hostie et détruit les fondements de la famille”’ (2004: 74). During his train journey to Mr Knott’s house, Watt makes the acquaintance of a Mr Spiro, editor of ‘*Cruix*’, a ‘popular catholic monthly’ (25) who wonders what, hypothetically, ought to be done with a rat that ‘eats of a consecrated wafer’ (26-27). Spiro struggles with this question due to its sacrilegious suggestion that a mere rat could consume the ‘body of Christ’ and be given an eternal soul; as with Vespoli’s desecration of Jesus/Mary/God in *Juliette*, there is a physical transgression of the sacred. This relates to Sam’s and Watt’s cruelties to the rats through the motif of cannibalism, historically raised in criticism of the Christian belief in transubstantiation (cf. Avramescu and Blyth: 152-53); the rats are therefore flesh-eaters in both scenarios. This recalls Sade’s terror at being eaten by the rats that shared his cell at the Vincennes prison and kept him up at night,<sup>28</sup> an anecdote which is itself reminiscent of Murphy’s own

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<sup>27</sup> The symbolic value of waste and its role in the Sadean imagination will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

<sup>28</sup> ‘je suis dévoré des rats et des souris, qui ne me laissent pas reposer un seul instant de la nuit. [...] Quand je demande en grâce qu’on mette un chat [...] pour les détruire, on me répond que *les animaux sont défendus*. À cela je réponds: “Mais, bêtes que vous êtes, si les animaux sont défendus, les rats et les souris doivent l’être aussi” (Lely: 299). An absurd conundrum worthy of Beckett.

'unhappy' cohabitation with rats (cf. *Murphy*: 64-65). In Sade, 'l'anthropophagie n'est certainement pas un crime' (*Aline*: 563). *Juliette* features one notorious cannibal, Minski, whom Beckett would have encountered when reading the Apollinaire (cf. 'Chez l'ogre': 129-31). The rat and cannibalism are infamously intertwined in Sade's 'Supplices en supplément' section at the end of the *120 journées*: 'Au moyen d'un tuyau, on lui introduit une souris dans le con; le tuyau se retire, on coud le con, et l'animal, ne pouvant sortir, lui dévore les entrailles' (447). This abominable scenario essentially stages a sort of reversed birth whereby the woman's powers of procreation are paradoxically negated, her body becoming infertile, but the alien creature trapped in her womb, feeding off her like a cannibalistic baby, condemning her in death to eternal pregnancy.

Our last example of conflation of sadism and mental asylums falls slightly outside of the time frame set for this chapter since it occurs in *Malone meurt* (published in 1951 but started in the last months of 1947) but it is worth including it here since it conforms so well to the pattern under discussion. Macmann, one of the characters conjured up by Malone, also finds himself in a psychiatric institution (Saint-Jean-de-Dieu, in an echo to St John of God in *Watt*), with a caretaker called Lemuel: 'Lemuel faisait l'impression d'être légèrement plus bête que méchant, et cependant sa méchanceté était considérable' (*Malone*: 149). Lemuel's wickedness and Macmann soon meet

through the intermediary of a beating stick and, significantly, of a third person holding the stick:

Un soir où Macmann rentrait avec une branche [...] dont il voulait faire un bâton pour soutenir ses pas, Lemuel la lui prit et l'en frappa longuement, non, ça ne va pas, Lemuel appela un gardien nommé Pat, une vraie brute [...] et lui dit, Pat, regarde-moi ça. Alors Pat arracha la branche des mains de Macmann [...] et l'en frappa jusqu'à ce que Lemuel lui dit de s'arrêter, et encore après. Tout cela sans la moindre explication. (164)

The narrator's unexpected interruption emphasises the importance of the beating being performed by an agent of the authority rather than the authority itself – as observed in *Murphy* and *Watt*. Soon after, the patients are taken on an outing to 'the islands', during which Lemuel proceeds to kill two members of the group with a hatchet, his motive for violence no clearer than previously, before herding the rest of the expedition back on the boat for an uncertain return to the asylum, the novel ending on the image of the boat and the sanguinary Lemuel fading away with the last of Malone's dying words: 'Lemuel c'est le responsable, il lève sa hache, où le sang ne séchera jamais, mais ce n'est pour frapper personne, il ne frappera personne, il ne frappera plus personne, il ne touchera jamais plus personne' (185).

## II. 'ils sont tous fous': Beckett's Sadean satire of pure Reason

### 1. The 'ethical yoyo': Beckett's 'po-ethics' of parody

This section proposes a Sadean reading of Beckettian humour, arguing that a central aspect of his reception of and interaction with Sade has to do with the complex relationship between laughter and ethics, which, in Beckett, is essentially parodic. In other words, we shall see that Beckett's idiosyncratic perspective on Sade activates the comical, or ludicrous, dimension of texts that are usually considered profoundly unfunny. This in turn demonstrates Sade's usefulness in reassessing the modalities of laughter in Beckett, in particular as regards parody and satire as discursive devices: it will be shown that the ethical paradigms found in Beckett may be construed as ethical satires grounded in Sadean parody.

In order to determine just what kind of Sadean laughter can be brought to light by adopting a specifically Beckettian perspective, we must start by asking what forms of humour may be found in Sade. Sade is overwhelmingly regarded as 'un clinicien ennuyeux, ne cherchant point à séduire'<sup>29</sup> who has no sense of humour whatsoever.<sup>30</sup> It is true that the seriousness and earnestness with which he exposes his libertine ethics leave little room for self-irony or for the kind of author-reader complicity that might facilitate

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<sup>29</sup> Pauvert's lawyer Maurice Garçon, quoted in Harrison: 62.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Lacan: 'quelqu'un qui en manque, lui, tout à fait absolument, [...] c'est Sade' (262).

laughter. On the rare occasions when Sade can be suspected of deliberate attempts at humour, it is, as Lacan also notes, '[de l']humour noir au mieux' (247), hinging purely on a callous delight in transgression.

Yet this does not necessarily mean that, as David Wheatley claims, '[l]aughter is in short supply in Sade's novels' (2003: 121); in fact, I suggest that Beckett saw in Sade an epitome of Enlightenment rationalism and ethics pushed to their extremes and gone 'mad', effectively turned into an unwitting parody of themselves. Sade stands out in his belief that passion is the only truth and tireless pursuit of sensual pleasure the only rational *modus operandi*; this 'reasoning' functions as an inversion of Kantian ethics (with pleasure recast as Categorical Imperative), epistemology (sensual knowledge vs. philosophical scepticism), and Cartesian thought ('I lust, therefore I am'), while still striving to present itself as an implacable logical demonstration. There is tremendous philosophical irony in this, and it seems very unlikely that Beckett should have ignored or missed it altogether, due not least to his own well-known affection for philosophical parody – eloquently illustrated in the early poem *Whoroscope*, a parodic overview of Descartes' life, in which 'Beckett skilfully intertwines the colloquial and the erudite, achieving a comic incongruity' (Cohn: 15). Lacan suggests that, should Kant (and Sade) have had the slightest sense of humour, their ethics could be construed as funny (Lacan: 262). Sade's (involuntary) parody of rationalism is one of the crucial sources of laughter of interest to us here, for its resonances with Beckett's

texts offer new insights into his compositional process as well as his reception of Enlightenment philosophy and, of course, of Sade himself.

Let us first examine the Kantian dimension of Sade's ethics as a point of entry into the Sadean dimension of Beckett's satirical take on rationalism. In Kantian ethics, ethical 'truths' and moral imperatives are determined not by external or communal principles, but by individual will to act in accordance with what Kant calls the 'universal laws of nature'. This means that worthy pursuits should appear to the subject as potentially desirable on a universal scale and at all times; ethics, for Kant, are therefore a product of the subject's internal system and his/her interpretation of the world.<sup>31</sup> Parallels with central elements of Sade's thought already appear, such as Kant's individualistic perspective and his 'explicit recognition of the will's autonomy, the articulate awareness that rational beings, as beings with wills, are subject to laws only through also being the legislators of those laws' (Engstrom: 151). Moral law becomes dependent on the subject's own conception of happiness: as long as those principles which one considers to apply to oneself and all things are not challenged, then no deed is unethical. However, as Adorno and Horkheimer observe, in a case like Sade's, where the phenomenon of crime is woven into an elaborate justification of its universal necessity, Kant becomes the devil's advocate, as it were, effectively

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<sup>31</sup> For useful exegeses of Kant's moral theory, see for instance Timmons' chapter on 'Kant's moral theory' (205-43), and also Engstrom's on 'The Categorical Imperative' (149-83).

allowing Sade to argue that, destruction occurring routinely in the phenomenal world, it is only natural that one should be free to indulge one's own destructive impulses: 'c'est obéir [aux] lois [de la nature] que de céder aux désirs qu'elle seule a placés dans nous' (PB: 61-62). For the Sadist, the only law worth abiding by is his/her own: 'les lois, bonnes pour la société, sont très mauvaises pour l'individu qui la compose' (PB: 146-47).

Sade is unmistakably Kantian in his belief that self-sufficiency is the condition *sine qua non* of success for the individual. As summed up by Rabaté: 'Adorno et Horkheimer avaient tenté de démontrer que Sade prouve par l'absurde l'inhumanité de la loi morale kantienne, et que de plus, il signale la férocité d'une Raison qui cache en fait l'appétit sauvage d'une bourgeoisie' (2004: 73). As Marty writes, Adorno and Horkheimer do not simply describe Sade as a sadist and a sociopath, but they also place him beside 'la loi morale kantienne, devenue sa sœur et sa complice, comme vidée de toute finalité précise au profit d'un pur fonctionnement rationnel et formel' (45). Suzanne Dow (127) argues that Sade 'gives the "truth" of Kant [by] figuring his categorical imperative as something to which the subject cannot approximate without extreme suffering'. Crucially, Dow also recognises Sade's Kantian reveal as a form of unwitting "'off-colour" caricature' of Kantian ethics, comparing Sade's relation to Kant to the function of humour in the Lacanian super-ego:

Humour is for Lacan the exposition and betrayal of the superego function as that 'obscene, ferocious' anti-ethical agency that masks or obscures radical evil [...]. [Sade] thus exposes the complicity of Kantian ethics with the perverse superego function. (127)

Rabaté notes the 'curious coincidence' of the writing of *Watt* and *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, started around the same time and in similar conditions. It does indeed seem plausible that Beckett too had spotted the conceptual 'loophole' allowing Sade to make his voice heard through Kant: in January 1938, he had recently purchased 'the entire works of Kant' in German, 'two immense parcels that [he] could hardly carry from customs to taxi' (L1: 581) and, by 12 May (shortly after his discovery of the *120 journées*), he was 'read[ing] nothing and writ[ing] nothing, unless it is Kant (de nobis ipsis silemus) and French anacreontics' (L1: 622) – tellingly, it is in this same letter that he mentioned that he might write an article on Sade for *Hermathena*. I therefore agree with Rabaté that '[l]e projet de Beckett se situe dans un cadre comparable à celui d'Adorno et d'Horkheimer' (2004: 73).

Before analysing forms of Sadean ethical parody in Beckett, it is necessary to acknowledge explicit associations between laughter and ethics in his thought and to highlight their Sadean dimension. This brings us to the well-known taxonomy of laughter outlined in *Watt*, starting with the 'bitter' laugh, the laugh that 'laughs at that which is not good, it is the ethical laugh' (47): this is the laugh that rejoices at vice, evil and crime; Ruby Cohn sees it as 'laughter aroused by cruelty' (quoted in Salisbury: 42). As such, it signals

intellectual pleasure derived from the transgressive value of evil deeds and therefore has clear Sadean undertones. Laura Salisbury shows how this 'bitter laugh' relates to the sarcastic tone of Beckett's early critical essays such as 'Censorship and the Saorstát', which 'rails against an Act of censorship that made "provision for the prohibition of the sale and distribution of unwholesome literature" alongside the banning of contraceptives, in the Irish Free State' (43) – incidentally, the problem of censorship reinforces our Sadean parallel. Then there is the second, 'hollow' laugh, the laugh that 'laughs at that which is not true, it is the intellectual laugh' (*Watt*: 47) aroused for instance by ignorance. Again, it is easy to see how Sadean the hollow laugh appears, since so much of Sade's 'philosophy' consists in ridiculing what he saw as widely accepted fallacies such as the usefulness of religion and the existence of God, narratives which to him have no possible use beyond eliciting laughter, like the premise of a circus or comedy act: 'je désirerais qu'on fût libre de se rire ou de se moquer de tous [les cultes]; que des hommes, réunis dans un temple quelconque pour invoquer l'Éternel à leur guise, fussent vus comme des comédiens sur un théâtre, au jeu desquels il est permis à chacun d'aller rire' (*PB*: 174-75). Last, but not least, there is the terrible, 'mirthless' laugh, 'the dianoetic laugh, down the snout—haw!—so. It is the laugh of laughs, the risus purus, the laugh laughing at the laugh, the beholding, the saluting of the highest joke, in a word the laugh that laughs – silence please – at that which is unhappy' (*Watt*: 47). This dianoetic laugh,

famously summarised by Nell in *Fin de partie* – ‘Rien n’est plus drôle que le malheur, je te l’accorde. [...] Si, si, c’est la chose la plus comique au monde’ (*FdP*: 31-32) – encompasses the other two laughs and is pure celebration of power freed from laws and ethics. It is perfectly sadistic, and indeed eminently Sadean, since it requires the object of laughter to be aware of its own suffering – one need only look at the regularity with which Justine’s pathetic lamentations and cries for mercy are met by raucous laughter in Sade whenever she narrowly escapes death or encounters a potential protector (who inevitably turns out to be even worse than her previous tormentors). As Salisbury puts it, this laugh ‘separates itself from those shaky moral structures of the good and the true’ and ‘laughs at the poverty and contingency of those normative categories which attempt to paper over the misery’ (41). Adorno and Horkheimer interpret the Sadean laugh as ‘[f]ear averted from the self [which] bursts out in hearty laughter, the expression of a hardening within the individual which can only be fully lived out through the collective’ (88).

We have outlined the close and complex relationship between sadism and laughter in Sade’s and Beckett’s works. We shall now argue that, within Beckett’s works, the text and characters form a fictional ‘collective’ through which a kind of narrative sadism is enacted as part of a parody of ethics modelled on the final episode of *Juliette*. Beckett was very sensitive to the comical potential of certain ideas when seen through a caricatural lens. In his work, philosophical and literary sources become compositional devices used

to flesh out parables and allegories or as narrative strategies. Salisbury writes that 'Beckett admired writing that worked to express multiplicity and incoherence rather than unification under an ordered technical surface' (65). She goes on to outline Bakhtin's definition of parody as a form of dialogic splitting within a discourse, using this as theoretical framework in her analysis of Beckettian humour:

in parody, one must recognise the form that is to be imperfectly repeated, its ideologies and ways of seeing, before submitting it to a dialogue with another discourse that might then render it laughable. [...] [Parody] is marked by the irruptive and interruptive return of another discourse that both produces the incongruities of comedy but also submits the laughter that appears to a radical evacuation of any absolute or unidirectional power. (66)

As we have seen, Beckett's early works contain a number of references and allusions to Sade, some of which, like the recurring association between sadism and madhouses, are difficult to account for in the sole light of what sources Beckett is known to have encountered, especially before his first reading of the *120 journées* in 1938 – a matter of weeks before the publication of *Murphy* – and given the fact that Pauvert only published the *Nouvelle Justine* in 1947. There are further instances in which a Sadean discourse may be irrupting into Beckett's to the effect that its ethical implications are accompanied by incongruous laughter. While there is obviously no trace of the *120 journées* in *Murphy*, it is worth noting that Sade was an occasional topic of conversation at the Joyces' in the 1930s, which is how Beckett's and

Kahane's translation project came about in the first place.<sup>32</sup> However, what Beckett would certainly have known about, if only from his reading of Praz,<sup>33</sup> is the infamous manner of Justine's death from a lightning strike in all three versions of Sade's tirelessly rewritten masterpiece. There is considerable and deliberate Sadean irony in the virtuous Justine surviving innumerable atrocities, only to find her death, not directly at the hands of her libertine torturers, but in a 'natural' or metaphysical (God-inflicted) catastrophe.<sup>34</sup> This raises the tantalizing possibility that Justine's demise somehow influenced another accidental death of notable irony, namely Murphy's. Murphy's existential dilemma throughout the novel may be described as a longing for quietistic, solipsistic will-lessness, ill-combined with more worldly desires such as those elicited by his girlfriend Celia. One night, after failing to 'see himself' in the dead eyes of Mr Endon, Murphy is overwhelmed by anxiety and resolves to go 'back to Brewery Road, to Celia' (141) in the morning, only to die, moments later, in a sudden gas explosion under his garret at the MMM – caused unwittingly by Mr. Endon himself, left to wander unsupervised about the hospital. Murphy's death is often read as a 'huge Democritean joke' (Ackerley and Gontarski: 388) but it is easy to see how it could also be construed as a Sadean one: the two endings are connected not only by the

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Girodias: 225. For details of Kahane's long association with Joyce, see Pearson: 414-21.

<sup>33</sup> 'Even the death of Justine is a meteorological event' (Praz: 106).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *NJ*, t. 10: 345-52. Sade is purposely unclear as to whether Justine's death is considered accidental, and whether it proves either the absence of God or his wickedness, his principal point being that no success can come from virtue.

deaths themselves, but also by the dark and absurd comedy they enact. Further parallels with *Justine* may be pointed out, such as the predictably sorry state of the victims' remains, 'complètement défiguré[s]' (*NJ*, t. 10: 346) with, in both cases, mysteriously unscathed buttocks: 'Qu'on a raison de faire l'éloge de Dieu, dit Noirceuil; qu'il est décent; il a respecté le cul; il est encore plus beau ce sublime derrière' (*NJ*, t. 10: 347). In addition, both Justine's and Murphy's wishes and last wills, together with their corpses, are utterly disrespected and desecrated: Justine is raped once again post-mortem and denied her last sacrament: 'Triste et malheureuse créature; il était écrit dans le ciel, que le repos même de la mort ne te garantirait pas des atrocités du crime, et de la perversité des hommes' (*NJ*, t. 10: 347).<sup>35</sup> As to Murphy, his dying wish is to have his 'body, mind and soul' flushed down the 'necessary house' of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, 'if possible during the performance of a piece, the whole to be executed without ceremony or show of grief' (151). This latter instruction is certainly followed, but not the others, as Cooper, left in charge of the parcel of ash after a cheap incineration, first decides he will 'drop it into the first considerable receptacle for refuse that he [comes] to' (153) but is distracted by a pub on his way and ends up throwing it at someone in angry drunkenness instead:

It bounced, burst, off the wall onto the floor, where at once it became the object of much dribbling, passing, trapping, shooting, punching, heading

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<sup>35</sup> Murphy's 'charred buttocks' are sufficiently intact for Celia to identify him thanks to the large birthmark on his bottom.

and even some recognition from the gentleman's code. By closing time the body, mind and soul of Murphy were freely distributed over the floor of the saloon [...]. (154)

Despite its tragic context, this passage has flagrant comic overtones, due not least to the narrator's delight in detail and flourish and to his pointed reference to Murphy's 'mind, body and soul' in an ironic echo of the protagonist's last will. The laughter elicited by the narration is therefore undeniably dianoetic, being at once ethical and intellectual (Cooper's actions are neither 'good' nor true to Murphy's wishes) and also aroused by the protagonist's posthumous misfortunes as a bag of ash. A final parallel may be drawn between Murphy's last will and Sade's own detailed instructions regarding the disposal of his body after his death, in an oft-quoted passage from his testament, first published in Jules Janin's *Le livre* in 1870, reproduced in Apollinaire's 1909 book, then in Maurice Heine's posthumous *Le marquis de Sade* (1950), and again in Lely's *Vie du Marquis de Sade* (1952-1957). We know from Beckett's correspondence with George Duthuit in late 1950-early 1951 that he wished to include this text (or parts of it) in their common critical project on Sade (plausibly for a special issue of *transition*): 'On pourrait mettre également la fin du texte que je t'ai lu, concernant la disparition de son corps' (L2: 216) – though this did not come to fruition. In this passage, which Beckett must have encountered either in the Apollinaire or the Heine (or indeed in both on separate occasions), Sade, like Murphy, requests that his funeral be conducted 'sans aucune espèce de cérémonie' and that his body should not be

dissected (as was common practice at the time) but left whole instead, thereby preserving the integrity of 'mind, body and soul'. He indicates a specific location for his burial place, hidden away in the middle of a forest on his land of Malmaison, and asks that

[l]a fosse une fois recouverte, il sera semé dessus des glands, afin que, par la suite, le terrain de ladite fosse se trouvant regarni et le taillis se trouvant fourré comme il l'était auparavant, les traces de ma tombe disparaissent de dessus la surface de la terre, comme je me flatte que ma mémoire s'effacera de l'esprit des hommes. (quoted in Apollinaire: 15)

Like Murphy's, his demands were largely ignored: 'au mépris de ses dispositions testamentaires, le marquis devait être inhumé religieusement dans le cimetière de la maison de Charenton' (Lely: 693), his last residence and asylum – and we note the irony of this religious funeral, the ultimate insult to Sade's atheism and perfect inversion of Justine's denial of her last sacrament. Instead of erasing all traces of his physical existence (another parallel with Murphy's will), he is given a tomb clearly marked with a cross, though admittedly the latter does not bear his name. In a sense, the fate of Murphy's body stands closer to Sade's wishes to disappear from the surface of the earth than Sade's own fate ever did: 'before another dayspring greyned the earth had been swept away with the sand, the beer, the butts, the glass, the matches, the spits, the vomit' (*Murphy*: 154).

Murphy, like Justine, is therefore subjected to extreme narrative sadism – which remains a dominant feature of Beckett's aesthetics up to his last works. He is embroiled in a complex Sadean parody articulated around the

themes of death, transgression and human finitude. What, then, of the ethical implications of such a parody with regard to Beckett's reception of Kant and Sade? Dow proposes a compelling Sadean/Lacanian reading of the role of humour in Beckett's reception of Kantian ethics, addressing humour as a post-Kantian discursive mode 'caricaturing an ethical discourse that remains complicit with the [sadistic] superego by the very specific procedure of betraying the superego function itself' (128). In other words, the dianoetic humour accompanying Murphy's annihilation signals an intellectual (Kantian) justification of narrative sadism, in a dispassionate ethical satire based on a parodic rewriting of Justine's death. In realising this, 'we are quite literally taking seriously the lesson that Lacan takes from Sade: namely, that a good joke seems to require a negativity that is also beyond a joke' (Dow: 129).

## **2. Beckett, with Kant and Sade: epistemology and rationalism**

The Enlightenment embraced the emergence of a scientific and systematised model of thinking that rejected empirical or unproved beliefs in favour of ideas that could be demonstrated by way of a logical protocol. 'Thinking, as understood by the Enlightenment, is the process of establishing a unified, scientific order and of deriving factual knowledge from principles, whether these principles are interpreted as arbitrarily posited axioms, innate ideas, or the highest abstractions' (Adorno and Horkheimer: 63). In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant sought to prove that it is possible to deduce 'truth'

through a process of rational enquiry, without this *a priori* knowledge being a product of empirical experience – itself recognised as *a posteriori* knowledge. For Beckett, who first encountered Kant through Schopenhauer<sup>36</sup> and took issue with the very notion of ‘truth’, such epistemological models were as inhuman as they were unsustainable, for, as Adorno and Horkheimer explain in their seminal essay ‘Excursus II: Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality’, a philosophy which ‘equates truth with the scientific system’ (66) is bound to lose touch with the complexities of the human condition in favour of a glorification of the progress and power achieved through science.

A letter from January 1937 illustrates Beckett’s scorn for the idea that reason is capable of much more than arbitrary interpretations of whatever little is knowable in the world – or even, for that matter, that there *is* a coherence to be restored in the first place:

I am not interested in a unification of the historical chaos any more than I am in the ‘clarification’ of the individual chaos [...]. What I want is the straws, flotsam, etc., names, dates, births and deaths, because that is all I can know. [...] I say the background and the causes [according to Meier] are an inhuman and incomprehensible machinery [...]. Rationalism is the last form of animism. (quoted in Knowlson, 1997: 244)

Beckett (and his characters) relate to the incoherence of the factual in as much as they experience it in its discordant multiplicity; however, rationalism approaches it systematically with the ambition of ‘clarifying’ the chaos: ‘The system which enlightenment aims for is the form of knowledge which most

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Ackerley and Gontarski: 294-95.

ably deals with the facts, most effectively assists the subject in mastering nature' (Adorno and Horkheimer: 65). This obsession with rationalising 'nature' into knowable facts necessarily reifies humans; as Adorno and Horkheimer point out, Kant's method considers 'human actions and desires exactly as if [it] were dealing with lines, planes, and bodies' (quoted in Adorno and Horkheimer: 67). Beckett's biting criticism of rationalism echoes his previous statement from 1934 about the 'ludicrous rationalisation of the itch to animise' being as futile and vapid ('mièvre') as Sade's dream of outraging nature, and also anticipates these words from the late 1960s:

The 18th century has been called the century of reason, Le siècle de la Raison. I've never understood that; they're all mad, ils sont tous fous, ils déraisonnent! They give reason a responsibility which it simply can't bear, it's too weak. The Encyclopedists want to know everything... But that direct relation between the self and — as the Italians say — lo scibile, the knowable, was already broken. (quoted in Fehsenfeld and McMillan: 231)

Beckett reiterated this view in 1977, stating his clear preference for oriental mysticism over 'cette saloperie de logique' (quoted in Juliet: 72). His comparison of rationalism with madness suggests that the picture of reality painted by the rationalists was no less absurd a representation of the world than one drawn by some of the certified insane. As the paragon of rationalism gone 'insane', Sade provides a compelling illustration of the dangers of deferring all ethical and epistemological responsibility to reason. This, I argue, is one of the key facets of his works that compelled Beckett to him.

When considered in its historical context, Sade's libertine philosophy becomes a pseudo-rationalist demonstration of the failings of rationalism, a kind of epistemological catastrophe in which the 'enlightened' subject reasons its way into what can only be described as a form of nihilistic madness: 'the work of Sade [...] is an intransigent critique of practical reason, beside which even that of Kant himself appears like a revocation of his own thought. It pushes the scientific principle to annihilating extremes' (Adorno and Horkheimer: 74). Sade's worldview is inherently rationalistic because it is founded on the relationship between thinking and power; libertine knowledge liberates individuals from the yoke of ignorance (i.e. oppression from the legal system, religion and taboos), and their *apprentissage*, like Eugénie's in *Philosophie*, culminates in their 'rebirth' as powerful subjects of their own lubricious imperative. Juliette embodies 'the same inner discord as the Enlightenment itself' (Adorno and Horkheimer: 86), that is, rationalism's intellectual justification of inhumanity. Juliette 'loves systems and logic. She wields the instrument of rational thought with consummate skill. As far as self-mastery is concerned, her instructions sometimes stand in the same relation to Kant's as the special application does to the principle' (Adorno and Horkheimer: 74). But while, for Kant, reason is 'a faculty of deducing the particular from the universal' (quoted in Adorno and Horkheimer: 64) the libertine philosophy holds that individual instincts prove that vice is as essential and necessary in the world as any other natural destructive force

such as death. Sade's discourse is perverse because it exploits logic as justification for its own self-serving ideology, and it does so because it blithely warps its own principles to fit its argument; '[t]he laws of logic establish the most universal relationships within the order and define them. Unity lies in self-consistency. The principle of contradiction is the system *in nuce*' (Adorno and Horkheimer: 63).

Sade, as the outmost philosophical aberration, firmly established on both sides of the border between reason and insanity, becomes Kant's ideal counterpart in Beckett's comedy of reason, in which reason is pushed to its limits, ultimately made to derail and lose at its own game. Beckett pairs Kant and Sade in a parodic denunciation of the utter absurdity of any enterprise based on the urge to 'make sense' of the world instead of 'accommodating the mess' (quoted in Driver: 219). The epistemological comedy enacted in *Watt* is conceptually identical to the Sadean aporia of a text that reasons and 'déraisonne' at the same time. Parody reduces the proceedings of reason to absurdity by pointing out that, when the question of what can be known becomes obsessive, as it does in *Watt*, method, reason and logic are utterly powerless to provide any epistemological relief, instead hurling the mind into insanity and its owner into the asylum. Watt's epistemological anxiety is palpable throughout the novel and infects the narration, resulting in interminable reviews of probabilities associated with (often mundane) phenomena that he compulsively needs to explain to himself: 'Not that it was

a knowledge that could be of any help to Watt, or any hurt, or cause him any pleasure, or cause him any pain, for it was not. But he found it strange to think that he would know nothing of [all those little unknown facts]' (36). P. J. Murphy writes that '*Watt* is a Kantian novel', and notes the phonetic correspondence Kant/Knott, (P. J. Murphy: 229) – much of the knowledge Watt is so eager (and fails) to acquire pertaining to Mr Knott's daily routine. The frenzied concern with permutations of possibilities forming much of *Watt's* narrative universe caricatures the rationalist obsession with the 'knowable', in which reason is revealed as 'the organ of calculation, of planning' (Adorno and Horkheimer: 69), and becomes 'a purposiveness without purpose, which [...] could be harnessed to any end. It is planning considered as an end in itself' (Adorno and Horkheimer: 69-70). One of the first such digressions ends with Watt's perplexity at finding the back door to Knott's house open, having thought it closed moments earlier, which challenges his 'science of the locked door' (*Watt*: 35) – this phrase could be read as a metaphor of rationalism as an epistemological dead-end. On several occasions, Watt is 'detained' (34) by voices from within 'singing, crying, stating, murmuring, things unintelligible, in his ear' (27) and reminiscent of the kind of break from reality and linguistic malfunctions found in psychosis, which may (or may not) account for Watt's sudden transfer to the asylum – the irony here being that Watt's very frenetic desire for knowledge ultimately causes the narration to become obscure and elliptical. As Pilling puts it,

'[a]gainst the background of an epoch given over to irrational barbarism posing as the saviour of civilization, Watt's mobilization of ridiculously "rational," and hence utterly deranged, strategies, looks almost perfectly emblematic' (1994: 36). Ultimately, in *Watt*, '[t]he special architectonic structure of the Kantian system, like the gymnasts' pyramids in Sade's orgies [...] prefigures the organization, devoid of any substantial goals, which was to encompass the whole of life' (Adorno and Horkheimer: 69). Nixon and Van Hulle rightly suspect a Sadean parallel: 'This procedure of enumerating becomes a narrative strategy in *Watt*, possibly inspired by the system of exhaustive enumeration as a critical perversion of the Enlightenment project in the Marquis de Sade's *Les 120 Journées de Sodome*' (187).

Another Sadean parallel may be pointed out in *Watt*, in which Beckett develops an aesthetics of textual 'unfinishedness' that both resonates with Sade and can be construed as an allegory of the futility of rationalist epistemology striving to organise and catalogue the world. With its embedded stories, shifts of narrative focalisation and its 'Addenda' – which could not be incorporated due to 'fatigue and disgust' (*Watt*: 247) – *Watt* poses the problem of a fictionality in performance, aware of its own artificiality, peppered with incongruous textual interruptions such as '(Hiatus in MS)' (238) or '(MS illegible)' (240). Many of these attempts to anchor *Watt* in alternative (fake) narrative and enunciative realities gesture towards a Sadean reality, where important novels are left unfinished, painstakingly composed

manuscripts get lost or stolen, are scattered, worn and (sometimes) mysteriously recovered; as Rabaté notes, the Addenda to *Watt* 'looks like a direct borrowing from the Addenda left by Sade at the end of the *120 Days of Sodom*' (2005: 100). This Addenda falsely inscribes *Watt* in a tradition of the 'unfinished novel' since its inclusion 'precludes any determinate or finished quality to the novel as text' (Ackerley, 1993: 175). This Sadean thematic of the long-lost manuscript and correlated aesthetics of incompleteness are best illustrated by a story (itself unfinished) told to Watt of Louit, an aspiring academic of sorts, and his dissertation defence. Louit is particularly distressed at having mislaid, out of 'misfortune'

the one hundred and five loose sheets closely covered on both sides with shorthand notes embracing the entire period in question. This represented, he added, an average of no less than five pages, or ten sides, per day. He was now exerting himself to the utmost, and indeed he feared greatly beyond his strength, with a view to recuperating his MS., which, qua MS., could not be of the smallest value to any person other than himself and, eventually, humanity. (171)

How not to sense in this passage Sade's famous despair and 'tears of blood'<sup>37</sup> at the loss of the manuscript of the *120 journées*, stolen from his prison cell days after his transfer to Charenton during the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789? There is also something distinctly Sadean to the manuscript's ambivalent value, being at once worthless and universally important,

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<sup>37</sup> 'mes manuscrits, sur la perte desquels je verse des larmes de sang !... On retrouve des lits, des tables, des commodes, mais on ne retrouve pas des idées... Non, [...] je ne vous peindrai jamais mon désespoir de cette perte: elle est irréparable pour moi.' (quoted in Lely: 457).

highlighting the contrast between the negative reception of Sade's works and his own conviction of their philosophical usefulness.<sup>38</sup>

### **3. Mind-body dualism and the sexual imagination: Descartes, Kant, Sade**

Is the mind categorically distinct from the body? What is the nature of their bond? How do they interact with and affect each other? In modern continental philosophy, these questions are predominantly approached through Enlightenment philosopher René Descartes. Beckett was familiar with Descartes' system and acquired a cursory knowledge of some of his followers through his reading of Windelband's *History of Philosophy* in the early 1930s. While much has been made of the importance of Cartesian thought in Beckett's writing, this section re-examines his treatment of mind-body dualism in the light of a Sadean conceptual apparatus, suggesting that both philosophers inspired Beckett to conduct similar experiments in philosophical parody, and that part of what drew him to Sade can be explained through his interest in Descartes. It will be shown that Beckett's artistic reception of the question of mind-body dualism manifests through his relocation of sensual pleasure in the mental realm.

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<sup>38</sup> Sade, who had notorious didactic ambitions, considered the role of the work of art to be morally subversive : 'Je voudrais que les hommes eussent chez eux [...] une espèce d'arbre en relief, sur chaque branche duquel serait écrit le nom d'un vice, en observant de commencer par le plus mince travers, pour arriver ainsi par gradation jusqu'au crime de l'oubli des premiers devoirs. Un tel tableau moral n'aurait-il pas son utilité? et ne vaudrait-il pas bien un Téniers ou un Rubens?' (quoted in Lely: 442-43).

Descartes famously concludes his epistemological protocol with 'Je pense donc je suis' in *Discours de la méthode* (1637), having dismissed sensory affect altogether as a means to access objective truth. As he explains in *Les passions de l'âme* (1649), he considers body and mind to be absolutely separate, their interactions only made possible by the pineal gland (conarium), 'la petite glande qui est au milieu du cerveau' (Descartes: 121), which he regards as the seat of the soul – 'le principal siège de l'âme' (120). As such, the pineal gland is also the only organ that directly manifests the existence of God in the body. Descartes' argument for the existence of God is the argument of necessary existence (i.e. if one can imagine a perfect being, then that being must exist) developed in the 'Méditation Troisième' in *Méditations métaphysiques* (1641). This allowed him to adopt an occasionalist view of the interaction between mind and body. Beckett's interest in Cartesian occasionalism is clear from his notes on Descartes followers such as Flemish occasionalist Arnold Geulincx:

The nature of man consists in the inner union, metaphysically incomprehensible, of two heterogeneous substances, mind and body, and this is the only instance of interaction between the conscious and spatial. Animals are mere bodies, but in humans the [...] pineal gland (conarium) disturbs the mental substance and gives rise to unclear and indistinct idea (emotion, passion). [...] [The] ultimate cause for causal connection between stimuli and sensation, purpose and action, is God. This is occasionalism. (TCD MS10967/189)

Sade's own mechanistic approach requiring no divine agency, he despised Descartes' occasionalist dualism. Rather ironically, he concurred with

Descartes on the importance of the pineal gland, but instead of the 'seat of the soul', Sade's pineal gland is 'où, nous autres philosophes athées, établissons le siège de la raison' (1783 letter quoted in Lely: 430). Beckett and Sade certainly shared an obsessive scorn for Descartes and Cartesian dualism, but what makes the Sadean 'method' so peculiar is how close it is to Descartes' in some respects. Sade, in his own way, also follows a philosophical protocol based on epistemological doubt but, crucially, unlike Descartes, he finds that there is much more truth in the body and the physical world than in the feeble and fallible human mind. What Sade does is not so much attempt to extricate mind and body from dualism (he does believe mind and body to be separate), but rather ground the principle of reason in sensual pleasure. Desire for pleasure binds mind and body together; it replaces God as the main cause of life and death, and provides the Sadean individual with his/her ontological grounding. Sade, as it were, therefore rewrites 'I think, therefore I am' into 'I lust, therefore I am'.

Unlike Beckett, Sade's issue with Descartes does not lie with the concept of reason itself but with his categorical relegation of truth (whether ontological, moral, epistemological) outside of physical experience. He sees Descartes' insistence on the existence of God as a refusal to engage with science and the world. In *Dialogue entre un prêtre et un moribond* (1782) – which Beckett aptly described as 'une profession de foi athéiste de Sade très vibrante' in a 1951 letter to Georges Duthuit (L2: 223) – Sade writes:

Qu'as-tu besoin d'une seconde difficulté, quand tu ne peux pas expliquer la première, et dès qu'il est possible que la nature toute seule ait fait ce que tu attribues à ton dieu, pourquoi veux-tu lui aller chercher un maître? [...] Perfectionne ta physique et tu comprendras mieux la nature, épure ta raison, bannis tes préjugés et tu n'auras plus besoin de ton dieu. (*Dialogue*: 39-40)

For Sade, ideas are always in some way a result of the senses. In a pamphlet entitled 'Pensée sur Dieu', Sade launches one of his most direct attacks on the Cogito and its rejection of sensual experience as epistemologically flawed:

Point de sens, point d'idées; *nihil est in intellectu, quod non prius fuerit in sensu*, est en un mot la grande base et la grande vérité qui établit [notre] système [...]. [C'est l'] axiome certain de toute vraie philosophie. Il entre, prétend-[on], dans notre esprit d'autres idées que celles acquises par les sens, et l'une de ces grandes idées qui peuvent arriver à nous, abstraction faite des sens, est: *Je pense donc je suis*. Cette idée, dit cet auteur, n'a aucun son, aucune couleur, aucune odeur, etc., donc elle n'est pas l'ouvrage des sens. Peut-on s'astreindre aussi servilement à la poussière de l'école jusqu'à faire des raisonnements de cette fausseté-là! Sans doute cette idée: *Je pense donc je suis*, n'est pas de l'espèce de celle: Cette table est unie, parce que le sens du toucher en apporte la preuve à mon esprit. Elle n'est, j'en conviens, l'opération d'aucun sens en particulier, mais elle est le résultat de tous, et si réellement, que s'il était possible qu'une créature existât sans aucun sens, il lui serait parfaitement impossible de former cette pensée: Je pense donc je suis. Donc, cette pensée est le résultat de l'opération de tous nos sens [...] et donc elle ne peut détruire le grand et infaillible raisonnement de l'impossibilité d'acquérir des idées abstractivement des sens. (519-50)

This passage illustrates Sade's often-syllogistic approach to logical reasoning, presupposing the sensual origin of ideas rather than demonstrating it, and grounds Sadean reason in a Cartesian inversion by which ontological truth is not wholly contained within the mind.

Mind-body dualism being a central theme in Beckett's works, Beckett cannot have failed to note the conflict between Cartesian and Sadean dualism. I argue that this tension was instrumental in his literary experiments staging

the collapse of the Cartesian individual. Belacqua struggles with the disharmony between his fraught sexual appetites and his longing for 'a beatitude of indolence [...] a waking ultra-cerebral obscurity, thronged with grey angels' (*Dream*: 44). In this mental state, which he calls his 'tunnel', his 'wombtomb', he is a 'grave paroxysm of gratuitous thoughts, his thoughts, free and unprofessional, non-salaried, living as only spirits are free to live', he is 'wholly a gloom of ghostly comfort, a Limbo from which the mistral of desire had been withdrawn' (*Dream*: 45). In 'Yellow', he has 'a tumour the size of a brick [...] on the back of his neck' (*MPTK*: 164), suggesting a diseased conarium. *Murphy* can be read as a philosophical parody or, as Richard Begam argues, 'an attack against the idea that the cogito provides a "rational" basis for modernity and the "truth-telling" genre of the novel' (7). Murphy conceives of himself as split between a mind and a body, and struggles with the demands of his physical desires. His 'conarium has shrunk to nothing' (*Murphy*: 8); he is a defective Cartesian man, godless and soulless, and therefore not 'rightly human' (47). Beckett's 'seedy solipsist[s]' (50) idealise the mental world over the physical world; in their fantasies, the mind is stylised as a womb-like place of utter peace and painlessness, but also as the place of the highest possible level of bliss: 'For it was not until his body was appeased that he could come alive in his mind [...]. And life in his mind gave him pleasure, such pleasure that pleasure was not the word' (*Murphy*: 6).

It therefore seems that Beckett, like Sade, uses the notion of pleasure to subvert Cartesian dualism and erode the distinction between reason and madness, nurse and patient, inside and outside the asylum. Beckett relocates sexuality and eroticism in the mental realm, and this represents a logical inversion, or mirror image, of Sade's libidinous rationalism. As Neary says, '[a]s it is with the love of the body, so with the friendship of the mind [...]. Here are the pudenda of my psyche' (31).<sup>39</sup> In *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, Belacqua thinks about his love, the Smeraldina, and tries to 'work himself up' to 'the little gush of tears that would exonerate him' (i.e. make himself cry): 'First the cautious gyring of her in his 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' (4). The climactic, ascending narrative movement based on repetition, jerks and literal and figurative discharges ('gush of tears;' 'voiding') confers clear sexual overtones to mental states; in Stewart's words, there is 'a manipulation of the real and mental worlds within a confusion of cross-contaminations: the mind of the body, the body of the mind' (35).

Indeed, if Beckett's minds have bodies, his bodies have minds. Body parts, in particular behinds and genitals, become props in the dramatisation of the logical deduction process. Epistemological deduction now hinges on

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<sup>39</sup> Pilling's transcriptions of the 'Whoroscope Notebook' indicate that 'pudenda' is the word for private parts in Plinius' *Natural History*, where Beckett got it from (2006: 212).

clues found on the 'lowest' part of one's being, as when Celia identifies Murphy's disfigured body thanks to a 'huge pink naevus on the pinnacle of the right buttock' (20): '[t]he remains having been turned over, Celia addressed herself with a suddenly confident air to the farthest of the charred buttocks and found at once what she sought' (149). In *Watt*, Mr Case claims to have 'a great memory for arses' and the ability to identify anyone from their arse: 'Let me once catch a fair glimpse of an arse, and I'll pick it out for you among a million' (242). In *Sade* too, the buttocks are a defining feature of one's identity: 'une des choses à quoi l'on s'amusa le plus fut de cacher le visage et la gorge des jeunes filles et de parier de les reconnaître rien qu'en examinant leurs fesses' (120J: 130). In *Watt*, the time of the day can be determined not from the course of the sun, but from people's genitals, as Mr Gorman does, 'lowering the hand that [holds] [his] watch to the level of the glans (Mr. Gorman had a very long arm) penis', 'laying the other to his temple', and 'cuddl[ing] the watch to his ear' (238). This incongruous and utterly unscientific method reduces the question of what can be known of time (and any phenomenological significance of this for the individual) to a meaningless, absurd ritual.<sup>40</sup>

The pursuit of pleasure in the mind is also the pursuit of a retentive existence in which the impulse to create is associated with the itch to move,

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<sup>40</sup> Beckett adds the footnote 'Et la chaîne?' in the French translation (249), drawing attention to the absurdity of the gesture, apparently impossible to perform due to the length of the chain.

the urge to masturbate. Descriptions of the artistic mind at work have overt sexual connotations, and creation becomes compulsive; as Stewart puts it, '[m]asturbation and literary creation are allied or flow from the same situation' (36). Beckett's juxtaposition of autoeroticism and artistic creation may be found in his characteristic musical metaphor for sex.<sup>41</sup> In *Dream* in particular, the ataraxic pleasures of the mind at peace fade into the onanistic pleasures of the mind engaged in creation:

The ecstatic mind, the mind achieving creation, take ours for example, rises to the shaftheads of its statement [...] 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 [...]. (16-17)

The narration flows in a crescendo, with compulsive bursts of angry energy evoking Sade's libertines' libidinous lyricism.

Solipsistic mental masturbation also evokes Adorno and Horkheimer's comments on Sade's libertine world, in which '[w]hat seems to matter [...], more than pleasure itself, is the busy pursuit of pleasure, its organization' (69). This remark, made as part of a parallel between the implications of Kant's and Sade's respective takes on rationalist thinking, draws our attention to the common Kantian subtext linking Beckett's and Sade's views on imagination. In the description of Belacqua's creative ecstasy, creation emerges from a sort of primordial soup, in the deeper recesses of the psyche.

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<sup>41</sup> On the association between music and sex see for instance Stewart's section on 'The Business and Music of *Murphy*' (44-49).

The term 'schema' may well be an allusion to Kant's transcendental schema. Beckett's rejection of such rationalisation of the creative process therefore points to a vision of art and creation as pre-cognitive – 'the glare of understanding switched off' (44) – pre-ethical thinking. This mode of mental existence is utterly impossible to rationalise or encapsulate, it is pure, 'ecstatic' compulsion to create; 'sexuality turns into an imaginative manipulation of sensory data, a reordering of the real followed by a process of distillation that results in the "spirit" or the "art" being achieved' (Stewart: 36). While Beckett resists Kant's attempts at rationalising the cognitive uses of imagination, however, his depiction of the creative mind sits somewhat more comfortably with Kant's view of aesthetic imagination as a means to free oneself from the 'constraint of the understanding': 'when the aim is aesthetic, then the imagination is free, so that [...] it may supply, in an unstudied way, a wealth of undeveloped material for the understanding which the latter disregarded in its concept' (quoted in Stokes: 157).

At any rate, imagination has equally important roles for Kant, Beckett and Sade. For the latter, it is a way to form a picture of the world and interact with it. In Clément's 'dissertation philosophique' to *Justine* (NJ, t. 2: pp. 204-10), he explains the perverse and subversive powers of imagination, beginning with their influence on the libertine perception of reality:

[L]es objets n'ont de prix à nos yeux que celui qu'y met notre imagination [...]. L'imagination de l'homme est une faculté de son esprit où vont, par l'organe des sens, se peindre, se modifier les objets, et se former ensuite

ses pensées, en raison du premier aperçu de ces objets. Mais cette imagination, résultative elle-même de l'espèce d'organisation dont est doué l'homme, n'adopte les objets reçus que de telle ou telle manière, et ne crée ensuite les pensées que d'après les effets produits par le choc des objets aperçus. (206-07)

This is not far removed from Kant's transcendental schema, at least from a formal point of view: we find a pre-existing, *a priori* 'organisation', which is then combined with sensory stimuli from the external world through imagination to produce a picture of the world.<sup>42</sup> This visual analogy is Sade's own, as he goes on to compare the action of imagination to that of distorting mirrors, some of which 'diminuent les objets, d'autres qui les grossissent; ceux-ci qui les rendent affreux, ceux-là qui leur prêtent des charmes':

T'imagines-tu maintenant que si chacune de ces glaces unissait la faculté créatrice à la faculté objective, elle ne donnerait pas, du même homme qui se serait regardé dans elle, un portrait tout à fait différent? [...] La glace qui l'aurait vu beau, l'aimerait; celle qui l'aurait vu affreux, le hairait; et ce serait pourtant toujours le même individu. (*NJ*, t. 2: 207)

Beyond its Kantian implications and its intellectual justification of perversion, this passage denotes a certain modernist intuition of man's inevitably flawed rapport to reality, which contributes to undermining his parallel attempts at rationalising ethics. What this passage also seems to undermine is Maurice Blanchot's view that 'Sade [...] dans son système réduit autant que possible la part des voluptés intellectuelles' and 'a supprimé presque complètement l'érotisme de l'imagination' (Blanchot: 35) in his seminal essay 'La Raison de Sade' (1949, which Beckett was to read in 1950). Clément's harangue to Justine

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<sup>42</sup> For a synthesis of sensory influence on imagination according to Kant, see Matherne.

makes it quite clear that sexual imagination holds a capital function in the libertine philosophy and psychology:

[S]i nous avouons que la jouissance des sens soit toujours dépendante de l'imagination, toujours réglée par [elle], il ne faudra plus s'étonner des variations nombreuses que l'imagination suggérera dans ces jouissances, de la multitude infinie de goûts et de passions différentes qu'enfanteront les différents écarts de cette imagination. (*NJ*, t. 2: 207-08)

Blanchot does, however, admit that Sade has, on exception, 'exalté l'imagination', and that this is due to the fact that 'le fondement de tant de crimes imparfaits est un crime impossible dont seule l'imagination peut rendre compte' (Blanchot: 35). Indeed, the Sadist thrives on the abstract transgressive value of the crime alone: 'il est donc vrai que le crime a par lui-même un tel attrait, qu'indépendamment de toute volupté, il peut suffire à enflammer toutes les passions et à jeter dans le même délire que les actes mêmes de lubricité!' (*120j*: 234) The libertines' libidinous trance is only really underway when their imagination has been 'enflammée', sometimes by abominable spectacles of cruelty,<sup>43</sup> sometimes by tales, told and heard, as in the *120 journées*, where the theme and structuring device of storytelling is such a source of excitation for the libertines that they must make sure that there are victims underhand, 'pour servir à calmer l'irritation des sens produite par les récits' (60). Imagination having such autoerotic powers in Sade and Beckett, it is unsurprising that, for the latter, the mind should also

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<sup>43</sup> See for instance Eugénie's depraved ecstasy at the sight of Dolmancé sewing her mother's anus shut: 'C'est que les douleurs de cette gueuse-là enflamment mon imagination, au point que je ne sais plus exactement ce que je fais' (*PB*: 250).

generate and stage sadistic fantasies, becoming a place where, for instance, Murphy can freely indulge his crueller desires: 'Here the chandlers were available for slow depilation, Miss Carriage for rape by Ticklepenny, and so on. Here the whole physical fiasco became a howling success' (*Murphy*: 65).

We have seen that dualistic representations of mind and body in Beckett have direct implications with regard to his artistic and intellectual reception of the cult of reason as approached through Enlightenment philosophers such as Descartes and Kant. Sade's take on ethics, epistemology and mind-body dualism adopts key elements of the rationalist discourse while subverting their conclusions; the irony of this, I have argued, is an important dimension of Sade's appeal to Beckett in his own parody of rationalism. In Sade, as in Kant, 'reason, as a purely formal entity, is at the service of every natural interest. Becoming simply an organ, thinking reverts to nature' (Adorno and Horkheimer: 68). Not only does Beckett align with Sade in depicting Cartesian reason as utterly irrational, but he also does it by incorporating a Sadean caricature into his own parody, through a portrait of the archetypal philosopher as

a very irrational man, [...] captured via his hidden side, caught in an unconscious network of fears and fascinations. His rationalism appears as the reverse of an irrational devotion to omens and dreams – crucial dreams that motivated him to become a philosopher. [...] Madness, displayed first in its seductive then horrifying aspects, appears as the exact reverse of arrogant rationalism.' (Rabaté, 2016: 60-65)

In this, Rabaté also points out, Beckett anticipates Derrida's reading of the Cogito as inclusive of madness. From 'sick-room' to 'chapelle ardente', the mind fades into the asylum, a place of reason in the eyes of the Enlightenment, but ultimately ruled by passion, senselessness and absurdity. The upshot here is therefore that the mocking, at times scathing, picture of the rationalist philosopher that emerges from Beckett's texts ultimately manages the feat of resembling both Sade and Descartes.

### **III. The Sadean Body: disgust, ugliness and the grotesque**

#### **1. The body disgusting**

This section argues that, in Sade and Beckett, disgust is endowed with great erotic power. Beckett meets Sade within this paraphilic dimension where compulsive narrative eroticisation of disgust becomes a symptom (or the staging of a symptom) of existential instability.

The aesthetics of disgust constitute an important meeting ground between Sade and Beckett, and may be said to participate to their respective staging of the collapse of the border between oppositional categories such as reason/madness, mind/body or self/other. As Kristeva shows, abjection originates in the disquieting transgression of the physical frontiers of the body: 'L'intérieur du corps vient dans ce cas suppléer à l'effondrement de la

frontière dedans/dehors. Comme si la peau, contenant fragile, ne garantissait plus l'intégrité du "propre," mais qu'écorchée ou transparente, invisible ou tendue, elle cédait devant la déjection du contenu' (65). In particular, Beckett and Sade share an obsession with the motif of diseased skin, in which infected purulence from inside the body oozes out from weeping sores in a textbook illustration of this definition of disgust. Skin disease may be seen as yet another purveyor for a critique of the absurdity and corruption of rationalist thinking, as suggested in *L'Innommable*: 'un jour il me poussera sur la trachée ou à un autre point quelconque de la trajectoire un beau petit abcès avec une idée dedans, point de départ d'une infection généralisée. [...] Et je ne serais bientôt plus qu'un réseau de fistules charriant le pus bienfaisant de la raison' (110). We shall see that the skin becomes an existential sore in Beckett, a sort of physical counterpart to mental suffering. As to disgust, it becomes a paradoxical ontological 'crutch' for the subject through a process of eroticisation: 'la jouissance seule fait exister l'abject comme tel. On ne le connaît pas, on ne le désire pas, on en jouit. violemment et avec douleur. [...] On comprend ainsi pourquoi tant de victimes de l'abject en sont les victimes fascinées sinon dociles et consentantes' (Kristeva: 17).

Descriptions of diseased skin are legion in Beckett and Sade; they are characterised by the same narrative delight in disgusting imagery and often rely on near-identical lexicon, to the extent that some passages by the one could easily be misattributed to the other. In the *120 journées*, for instance,

Fanchon has 'un érysipèle lui couvr[ant] le derrière, et des hémorroïdes grosses comme le poing lui pendaient à l'anus; un chancre affreux dévorait son vagin [...]. Le trou de son cul, malgré le paquet d'hémorroïdes qui le garnissaient, était si large naturellement qu'elle vessait et pétaït [...] sans s'en apercevoir' (57); similarly, La Fournier has 'un érysipèle [qui] lui mangeait toute la peau' (219) and Marie 'une fesse mangée par un abcès' (56). The Beckettian equivalents are easy to come upon: in *Murphy*, Celia is obscenely propositioned by a 'weekend lecher well advanced in years, sprawling on his sacrum (which was a mass of eczema) in a chair directly before her' (156). The narrator of 'La Fin' is similarly afflicted: 'J'en avais partout, sur les parties, dans les poils jusqu'au nombril, sous les bras, dans le cul, et avec ça des plaques d'eczéma et de psoriasis que je pouvais allumer rien qu'en y pensant' (101). In *Watt*, anal and genital infections are the Lynch family's distinctive feature and heirloom, each member suffering from various congenital ailments: 'Jim's wife Kate née Sharpe [is] covered all over with running sores of an unidentified nature' (98) – her name, fittingly, an anglicised spelling of the French 'charpie' – and her grandson, taking after her, has 'a patch [...] on the sacrum the size of a plate of weeping eczema' (100). The Lynch family is described at length in a series of individual portraits that strongly evoke Sade's own gallery of purulent characters. Mr Nackybal loves nothing more than to scratch 'gently but firmly, learnedly, [...] a diffuse ano-scrotal prurit (worms? nerves? piles? or worse?) of sixty-four years standing. The faint rasp

could be heard of the heel of the hand coming and going, coming and going' (181).

In both Sade and Beckett, disgust is endowed with great erotic power. Sadean sexuality replaces repulsion with lust and pleasure as reactions to the abject; this is an explicit tenet of libertine philosophy:

Il est d'ailleurs prouvé que c'est l'horreur, la vilénie, la chose affreuse qui plaît quand on bande: or, où se rencontre-t-elle mieux qu'en un objet vicié? Certainement si c'est la chose sale qui plaît dans l'acte de lubricité, plus cette chose est sale, plus elle doit plaire, et elle est sûrement bien plus sale dans l'objet vicié que dans l'objet intact ou parfait. [...] Il ne faut donc point s'étonner d'après cela que tout plein de gens préfèrent pour leur jouissance une femme vieille, laide et même puante à une fille fraîche et jolie [...]. (120f: 55)

Not only is the abject object appealing to the libertines, but they take the delight in transgression further through the act of contamination and inoculation: Juliette meets a man 'absolument couvert de pustules..., de verrues..., de chancres, etc. symptômes abominables, et malheureusement bien réels de la maladie vénérienne dont est rongé ce vilain homme' (*NJ*, t. 5: 239). As she refuses to come near him, he exclaims: 'payerai[s]-je les femmes aussi cher, si ce n'était pour le plaisir de leur communiquer mon venin! C'est là mon unique passion, la seule cause qui fait que je ne me fais point guérir' (*NJ*, t. 5: 239). In psychological terms, such pleasure in abjection indicates a degree of degradation of the subject's ontological security: '[u]rine, sang, sperme, excrément, viennent alors rassurer un sujet en manque de son "propre." L'abjection de ces flux de l'intérieur devient le seul "objet" du désir

sexuel, un véritable “ab-ject” où l’homme, apeuré, [...] s’épargne le risque de la castration’ (Kristeva: 65).

I argue that Beckett meets Sade within this paraphilic dimension where compulsive narrative eroticisation of disgust becomes a symptom (or the staging of a symptom) of existential instability. This, of course, is only one angle from which to approach the motif of skin wounds and disease in Beckett; Benjamin Strong reads it as part of Beckett’s aesthetics of impotence:

If Joyce invests the quotidian flesh wound with import by allusion to epic, Beckett chooses instead to see the quotidian for itself, [...] to make it impotent. If ignoble wounds in Beckett [...] inspire pathos, it is not because they resonate with mythical injuries that aggrandise them with narrative, but precisely because they remain as insignificant as our own everyday pain. (300)

This sits well with the present interpretation of disgust in Beckett as systematically associated with autoerotic sexuality, which for him, as for Freud, represented one of the most common and earliest human experiences. Repetitive actions/sensations involving the ‘abject’ body, such as itching and scratching, in particular, are deemed superior to masturbation; as the narrator of ‘La Fin’ puts it: ‘Le vrai grattage est supérieur au branlage, à mon avis’ (101). This remark, together with other motifs such as Nackibal’s ‘ano-scrotal prurit’, can be traced directly to Beckett’s reading of Garnier’s *Hygiène de la génération*, which argues that the ‘evil’ of masturbation, this ‘prurit vénérien’ (32) or ‘prurit voluptueux’ (363), is discovered inadvertently through the urge to scratch oneself, brought about ‘surtout par la malpropreté’ (101). As shown

by the corresponding entry in Beckett's *Dream Notebook* – 'prurience, prurigo, prurit', numbered 443 (DN: 62) – this association between itching and onanism, and more generally between disgust and eroticism, was of significant aesthetic interest to Beckett from early on.

## 2. Sexual grotesquerie

The grotesque has inhabited many aspects of art and culture throughout the ages, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to Rabelais and from the medieval to the modern gothic and its re-emergence in Romantic literature. The grotesque in art is that which is deemed 'unnatural', 'deviant from right reason, from normality, and from rigorously harmonious mathematical form' (Clark: 19). It is also 'repeatedly associated with gross unnatural distortion and calls to mind the fearful, the unearthly, the nightmarish, and the demonic' (Clark: 19). This section explores the grotesque as a common aesthetic ground between Beckett and Sade, in particular as regards representations of the sexual body, which is given monstrous, inhuman traits and prosthetic attributes. This confers an 'unreal' character on the bodies that populate the two authors' texts, in an effect of defamiliarisation that is at once uncanny and ridiculous – hence why the grotesque often engages the mechanisms of humour. In both Beckett and Sade, this grotesque sexual humour manifests in the notion of absurdity as well as in slapstick comedy. Ultimately, sexual grotesquerie in

Beckett and Sade functions as a textual dismantling of the boundaries between normality and abnormality.

Bodily grotesquerie often banks on the aesthetics of deformity, distortion and disharmony: '[G]rotesque forms distort proportion and problematize vision, making objects idiosyncratic and liberating the field of vision through the freedom of the imagination' (Edwards and Graulund: 17). This physical instability certainly encompasses the abject dimension discussed above, since deformity displaces traditional expectations of the body, which becomes revolting in its disproportion. The grotesque is also associated with monstrosity, i.e. bodies with too few or too many body parts, or made up of mismatched elements – often both human and animal, as with the mythological hybrid or chimera. Therefore, a 'grotesque body that is incomplete or deformed forces us to question what it means to be human' (Edwards and Graulund: 3), and this applies particularly well to its function in Beckett and Sade.

In Sade, vices imprint the body, which becomes an indicator of the extent of one's libertine experience; often, this amounts to such physiological distortion that the result comes across as monstrous and grotesque: in the *120 journées*, Curval has 'des fesses molles et tombantes qui ressemblaient plutôt à deux sales torchons flottant sur le haut de ses cuisses; la peau en était tellement flétrie à force de coups de fouet qu'on la tortillait autour des doigts

sans qu'il le sentît' (29). Similarly, Thérèse has 'les fesses si prodigieusement molles qu'on en pouvait rouler la peau autour d'un bâton' (56). Such comparisons of the body with 'floating rags' make it seem like a hybrid of animate/inanimate or human/non-human. The inhuman traits created by a lifetime of libertinage have made Curval and Thérèse living embodiments of the question of what it means to be human. Other such inhuman traits can be found for instance in the description of Marie's battered belly, 'ondoyé comme les flots de la mer' (56) or of Desgranges: 'Son cul flétri, usé, marqué, déchiré, ressemblait plutôt à du papier marbré qu'à de la peau humaine, [...] [elle] avait un téton de moins et trois doigts de coupés; elle boitait, et il lui manquait six dents et un œil' (45). In Beckett, the sexual body is also grotesquely inhuman: the elderly Mrs Gorman, Watt's former paramour, for instance, only has her right breast, 'the left having unhappily been removed in the heat of a surgical operation' (138) – this evokes Sade's Fanchon, who has 'un cancer qui ronge le sein' (120J: 79). As in Sade, time has formed and deformed the body; when Beckett's decrepit characters engage in sexual intercourse, there are grotesque overtones worthy of Sade's 'floating rags': 'Macmann [...] s'acharnait à faire rentrer son sexe dans celui de sa partenaire à la manière d'un oreiller dans une taie, en le pliant en deux et en l'y fourrant avec ses doigts' (*Malone*: 139). Grotesque deformity in literature is in essence a caricature of the body; as such, it is a type of embedded fictionality opening onto a dimension of the unreal and bringing about hesitancy as to whether

the universe under description obeys common physical laws – an ambivalence famously singled out by Tzvetan Todorov as the keystone of the genre of the fantastic. As Edwards and Graulund put it, '[t]he uncanny, like the grotesque, depends on a conflict or confrontation based on the notion of incongruity or the juxtaposition of opposites. [...] The stamp of the grotesque in the realm of the fantastic is the conscious confusion between fantasy and reality' (7). For Simone de Beauvoir, in Sade 'l'anatomie et les postures des personnages sont dessinées avec un réalisme minutieux, mais la sérénité maladroite et monotone de leurs visages rend parfaitement irrélles leurs horribles bacchantales' (36).

The inherent incongruity of the notions of the unreal and the monstrous makes them instruments of defamiliarisation and places them at the confluence of fear and ridicule; this is why, in the grotesque, 'scenes of terror often include touches of humour through an ironic treatment of the characters and the development of a bathetic contrast between drama and absurdity' (Edwards and Graulund: 5). The absurd is indeed liable to elicit either (or both) laughter or fear – an obvious example of this would be the strong initial reactions to Beckett's own 'tragi-comedy', *En attendant Godot*. This is also true of Sade's world, where, as we have seen, the coexistence of madness and reason generates a kind of incoherence that is at once comical and dangerously serious. In Beckett, who admired Charlie Chaplin, the grotesque body becomes an act in a sexual slapstick where comedy overtakes

the horror of the impaired body, and the sexual action itself becomes a joke or a pantomime; Watt, for instance, fondly recalls 'the time when an old lady of delicate upbringing, and advantageous person, for she was amputated well below the knee, [...] unstrapped her wooden leg and laid aside her crutch' (70). The body, though infirm, is 'prosthetic'<sup>44</sup> and mechanised, a technological contraption by which motion resumes and new outlets for desires appear through perversion and sexual obsession; in *Watt*, a certain Sam, 'whose amorous disposition [is] notorious [...] and who ma[kes] no secret of his having committed adultery locally on a large scale, moving from place to place in his self-propelling invalid's chair' is the presumed father of his cousin Ann's unborn child. 'He had no purpose, interest or joy in life other than this, to set out after a good dinner [...] in his wheel-chair and stay out committing adultery until it was time to go home to his supper, after which he was at his wife's disposal' (104). There is something Sadean to Sam's devotion to the notion of adultery and to the grotesque image of the lubricious wandering invalid. As Barthes points out in the section entitled 'Les machines' (156-57), the theme of the human/machine hybrid is a regular feature in Sadean imagery; various apparatuses are designed to provoke either pleasure or pain, and the Sadean community itself adopts a mechanistic organisation: '[l]a machine sadienne ne s'arrête pas à l'automate [...]; c'est tout le groupe vivant qui est conçu, construit comme une machine' (Barthes: 156).

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<sup>44</sup> On this topic, see Yoshiki Tajiri.

Murphy's relationship with his beloved rocking-chair also incorporates elements of slapstick comedy, as he straps himself to it naked using seven scarves in order to 'appease' his body and withdraw into his mind – 'Only the most local movements were possible. Sweat poured off him, tightened the thongs' (5). Celia once finds him in a yet more 'extraordinary' position:

[T]he rocking-chair was now on top. Thus inverted the only contact with the floor was that made by his face, which was ground against it. His attitude roughly speaking was that of a very inexperienced diver about to enter the water, except that his arms were not extended to break the concussion, but fastened behind him. [...] Blood gushed from his nose. (20)

This passage is at once pathetic and unquestionably funny, in the same cruel way as Murphy's and Justine's deaths or Watt's repeated misfortunes can be construed as funny. This is not simply because of the immediate situational comedy these episodes involve, but because the characters repeatedly run themselves into these situations for the sake of abstract unattainable intellectual ideals – i.e. respective longings for ataraxia, virtue and knowledge.

In Beckett and Sade, the grotesque body ultimately signals a departure from traditional expectations of the physical world as well as its contamination by erratic reason: 'the grotesque has the power to eliminate borders: it can reveal how the boundaries between the "normal" and "abnormal" are fluid, not fixed, and how grotesquerie can lead to an erasure of common distinctions' (Edwards and Graulund: 9).

### 3. 'essentially a girl': Sade's and Beckett's female bodies

This section examines and compares Beckett's and Sade's representations of the female body, arguing that the Sadean discourse and aesthetics can offer new ways to interpret Beckett's misogynistic streak. I begin by delineating a number of parallels between their respective characterisations of female sexuality as aggressive and monstrous, showing that in both cases the female body is at once an object of hatred and the embodiment of a narrative fascination with ugliness. It is exposed through series of descriptive vignettes or tableaux, the most scathing of which may be interpreted as part of a modern revival of the French literary tradition of the *contre-blason* inherited from sixteenth-century poetry. The richness of Beckett's and Sade's descriptions of female ugliness will be contrasted with their comparatively insipid representations of classical beauty, and it will be argued that one common function of female bodies in Beckett and Sade is to accommodate an aesthetic ritual of desecration of the feminine born of a paradoxical celebration of disgust and perversion.

In a subsection on 'Beckett's Misogyny' (70-76), Stewart articulates the critical challenge posed by Beckett's undeniably vitriolic treatment of women in his works, explaining how 'any attempt to deal with Beckett's misogyny runs the risk of seeming to excuse [...] its damaging impact' (71). For example, to inscribe it within a paradigmatic tradition of misogyny – as Ackerley does,

describing Beckett's portraits as 'set pieces in a tradition of misogynistic satire running from Juvenal to Chaucer and Burton' (2002: 56) – creates 'a certain distance between the figure of Beckett and the words on the page' (Stewart: 71) that might somehow exonerate Beckett from personal misogyny. Similarly, speculating on Beckett's personal views would be reductive and of limited interest to the study of the 'significance' of misogyny in his works. While these points are valid, it remains that any interaction with a certain 'tradition' is by definition complex and multifaceted, if only in its motivations, processes and outcomes. In other words, including Beckett in misogynistic tradition does not sufficiently undermine the perverse narrative delight in demeaning female characters and the female form to 'free' Beckett of accusation. Beckett's portraits, like Sade's, ought to be examined through the prism of their own discourse as well as within the wider context of literary tradition.

A comparison with Sade's women yields helpful keys in positioning Beckett's representations of the female form within the existing debate. As the previous sections on abjection, disgust and the grotesque have shown, Beckett's treatment of the body is characterised by narrative eroticisation of disgust that may also be found in Sade. The narration does not merely convey a fixed idea of monstrosity, it also enacts and stages monstrosity in the individual process of description, and the strategies chosen can highlight some of the underlying dynamics of the discourse. This is essentially what

Beauvoir does in *Faut-il brûler Sade?*, in which she makes it clear that the all-powerful female libertine archetype in Sade should not be mistaken for a positive or modern representation of femininity. For Beauvoir, Sade's triumphant, successful women are only used as rhetorical props in his praise of libertinism: while their wickedness contrasts strikingly with the traditional meekness of their sex, 'quand elles surmontent par le crime leur abjection naturelle, [...] si elles deviennent imaginairement les plus magnifiques bourreaux, c'est que dans la réalité ce sont des victimes nées: serviles, larmoyantes, mystifiées, passives, à travers toute son œuvre percent le mépris et le dégoût qu'en vérité Sade éprouvait à leur égard' (43).

In her analysis of female sexuality in Céline, Kristeva calls attention to the 'pouvoir abject' of 'la représentation d'une féminité sauvage, obscène et menaçante' (196), often attached to such character types as the prostitute or nymphomaniac, who elicit a form of paradoxical fascination for their '[p]uissance sombre, abominable et dégradée' (197). This would be an apt description of Beckett's women, who typically combine physical abjection with obscene lubricity and aggressiveness: in *Dream*, Belacqua's relationship with 'a slob of a girl called Smeraldina-Rima' (3) began peacefully, '[u]ntil she raped him. | Then everything went kaputt. | The implacable, the insatiate, warmed up this time by her morning jerks to a sexy sudorem, she violated him after tea' (18). The sexually aggressive female carries a degree of agency

and power that subverts traditional gender-roles; through this subversion, she becomes a hybrid entity and enters the realm of the grotesque:

The language Kristeva uses to define the 'monstrous-feminine' describes a state of abjection that breaks down the binary oppositions between subject and object and, in so doing, she challenges the 'well-known construction of virgin/whore dichotomy' that counterposes the 'pure' woman, the pristine body, to the slut, 'the grotesque female body' (Edwards and Graulund: 34).

In *Dream and More Pricks*, the description of Miss Dublin/the Frica clutching the *120 journées* 'in her talons earnestly' confirms her monstrous nature – 'talon' can refer to the claws of a bird of prey or of mythical creatures such as dragons, griffins, etc. These early Beckettian females are therefore doubly associated with Sade/sadism: as Praz claims, '[t]his necessity of believing the lover to be a monstrous creature is a characteristic of sadism' (150). Praz's comment suggests that the sadistic gaze becomes a constitutive element of the monstrous lover; the gaze creates abjection in the object in order to assert its own transgressive subjectivity. In short, the grotesque libidinous females that populate Belacqua's world are really a reflection of himself. *Echo's Bones* features another Beckettian harpy from the 1930s, Moll, whom Belacqua has been asked to impregnate by her husband, Lord Gall, in the afterlife. Moll exudes abjection and diseased sexuality and has more than a little of what Kristeva describes as 'l'obscénité débile' (191) of Joyce's Molly Bloom in *Ulysses*: 'Moll turned out to be the most filthy little bromide of a half-baked puella that you could possibly imagine, face like a section of spanked bottom,

simple duple specks, giggle, clitoridian croon, warts and a cacochethes of hoisting all propositions addressed to her' (*Echo*: 35). Belacqua nevertheless complies 'with a kind of wild civility' and Moll immediately produces a child who, as put by the 'medical advisers', is 'essentially a girl' (35). Belacqua's inconsistent enthusiasm for sex reflects his fluctuating and complex rapport with aggressive female sexuality, which repulses him in the Smeraldina but kindles his desire for Moll. The vague reference to the child's sex perpetuates the idea of the feminine as an inherently problematic category – as Mark Nixon notes in his annotations to the text, this 'leaves Lord Gall without an heir' (97). In his introduction to the story, Nixon also comments that 'the threat of reproductive sex, visible across Beckett's early work, is here deflected humorously, and the general profanity owes much to the Marquis de Sade'<sup>45</sup> (xvii) – this is certainly also true of Moll's physical portrait.

Stewart (72-73) reviews critical attempts at explaining away Beckettian misogyny by linking it to a 'pseudo-Cartesian binary' placing 'the cerebral within the sphere of the male and the carnal within the sphere of the female'. As we have seen, Beckett addresses Cartesian dualism via a Sadean parody of the passions and the *cogito* that stages a cross-contamination between mind and body; I therefore cannot agree with the view that the Cartesian model alone suffices to explain Beckett's repeated depictions of the feminine as

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<sup>45</sup> Even though, as discussed previously, Beckett had had limited encounters with Sade at that point.

depraved and monstrous. Furthermore, as Stewart points out, these views 'cannot account for the Beckettian man's frequent attraction to the female. If the female is so corporeal, what are Beckett's supposedly "Cartesian" men doing in relation with something so regrettable?' (73). We have seen that there is certainly a great deal of tension between attraction and repulsion when it comes to eroticism in Beckett. Stewart rightly sees this as playing out the wish to return to the mother's womb and horror at the irreversibility of birth;<sup>46</sup> yet this interpretation posits attraction and horror as alternative, distinct stages in a 'journey.' What is at stake here, rather, is Beckett's narrators' palpable delight in describing the female as abject; this points both to gratuitous sadism (an act of narrative aggression) and to Sadean perversity.

Sade's and Beckett's descriptions of female ugliness may be traced to a satirical legacy that goes back to sixteenth-century French poetry and the *blason* genre initiated by Clément Marot (1496-1544) with his famous *Blason du Beau Tétin* (1534), but more specifically to the subsequent subversion of the *blason*, the *contre-blason*, again popularised by Marot and his *Blason du Laid Tétin* (1535).<sup>47</sup> Just as the *blason* celebrates a chosen part of the (usually female) body for its beauty and evocative powers, the *contre-blason* is characterised by its eloquent attack on the body ugly, in an alternative poetics where the

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<sup>46</sup> The Sadean resonances and psychological implications of this theme will be addressed in Chapter Two.

<sup>47</sup> See for instance Crépet (580-606) for more information about Marot's poetry and influence.

creative imagination thrives on the aesthetics of ugliness. While there have been subsequent attempts to revive the genre of the *blason* – for instance André Breton’s poem ‘L’Union libre’, which ‘appropriat[es] it as a vehicle for the Surrealist aesthetic’ (Stout: 59), or the 1990 collection of poems *Blason du corps masculin* (by female writers) – there are seemingly no records of a modern afterlife of the *contre-blason*. However Sade’s and Beckett’s respective takes on the female form should certainly be taken into account in this respect.

One of the first of Beckett’s misogynistic ‘set pieces’ illustrates the Smeraldina’s body in *Dream*:

Because her body was all wrong, the peacock’s claws. [...] Poppata, big breech, Botticelli thighs, knock-knees, ankles all fat nodules, wobbly, mambose, slobbery-blubbery, bubbububbub, a real button-bursting Weib, ripe. Then, perched aloft on top of the porpoise prism, the loveliest little pale firm cameo of a birdface [...]. (15)

There is a downward progression in the focus of the description, from the breasts (‘poppata’: Italian for ‘breastfeeding’ or ‘suckling’) to the ankles, effectively creating a descending motion, as though the woman were gradually emerging into the field of vision, like the trope of Venus Anadyomene depicted in paintings as rising from the sea. The allusion to Venus is confirmed by the phrase ‘Botticelli thighs’, this trope being best known through Sandro Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* (1486), which, according to Pilling (2004: 43), Beckett had seen in Florence in 1927 – as Pilling adds, a later mention of the Smeraldina’s ‘Primavera buttocks’ (*Dream*: 50) continues the

Botticellian analogy. Closer to Beckett's satirical take on the matter, Arthur Rimbaud's poem 'Venus Anadyomène' (Rimbaud: 37), which Beckett had almost certainly read (having translated 'Le bateau ivre' in 1932), conflates the genre of the *contre-blason* and the theme of the birth of Venus, and subverts the beauty and purity of the goddess standing on her shell into the image of a foul-looking prostitute past her prime standing in an old bathtub – thus actualising the grotesque breakdown of the virgin/whore dichotomy. Like the Smeraldina, the physicality of Rimbaud's 'Clara Venus' is portrayed in a negative light: her skin is grey with suspicious hues and reveals the flat layers of fat underneath ('la graisse sous la peau paraît en feuilles plates') in another prime example of disgust as elicited by a risk of contamination of the outside by the inside of the body. She is also 'belle, hideusement, d'un ulcère à l'anus', like Beckett's Nackybal and his 'ano-scrotal prurit', and Sade's Fanchon in the *120 journées*. In all three descriptions, the woman emerges as not 'rightly human' (cf. *Murphy*: 47), a dissonant sum of abject fragments from various species rather than a person – the 'peacock's claws' in Beckett's description echoing Miss Dublin's 'talons'. The same descending movement and monstrous qualifications are at work in Moll's portrait in *Echo's Bones*, as well as in Arsene's description of 'Mary' in *Watt*:

I see her still [...], her long grey greasy hair framing in its cowl of scrofulous mats a face where pallor, languor, hunger, acne, recent dirt, immemorial chagrin and surplus hair seemed to dispute the mastery. Flitters of perforated starch entwine an ear. Under the rusty cotton frock, plentifully embossed with scabs of slobber, two cup-like depressions mark

the place of the bosom and a conical protuberance that of the abdomen.  
(53)

Mary's bosom is hollow, reminiscent of Miss Dublin and the Frica's 'concave' breast and contrasting with the equally puzzling 'conical' abdomen, her inexplicable body adding to the aesthetics of disgust and the grotesque.

Descriptions of female beauty in Beckett and Sade differ markedly from their detailed celebrations of ugliness: if they recast the ugly woman as their 'Venus', the beautiful woman cannot be a Venus unless she is a whore. Sade literalises this idea and salutes the ancient practice of prostituting virgins as a sacrifice to Venus before marriage: 'Les Babyloniennes n'attendaient pas sept ans pour porter leurs prémices au temple de Vénus. Le premier mouvement de concupiscence qu'éprouve une jeune fille est l'époque que la nature lui indique pour se prostituer' (*PB*: 194). This also applies to Beckett's Celia, a prostitute and one of the few women known to be 'beautiful' in Beckett's works. Celia is first introduced, not by a description, but by a detailed breakdown of her physical characteristics and measurements, presented as a list of twenty elements, e.g. 'Eyes: Green | Complexion: White | Hair: Yellow' (*Murphy*: 10). Though Celia is evidently beautiful, and the descending movement is present, the effect is not that of a *blason* but one of fragmentation, rationalisation, and overall emotional distancing from this plastic perfection: Celia's very beauty renders her surprisingly bland and intangible to the reader. Later in the book, Cooper describes Celia as 'the most

beautiful young woman he ha[s] ever seen' (71); there again, beauty is stated, but not represented, described or fleshed out.

There is a significant discrepancy between Beckett's eloquent treatment of the disgusting body and his comparatively insipid beauties. Beckett's 'Whoroscope Notebook', where most of his notes towards *Murphy* were consigned, contains 'a catalogue headed by an enigmatic "Venus de Milo," presumably in jest, given that it includes measurements for upper arm, forearm and wrist' (Ackerley and Gontarski: 87); this places Celia, like Rimbaud's prostitute, in our gallery of Venus figures. Her name, as well as her virgin/whore connotations, strongly evokes what may be described as a Swiftian *contre-blason* in his 1732 poem, 'The Lady's Dressing Room', in which 'he offers an obscene and scatological satire directed at women, and particularly women's bodies. Sometimes read as an example of misogynistic discourse, the text describes the character Strephon, who ventures through the vacant dressing room of "lady" Celia' (Edwards and Graulund: 98). The text begins 'with an ideal image of her' then 'moves from mockery to ridicule and identifies the "lady" as a ludicrous and grotesque figure' (Edwards and Graulund: 98).

As regards representations of beauty in Sade, Roland Barthes' essay 'Sade I' (19-40), initially published in *Tel Quel* no. 28 (1967) as 'L'Arbre du crime', provides the most useful critical commentary. Barthes also observes a divide between the rhetorics of beauty and ugliness:

ce portrait-là est purement rhétorique, c'est un *topos*. [...] Le portrait rhétorique [...] ne peint rien, ni la chose, ni son effet [...]; il se contente de nommer des éléments anatomiques dont chacun est parfait; et comme cette perfection, en bonne théologie, est l'être-même de la chose, il suffit de dire qu'un corps est parfait pour qu'il le soit: la laideur se décrit, la beauté se dit; ces portraits rhétoriques sont donc vides [...]. (Barthes: 25-26)

It is striking that Barthes' comments might so easily be applied to Beckett, down to the 'unreal' literary texture of the beautiful Sadean woman and her absence of distinctive features, at most limited, like Celia's, to 'la couleur des yeux, des cheveux' (26). In both Sade and Beckett, therefore, traits denoting beauty do not require detail, or imaginative variations, which points once more to an applied poetics of the perverse imagination. In Sade's words,

la beauté est la chose simple, la laideur est la chose extraordinaire, et toutes les imaginations ardentes préfèrent sans doute toujours la chose extraordinaire en lubricité à la chose simple. La beauté, la fraîcheur ne frappent jamais qu'en sens simple; la laideur, la dégradation portent un coup bien plus ferme, la commotion est bien plus forte, l'agitation doit donc être plus vive. (120J: 55)

The traits given to beautiful women are generic qualities attributed to all, varying only in the intensity of the superlatives (often so extreme as to become grotesque) and their combinations. For Sade, the beautiful woman is typically plump, her skin is remarkably 'white', 'soft' and 'fresh' and her breasts and 'arse' are usually a combination of the three.<sup>48</sup> As Barthes notes (25), in Sade's erotic world, age is irrelevant outside of the extremes, the same way Celia's age, the first item on the list of facts about her body, is simply deemed 'unimportant'. At times, Sade's narrators even seem at pains to

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<sup>48</sup> Barthes quotes the description of Alexandrine (from *Juliette*); see also in the *120 journées* the portraits of Constance (34-35), Eugénie (188), Duclos (43) among many others.

conceal their lack of imagination (or lack of interest) when describing classically beautiful women, tirelessly relying on the same strategies to attempt to breathe some life into them. Sade's hyperbolic descriptions in the *120 journées* typically end with an undermining statement intended to feign specificity, as in Adelaïde's portrait: 'quelle chute de reins, quelle coupe de fesses, que de blancheur et d'incarnat réunis! mais l'ensemble était un peu petit' (37). Eugénie is 'blanche comme le lys et douce comme du satin, assez bien faite, mais pourtant un peu grasse, léger inconvénient d'où il résultait le cul le plus frais et le plus mignon, le plus potelé et le plus blanc qu'il y eût peut-être à Paris' (188). Curiously, the narrator seems aware of his own limitations, at times declining to engage with descriptions of beauty under the claim that he would not do it justice: 'Je ne m'aviserais pas de peindre ces beautés: elles étaient toutes si également supérieures que mes pinceaux deviendraient nécessairement monotones' (49). This poses the question of whose reservations these really are: Sade was probably trying to spare himself an effort of imagination regarded as tedious. In Beckett (as in Sade), beauty is no prerequisite for physical attraction, as is the case with Ann of the Lynch family, who, 'though apparently plain and rotten with disease, had her partisans, both inside and outside the house' (105). Ann, however, has 'a splendid bosom, white and fat and elastic', which redeems her body in the male imagination:

this splendid part of Ann, so white, so fat and so elastic, [would] grow and grow, whiter and whiter, fatter and fatter, and more and more elastic, until all thought of these other parts [...] where whiteness did not dwell, nor fatness, nor elasticity, but greyness, and even greenness, and thinness, and bagginess, were driven quite away. (105)

There is something of a Sadean pastiche in this passage, beginning with the impersonal adjective 'splendid' and the blason-like focus on breasts. But it is of course the grotesque elasticity of this inhuman 'bosom' that most evokes a hyperbolic literalisation of Sade's take on beauty. This passage reiterates the connection between sexual perversity and imagination in Beckett's world.

### **Conclusion**

Beckett's development as a writer arguably started with the voracious and eclectic reading that informed his interest in the transgressive aspects of human sexuality and relationships. His early discovery of Sade, first through secondary sources, then in the text, marks the beginning of an intertextual relationship that would manifest in his writing up to his very last works. The aura of controversy surrounding Sade can only have resonated with Beckett's own loathing of censorship, drawing him closer to Sade while accounting for his cautious stance in 1938 regarding the *120 journées* translation. The texts written before the late 1940s explore the complex ties between sexuality, violence and disgust, an aesthetics of perversion and abjection which, as we have sought to demonstrate, can be fruitfully compared with Sade's own representations of desire and the body. The grotesque element inherent to this

aesthetics brings up the question of humour and parody in Beckett. Beyond frequent deliberate attempts to make the reader laugh, his works also convey a more 'serious' commentary on rationalism and ethics, which are amplified, caricatured and used as narrative devices, moving from implacable logic to utter absurdity, exactly as happens in Sade. For Kristeva, (post)modern literature's very ability to transcend ethical and metaphysical meta-narratives inscribes its discourse in the realm of perversity:

[La littérature contemporaine] constate l'impossibilité de la Religion, de la Morale, du Droit – leur coup de force, leur semblant nécessaire et absurde. Comme la perversion, elle en use, les contourne, et s'en joue. [...] L'écrivain, fasciné par l'abject, en imagine la logique, s'y projette, l'introjecte, et pervertit la langue [...]. Aussi pourrait-on dire qu'avec cette littérature-là s'accomplit une traversée des catégories dichotomiques du Pur et de l'Impur, de l'Interdit et du Pêché, de la Morale et de l'Immoral.  
(23)

The perverse imagination therefore becomes a kind of poetics in Beckett's works, a psychological phenomenon based on subversion and deviation used as a narrative device and as a mode of commentary on the world. As will be the main focus of Chapter Two, Beckett's thorough knowledge of the theories of Freud and other pioneers of psychoanalysis confers a new dimension to this approach to perversity, in which Sade's works and their reception in the early twentieth century will again prove essential.

CHAPTER TWO<sup>49</sup>  
'FREUDIAN BLARNEY, SODOM AND BEGORRAH':<sup>50</sup> FROM SCHOPENHAUER TO  
FREUD... WITH SADE

In the present chapter, Beckett's aesthetic and intellectual engagement with Sade in works written between 1945 and 1958 will be investigated via his interest in Freud's theory of the anal-erotic complex. By confronting Beckett's unpublished notes, his source texts, and his own literary output during this decisive and fertile period, it is possible to delineate a number of recurrent patterns and echoes in his handling of various themes and ideas related to sadism. The point of this inquiry is twofold: firstly, it provides insight into Beckett's incorporation of psychoanalytical theory into his texts; secondly, since the bulk of Beckett's research on psychology was carried out before his first documented reading of Sade in the text in 1938, it must have constituted a non-negligible premise for his subsequent discovery of and return to Sade in the early 1950s. At the very least, the chronology begs the question: what impact did Beckett's early forays into psychiatric literature on sadism have on his later reception of Sade's works, and how would this have shaped what may be referred to as a unique Beckettian form of sadism?

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<sup>49</sup> Parts of this chapter build upon my 2010 article 'From Narcissistic Isolation to Sadistic Pseudocouples: Tracing the Genesis of *Endgame*'.

<sup>50</sup> Early review of *Murphy* written by Dylan Thomas shortly after its publication.

**I. Desire, narcissism and the Freudian myth (Schopenhauer, Sade, Freud)**

*Il est vrai que pour tout ce qui touchait aux questions sexuelles on était  
extraordinairement fermé, dans ma région.  
(Molloy: 78-79)*

It has often been suggested that Sade anticipated Freud through the central role given to desire, violence and sexuality in his systematic view of the human psyche. Gilbert Lely writes for instance:

Si le Marquis de Sade a précédé de cent ans les Krafft-Ebing et les Havelock Ellis dans le domaine de la pathologie sexuelle descriptive, il doit être considéré également comme ayant précédé quelques unes des notions fondamentales qui régissent le système freudien. On sait que la clef de voûte de la psychanalyse est la notion de préexistence de l'érotisme chez l'enfant. (Lely: 608)

To Lely and others, Sade's works showed an intuition of the importance of a child's first sexual impressions on his or her later life, and anticipated later findings in hormonology and physio-pathological anatomy (Lely: 608). Even Jacques Lacan, who introduces his essay on Kant and Sade with a dismissal of the idea that Sade's 'catalogue des perversions' anticipates Freud's, accepts that their respective thoughts bear witness to the same modern epistemological principle, by which 'on prépare la science en rectifiant la position de l'éthique' (243).

At any rate, it is not surprising that Sade's slow rehabilitation in the wake of the twentieth century occurred largely concurrently with the advent of psychology as a scientific discipline. Beside the Surrealists' celebration of

the unconscious as artistic inspiration – which influenced their view of Sade as an emblem of freedom – ‘Sade est surréaliste dans le sadisme’ (Breton, 1966: 12) – what also defined both Freud and Sade in the twentieth century was their challenging of established conservative views on metaphysics and ethics, thus resonating in their own respective ways with the decline of religious faith that characterised the early 1900s. This is what Lacan means when he imputes the possibility for Freud’s ideas to take hold in the twentieth century to ‘la montée insinuante à travers le XIXe siècle du thème du bonheur dans le mal’ (243). That this was also the intellectual context to Beckett’s development as a writer is also significant, as is the fact that he subsequently developed an interest in both Freud and Sade. In short, Sade’s, Darwin’s, Freud’s and Beckett’s respective impacts on the twentieth century may be viewed as individual symptoms of a wider phenomenon in the intellectual history of the Modern avant-garde.

### **1. Desire and pessimism**

The aim of this section is to show how Beckett’s interest in Schopenhauer’s ‘intellectual justification of unhappiness’ (i.e. the tireless ‘will-to-live’ as the cause of existential suffering) can be used to explain important aspects of Sade’s appeal to him. Through a study of Schopenhauer’s and Sade’s respective views on the relationship between desire and suffering, it is

possible to delineate a specifically Sadean kind of pessimism, which finds echoes in Beckett's works.

Beckett's interest in and reception of psychoanalytic theory derives from a wider-ranging concern with unhappiness and existential misery: asked to qualify his interests 'when, as a young man, he had sought out new authors', Beckett readily answered: "'Pessimism", he said. "Pessimism"' (quoted in O'Hara: 3). The philosophical name that immediately comes to mind is that of Schopenhauer, whom Beckett, as is well known, held in high regard; we shall see that Beckett's interest in pessimism might have led him to seek out Sade's works. Schopenhauer's concept of the will-to-live, this blind, tireless drive that underlies all movement and desires, may rightly be said to belong in the filiation between Freudian sexual energy, or 'libido', and the 'lubricious fury' that seizes Sade's libertines as they enact their perverted desires. In this important respect too, by engaging with each of these three thinkers, Beckett was also interacting with the others and with a very particular area of the post-war intellectual landscape, where Sade and psychology had 'the aura of impropriety and revolution that the Darwinian evolution had and that, for the cultured few, Schopenhauer also had' (O'Hara: 6).

Any attempt to form an understanding of the impact of Freud's take on sadism upon Beckett's works must proceed from Schopenhauer's view of

suffering as 'nothing but unfulfilled and thwarted volition' (Schopenhauer, 1995: 225), which Beckett regarded as the greatest 'intellectual justification of unhappiness' ever attempted (*L1*: 33). In his 1932-1933 'Philosophy notes' on Wilhelm Windelband, Beckett sums up the relation of the will and existential pain as follows: 'Creating itself alone and perpetually it is the never satisfied, the unhappy will; and since world is nothing but self-revelation (objectivation) of the will, it must be a balls aching world' (quoted in Feldman: 50).

Sade's views on desire relate to Schopenhauer's through the same intuition of the nature of the will as generally infinite and tireless; however, he sees this from the opposite perspective: to him, pleasure is only ever possible *because* desire is endless. In other words, transgressive pleasure in itself is worthless without the prospect of greater transgressions to come. Sade's system depends on his conviction that one should employ any means at one's disposal to indulge every single wish – this belief is at the core of his utopia of libertine existence as a long succession of fulfilled wishes. Sade stages this violent conclusion, which consists in embracing the aggressive nature of the will, in a debate between the duc de Blangis and banker Durcet in the *120 journées de Sodome*:

Le duc voulut soutenir [...] que si le bonheur consistait dans l'entière satisfaction de tous les plaisirs des sens, il était difficile d'être plus heureux qu'ils l'étaient. 'Ce propos-là n'est pas d'un libertin, dit Durcet. [...] Ce n'est pas dans la jouissance que consiste le bonheur, c'est dans le désir, c'est à

briser les freins qu'on oppose à ce désir. Or, tout cela se trouve-t-il ici, où je n'ai qu'à souhaiter pour avoir?' (120J: 77)

In Sade's worldview, the 'unhappiness' felt by Beckett and Schopenhauer would originate not from desire itself, but from one's instinct to repress it instead of continually striving to unleash it ('briser les freins'). In psychoanalytical terms, the true sadist is therefore above all the individual for whom the censoring defences normally deployed by the superego (the law or 'nom du Père' for Lacan) in order to repress desires that are harmful to society are inactive or subverted, so that that which is *not* transgressive is taboo. In more practical terms, this also means that the Sadean individual must be in such a position of power as to be somehow exempt from the effects of the law – often by occupying a high legal position themselves, or by exploiting libertine connections that do.<sup>51</sup> Without this incredible ability to carry out his or her darkest desires with little or no consequence, the Sadean libertine, like Sade himself, would inevitably feel tortured by unfulfilled desire, '[des] désirs tyranniques qui, malgré lui, le tourmentent sans cesse' (PB: 187).

It follows that there is in Sade's apparent ethical nihilism a kind of repressed, or negative pessimism, a philosophical and psychological aporia that might well have caught Beckett's attention. This is confirmed by John Pilling's view that 'what interested Beckett in Sade was Sade the pessimist, the imprisoned man writing fantasies of compensatory violence and sexuality

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<sup>51</sup> The necessarily contingent nature of what is considered lawful in a given society/community will be relevant to the next stage of the present discussion.

in the absolute absence of any “normal” outlet for his desires, desires which may in any case have been ‘abnormal’ to the moral majority of any given epoch’ (2014: 121).

From his early works, Beckett paints desire as a necessary burden of existence: ‘I greatly fear’, says Wylie in *Murphy*, ‘that the syndrome known as life is too diffuse to admit of palliation. For every symptom that is eased, another is made worse’ (36). In *Watt*, Beckett moves on from the question of evading desire altogether (Murphy’s main concern and nirvanic ambition), but offers a thorough exploration of the insatiability of desire and the futility of hoping to resist it:

And yet it is useless not to seek, not to want, for when you cease to seek you start to find, and when you cease to want, then life begins to ram her fish and chips down your gullet until you puke, and then the puke down your gullet until you puke the puke, and then the puked puke until you begin to like it. The glutton castaway, the drunkard in the desert, the lecher in prison, they are the happy ones. To hunger, thirst, lust, every day afresh and every day in vain, after the old prog, the old booze, the old whores, that’s the nearest we’ll ever get to felicity, the new porch and the very latest garden. (43)

This passage combines the Schopenhauerian and Freudian discourses on the tireless will/libido and the intractability of the desired object. But most striking is how Sadean the position suggested in Arsene’s cri-de-cœur rings here: to always know precisely what one desires (e.g. due to perversion, addiction, etc.) and to fully embrace this desire (regardless of any ethical concerns) could create the illusion of leading a meaningful existence. This resonates sharply with the Sadean philosophy of desire: ‘Il y a un proverbe

[...] qui prétend que l'appétit vient en mangeant. Ce proverbe, tout grossier qu'il est, a pourtant un sens très étendu: il veut dire qu'à force de faire des horreurs, on en désire de nouvelles, et que plus on en fait plus on en désire' (120J: 339).

## 2. The Freudian myth: Beckett's comedy of pessimism

Like many revolutionary ideas, Freud's theories on infantile sexuality were first met with outrage and controversy: 'Freud's sense of the psyche re-enacts a distressing part of Darwin's evolutionary ideas. As Darwin suggested that humans evolved from apes, so Freud suggests that humans still possess a bestial ancestral mind. The concerns of the psyche, he found, are simple, basic, amoral, and emotional' (O'Hara: 6). The initial hostile reception was followed by a number of progressive alternative narratives in an attempt to make these degrading suggestions more palatable to the conservative sensibility: after all, psychology could be redeemed from exposing inglorious drives, neuroses and pathologies, because it presented itself as a way to cure them. In the same way that Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* (1859) can be twisted into grand narratives or 'generalities about cultural and social progress' (O'Hara: 6) or that Georges Bataille, at Jean-Jacques Pauvert's trial, was able to fashion his testimony statement as 'un modèle d'équivoque jésuitique: fascination réprimée et justification scientifique' (Levent: 115), so one could apply the positive narrative of redemptory, salvific analysis –

promoted by Freud himself – to psychology: ‘We must move upward, work out the beast, and let the ape and the tiger die. A Christian society such as that into which Beckett was born in 1906 could not accept a less positive interpretation’ (O’Hara: 6).

Thus, the myth of psychoanalysis was born; as Phil Baker rightly argues, the ‘debris’ of psychoanalytic theory that ‘litters’ (xi) Beckett’s works should be seen as ‘a form of unstably ironised citation; a mythic borrowing compounded by considerations of polarity and structure along the lines of Beckett’s declared interest in the “shape of ideas” rather than their content’ (xiv). Beckett himself famously undertook a two-year analysis with Wilfried Bion in 1934-35, but he certainly approached it with great scepticism and ‘remained doubtful about and hostile towards psychoanalytic theory and procedure’ (Connor: 10) throughout:

If I cod myself with all this I cod myself and that is all. It will have been an expensive canular. (L1: 259)

I don’t expect the troubles I hoped first and foremost to get rid of via analysis will be gone [by Christmas] any more than they are now. Tant pis. I must use me to them. (L1: 283)

His distrust in dogma and his personal disappointment at the outcome (or lack thereof) of his therapy did not damper his fascination for the theory of psychoanalysis, however. As a number of studies have shown,<sup>52</sup> his extensive research on the subject during his two years with Bion, known as the

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<sup>52</sup> The most noteworthy of which remains Matthew Feldman’s *Beckett’s Books: A Cultural History of Samuel Beckett’s Interwar Notes*.

'Psychology Notes' (unpublished for the most part), remained a source of artistic inspiration for the rest of his life, and now offers scholars much insight into his eclectic readings and his reception of them.

Of particular interest are the infantile mind and its role in creating the symptoms of various regressive disorders in later life, since these dynamics are responsible for unconscious symbolic associations: 'The infantile mind', Beckett writes, 'is the core of the adult unconscious' (TCD MS10971/8/18). As Weller writes, this could suggest that

Beckett thought it very possible that he was himself an obsessional neurotic, but also that his reading of psychoanalysis and psychology more generally in the mid-1930s was very much an attempt to diagnose himself in order to free himself from a range of extremely unpleasant and debilitating symptoms, mental and physical – to no avail. (2010: 145)

As with other great meta-narratives such as rationalism, the 'cogito', or religion, Beckett found in his knowledge of psychology a source of compositional devices (narrative, fictional, thematic, linguistic...), but also sometimes a source of considerable amusement: there is often a comic element to be found somewhere in a 'canular' or a 'cod'. The 'Psychology Notes' bear various indications of this, such as the title 'Erogenous Jones' heading the hefty section on British Freud disciple Ernest Jones, also referred to as 'Freudchen' [Little Freud] throughout. 'Chapters from his two books, *Treatment of the Neuroses* and *Papers on Psychoanalysis* [...] establish Jones as Beckett's main expositor of psychoanalytic theory, comprising nearly half the entire corpus [54 pages] of psychological notes' (Feldman: 100).

Jones' two aforementioned books bear witness to his profound enthusiasm for Freud's theories at that stage in his career, to the extent that the mythological language occasionally pervades the scientific discourse, for instance in the following conclusion to a case-study demonstrating the long-lasting effect of 'infantile incestuous wishes': 'In the course of the treatment the patient fully realised, and confirmed by recalling a number of forgotten memories, the incestuous origin of her family troubles; since the analysis she had been on excellent terms with both her father and mother' (266). Jones' palpable fervour for this optimistic interpretation suggests a kind of stubborn overconfidence in his salutary narrative, which therefore comes across as exaggerated, or even slightly absurd, not unlike that of Juliette's swift rise to prosperity after choosing vice over virtue, or Vladimir's and Estragon's conviction that they ought to wait for Godot.

There is therefore in Beckett's attitude towards this theoretical material something of Watt's 'intellectual laugh' that 'laughs at that which is not true', and something of the 'mirthless' laugh at 'that which is unhappy' (*Watt*: 47), reprised in Nell's well-known aphorism: 'Rien n'est plus drôle que le malheur, je te l'accorde. [...] Si, si, c'est la chose la plus comique au monde' (*FdP*: 31-32). In Sade too, as Lacan notes, there is a kind of dark humour that has to do precisely with the mythology of the law as fundamentally true or good: 'l'humour est le transfuge dans le comique de la fonction même de surmoi' (247). This comment refers to the contingency of the notions of

morality and transgression and resonates with Sade's libertines' immunity to censorship and repression, whether institutional or psychological.

It is necessary to acknowledge this characteristic critical distance between Beckett and his source when attempting to reconstitute aspects of his creative process; as several critics, such as Feldman and Rubin Rabinovitz have observed, 'looking at the influence of and treatment by psychoanalysis must not be confused with a psychoanalytical reading of Beckett' (Feldman: 80).

### **3. Narcissism and self-love**

Beckett's interests in frustrated desire and psychology converge within the notion of self-love, which he explores through what may be termed an aesthetics of narcissism. This section outlines the importance of the concept of narcissism in Beckett's reception of Freudian psychology and investigates its incorporation into his portrayal of the psyche as a system governed by regressive drives and desires. This regressive streak lays the foundation for Beckett's aesthetic recuperation of Freud's theory of anal-sadism, which creates new interpretations for his use of Sadean motifs.

In Freudian psychology, autoeroticism is tightly linked with 'narcissism'. Jones defines narcissism, or 'self-love', as an early 'stage of development in which the auto-erotic impulses are co-ordinated, but the

object is still the self and not yet another person' (499). The psyche normally moves on from this phase quickly and new, external 'love-objects' are chosen. Narcissistic individuals, then, are those with regressive and neurotic personality traits revolving around self-centredness or the search for a surrogate of the self in their external love-objects. Beckett dutifully defines narcissism in his notes as an 'egocentric attitude towards the world and belief in omnipotence of thought' (TCD MS10971/8/4); he also notes: 'Narcissism: perversion described by Havelock Ellis & christened by Naecke. Regarded by Freud as intermediate between early autoeroticism and later object-love. Hence important distinction between libidinal & egoistic aspects of the self' (TCD MS10971/8/4). In the light of this, it seems significant that, as discussed in the previous chapter, he should have referenced Sade and Havelock Ellis directly alongside each other in both *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and *More Pricks than Kicks*. For Freud, narcissism is a constitutive aspect of the anal-sadistic pathological 'type' that will be of particular interest to this chapter: 'It is not hard to see that many of the [sadistic and anal erotic] temperamental traits [...] are closely related to narcissistic self-love and over-estimation of self-importance, a fact which indicates the importance of the contribution made by anal erotism to infantile narcissism' (Jones: 420-22).

This interest in narcissism is traceable to the early 1930s, at the time of the composition of the *Dream Notebook*, in which Beckett translated various fragments from Ovid's myth of Narcissus (entries 1098 to 1118; 1999c, 156-60).

One finds various references to this myth in *Murphy*, including Murphy's fascination for Mr Endon's painless mental condition, which is described as 'a psychosis so limpid and imperturbable that Murphy felt drawn to it as Narcissus to his fountain' (105). Moreover, Beckett's 'Interwar Notes' indicate that his curiosity regarding such narcissism extended beyond Greek mythology. As he was recording Schopenhauer's concept of will-lessness at the end of the 'Philosophy Notes': 'There is relative deliverance in the activity of pure will-less subject of knowing (contemplation & disinterested thought), where objects are not phenomena but eternal Forms of objectivation of will – Ideas. (Narcissism!)' (TCD MS10967/253). Beckett's spontaneous interjection here suggests a link between his 'seedy solipsists'<sup>53</sup> and their 'Belacqua fantasy' (*Murphy*: 48) on the one hand and the Freudian narcissist, a pervert, on the other. This is in keeping with the transition from his focus on single individuals in *Murphy* and *Eleutheria* to his famous pseudocouples in *Godot* and *Fin de partie*, a transition which appears to mimic the chronology of the evolution of Freud's primary narcissism into pathological narcissism in later life.

The figure of the double, or pseudocouple, is certainly one of the most emblematic aspects of Beckett's works; it appears immediately after the war in 1945 and seems to recur mainly in the works written in the following fifteen years; this coincides with the period under study in the present

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<sup>53</sup> The term 'seedy solipsist' is used in *Murphy* to refer to the protagonist (50).

chapter. In the pairs formed by Mercier and Camier, Vladimir and Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky, Hamm and Clov, Nagg and Nell, Molloy and Moran, the individuals may all be seen as some kind of iterations of each other, the concept of self-love being dramatised as the pseudo-coupling of the same, as though the experience of the war had revealed to Beckett that company was more essential to survival than solipsism. Crucially, upon realising that a self-sufficient relationship with one's self is impossible, the narcissist may be driven to seek – or invent – an 'other' in order to restore sufficient distance between subject and object to enable possession of some aspect of that self in the other. 'I would that what I love were absent from me', cries Ovid's Narcissus in Beckett's translation (*DN*: 158). 'Il est difficile à celui qui vit hors du monde de ne pas rechercher les siens', runs the well-known epigraph to chapter 9 in *Murphy*. '[J]e ne peux me passer longtemps de la société de mes semblables', claims Pozzo in *Godot*, 'même quand ils ne me ressemblent qu'imparfaitement' (30). The 'other' is only needed insofar as he is similar enough to be used as a projection or surrogate of the self, hence Pozzo's delight at the realisation that Vladimir and Estragon are '[d]e la même espèce que moi [...] que Pozzo! D'origine divine!' (28). From this process arise the homoerotic innuendos that often characterise Beckett's pseudocouples. As mentioned previously in relation to Proust, homosexuality constituted a feature of aesthetic interest since early on. As he was taking notes about homosexual erotic practices (among other things) from Garnier's *Hygiène de la*

*génération*, Beckett was inspired to jot down: 'All men are homosexual. I wish to Christ I'd been born a Lesbian (DN: 69);' this sentence is uttered almost verbatim ('homo-sexy' for 'homosexual') by the Alba in *Dream*, and prefigures M. Krap's 'J'aurais dû être homosexuel' in *Eleutheria* (66) nearly twenty years later – a telling example of the enduring impact of Beckett's early reading on his work.

Beckett's entries on the subject of homosexuality in the 'Psychology Notes' record Freud's (unfortunate) theory of homosexuality as one of the cardinal traits of unresolved narcissism in adult life:

Narcissism related to (1) Homosexuality (2) Primitivism (3) The Paraphrenias (4) Organic disease (5) Love. (1) Love & admiration of self common to both perversions, especially when inversion is of passive type. This close relationship is of a genetic order. Love of one's own sex stands closer to autoeroticism [sic] & narcissism than does love of the opposite sex. (TCD MS10971/8/4)

It is worth highlighting that Beckett's engagement with the concept of homosexuality is more suggestive of a curiosity for its artistic resonance with Narcissus' fruitless self-love (a metaphor for the vain search for the 'true' self), rather than from his (undisputed) interest in Freud's theory of the perversions. From his characters' and narrators' point of view, homosexuality usually represents something desirable, a trait that might have allowed some form of alleviation for the frustration caused by unfulfilled solipsistic/narcissistic ambitions. Even Ticklepenny's budding romance with Bim in *Murphy* is by far one of the most positive – albeit deliberately clichéd –

representations of infatuation in all of Beckett's œuvre, thereby inscribing homosexuality in the symbolical quest for narcissistic Nirvana.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, Ticklepenny is effectively responsible for directing Murphy to the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, where the latter, as a mental health nurse, finds an illusory form of alleviation for his fraught solipsistic/narcissistic ambitions in his obsession with Mr Endon. There is arguably no hint of sexual attraction there, but rather Murphy seeking in Mr Endon's self-sufficient catatony what he wishes he himself were. This is consistent with the following lines in Beckett's notes on Jones: 'The love choice of homosexuals dictated not by characteristics of parent, but by those of person himself. [...] Thus narcissistic type may fall in love with (1) What he is (or actually himself) (2) What he once was (3) What he would be' (TCD MS10971/8/8). In *Mercier et Camier* too, the two protagonists' overtly homoerotic relationship is presented as far more uncomplicated and harmonious than traditional hetero-normative configurations. Mercier and Camier's favourite way to pass the time and comfort each other is mutual (or at least communal) masturbation:

Le temps leur semblant long, ils se touchèrent un peu, mais sans se fatiguer. Devant un bon feu, à la lumière mêlée de la lampe et du jour plombé, ils se tordaient doucement sur le tapis, les corps nus entremêlés, se touchant avec langueur, avec des gestes d'arrangeuses de fleurs, pendant que la pluie battait les vitres. Que cela devait être bon! (101)

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<sup>54</sup> Even though, as Stewart notes, Beckett treated Ticklepenny with a certain contempt – see his chapter on 'Sexual Preference and Identity' (102-07).

However, such candidly positive characterisations of sex are notoriously rare in Beckett (especially when it comes to heterosexual intercourse).<sup>55</sup> Even homo-romantic or homoerotic relationships – though they do appear to offer momentary respite from existential misery – can hardly be said to offer the kind of fulfilment of mutual desire that could extricate Beckett’s characters from the solitude of their condition. In *En attendant Godot* (1952), Vladimir and Estragon, Beckett’s most iconic pseudo-couple, while undeniably fond of and dependent on each other, associate the male erection not with lust (although Estragon is ‘aguiché’) but with an alleged physiological response to death by hanging: ‘Estragon: Si on se pendait? / Vladimir: Ce serait un moyen de bander’ (20). This first association of sex with death is reinforced by Vladimir’s reference to the superstitious belief that mandrakes grow where the semen of the hanged falls – ‘la plante née des éjaculations des pendus et qui crie quand on la cueille’, according to Moran (*Molloy*: 213) – especially since mandrakes are poisonous, potentially lethal plants. The solipsistic lure of narcissism as an existential attitude therefore persists well beyond infancy in Beckett’s works; however, like most regressive tendencies, narcissism is guaranteed to fail to alleviate the qualms of the will, and the Beckettian subject therefore deploys further regressive drives inspired from Beckett’s psychoanalytic reading.

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<sup>55</sup> Compare for instance the passage just cited with Mercier’s description of sex with his wife Toffana: ‘Elle vit encore. Un entonnoir. On croirait baiser une fondrière. Quand on pense que c’est à cause de cet hectolitre de merde que j’ai renoncé à mon rêve le plus cher’ (124).

## II. Anal sadism and its aesthetic and diegetic manifestations

*À qui n'a rien il est interdit de ne pas aimer la merde.*  
(Molloy: 31)

### 1. Coprophilia and the body as eating-shitting machine

The overarching characteristic of the anal-sadistic complex is a strong preoccupation with the excremental and, by extension, with the dynamics of absorption and ingestion, which are heavily featured in Beckett's works. While there is no direct link between Freud's theory and Sade's writings beyond his use of the (by then vulgarised) term 'sadism', this section shows how Beckett's treatment of coprophilia mobilises Sadean motifs in order to stage the Freudian theory. We shall see that the anal-sadistic theory manifests in Beckett as an aesthetic fusion of Sadean and Freudian sadism.

Thanks to Beckett's 'Psychology Notes', we know of his interest in Freud's idea that many character traits are the result of persistent infantile sexual tendencies (e.g. narcissism) in adult life that preclude the 'normal' sublimation of sexual energy:

All forms of perversion exist potentially in the child, polymorphe pervers. 3 principal tendencies of infantile perversion: (1) Exhibitionism (2) Anal eroticism (3) Sadism & masochism. They are sublimated (through development of modesty, disgust, sympathy), manifested in later life as perversions, or manifested in later life as psychneuroses [sic] (when sublimation inadequate as repressive agent). (TCD MS10971/8/2)

Polymorphous infantile sexuality is a central tenet of psychoanalytic theory and is considered to be the initial stage of the psychological formation and later development of the subject. As such, it is crucial to the understanding of psycho-regressive disorders, including the anal-sadistic complex, to which Jones dedicates a chapter entitled 'Anal-Erotic Character Traits', on which Beckett took detailed notes. This chapter exposes what Freud termed the 'anal-sadistic phase' in children and discusses the corresponding 'pathogenic' paths of 'discharge' used as outlets for the frustrated libido when the sublimation process – which, as Beckett notes, normally intervenes from the age of five – is inadequate. Instead of projecting this energy onto a love-object, the subject reverts to (or fails to move on from) the autoeroticism that characterised his/her relation with the world in early years. In the anal-sadistic phase, this has to do with 'sexual excitation experienced by the infant in the region of the anal canal', (Jones: 413) resulting in intense preoccupation with the dynamics of absorption and excretion:

The act of defaecation constitutes one of the two greatest personal interests of the infant during the first year of life. [...] [T]he primordial function of excretion, and the association between it and sexuality, [...] result in far-reaching effects on mental development [...]. (413)

In his notes, Beckett records:

The mucous membrane lining anus & anal canal possess the capacity of giving rise, on excitation, to sexual sensations, just as does that lining entrance to alimentary tract. (TCD MS10971/8/18)

Jones insists on the fact that this anal fixation extends to the excretory product itself: 'The infant regards his product as part of himself, and attaches to it a strong sense of value and of possession' (424). Such identification of the self with bodily waste, normally resolved early on in childhood, appears to remain a significant ontological point of reference for Beckett's characters, as it does for Molloy, who sees great 'dignity' in the anus,

dignité due peut-être à sa **centralité** et à ses allures de **trait d'union** entre moi et l'autre merde. On le méconnaît, à mon avis, ce petit trou, on l'appelle celui du cul et on affecte de le mépriser. Mais ne serait-il pas plutôt le vrai **portail** de l'être, dont la célèbre bouche ne serait que l'**entrée de service**? Rien n'y pénètre, ou si peu, qui ne soit rejeté sur-le-champ, ou peu s'en faut. Presque tout lui répugne qui lui vient du **dehors** [ou] du **dedans** [...]. Ne sont-ce pas là des choses significatives? L'histoire en jugera. (108-09)

Here Molloy not only glorifies the anus as the location of the self – as opposed to the brain or skull – but also refers to the outside world as 'l'autre merde', which evokes the initial infantile inability to discriminate between oneself, one's mother and the world. There is also an effort to rationalise the notion of self through concrete or literal similes (bolded). The 'trait d'union' simile in particular denotes a relation between self and non-self that is defined by its problematic nature; Beckett once called hyphens 'traits de désunion' as he was composing his penultimate text, *Stirrings Still*, in the late 1980s (Van Hulle, 2011: 102). The narrator of *L'Innommable* goes yet further and invokes science: '[J]'ai connu un médecin qui soutenait que le souffle suprême, au point de vue strictement scientifique, ne pouvait sortir que par le fondement,

et que c'est à ce dernier orifice qu'on devait présenter le miroir, avant d'ouvrir le testament' (92). The vagueness of the reference, contrasting humorously with the 'strictly scientific' claim, might be read as an oblique, perhaps mocking allusion to Freud (or Jones), while at the same time reinforcing the association between the anus and the 'true' site of the self.

Having argued that control over one's bowels is of prime importance in infancy, and that this manifests as a great interest in the final product of digestion, Jones goes on to examine the regressive (pathological) versions of these behaviours in adults whose failure to develop appropriate sublimation mechanisms led to an anal-sadistic complex. One such consequence, says Jones, is the 'desire for self-control', which may become 'a veritable passion' and 'may take either a physical or moral direction' (423), the former typically resulting in constipation in adult life. Beckett notes: 'Postponement of act: child squatting down supporting anal orifice with heel so as to keep back stool until the last moment & then voiding with intense concentration during which he resents any disturbing influence from without' (TCD MS10971/8/18). Given the virtual ubiquity of the motifs of constipation and retention in Beckett – particularly in prose works from the late 1940s to early 1950s – it will be useful to study the extent to which such occurrences conform to (or depart from) psychoanalytic theory in order to garner some insight on Beckett's aesthetic preoccupations during this period as well as their resonances with Sade's own aesthetics.

In *Watt*, we see a clear need for control over the digestive process in individual bodies as well as in the macrocosmic organism of Mr Knott's house. Watt's 'emissions', a 'weekly stool' (232), echo the description of the picture in Erskine's room of a man seeming 'about to be delivered, after many days, of particularly hard stool' (251). Molloy shows similarly retentive bodily habits: 'Je vais vous dire une chose, je ne pisse plus, parole d'honneur' (110).

As Jones explains in his essay, the anal-sadistic subject's coprophilic inclinations lead to a preoccupation with all stages of the digestive process. There is therefore a 'natural' association between excrement and food, 'this being the same substance in an earlier stage; many idiosyncrasies, both positive and negative, with regards to various articles of diet – e.g., sausages, spinach, rissoles, etc. – are due to this unconscious association' (424). The process of transubstantiation of food into shit is a prominent motif in Beckett's prose, particularly in *Watt*, where this results in a kind of mechanisation of the body, which may be interpreted as part of Beckett's aestheticisation of psychoanalytic theory. Mr Knott exclusively lives on his 'mess' or 'poss' or 'single good thing' (84) which Watt is responsible for preparing and which consists of a mixture of mismatched foods and beverages, both savoury and sweet, cooked together in a large pot, so that the prepared concoction presumably looks as though it has already undergone the digestive process. This is then fed to Mr Knott, whose unusual eating habits are shaped by a fear of frustrated desire, as suggested by the alleged

properties of the meal, 'of which the tiniest spoonful at once opened the appetite and closed it, excited and stilled the thirst, compromised and stimulated the body's vital functions, and went pleasantly to the head' (84). Eventually, Mr Knott's 'slops' are emptied – also by Watt – in various flowerbeds around the garden or sometimes, in bad weather, 'on the dunghill' (64). The stages of Mr Knott's digestive process therefore condition and depend on the smooth running and economy of the household, which reproduces the dynamics of absorption/excretion and becomes its master's mechanical double.

Food in *Watt* may be linked to the kind of autoerotic regressive dynamics observed in the theory of anal-sadism. Food consumption is most clearly associated with the Freudian source in another passage of the novel, where Arsene conjures up the character of Mary, a house servant, whose principal occupations are near-catatonic daydreaming and constant eating: 'the reason for her presence in that place faded from her mind, as with the dawn the figments of the id [...]. Now what [...] can the fancies have been that so ravished Mary from a sense of her situation? [...] Erotic cravings? Recollections of childhood?' (50). Mary's loss of all 'sense of her situation' is compared to the intractable loss of dream memories that most people have experienced upon waking; Beckett's 'figments of the id' reference anchors this passage firmly in his aesthetic processing of psychoanalytic theory. So does the speculation about the cause of her apathy, concerned as it is with

eroticism, desire and early memories. But it is in the description of Mary's 'exceptional' appetite, which 'knew no remission' that anal-sadistic inflexions are most apparent:

The ordinary person eats a meal, then rests from eating for a space, then eats again, then rests again [...]. Let him be a small eater, a moderate eater, a heavy eater, a vegetarian, a naturist, a cannibal, a coprophile, [...] let him eliminate well or let him eliminate ill, let him eructate, vomit, break wind or in other ways fail or scorn to contain himself as a result of an ill-adapted diet, congenital affliction or faulty training during the impressionable years, [...] the fact remains [...] that he proceeds by what we call meals, whether taken voluntarily or involuntarily, with pleasure or pain, successfully or unsuccessfully, through the mouth, the nose, the pores, the feed-tube or in an upward direction with the aid of a piston from behind is not of the slightest importance [...]. (50-51)

The typological organisation of the enumeration, especially as regards digestive profiles, is reminiscent (possibly ironically) of the psychoanalytic ambition to rationalise mental disorders through typecasting. The psychoanalytic subtext is also reinforced by the suggestion that 'faulty training during the impressionable years' might cause lasting damage, as well as by the reference to the pleasure/pain dyad, in a nod to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), with which Beckett was familiar. The anal-sadistic obsession with detail and order (to which we shall return) is manifest in the enumeration – one might say catalogue – of the various kinds of eaters, most notably in the direct mentions of cannibalism and coprophilia. This passage is a prime example of Beckett's aesthetic fusion of Sadean and Freudian sadism: we see the scientific typology turn into a 'dispassionate' and inventive Sadean catalogue of the ways to force-feed somebody. Ultimately, Mary is defined

diegetically by her insatiable appetite and the automatic behaviours she has developed to deal with it:

Between on the one hand a large pouch or bag [...] and on the other Mary's mouth, Mary's hands flash to and fro, with a regularity that I do not hesitate to compare with that of piston-rods. [...] And the [one hand], on its way down to be filled, meets the [other] on its way up to be emptied, at a point equidistant from their point of departure, or arrival. (54)

Once more, the dynamics of desire take on mechanical properties, as they do in Sade's *120 journées*, in which the dynamics of force-feeding, excretion and re-ingestion dominate the libertines' devious practices; as put by Lely, 'sur les six cents cas anormaux narrés par les historiennes, sans compter la fiction proprement dite où cette pratique répugnante abonde, plus de la moitié offre l'image d'une ingestion d'excréments, autonome ou associée à une autre passion' (444). Most of the time, the primary function of force-feeding in Sade (beyond the obvious purpose of torturing others) is to give the subject indigestion and/or satisfy the despots' coprophagic obsession; the libertines conduct 'experiments' and adopt a 'système' consisting 'non pas [à faire] manger des choses contraires ou malsaines, mais [à obliger] à manger précipitamment hors des heures de ses repas' (120J: 273-74), with added clauses such as not to feed bread. 'Il n'y eut pas de jour où l'on ne donnât ainsi de demi-indigestions [aux sujets de débauche], et ce que l'on en obtint ne s' imagine pas. Je le dis en passant, afin que si quelque amateur veuille user de ce secret, il soit fermement persuadé qu'il n'en est pas de meilleur' (120J: 273-

74). Sadean and Beckettian aesthetics both rely heavily on the motif of coprophilia, which affects the diegesis and its organisation, as though the narrative integrity required the presence of abjection (an excremental surrogate for the partially-unborn self) in order to be preserved. Beckett therefore makes use of the connection between Freudian theories and Sadean imagery in order to produce his own regressive tales of anal-sadism.

## **2. Unconscious copro-symbols**

In addition to literal coprophilia, Freud and Jones claim that the regressive tendencies manifested in anal-sadism also involve preoccupation with unconscious copro-symbols such as refuse, dirt, money and possessions, as well as infantile patterns of behaviour and speech. As Beckett notes: 'Large number of acts unconscious symbols for defaecation: tasks intrinsically disagreeable ("chores," boring routine, writing up diary, etc.), tasks involving objects that are unconscious symbols for excretory products (dirt, paper, waste products, money)' (TCD MS10971/8/18). This section demonstrates that these motifs can be identified in Beckett's rendering of the psyche as a system of retentive, regressive autoerotic drives.

The strong sense of value and desire for control that the child attaches to faecal matter progressively spreads to other objects unconsciously associated with it. Some of these, such as dirt or refuse, present obvious

similitudes with faeces, while others, such as money and personal belongings, have less evident – but just as strong – symbolic ties to it. Beckett dutifully records the symbolic associations between excrement, money, and seemingly worthless possessions that the anal-sadistic individual may hold dear: ‘Interest gradually transferred from excreta to money via mudpies (odourless), sand (dehydrated), pebbles (steinreich), marbles, buttons’ (TCD MS10971/8/19). Beckett’s characters’ great interest in all manners of dirt and rubbish is easy to demonstrate, in particular in the Three Novels. In *Molloy*, for instance, Molloy relates his first encounter with the elderly Ruth/Edith/Rose <sup>56</sup> in a ‘terrain vague’ – ‘rubbish dump’ in Beckett’s translation (57): ‘J’ignore ce qu’elle était venue y faire. Moi je remuais mollement des détritrus, en me disant probablement, car à cet âge je devais avoir des idées générales, Voilà ma vie. [...] [J]’étais courbé sur un tas d’ordures, espérant y trouver de quoi me dégoûter d’avoir faim’ (77-78). Later on, Moran ‘fouill[e] jusque dans la poubelle’ (141), searching for onions that he suspects his ill-treated servant, Marthe, to have deliberately omitted from his stew to spite him; we see here how Beckett relates the motif of rubbish to that of food as well as to the notion of suffering caused by frustrated desire. In *Malone meurt*, Macmann struggles to acquit his duties as town sweeper, leaving the area dirtier after his passage:

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<sup>56</sup> As Linda Ben-Zvi notes, this is an anagram of Eros (137).

[E]n fin de journée, tout le long du secteur qui lui avait été confié, on voyait les pelures d'orange et de banane, mégots, papiers innommables, crottes de chien et de cheval et autres immondices, concentrés avec soin le long des trottoirs [...] dans le but apparemment d'inspirer aux passants le plus de dégoût possible et de provoquer le maximum d'accidents, dont des mortels, par glissade. (112-13)

It is worth noting the element of cruelty that underlies these last two examples since, as shall be discussed in more depth in the final part of this chapter, sadism in its vulgarised sense of cruelty is also characteristic of the anal complex.

The next copro-symbol of interest – which Beckett records in his notes as 'Chief coprosymbol' (TCD MS10971/8/19) – is money and, by extension, gold, precious gems and other valuable possessions. Jones, paraphrasing Freud, explains that this association is partly due to contrast between 'the most valuable substance man possesses and the least valuable' (426), but also 'a direct continuation of the sense of value that the infant attaches to its excretory product, one which in the adult consciousness is replaced by its opposite, though it still persists unaltered in the unconscious' (426). There is typically little, if any, money in the Beckettian universe, but the symbolic relationship between the two was clearly of interest to Beckett when he was researching the anal-sadistic complex: 'money (Dukatenscheisser, goose with golden eggs, golden Ader (piles), filthy lucre, wallowing in, stinking with, money, currency, liquid money)' (TCD MS10971/8/19). The leading consequence of this symbolic attachment, and one of the three cardinal traits

of anal-sadism, is parsimony: 'There are two aspects to the trait, the refusal to give and the desire to gather, and [...] [a given person] may be either niggardly or avaricious, or both' (Jones: 429). Some of Beckett's characters certainly display a reluctance to part with their assets, for instance Pozzo in *En attendant Godot* or Hamm in *Fin de partie*. The former does not deign to share his meal with Vladimir and Estragon, instead leaving them his chicken bones. He plans to sell Lucky at the Saint-Sauveur market – 'où je compte bien en tirer quelque chose' (40). Hamm's avarice is manifest in his cruel reluctance to feed Clov, Nagg and Nell: 'Je ne te donnerai plus rien à manger. [...] Je te donnerai juste assez pour t'empêcher de mourir. Tu auras tout le temps faim' (18); 'Il n'y a plus de bouillie. Tu n'auras plus jamais de bouillie' (21). This attitude seems to have been consistent throughout his life, as clearly indicated in his 'story' (which he presents as fictional but could well be a vignette inspired by his past): a man '[d]'une pâleur et d'une maigreur admirables' comes to him 'en se traînant sur le ventre' (68) to beg for bread or wheat for his dying child. Although he does have grain supplies and implies he is very well off, Hamm pitilessly refuses to help, arguing that a full belly would only prolong their misery by delaying inevitable death – 'Mais réfléchissez, réfléchissez, vous êtes sur terre, c'est sans remède!' (71). Other anecdotes confirming Hamm's parsimony include his refusal to provide Clov with a bicycle despite him crying and crawling on the floor (21), and 'la Mère Pegg' with oil for her lamp, causing her death: 'Quand [...] tu l'envoyais

paître, à ce moment-là tu savais ce qui se passait, non? [...] Tu sais de quoi elle est morte, la Mère Pegg? D'obscurité' (97).

This first aspect of the parsimonious character-trait is accompanied by a second one, the 'impulse to gather, collect, and hoard':

All collectors are anal-erotics, and the objects collected are nearly always topical copro-symbols: thus, money, coins [...], stamps, eggs, butterflies [...], and even worthless things like pins, old newspapers, etc. In the same connection may be mentioned the joy [...] and the interest in the discovery of treasure-trove. (Jones: 430)

One begins to see more clearly how the parsimony trait might have been of aesthetic and compositional relevance to Beckett's writing, considering his characters' tendency to collect and fondly keep various, often apparently useless objects found along their way – 'ces petits objets que je ramassais par-ci par-là' (*Malone*: 118-19). Molloy's obsession with his belongings, which he frequently indulges in listing – 'dresser l'inventaire de mes biens et possessions' (17) –, is a telling example of this. While he never manages to complete his inventory, he derives a sense of relief from listing and speaking at length about his belongings, in the hope that 'ayant parlé longuement [de mon couteau] [...] je n'aurai plus à en parler quand viendra le moment [...] de faire l'inventaire de mes possessions, et j'en serai soulagé d'autant, à un moment où j'aurai besoin d'être soulagé' (60). In fact, the first part of the novel is effectively framed by Molloy's preoccupation with his inventory, mentioned again in the final pages: 'Et cette liste de mes points faibles, que je ne ferai jamais, de crainte de m'achever, je la ferai peut-être un jour, quand il

s'agira de faire l'inventaire de mes biens et possessions' (111). Among these possessions, we do find items evoking the copro-symbol of precious, shiny metal: 'J'avais emporté de chez Lousse un peu d'argenterie, oh pas grand'chose, des cuillers à café massives pour la plupart, et puis d'autres menus objets dont je ne saisissais pas l'utilité mais qui semblaient devoir avoir de la valeur' (85). However, for the most part, Molloy's possessions hardly have any monetary worth, like his 'pierres à sucer', or his 'chèvre de bucheron', which he never got around to selling, 'même dans l'extrémité de [s]on besoin' (86), never having understood what its use was. Nevertheless, Molloy feels 'une sorte de vénération' for this object, because 'ce n'était pas un objet de vertu, mais qu'il avait une fonction des plus spécifiques et qui me resterait toujours cachée' (86). Such attachment to banal, worthless objects is arguably a distinctive feature of most of Beckett's characters. *Malone meurt* is interspersed with Malone's anxious references to his 'possessions':<sup>57</sup> 'Vite, vite, mes possessions!' (116). Like Molloy's, Malone's relationship with objects (e.g. with his pencil, which he likes to suck on, like Molloy on his stones) has undertones of infantile autoeroticism:

Si je faisais venir toutes mes possessions telles quelles et les prenais avec moi dans le lit? [...] Alors je les aurai tout autour de moi, sur moi, sous moi, à mes côtés, je serai au milieu de mes possessions, [...] tout sera dans le lit, avec moi. Je tiendrai à la main ma photo, ma pierre, pour qu'elles ne s'en aillent pas. Je mettrai mon chapeau. J'aurai peut-être quelque chose dans la bouche, mon papier journal peut-être, ou mes boutons, et je serai couché sur d'autres trésors encore. (124)

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<sup>57</sup> There are 23 such references between p. 9 and p. 259.

The oral compulsion to suck on objects, together with the desire to be engulfed, cradled, covered by copro-symbols ('trésors'), have distinct regressive connotations, evoking as they do the comfort and safety of the mother's all-encompassing presence. Malone employs the term 'jouissance' (126) to describe his use of his 'vases [de nuit]' (here the metonymic association between the chamber pot and faecal matter is evident), and openly acknowledges the sensual, tactile relationship with his belongings: 'j'aimais tâter et caresser les objets durs et nets qui s'y trouvaient, dans mes profondes poches, c'était ma façon de leur parler et de les rassurer. Et je m'endormais volontiers en tenant à la main un caillou, un marron d'Inde ou une pomme de pin, et je les tenais encore à mon réveil, les doigts repliés dessus' (119). The stones, chestnuts and pinecones have a multiple symbolic connection with faeces through the themes of hoarding, money, and earth/nature. This is reinforced by Malone's habit of hiding them or burying them in the ground:

[J]e cherchais longuement un endroit où ils fussent tranquilles pour toujours, où jamais personne ne pût les trouver à moins d'un hasard extraordinaire, et de tels endroits sont rares, et je les y posais avec soin. Et quelquefois je les enterrais, ou je les jetais à la mer, de toutes mes forces aussi loin que possible de la terre [...]. (119)

This resonates strongly with Jones' claim that 'the [symbolical] treasure-trove is usually buried underground', in what he likens to 'incestuous exploration of Mother Earth' (430). The urge to bury recalls Malone's fantasy to be surrounded by his possessions, and even prefigures the mound (or breast)

slowly engulfing Winnie in *Happy Days*. Furthermore, the concrete, methodical and somewhat absurd obsession with objects in Beckett's early-1950s prose may be said to anticipate the importance of props in his plays, resonating particularly strongly with Winnie's own inventory of her belongings nearly a decade later.

### 3. Spatial metaphors and the economy of shit

In Freud's theory, anal-sadism manifests not only as pleasure derived from control over one's bodily functions, but also as the urge to control space and one's place within it. This section proposes to analyse Beckett's treatment of space and places in this light, by showing how the rules governing the body contaminate the organisation of the diegetic space it inhabits, so that houses, towns and other communities become self-contained organisms whose economy is based on literal and symbolical production and recycling of excremental matter.

Besides the 'great affection' and 'fond care' that may be 'lavished' (Jones: 430) on symbolic objects by anal-sadistic individuals, Jones also comments on another trait related to the desire for self-control, namely 'orderliness', another one of the three cardinal traits of anal sadism, which also include behaviours such as procrastination. This obsession with orderliness is apparent in the compulsion to make exhaustive inventories of

one's possessions, as delineated in the examples from the Three Novels. Beckett's 'Psychology Notes' bear witness to his interest in this particular aspect of anal sadism: 'The desire for perfection, nothing must be done by halves. [...] Mania for proving capacity for self-control (sphincters). [...] tasks connected with oughtness (moral tasks)' (TCD MS10971/8/18-19). In the same way that symbolic 'possessions' are transposed to the stage as theatrical props, the trait of orderliness can be identified in Beckett's plays, for instance in Clov's attempts to tidy up and put away the various objects strewn across the stage:

*CLOV commence à ramasser les objets par terre.*

HAMM: Qu'est-ce que tu fais?

CLOV: De l'ordre. (*Il se redresse. Avec élan.*) Je vais tout débarrasser!

*Il se remet à ramasser.*

HAMM: De l'ordre!

CLOV (*se redressant*): J'aime l'ordre. C'est mon rêve. Un monde où tout serait silencieux et immobile et chaque chose à sa place dernière, sous la dernière poussière. [...] J'essaie de fabriquer un peu d'ordre. (*FdP: 76-77*)

Clov's wording echoes Jones': there is 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." [...] Everything must be put in its proper place, and if possible put away out of sight' (431). Jones also finds that '[i]n the field of thought this tendency commonly leads to undue pedantry, with a fondness for definitions and exactitude, often merely verbal' (431). Such verbal attachment to pseudo-definitions is arguably a typical feature of Beckett's narrators, in what may be interpreted (as was done in Chapter One)

as the linguistic staging of a kind of epistemological farce, but also as a futile attempt to ground one's sense of an integrated self in superficial abstract certainties. In *Malone meurt*, fittingly, Malone is particularly anxious to define exactly what he means by his 'possessions', i.e. objects that he considers to be his, even if technically they are not. The love of order goes hand in hand with that of detail, which resonates with Beckett's (and Sade's) narrators' propensity to enumerate and catalogue the many possible outcomes of various given situations. In *Watt*, the picture of the pianist on Erskine's wall features '[b]eads of sweat, realised with a finish that would have done credit to Heem' and testifies to its painter's 'love of significant detail' (251).

Pathological perfectionism, perhaps unsurprisingly, often leads to procrastination, the tendency to 'neglect and postpone [tasks] until the unconsciously accumulated energy bursts forth in an orgy of [...] activity' (Jones: 418). This often concerns 'tasks that are intrinsically disagreeable or tedious, towards which, therefore, there is already some counter-will' (417). Jones gives the example of patients for whom letter-writing is perceived as a 'chore' and put off for a long while until they finally set down to work and produce 'epistles' rather than ordinary-length letters. The dynamics of procrastination are useful in analysing aspects of Beckett's retentive narration, e.g. Malone's reiterated intention to list his possessions is immediately retracted. Procrastination also becomes a diegetic *modus operandi* for the characters; Moran endlessly temporises his departure on his mission to find

Molloy, pretexting a need for careful and detailed planning: 'J'avais un esprit méthodique et je ne partais jamais en mission sans avoir longuement réfléchi à la meilleure façon de partir' (135); 'Mais ne pourrais-je renvoyer notre départ au lendemain? Ou partir seul? Tortillements inutiles. Mais nous ne partirions qu'au dernier moment, un peu avant minuit' (146).

Having shown how the character-trait of orderliness finds narrative and aesthetic echoes in Beckett's writing, it is now necessary to investigate the specifically spatial manifestations of anal-sadism in his representation of space, including a 'tendency to be occupied with the reverse side of various things and situations', as well as an 'extreme interest in the idea of centrality' (Jones: 423) – both recorded by Beckett in his notes. The former 'may manifest itself in many different ways' such as 'marked curiosity about the opposite or back side of objects and places – e.g., in the desire to live on the other side of a hill because it has its back turned to a given place' (Jones: 423). This motif finds a direct equivalent in Hamm's ecstatic '[I]ci nous sommes dans un trou. [...] Mais derrière la montagne? Hein? Si c'était encore vert? Hein?' (*FdP*: 54).<sup>58</sup> Equally noteworthy are Molloy's musings about the moon: 'Qu'il est difficile de parler de la lune avec retenue! Elle est si con, la lune. Ça doit être son cul qu'elle nous montre toujours' (52). Jones also mentions the 'proneness to make numerous mistakes about right and left, east and west' (423); in Beckett, the cardinal points and other traditional directional references are

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<sup>58</sup> 'montagne' becomes 'hills' in English (*Endgame*: 25).

depolarised. In *Fin de partie*, there is no more sun – ‘Néant’ (46) – so it is no longer possible to tell east from west. Molloy, for his part, experiences increasing difficulties in discriminating the linear from the circular: ‘Et ayant entendu dire, [...] qu’en croyant aller tout droit devant soi, dans la forêt, on ne fait en réalité que tourner en rond, je faisais de mon mieux pour tourner en rond, espérant ainsi aller droit devant moi’ (116). It is also in *Molloy* that another manifestation of this passion for centrality according to Jones, the tendency ‘to reverse words and letters in writing’ (423), finds a compelling counterpart in Moran’s comments about his neighbours’ dog, Zoulou: ‘Je n’aime pas les bêtes. C’est curieux, je n’aime pas les hommes et je n’aime pas les bêtes. Quant à Dieu, il commence à me dégoûter. Accroupi je lui taquinai les oreilles, à travers la grille, en lui disant des mots câlins. Il ne se rendait pas compte qu’il me dégoûtait’ (145). Beckett’s characteristically irreverent pun on the dog/god palindrome not only illustrates Jones’ reverse-spelling theory, but also appears to stage another case mentioned earlier in Jones’ *Papers on Psychoanalysis*, ‘in which a patient, possessed with [a] licentious impulse relating to a dog, suffered from an apparently innocent obsessive thought concerning God’ (8).

Fascination with centrality is another distinctive feature of anal sadism, and one that opens new interpretative possibilities with regards to Beckettian topography. One of Jones’ patients ‘was always restlessly trying to discover what was really the exact centre of any town he might be in, and developed

many philosophical ideas as to what constituted the very “centre of life,” the “centre of the universe,” etc’ (423). The desire to be ‘in the centre’ has many resonances in Beckett’s works, for instance the concentric organisation of space in Molloy and Moran’s world, to which we shall return, or the narrator of *L’Innommable*’s opening speculation about his position within the (narrative) space he occupies at that moment: ‘Il me plaît de croire que j’en occupe le centre, mais rien n’est moins sûr. [...] Enfin, entre le centre et le bord il y a de la marge, et je peux être sis quelque part entre les deux’ (13-14). He claims that Malone and other fictive figures revolve around him ‘comme la planète autour de son soleil’ (13). This notion of centrality, which Beckett combined with the notion of egocentrism, is expressed literally in Hamm’s maniac obsession with being put at the exact centre of the stage in *Fin de partie* (40-41). All the preliminary versions of the play in the Archive feature this particularity, clearly pointing at sadism as a keystone in its genesis.

We have seen that the dynamics of retention/excretion, together with the marked preoccupation with food and other copro-symbols at work in Beckett’s texts contribute to a mechanistic rendition of the body, and we have also suggested that macro-organisms (such as Mr Knott’s house) come to mirror these motifs. We now propose to combine these observations with the argument that the anal-sadistic concern with space and centrality becomes a structuring principle in Beckett’s representations of economic and social

communities. This will be demonstrated by way of an analysis of the recycling of waste matter in *Watt*, followed by a study of a lengthy (13 pages) deleted passage from *Molloy*,<sup>59</sup> in which Moran explains that the opulence of Ballyba, Molloy's town, is the result of an economy based on its citizens' excrement.

In *Watt* and *Molloy*, both macro-organisms are characterised by the strict monitoring and systematised handling of the community's energetic input and output. Knott's house functions like a human body, with a 'front door' and a 'back door' mysteriously locked and unlocked at close intervals (34-35) and 'penetration' (66) by visitors. The sexual and copro-symbolic conception of space is evident in place names: Moran lives in 'Shit, chef-lieu de Shitba', and when on a walk in the land surrounding Shit, 'c'est le frais de Shitbaba que je prenais, et nul autre' (184). He claims that his son is 'un as pour l'histoire et la géographie' and that he owes him his knowledge that 'Condom est arrosé par la Baïse', then orders the son to set off for the nearest town, named Hole (193). The concern with waste is symptomatic of the retentive and regressive nature of anal-sadistic disorders, this retention itself relating to the latter's autoerotic and narcissistic origin; Jones cites a 'dislike of waste' (436) as a trait associated with anal sadism and involving compulsive recycling and optimisation of resources. In *Watt*, this can easily be related to

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<sup>59</sup> Our analysis of this material will be based on O'Reilly's summary. See also Van Hulle, 2010: 72-75.

the strict regulations surrounding the preparation, consumption and recycling of Mr Knott's meals, which he eats straight from the pot using a 'little plated trowel', an 'arrangement [that] represented a great saving of labour. Coal was also economised' (86). Knott's hatred of waste is yet more manifest in his instructions to 'give what [he] left of his dish, on the days that he did not eat it all, to the dog' (87). One of the lengthiest digressions (11 pages) in the novel ensues, as Watt is faced with the problem of finding a dog whose eating habits would accommodate this requirement, so that no food should ever remain uneaten. Watt speculates that someone might be employed

to take that food to a dog, to any dog, and to stand over that dog until it had eaten the food, and if it could not or would not finish the food to take what remained of the food to another dog, to any other dog, and to stand over that other dog until it had eaten what remained of the food, and if it could not or would not finish what remained of the food to take what still remained of the food to another dog, to any other dog, and so on, until all the food was eaten, and not an atom remained, and then to bring back the pot empty. (92)

In the published text of *Molloy*, little is revealed regarding Molloy's town beyond its name and that of its 'campagnes circonvoisines' (184). Ballyba is known to be prosperous, yet its land is arid and unfit for agriculture: 'il n'y avait rien à [en] tirer sinon un peu de tourbe de fort mauvaise qualité ou des débris de chêne comprimé dont on fabriquait des amulettes, coupe-papier, ronds de serviette, chapelets, scapulaires et autres babioles' (185). Moran therefore asks the question 'D'où Ballyba tirait-il donc son opulence?', adding

'Je vais vous le dire', but instead of proceeding with the explanation, he immediately retracts this: 'Non je ne vous dirai rien. Rien' (185).

This last quotation can be construed as retentive from both narrative and metatextual points of view. Indeed, it is what Dirk Van Hulle has called "sutures" in the published texts, which Beckett has often deliberately left unpolished, showing sometimes slightly unsettling "textual scars" that remind readers of the text's eventful past and draw attention to its often "unsettled" nature' (2014: 307). The copro-symbolic 'babioles', together with the 'tourbe' and 'débris de chêne', were once a fitting prologue for the original 13-page Ballyba explanation found in the Archive, as summarised in detail by Edouard Magessa O'Reilly. Without going so far as to argue for a direct intertextual link between the genesis of *Molloy* and the *120 journées*, we may point out that, while Moran's town's name, Shit, has evident coprophilic connotations, Bally has a strikingly similar ring to Bâle, a Swiss town mentioned at the start of Sade's novel, and through which the libertines and their victims travel before reaching Silling through the Forêt Noire. Furthermore, we shall see that the dynamics exposed (then withheld) by Beckett in this deleted passage mobilise numerous key anal-sadistic elements and symbols, and also reproduce the organisation of life around excrement in Sade's Silling macrocosm. The dislike of waste observed in *Watt* becomes not only an obsession with recycling faecal matter in *Molloy*, but also the very foundation of Ballyba's economy:

[T]he economy of Ballyba is based on its citizens' stools, which are recycled as fertilizer and account for the region's high agricultural productivity and for its wealth. [...] Producing shit is, in fact, a civic duty. Each citizen has a quota of shit to produce, as determined by a committee. Trips away have to be compensated, a regulation which explains why citizens prefer to stay home.

Government officials, on the other hand, are exempt from the requirement to compensate for faeces not contributed to the community during an absence. It is the duty of a particular official, apparently of very high status, the Odibil, to determine who must compensate for trips away. [...]

At the end of every year, totals are calculated and diplomas are awarded to those whose contribution exceeded their quota. [...] These diplomas are very much sought after and are particularly useful when one is seeking employment. [...]

In creating Ballyba's economy, Beckett has touched upon matters of civic duty and civic pride, of bureaucracy, folklore and tradition, science and technology, poetry, celebrity, social status and sainthood. In Ballyba, it would appear, all these are built on shit.

The whole passage displays a complex arrangement of patterns and themes that are central to the theory of anal-sadism. The mention of the 'Obidil' further confirms the psychoanalytical subtext through a conspicuous anagram of the Freudian term 'libido' and reaffirms the centrality of the concept of desire to Beckett's idiosyncratic rendering of social organisation within a community – even though the only remaining allusion to the Obidil in the published text is essentially yet another Beckettian retraction: 'Et cet Obidil, dont j'ai failli parler, que j'aurais tellement voulu voir de près, eh bien je ne le vis jamais, ni de près ni de loin, et il n'existerait pas que je n'en serais que modérément saisi' (222). The sense of 'oughtness' and 'mustness' mentioned previously is manifest in the ways the collective psyche of the town has organised itself around the value imputed to shit – which is of course evocative of the symbolic equivalence expounded by Freud and Jones. The

sense of 'civic duty' has generated a set of 'regulations' that shape the legal system and the administrative roles held therein, such as 'committees' and 'officials'. There are numerous potential symbolic associations of faeces with wealth or gold, such as the 'shiny trashcans' in which each citizen is to place their excrement ahead of collection times, and which they must keep gleamingly clean, as there are 'fines' incurred if they do not. Other such symbols include the individual 'nametags' on each trashcan and the 'sought after diplomas' awarded to 'those whose contribution exceeded their quota' when 'totals are calculated' each year. The nametags and diplomas also resonate with another of Jones' copro-symbolic interests: 'Books and other printed matter are a curious symbol of faeces, presumably through the association with paper and the idea of pressing (smearing, imprinting)' (Jones: 425). The fact that, according to O'Reilly, '[f]olklore and tradition also bear shit's mark' confirms that the symbolical status of excrement has effectively become the emblem of the community and 'imprinted' its culture. The high symbolical value attached to shit seems to be a strong influence on Ballyba's citizens' biological preconceptions, as indicated by the case of a 'scientist' who 'suggested shit baths to alleviate certain nervous disorders' and designed his proposal so that 'none of the shit would be lost to fertilization as it would all be recycled'. However, shit also seems to govern the field of ethics, and human health becomes a secondary concern to that of preserving the integrity of the excretory product: despite the 'detailed plan he

submitted to the appropriate committee', the scientist's plan was turned down 'for fear the bathers would pollute the shit'. Instead, the notions of smearing and disseminating in Jones' copro-symbolic imagery are transposed to agricultural necessities, i.e. fertilising the soil to obtain a 'luxurious vegetable production' ('clergyman's stool makes the best fertilizer'). However, shit does still benefit other scientific domains, as it is 'the motivation for certain technological developments', including the 'admirable technology involving septic tanks arranged around cultivated land for the purposes of distributing the shit'. The whole passage indeed seems peppered with specialised technical or economic vocabulary, evoking the obsession with self-control and minute detail, e.g. 'agricultural productivity', 'quota', 'scientific research', 'totals are calculated', 'exceeded their quota', 'seeking employment', 'sell his excess', 'detailed plan'. This cyclical, retentive recycling plan is presented as a highly functional, successful system reminiscent of digestive mechanics in well-adapted organisms, as epitomised by the figure of 'a certain Colbert', who simply 'became rich by eating and defecating' and was so prolific that he 'was able to sell his excess to those who could not fulfil their quota', thereby doubly imprinting the community.

Besides displaying a structural and thematic enactment of the theory of anal sadism, this deleted passage also resonates strongly with the coprophilic drives observed in Sade's works themselves, in particular in the *120 journées de Sodome*, in which bowel movements condition not only the schedule and

code of conduct of the inhabitants of the Chateau de Silling, but also the spatial organisation of the castle itself: 'il est sévèrement défendu d'aller à la garde-robe ailleurs que dans la chapelle, qui a été arrangée et destinée pour cela, et défendu d'y aller sans une permission particulière, laquelle est souvent refusée' (64). The strict regulation of shit, as in Beckett, involves severe punishment for those who do not comply and waste an opportunity to put their excrement to what the community regards as good use,

afin que ces besoins, ainsi conservés, pussent fournir aux besoins de ceux qui les désiraient. [...] l'ami du mois visitait avec soin tous les pots de chambre, et s'il en trouvait un de plein, le sujet était à l'instant marqué sur le livre des punitions. Cependant on accordait une facilité à ceux ou celles qui ne pouvaient plus se retenir: c'était de se rendre un peu avant dîner à la chapelle dont on avait formé une garde-robe, contournée de manière à ce que nos libertins pussent jouir du plaisir que la satisfaction de ce besoin pouvait leur procurer; et le reste, qui avait pu garder le paquet, le perdait dans le cours de la journée de la manière qui plaisait le plus aux amis. (64)

Finally, the introduction to the tenth *journee* (quoted above) is a useful example of the retentive/excretive dynamics that also govern the Sadean text; Sade (uncharacteristically) heads this section with a note to himself – 'Souvenez-vous de voiler dans le commencement ce que vous allez éclairer ici' (64) – echoed immediately in the first sentence: 'Plus nous avançons, mieux nous pouvons éclaircir notre lecteur sur de certains faits que nous avons été obligé de lui tenir voilés dans le commencement' (64). This constitutes a mirror image, or inverted parallel, of the textual progression of Beckett's text, where the retention (deletion and 'textual scar') occurs after

excretion, thus showing how central self-control and obsession with detail and order are to both authors' creative processes.

### III. Anal sadism à deux

*Oui, j'essaierai de faire, pour tenir dans mes bras, une petite créature, à mon image, quoi que je dise. Et la voyant mal venue, ou par trop ressemblante, je la mangerai. Puis serai seul un bon moment, ne sachant quelle doit être ma prière, ni pour qui.*  
(Malone: 83)

#### 1. Anal sadism and the Oedipus complex

This section uses the conclusions reached thus far on Beckett's take on anal-sadism to form a new interpretation of the importance of the Oedipus complex in his works. Having studied sequences of interrelated scatological and spatial metaphors, it now appears that all share at least one constitutive trait with the figure of the mother, which is systematically associated with closed spaces (rooms, wombs, tombs) and indeed with the dynamics of excretion and expulsion through the process of giving birth. I shall argue that these connections satirise the Freudian theory of the Oedipus complex while at the same time replicating its basic dynamics.

Copro-symbols in Beckett's works are embedded in a wider paradigm concerned with staging the ontological precariousness caused by the failure of what Carl Jung and Jacques Lacan refer to as 'psychic birth', the most crucial

moment in the constitution of the self, when the subject effects its separation from the all-encompassing maternal entity, recognises the world as distinct from its own being and situates itself ontologically with regards to existing external sources of authority – variously understood in psychology as the superego, the Law, the Father or, for Lacan, the Nom du Père and its opening onto the ‘symbolic order’, i.e. the linguistic realm of signifiers. It was most likely through Jung that Beckett became acquainted with the concept of psychic birth; he famously attended his third lecture at the Tavistock Institute in London with Bion in 1935, where Jung told of the case of a little girl whom he treated unsuccessfully before reaching the conclusion that ‘she had never been born entirely’ (1968: 107). Beckett incorporated Jung’s story almost verbatim in the ‘Appendix’ to *Watt* – ‘never been properly born’ (248) and in his 1956 radio play *All that Fall*:

I remember attending a lecture by one of these new mind doctors. [...] I remember his telling us the story of a little girl, very strange and unhappy in her ways, and how he treated her unsuccessfully over a period of years and was finally obliged to give up the case. [...] The trouble with her is that she had never really been born! (*AtF*: 195-96)

The failure of psychic birth induces a strong symbolic fixation on the mother; in Jung’s words, ‘[m]an leaves the mother [...] and is driven by the eternal thirst to find her again, and to drink renewal from her; thus he completes his cycle, and returns again into the mother’s womb’ (1916: 427). From this perspective, Molloy is ‘a Jungian ego consciousness on a quest to reconcile his anima and thus be born into a state of integrated selfhood. His dilapidated

mother is an absent figure whom he must metaphorically find: he must recognize her as a projection and reject her dominating influence as a first step towards integration' (Ackerley and Gontarski: 290). Following this Jungian encounter, the failure of psychic birth remained a salient theme in Beckett's works for the rest of his career and informed many of their distinctive thematic and narrative configurations. It is necessary to recall this conceptual premise before studying the ways in which the theory of anal sadism may have impacted Beckett's representation of the mother, as it is fundamental to what may be described as a Beckettian aesthetics of regression, which include the anal sadistic dimension of his writing; as Beckett notes, for Freud, 'the most complete form of narcissism [is] the wish to return into the mother's womb' (TCD MS10971/8/6). With many of his prose narrators, Beckett presents the reader with psyches that are not fully formed yet already decaying, often condemned to an existence devoted to their solipsistic quest for the long-lost pre-natal bliss symbolised by the mother's womb.

We have seen that the copro-symbolic organisation of space is one aspect of Beckett's aesthetisation of regressive dynamics; a similar argument may be made about his characters' consistent attraction to closed spaces and other womb-like environments. These spaces, such as rooms (the notional transition between the two facilitated by the phonetic similarity between the signifiers /ru:m/ and /wu:m/), houses, shelters, cells, asylums, and even

mental space (e.g. Murphy's mind is represented in spatial terms, which was incidentally also inspired by Jung's lecture<sup>60</sup>) are symbolical structural variations on the notions of confinement and safety, and as such are interconnected within a larger metaphor whose initial term is the 'mythical womb' (Baker: xvi). In a chapter of *Papers on Psychoanalysis* dedicated to the theory of symbolism – and on which Beckett took scrupulous notes –, Jones argues that unconscious symbols are formed in the same way as abstract expressions in day to day language, for which 'the simile is the primary process' and precedes 'the gradual transference of significance from one use of the word to another, ending in the independence of the original metaphor, which has acquired a reality of its own' (92). This is arguably what takes place in Beckett's texts, with the abstract symbolical structures attached to the mother materialising in the diegesis and increasing in permanence and stability as the narrator's agency and control over the narration decreases. In the short story 'Fingal' in *More Pricks than Kicks*, Belacqua suddenly declares that he 'wants very much to be back in the caul, on his back in the dark for ever' (29) shortly before deciding to set off towards the next best thing: the Portrane lunatic asylum. In *Murphy*, Murphy's delight at the sight of a padded cell in the asylum contrasts humorously with the rather grim

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<sup>60</sup> The large, hollow sphere divided into concentric sections reproduces structural aspects of a diagram presented at Jung's second Tavistock lecture (cf. Jung, 1968: 49).

spectacle around him, and constitutes an early example of such irruptions of womb-symbols in the diegesis:

The pads surpassed by far all that he had ever been able to imagine in terms of indoor bowers of bliss. The three dimensions, slightly concave, were so exquisitely proportioned that the absence of the fourth was scarcely felt. The tender luminous oyster-grey of the pneumatic upholstery, cushioning every square inch of ceiling, walls, floor and door, lent colour to the truth, that one was a prisoner of air. (103)

In the Three Novels, rooms remain a major theme, but this time they frame and engulf the narration; Molloy's mother's room literalises the symbolical metaphor of the womb fantasy; Malone's room, mentioned over twenty times in the novel, is a 'chambre ordinaire;' and the narrator of *L'Innommable* dreams of one: 'si je pouvais me mettre dans une chambre, c'en serait fini de la chasse aux mots, même sans porte, même sans fenêtre, rien que les quatre faces, les six faces, si je pouvais m'enfermer, ce serait une mine, il pourrait faire noir, je pourrais être fixe' (185). These structural and symbolical metaphors link mental space, 'real' space and the physical body together in an elaborate aesthetic conceit, in which the motifs of the 'room' and the 'mindscape' are used as intermediaries between the two Beckettian poles of the womb and the tomb. The psychoanalytic origin of such use of metaphors and symbols is all but confirmed by Beckett's detailed notes from Jones' chapter on symbolism: 'Possible variations in meanings of the symbol are exceedingly restricted. [...]. It is true that the symbol may be ambivalent (as room for womb or for woman) & that there may be as many interpretations as

there are layers in the dream condensation' (TCD MS10971/8/12 – emphasis Beckett's). These notes on the 'Genesis of Symbolism' testify to the interest with which he researched the process of symbol-formation and its structural and linguistic mechanisms:

The unconscious mind identifies two ideas in a way alien to the conscious mind, whereby secondary idea may represent primary, but never vice versa. Symbolism implies identification, just as metaphor does simile. Tendency of primitive mind [controlled by Pain-Pleasure principle] to notice points of resemblance rather than of difference [...]. Moreover to notice only points of resemblance & ignore those of difference is an economy of effort, according to 'la loi de l'inertie mentale.' (TCD MS10971/8/12-13)

This resonates with Rubin Rabinovitz's admirable 1985 article on Beckett's figurative language, in which he argues that 'Beckett's descriptions of the outer world are often the raw materials for metaphors depicting inner reality' (317). He contends that 'running through his fiction are extended metaphors that use descriptions of the surroundings to represent subtle and elusive concepts' (319). It is easy to see, for instance, how Murphy's conception of his mind as a place in Chapter Six can be superimposed over his description of the padded cell and its hermetic, 'slightly concave' white walls, and how evocative the padded cell is of the womb itself, both being associated with cushiness and uterine warmth: 'The temperature was such that only total nudity could do it justice' (103). Though Rabinovitz steers clear of psychoanalytical interpretations in this article, he goes on to explain that 'Beckett's method of associating related images is to create strings of

metaphors. (A string, in the sense it is used here, can be defined as a set of metaphors linked by transitional ideas.)' (323). He then uses precisely the room-womb association under discussion here as an example: 'Descriptions of being evicted from a room in a house owned by a woman, for example, are at times associated with the idea of being expelled from the womb. Thus expulsion is the transitional idea in the string: room – (being expelled from) – womb' (327). However the 'Psychology Notes' were not available in the 1980s, whereas it is now possible to trace the Beckettian womb-room-tomb string to psycho-linguistic theories about unconscious symbol formation. As Beckett's summary of 'characteristic attributes' of symbols demonstrates, symbolic associations hinge on the felt resemblance between a primary and a secondary object or idea 'associated with but less unacceptable than banned idea, or by expressing it as a bodily symptom (conversion)' (TCD MS10971/8/2):

- (1) Its significance not inherent in itself, but derived from the anterior idea which it stands for. The more essential symbolised by the less essential.
- (2) Represents primary element through having something common with it.
- (3) Characteristically sensorial & concrete, whereas idea represented may be abstract & general. [...]
- (4) Symbolic modes of thought more primitive & represent reversion to an earlier stage of development. Thus they are more frequent in conditions favourable to such reversion (fatigue, neurosis, etc. [...]). (TCD MS10971/8/10-11)

All the above characteristics readily coincide with the womb-room symbolism: (1) the generic room stands for the 'essential' womb; (2) both share an enclosed or spherical physical structure as well as connotations of safety derived from confinement – Beckett also writes: 'Connection, as

evinced in philology & semantics, between word denoting symbol & connotation of idea symbolised' (TCD MS10971/8/12); (3) the room (and other substitutes such as cells, pads, garrets) is used as an earthly ('sensorial and concrete') surrogate for the womb; (4) indications of regressive, infantile or autoerotic drives are distinctly perceptible in Beckett's texts, for instance in Molloy and Malone's systematic oral fixation – 'un besoin physique' (*Molloy*: 100) –, alongside a propensity for repetition compulsion reminiscent of Freud's theories on the 'death drive' in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: 'Cela m'a toujours attristé de récidiver, mais la vie est faite de récidives, on dirait, et la mort aussi doit être une sorte de récidive, ça ne m'étonnerait pas' (*Molloy*: 83); 'se voir récidiver sans fin, cela vous remplit d'aise' (*Molloy*: 183). Beckett's notes also point to a parallel in the relationships between symbols and 'reality' in neurotic psychology on the one hand, and symbols in the diegesis of his texts on the other; in both cases there is a "'decay" of [the original] metaphor, from occasional figurative use of a term accepted literally through such familiarity with figurative use that there is only preconscious awareness of its metaphorical nature to the disappearance of original literal acceptance & its transference to exclusively figurative use' (TCD MS10971/8/11). In other words, the subject is 'unaware of the meaning of the symbol, even of the existence of symbol, which he accepts as the reality' (TCD MS10971/8/11). This new symbolical (fictional) reality is thus perceived and experienced as literal, concrete and tangible, in the same way as 'houses, asylums, rooms,

shelters, cabins, stables, dens, holes, urns, boxes, subterranean locales, and areas of various geometric shapes' (Rabinovitz, 1985: 320) come to shape the Beckettian topography and orient the characters' trajectories on their quest for the mother. Finally, this also resonates with Beckett's interest in the '[e]xtraordinary ubiquity of the same symbols' as well as in the 'disproportionately small number of ideas symbolised' by '[t]housands of common symbols' (TCD MS10971/8/12).

Analysing and interpreting Beckett's use of symbols on the backcloth of his documented research on psychoanalysis provides some insights into the aesthetics of repression and anal sadism in his works. His fashioning of spatial and mechanical metaphors is driven by his staging of repressive dynamics such as narcissism and anal autoeroticism: '[w]hen pregenital libido at point of fixation (anal, oral, etc) is incompatible with ideal of later ego & therefore suppressed, a 2nd or "internal" deprivation takes place & the libido in question becomes subject to the usual mechanisms of the unconscious - displacement, condensation, etc. - & a neurosis ensues' (TCD MS10971/8/3-4). We shall now examine Beckett's treatment of the mother-figure herself in order to show that his use of anal sadistic dynamics and aesthetics allows him to subvert the Freudian theory of the Oedipus complex, crafting in the process what may rightly be called a specifically Beckettian kind of sadism.

The mother-fixation engendered by the failure or incompleteness of psychic birth gives way in Beckett's works to a stylisation of the mother-figure as a copro-symbol, as well as to a general assimilation of the process of birth with that of excretion. Molloy's mother's name has faded from his memory, but he chooses to call her 'Mag', 'quand je devais lui donner un nom', because he feels that 'la lettre g abolissait la syllable ma, et pour ainsi dire crachait dessus, mieux que toute autre lettre ne l'aurait fait' (21). As an emission of bodily fluid, the idea of spitting constitutes a first copro-symbolic element, reinforced by the phonetic similitude between 'mag' and 'gag'. However Molloy does confess that 'en même temps je satisfaisais un besoin profond et sans doute inavoué, celui d'avoir une ma, c'est-à-dire une maman, et de l'annoncer, à haute voix' (21). The avowed wish to return to the mother immediately precedes a further double association of the mother with excrement by combining the symbolical function of her name – to which we shall return – with diegetic faecal imagery:

la question ne se posait pas [...] de l'appeler ma, Mag ou la comtesse Caca [...]. Je crois qu'elle faisait sous elle, et sa grande et sa petite commission, mais une sorte de pudeur nous faisait éviter ce sujet [...]. [C]ela devait être bien peu de chose, quelques crottes de bique parcimonieusement arrosées tous les deux ou trois jours. La chambre sentait l'ammoniaque, oh pas que l'ammoniaque, mais l'ammoniaque, l'ammoniaque. (22)

The maternal portrait is suffused with coprophilic imagery, including some of the copro-symbols discussed earlier on, particularly money, which Molloy frequently takes from his mother – though he claims that 'je lui en prenais,

mais je ne venais pas pour cela' (23). Due to her deafness, his preferred mode of communication with her is to knock her on the head with his fingers: 'Mais qu'elle associât les quatre coups avec autre chose qu'avec l'argent, voilà ce à quoi il fallait obvier à tout prix. Pendant la période de dressage donc, en même temps que je lui frappais les quatre coups sur le crâne, je lui fourrais un billet de banque sous le nez ou dans la bouche' (22). But since she cannot count, he finds 'un moyen plus efficace pour insérer dans son esprit l'idée de l'argent. Il consistait à substituer aux quatre coups de mon index un ou plusieurs (selon mes besoins) coups de poing, sur son crâne. Ça, elle le comprenait' (23).

The presence of money as a copro-symbol in direct association with the mother-figure raises a further parallel with Jones' theory of anal sadism, which claims that '[t]he two most remarkable, and perhaps most important, faecal symbols are money and children' (425). For the child, Jones explains, 'the abdomen is merely a bag of undifferentiated contents into which food goes and out of which faeces come', which leads to a "cloacal" theory of birth', i.e. the 'natural inference' that the foetus 'grows out of food' and faeces, and 'leaves the body through [...] the anus' (427). As Beckett records in his notes, there is an evolutionary basis for this: 'Sexual processes & organs derived from excretory organs: common ducts used for both in lower animals & partly in human beings' (TCD MS10971/8/18). We recognise in this theory other aspects of copro-symbolism, especially those concerned with food

ingestion/digestion; the notion of the body as a 'bag of undifferentiated contents' is essentially what Mr Knott's body is in *Watt* after ingesting his 'mess': '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' (84). Beckett applies this 'cloacal theory of birth' even more literally to Mrs Nolan's story of the birth of her son in the middle of a dinner party at the beginning of the novel, labour commencing at 'the first mouthful of duck' and going 'in full swing' during coffee and liqueurs, the baby 'leap[ing] like a salmon' (11). Mr Nolan and his guests retire, leaving the wife in 'anguish' to climb the stairs alone 'on her hands and knees, wringing the carpet-rods as though they were made of raffia', and giving birth 'unassisted': 'She severed the cord with her teeth, said Goff, not having a scissors to her hand. [...] I would have snapped it across my knee, if necessary, said Tetty' (12). Once again, there is an overlap between the motif of the offspring and food absorption, which converge in the liminal space of the mother's belly, the animal flesh she ingests seemingly contaminating the unborn flesh of the baby, now become a 'salmon'. This food/baby/animal hybrid also evokes the rat torture at the end of the *120 journées*, the creature in the woman's belly eating its way towards her digestive system, essentially becoming food in its turn. Mrs Nolan's cutting of the cord 'with her teeth' reinforces these cannibalistic overtones and anticipates the rodents'

cannibalistic infanticide later on in the novel. Jones goes on to argue that the child 'finds in Nature plenty of confirmatory evidence that charming things grow out of matter with a bad odour – e.g., flowers out of manured soil' (428). Again, this evokes Knott's all-important digestive cycle, which typically involves his excrement being used as fertiliser (anticipating Ballyba's economy in the genesis of *Molloy*) for his violets, pansies, roses, and other 'young growing thirsty thing[s] at the moment of [their] most need' (*Watt*: 64). The 'cloacal theory of birth' in the infantile or regressive imagination also resonates strongly with Molloy's own birth theory and his reference to his mother as 'celle qui me donna le jour, par le trou de son cul si je me souviens bien. Premier emmerdement' (20).

While Beckett was undoubtedly best acquainted with Freud and Jones' theories, his notes also reveal his curiosity for other takes on psychoanalysis, largely approached through secondary sources such as Robert S. Woodworth's *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* (1931). He therefore had at least a cursory knowledge of Carl Jung's ideas before he attended his London lectures with Bion in 1935. This is relevant to our study of the anal-sadistic inflexion in Beckett's representations of the mother, for if there is an Oedipal streak in the mother-son dynamics in his works, it is Jungian rather than Freudian, and moves away from the fixed triangle of the subject and his parricide and incestuous desires. For Freud, the child's drive towards the mother is inherently sexual; for Jung, it is not so: in her introduction to Jung's

*Psychology of the Unconscious* (1916), Beatrice M. Hinkle notes that 'Jung speaks no longer of the real father and mother but uses the term imago or image to represent the father or mother, because the feelings and phantasies frequently do not deal with the real parents but with the distorted and subjective image created by the imagination of the individual' (xxxii). It is from this archetypal maternal entity that Beckett's characters struggle to extricate themselves, rather than from the incestuous wishes to possess her sexually: 'Nous étions si vieux, elle et moi, elle m'avait eu si jeune, que cela faisait comme un couple de vieux compères, sans sexe, sans parenté, avec les mêmes souvenirs, les mêmes rancunes, la même expectative' (*Molloy*: 21). For Jung, the attraction to the mother is not necessarily doubled with an unconscious wish to slay the father or his 'imago', and in this he differs radically from Freud: 'The father, in the psychological sense, merely represents the personification of the incest prohibition; that is to say, resistance, which defends the mother' (1916: 364). This notion of the father as a prohibitive force relates to the role of the father in the advent of the subject according to Lacan. The father represents the Law, but also the first encounter with alterity (the 'big Other' or 'Grand Autre'), a repositioning of the self that allows for a primary understanding of symbols (i.e. the distinction between signifier and signified) and therefore for access to language – hence Lacan's choice of the term 'Nom du Père'. Without this encounter, the person remains entrapped in the mother-child dyad, incapable of distinguishing between subject and object, in a kind of narcissism à deux. In

Beckett, similarly, the son-father relationship denotes not so much rivalry or parricide as a wish for a sense of self that is separate and distinct from the mother's. This sometimes entails a degree of identification not with the father himself but with the father's *imago*, as shown in Molloy's dispassionate comment about his mother calling him 'Dan', which he presumes was his father's name: 'Dan était peut-être le nom de mon père, oui, elle me prenait peut-être pour mon père. Moi je la prenais pour ma mère et elle elle me prenait pour mon père' (21). In *Textes pour rien* (1950), the sentence 'j'ai été mon père et j'ai été mon fils' (121) brings to mind Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's argument in *L'Anti-Œdipe* (1972) that 'le père a dû être enfant, mais n'a pu l'être que par rapport à un père, qui fut lui-même l'enfant, par rapport à un autre père', which indeed implies that the proposition 'le père est premier par rapport à l'enfant' is 'dénuée de sens' (325-26). By marking the interchangeable nature of the father/son dyad, Beckett's narration dismantles the traditional Oedipian triangle. This results in an aporetic tension between the urge to fuse back with the mother and the urge to form an independent identity; in short, this is the ontological situation, gradually aggravated, of Beckett's characters/narrators in the Three Novels.

The mother in Beckett holds an ambivalent status: while her 'imago' or 'anima' embodies the painless quietude to which the individual longs to return, she is loathed and scorned as a person for being responsible for the

'unhappy event' (*Murphy*: 17) of birth. As is well known, horror of procreation is the norm in Beckett's works and may transpire in various ways – from *Murphy's* Miss Carriage's evocative name, to Dr Piouk's fervent tirade in *Eleutheria*:

J'interdirais la reproduction. Je perfectionnerais le condom et autres dispositifs et en généraliserais l'emploi. Je créerais des corps d'avorteurs sous le contrôle de l'État. Je frapperais de mort toute femme coupable d'enfantement. Je noyerais les nouveau-nés. Je militerais en faveur de l'homosexualité et en donnerais moi-même l'exemple. Et, pour activer les choses, j'encouragerais par tous les moyens le recours à l'euthanasie, sans toutefois en faire une obligation. (50)

This strongly suggests an intertextual reference to a passage from Sade's *Justine*, which Beckett may have found in the Apollinaire: 'À quoi bon laisser vivre des créatures qui [...] ne servent [...] qu'à surcharger l'État d'une denrée dont il a déjà trop? Les bâtards, les orphelins, les enfants mal conformés devraient être condamnés à mort dès leur naissance' (quoted in Apollinaire: 83). The narrator of 'L'expulsé' expresses gratuitous wishes to harm children, 'ces sales petits êtres' and 'tout leur sale petit bonheur': '[J]e dus me jeter par terre, afin de ne pas écraser un enfant. [...] Je l'aurais écrasé avec joie, j'abhorre les enfants, ç'aurait été d'ailleurs lui rendre service, mais je craignais les représailles. Tout le monde est parent, c'est ça qui vous interdit d'espérer' (*Nouvelles*: 21-22). Molloy too is torn between his mother-fixation and his bitter regret that she did not succeed in aborting him: 'Je sais qu'elle fit tout pour ne pas m'avoir, sauf évidemment le principal, et si elle ne réussit jamais à me décrocher, c'est que le destin me réservait à une autre fosse que celle

d'aisance. [...] Et je lui tiens compte également de ne pas avoir recommencé, instruite par mon exemple, ou de s'être arrêtée à temps' (23). For him, life in the womb is 'la seule période à peu près potable de mon énorme histoire' (23). Thoughts about heredity and generation are equally abhorrent to him: 'Ah, elle me les a bien passés, la vache, ses indéfectibles saloperies de chromosomes' (110). It is this tension between the love and hatred felt for the mother that most clearly indicates Beckett's distancing from the traditional Oedipal triangle (in which the son wants to possess the mother and slay the father), moving closer to Freud's revision of Oedipus in a more nuanced portrayal of infantile sexuality, characterised by ambivalence towards both parents – and particularly, for both sexes, by hatred of the mother due to 'penis-envy' or 'fear of castration'. This is apparent in Molloy's admission that if he ever were to look for the meaning of his existence, 'c'est de ce côté-là que je gratterai d'abord, du côté de cette pauvre putain unipare et de moi, dernier de mon engeance, je me demande laquelle' (23) – rather than incestuous desire, this points to Molloy's precarious sense of self, the mother being at once the only source of ontological security and the principal obstacle to independent, integrated selfhood.

In his article 'The Anethics of Desire: Beckett, Racine, Sade', Shane Weller seeks to interpret such antagonism towards the mother by means of an 'Orestean conception of desire' in which Orestes, who famously murders his mother Clytemnestra in Greek mythology, replaces Oedipus as the filial

archetype; according to McKinley and Burrows' notes from Beckett's lectures on Racine at TCD, he saw Racine's Oreste as 'the very embodiment of both doubleness and reversibility' (quoted in Weller, 2008: 105), making him a prime example of the reversibility of love into hate. Weller's Orestean reading also allows him to draw a parallel with Sadean ethics: 'Oreste stands out for Beckett not only on account of his radical isolation, however, but also because he is unremittingly subject to the passions' (106). Commenting on Beckett's point that 'Racine's statement of Orestean desire in its cruelty and madness is "cold,"' Weller then argues that '[t]his coldness is not simply owing to the absence of any moral frame; it is a commitment to an art of statement of the passions that is itself dispassionate' (108). We have already commented on Beckett's assessment of Sade's statement of the passions as 'dispassionate' in a 1938 letter, and it seems quite plausible that this kind of aporetic aesthetics of desire might have drawn Beckett to Racine and to Sade for the same reasons, as well as informed his idiosyncratic rendering of irreconcilable psychological drives towards the mother-figure. As Beckett noted, '[the reversal of] Love into hate represents regression to pregenital sadistic level, on which hate & self-preservation rather than love constitute the attitude to the world' (TCD MS10971/8/6).

We now see how important the concept of sadism is to Beckett's reception and use of psychoanalytic theory, in particular as regards the status of the mother in his works. The longing for the Jungian mother is

systematically imbued with the desire to possess by murder or annihilate her; the mother complex in Beckett is therefore not only anal-sadistic in nature, but also rightly Sadean. Unsurprisingly, mothers in Sade are frequent victims of rape and matricide, amongst a deluge of other torments. This hatred is especially virulent in *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, which ends with the libertines and their new recruit/convert, pointedly named Eugénie, torturing, raping and savagely murdering her mother. During Eugénie's libertine schooling earlier on, Dolmancé declares: 'Je ne suis pas encore consolé de la mort de mon père, et lorsque je perdis ma mère, je fis un feu de joie... Je la détestais cordialement. Adoptez sans crainte ces mêmes sentiments, Eugénie: ils sont dans la nature' (40). Contempt towards mothers' life-bearing abilities is reinforced by the peculiar belief that the offspring is formed from the paternal seed alone, thus categorically denying any constitutive maternal influence: 'Uniquement formés du sang de nos pères, nous ne devons absolument rien à nos mères; elles n'ont fait d'ailleurs que se prêter dans l'acte, au lieu que le père l'a sollicité; le père a donc voulu notre naissance, pendant que la mère n'a fait qu'y consentir. Quelle différence pour les sentiments!' (40). Unlike Freud's Oedipus complex, both Sade and Beckett depict relationships in which the child's hatred is directed primarily against the mother regardless of his/her gender; as Weller puts it, 'violence is directed not against the godhead, not against paternal authority, but rather against the figure of the mother' (2009: 41). Also noteworthy are their contrastive

attitudes to the parent perceived as responsible for bringing one into the world: for Sade, the mother is a near-passive receptacle who merely submits to the father's active impregnation (which by extension implies conjugal rape), whereas fathers in Beckett usually react to the news of a pregnancy with surprise, disgust and powerlessness, as does the narrator of *Premier amour* (1946): 'Un jour elle eut le culot de m'annoncer qu'elle était enceinte, et cela de quatre ou cinq mois, de mes œuvres. [...] Regardez, dit-elle, l'aréole fonce déjà. Je rassemblai mes dernières forces et lui dis, Avortez, avortez, comme ça elle ne foncera plus' (52).

While literal and symbolic instances of aggression directed at the mother are too numerous to be listed, there is one particular anecdote – or rather, matricide fantasy – repeated across many works that is worth highlighting: it typically involves a large, elderly woman being gravely injured in a dramatic accident. In *Mercier et Camier*, this interrupts Mercier's diatribe against birth and procreation:

Un terrible bruit de freins déchira l'air, suivi d'un hurlement et d'un choc retentissant. Mercier et Camier se précipitèrent (après une brève hésitation) dehors et purent voir [...] une grosse femme, d'un âge qui paraissait avancé, s'agitant faiblement par terre. [...] Son sang, issu d'une ou de plusieurs blessures, gagnait déjà la rigole.  
Ah, dit Mercier, voilà ce dont j'avais besoin. Je me sens tout ragaillard. Il avait en effet l'air transformé.  
Que cela nous serve de leçon, dit Camier. [...] Qu'il ne faut jamais désespérer. [...] Faisons confiance à la vie. (45)

The pair's palpable delight at this turn of events is mirrored in the narrator's factual (dispassionate) description of the woman's wounded body, as well as

in the fact that they simply walk on without the slightest concern for her or curiosity for the outcome of the accident, which is never mentioned again. When an ambulance drives past them towards the scene, Mercier expresses shock at what he considers a waste of valuable fuel: 'Une honte. [...] Et on nous parle d'une pénurie de carburant, dit Mercier. | Il y a peut-être plusieurs victimes, dit Camier. | Ce serait un bébé qu'ils ne feraient pas autrement, dit Mercier' (46). During Moran's visit to Père Ambroise in *Molloy*, he also hears about a woman in an accident: 'Il m'apprit que madame Clément, la femme du pharmacien [...] était tombée d'une officine, du haut d'une échelle, et s'était cassé le col [du fémur]. Il ajouta que ça devait arriver' (139). Moran, unmoved, immediately changes the topic to his sick hen that no longer lays eggs, thereby metaphorically associating the sadistic fantasy to hurt the mother with the wish to never have been born. *Malone meurt* ends with an embedded tale of the sadistic psychiatric minder Lemuel massacring staff and inmates during a day out organised by the insufferably cheerful Mme Pédale:<sup>61</sup>

à la vue des feux marins elle s'évanouit, ce qui la fit tomber. Smash her! hurla l'Anglais. [...] Elle avait dû se casser quelque chose en tombant, la hanche peut-être, les vieilles dames se cassent facilement la hanche, car sitôt revenue à elle elle se mit à gémir, comme s'il n'y avait qu'elle seule sur toute la terre digne de pitié. (183-84)

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<sup>61</sup> 'Pédale' being offensive French slang to refer to a homosexual man, Beckett may have chosen her name, like Miss Carriage's in *Murphy*, as means of associating the contrastive notions of femininity and infertility.

Beckett once planned to include a similar accident anecdote in *Fin de partie*. In an early version of the play dubbed 'Avant Fin de partie' (UoR MS1227/7/16/7) and probably composed in 1952 or 1953 according to S. E. Gontarski (1985: 31), 'X', the character that would become Hamm, recalls an accident that his mother had: 'Son accident. Épouvantable. [...] Dans quel état elle était. Une éponge. Pas un seul os de son cher corps qui ne fût rompu. [Des fractures ouvertes de partout.] [...] Quinze ans dans le plâtre et un régime lacté.' Although this passage was dropped from subsequent versions, it prefigures elements of the published text, such as Nagg and Nell's boating accident, the death of 'la mère Pegg' as well as Nell's potential death during the play. In 'L'expulsé', the narrator slips and falls, dragging down

une vieille dame couverte de paillettes et de dentelles et qui devait peser dans les deux cent livres. Ses hurlements ne tardèrent pas à provoquer un attroupement. J'avais bon espoir qu'elle se soit cassé le fémur, les vieilles dames se cassent facilement le fémur, mais pas assez, pas assez. (*Nouvelles*: 22)

This motif is an enduring one, as shown by its reappearance in the late 1970s prose text *Company* over fifteen years later: 'An old beggar woman is fumbling at a big garden gate. Half blind. [...] Stone deaf and not in her right mind the woman of the house is a crony of your mother. She was sure she could fly once in the air. So one day she launched herself from a first floor window' (*Nohow*: 10-11). The 'crony' is a duplicate, or projection, of the mother. The narrative subjectivities painstakingly brought into focus in Beckett's prose deploy series of maternal avatars destined to torture or

destruction, as though to alleviate some constitutive frustration through violence. The regressive subject thus re-enacts the crucial, and never-resolved, anal-sadistic phase.

## 2. Violence in (pseudo)couples

Beyond certain differences in their characterisation of desire, there is one crucial aspect of desire upon which Sade, Schopenhauer, Freud, Beckett, and even Darwin all concur: not only is it inherently violent, but violence is also its most fundamental trait. This section outlines the interpersonal power dynamics that come into play when Beckett's disappointed narcissists come to face the futility of their attempts to find respite from existential suffering in a relationship with a self-same other. I argue that Beckett stages the evolution of the need for company into the urge to instrumentalise and enslave the other; this gives rise to a specifically Beckettian type of sadism in which cruelty and violence become the primary mode of interaction within the couple.

Freud and Jones contradict the 'complacent' view that 'man was originally a peaceful animal on whom a liking for war and destruction descended within historical times' (Jones: 168), arguing that 'our life consists of nothing but a struggle between love and hate' (169). Jones adds:

[Psycho-analytic experience] teaches that the aggressiveness which makes the world such an unruly and alarming abode belongs to the deepest elements in man's nature, and they point to the simple fact [...] that for the

first months of its existence the infant responds to life with hate far more readily than with love. (168-69)

Both in Beckett's works and in Freudian theories, while the mother is the primary recipient of pent-up primitive aggressive drives, she is far from the only one. The most important function of psychic birth is to allow the subject to learn to redirect its psychic energy/desire/libido towards love-objects that are external to the mother-child dyad. In Beckett, the individual therefore remains caught in a limbo of endless tension between the solipsistic mother-fixation and the need for company – or, more specifically, for an object that might assuage existential suffering and help channel psychic energy towards the external world: 'Après l'échec, la consolation, le repos, je recommençais, à vouloir vivre, faire vivre, être autrui, en moi, en autrui. Que tout ça est faux. Je n'ai jamais rencontré de semblable' (*Malone*: 33). As mentioned earlier in relation to the theme of narcissism, the relationship with the 'other' is therefore based on self-similarity. Often, this 'other' has to be created (e.g. Moran's son, named Jacques like him) or invented and summoned as a means to trump solitude: 'Je ne serai pas seul, les premiers temps. Je le suis, bien sûr. Seul. [...] Je vais avoir de la compagnie. Pour commencer. Quelques pantins. Je les supprimerai par la suite. Si je peux' (*L'Innommable*: 8). By rooting the interpersonal element in fictionality, Beckett subverts the concepts of character and diegesis and, more importantly, reiterates the pessimistic views on love and alterity exposed in Proust: couples are made of 'two separate and

immanent dynamisms related by no system of synchronisation. So that whatever the object, our thirst for possession is, by definition, insatiable' (17). Since he only serves a purpose of self-iteration, the 'other' is therefore essentially instrumentalised. The distinction between love and friendship on the one hand, and the master-servant relationship is increasingly blurred. There are strong parallels between Beckett's master-servant couples and Denis Diderot's in *Jacques le fataliste* (c. 1784), from which Beckett probably lifted the name Jacques given to Mr Krapp's servant in *Eleutheria*, as well as to Moran and his son in *Molloy*. Although Moran is capable of occasional tenderness towards Jacques, his interactions with him are usually authoritarian and utilitarian; one of the child's main functions is to carry or fetch items for his father: 'Nous mangions froid, des choses en boîte que je l'envoyais chercher dans les villages. Il me servait à ça' (186). The instrumental and interdependent nature of their relationship is apparent in Moran's musings about Jacques disappearing one day: 'Je jouai brièvement avec l'idée de me l'attacher au moyen d'une longue corde, dont les deux extrémités s'enrouleraient autour de nos tailles' (177). The motif of the rope prefigures Pozzo's enslavement of Lucky in *Godot*, and both anticipate Beckett's most famous master-slave couple in *Fin de partie*. Hamm and Clov epitomise this type of relationship, blending Pozzo's enslavement of Lucky with Vladimir and Estragon's complicity. The early draft 'Avant Fin de partie' features a Clov prototype, 'F', who is bound to his identity of 'factotum' by

the very typography while his actual name in the play varies on a daily basis at the whims of his master. This attests to the centrality of subjection and power dynamics in *Fin de partie's* paired relationships from its earliest sketches onwards.

However, such instrumentalisation of the 'other' can only feebly assuage the disappointed solipsist by serving as a projection (like Narcissus's mirror) for his world-consuming desire. Thus arises a peculiarly Beckettian sadism, fully developed in Hamm and Clov's relationship: 'There must be maximum aggression between them from the first exchange of words onwards. Their war is the nucleus of the play' (Beckett to Michael Haertdter, quoted in Fehsenfeld and McMillan: 205). In general, questions of identity and alterity in Beckett are always bound up with the reversibility, or transferability, of suffering: 'Oui, plus d'une fois j'ai manqué me prendre pour l'autre, au point de souffrir à sa façon, un instant durant' (*Malone*: 44). Among Beckett's notes on Praz, one also finds 'lycantropy, lycantropé' (*DN*: 38), the condition of being a werewolf, or, by extension, a 'kind of insanity described by ancient writers, in which the patient imagined himself to be a wolf, and had the instincts and propensities of a wolf'. Praz comments that '[a]fter all, lycantropy is only another name for sadism'. It seems likely that the subject of the werewolf would have evoked Freud's case study of the so-called Wolfman (1918), in which, according to Freud, the adult patient had regressed to an infantile, 'anal-sadistic' stage.

The symbol of the werewolf also recalls the dynamics of (re)creation of a self-same other, a contamination of the other by the hated self, so that, when the instrumental nature of the relationship has eaten away the possibility of reciprocal love, cruelty arises as the only expedient capable of momentarily soothing the torments of consciousness. In *The World as Will and Idea*, Schopenhauer posits a causal relationship between suffering derived from the ceaseless demands of the will and suffering inflicted to others: '[the subject] will seek to mitigate his own suffering by the sight of the suffering of others, which at the same time he recognizes as an expression of his power. The suffering of others now become for him an end in itself and a spectacle in which he delights' (226). Sadism thus becomes the ultimate mode of existence of the pseudocouple; according to Schopenhauer, 'the difference between him who inflicts the suffering and him who must bear it' is non-existent, since the former's torture of the latter itself originates in suffering, and therefore victim and torturer are caught together in the manifestations of the same will:

[T]his is the will living in both, which [...] does not recognise itself, and seeking an increased happiness in one of its phenomena, produces great suffering in another, and thus [...] buries its teeth in its own flesh, not knowing that it always injures only itself [...]. The inflicter of suffering and the sufferer are one. (1995: 219)

For him, therefore, not only does violence have no real impact on the world, but the perpetrator of violence becomes morally exonerated, since all suffering, whether felt or inflicted, is one and the same natural phenomenon: 'in the violence with which the evil person affirms life, and which is made

plain to him in the sufferings which he inflicts on others, he measures how far he is from the surrender and denial of that will, which is the only possible deliverance from the world and its miseries' (229). Again, it is easy to see how such views could be construed as eminently Sadean; there are countless statements of this 'impossibilité d'outrager la nature' in his œuvre – which his libertines will sometimes deplore but always readily use as the chief argument in defence of their ways:

[L]a nature, nous dictant également des vices et des vertus [...] en raison du besoin qu'elle a de l'un ou de l'autre, ce qu'elle nous inspire deviendrait une mesure très incertaine pour régler avec précision ce qui est bien ou ce qui est mal. (PB: 173)

Comment donc pouvons-nous, d'après cela, nous supposer coupables envers elle, dès que nous ne faisons que suivre ses vues? (PB: 208)

Many elements of Beckett's writing may be traced directly to this idea of reversibility of pain into (momentary) pleasure as well as to torture as a means to relieve pain, for instance in the following statement from *All that Fall*: 'Her poor husband is in constant pain and beats her unmercifully' (193). Interdependence based on the other's sufferings is a keystone of the dynamics in *Fin de partie* and its genesis; this sadistic inflexion increases from draft to draft, before gaining its full intensity in the published text. The lack of love in Hamm and Clov's relationship is made clear from the earliest versions of the play, but is progressively emphasised by the former's pleasure and relief at his servant's sufferings. In UoR MS1660, for instance, B [Clov] confirms A [Hamm]'s statement that B does not love him, responding with 'Pas

spécialement', whereas Clov's reply becomes an unambiguous 'Non' in *Fin de partie* (18). To A's comment that he loved him once, B merely agrees, whereas Clov later stresses the importance of the past tense by repeating 'Autrefois!' in a sneer (18). More importantly, after A's 'Je t'ai trop fait souffrir. (Un temps.) N'est-ce pas?', A and B change the subject, whereas Hamm is eager for further confirmation of his role in Clov's suffering: '(Outré.) Je ne t'ai pas trop fait souffrir? [...] (Soulagé.) Ah! Quand même!' (19). By all accounts, UoR MS1660 is also the first version of the play to contain the passage later in keeping with Hamm's story, that of a poor man begging for food for his son in front of A/Hamm's evident lack of sympathy. This, together with A's announcement that he will feed B just enough to keep him from dying, points at the motif of starvation as a primary means of inflicting suffering in Beckett's world, and interestingly evokes Schopenhauer's conclusions regarding the moral value of sadism, according to which 'the serene contemplation of another's death from starvation [...] is certainly cruel and diabolical, but it is not wrong' (1995: 215).

### 3. L'affaire Moran

This section examines the character of Moran as a case study illustrating the sadistic dynamics outlined above, highlighting parallels between Moran's rhetoric and Sade's justification of violence in the family nucleus. Moran's relationship with his son will be of particular interest, as it enacts the search for ontological grounding in interdependence, leading to the

instrumentalisation and persecution of the self-same other. Finally, the symmetry between the brutal murders committed by Molloy and Moran contributes to anchor *Molloy* in an exploration of selfhood and alterity based on primitive violence.

Jones' essay confirms that anal-sadistic violence is particularly likely to be directed at the enslaved other: there is a 'very pronounced tendency to domineer the loved (and possessed) object; such people are often very dictatorial or even tyrannical, and are extremely intolerant of any display of independence on the part of the loved object' (430). While this is certainly reminiscent of Hamm, it also evokes Moran's extraordinary rudeness and cruelty towards his son and their housemaid Marthe. To the latter, he speaks peremptorily, with vociferations (160) and contempt – when he deigns speak to her at all: 'Je m'en allai sans lui adresser la parole' (149). He rejects her cooking as 'immangeable', makes her cry repeatedly with his outbursts of rage and abrupt schedule changes, and overall treats her as a slave – 'Détestable geste d'esclave' (159). This is in keeping with Jones' claim that 'the subject's reaction to [interference] is one of resentment, increasing on occasion to anger or even outbursts of extreme rage. [...] Infantile anal erotism that has been inadequately dealt with may be suspected in anyone who is the victim of chronic irritability and bad temper' (420-21).

Moran and Molloy's respective journeys mirror each other as they both encounter and brutally murder a perfect stranger on their way; both episodes may be said to condense and dramatise the dynamics of love/hate for the self-same 'other' derived from unresolved narcissism and anal-sadism, and culminating in torture. At the end of his tale, Molloy meets a man in the deep forest, who he assumes is a 'charbonnier': 'Il se précipita sur moi et me supplia de partager sa hutte [...]. Un parfait étranger. Malade de solitude probablement' (114) – solitude being the cause of the central aporia in Beckett's rendering of desire and suffering, since it is at once a solipsistic fantasy and the root of a profound need for company. The man grabs him by his sleeve so Molloy speculates he must want them to stay together, which earns the man a thorough, methodical beating:

Je dégageai donc prestement une béquille et lui en assénai un bon coup sur le crâne. [...] **Voyant qu'il respirait toujours**, je me contentai de lui envoyer quelques chaleureux coups de talon dans les côtes. **Voici comment je m'y pris**. Je **choisis avec soin mon emplacement**, [...] [p]uis, **bien calé entre mes béquilles**, je me mis à **osciller** en avant, en arrière, les  **pieds joints** [...]. Je me balançai [...] avec **une ampleur toujours grandissante**, jusqu'au moment où je me lançai de toutes mes forces en avant et [...] en arrière, ce qui donna le **résultat escompté**. [...] Je me reposai un peu, puis [...] allai me mettre **de l'autre côté du corps**, où je **me livrai avec méthode au même exercice**. J'ai toujours eu la manie de la **symétrie**. (114-15)

Once more there is a completely dispassionate narration of actions of extraordinary violence, carried out with the explicit intention to cause death ('il respirait toujours') and following a careful strategy, laid out in detail like a scientific protocol and in technical terms (bolded). Molloy speculates that he

has 'visé un peu bas' since 'l'un de [s]es talons s'enfonça dans du mou;' he reflects: 'Enfin, si j'avais manqué les côtes, avec ce talon-là, j'avais sans doute atteint le rein, oh pas avec une force suffisante pour le faire éclater, non, je ne crois pas' (115). He is nevertheless clearly pleased with himself: '[É]tant donné des conditions favorables, un agresseur débile et maladroit, à votre taille quoi, et un lieu écarté, il est quelquefois permis de montrer de quel bois on se chauffe' (115-16).

Molloy's love of symmetry seems to announce the end of his story and the narrative arrival of Moran, who ends his own journey in the same state of decrepitude and infirmity as Molloy starts his. The first glimpse of Moran's violent disposition occurs even before we learn of his son, as he receives the visit of Gaber, a messenger bearing orders to set off in search of Molloy. Moran is most displeased at this intrusion: 'Je regardai les énormes pieds qui écrasaient mes pâquerettes. Je l'aurais chassé volontiers, à coups de knout' (129). The knout, a 'kind of whip or scourge, very severe and often fatal in its effects, formerly used in Russia as an instrument of punishment',<sup>62</sup> denotes a specific interest in instruments of torture, which, as shall be seen in the next two chapters, also feature heavily in Beckett's later works. It is quite plausible that the inspiration for this knout came from Beckett's thorough reading of William M. Cooper/James Glass Bertram's 1887 *Flagellations & the Flagellants* (discussed in Chapter One) in the early 1930s, which dedicates an entire

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<sup>62</sup> 'knout, n.' *OED Online*, June 2018.

chapter to the instrument, described at length alongside famous cases of flagellation by knout, such as that of a Madame Lapuchin, portrayed on the book frontispiece in an engraving captioned 'THE BEAUTIFUL MADAME LAPUCHIN, knouted by Order of Elizabeth Empress of Russia'. The main symmetry with Molloy's murder of the 'charbonnier', however, lies in Moran's equally brutal slaughter of a stranger who looks like him: '[son] visage [...] ressemblait vaguement, je regrette de le dire, au mien' (207). In the same way as Molloy's stranger was eager for them to share the same hut, here the man is primarily identified with the self, which triggers a fit of rage in Moran, who blacks out in his fury:

Je ne sais pas ce qui se passa alors. Mais un peu plus tard, peut-être beaucoup plus tard, je le trouvai étendu par terre, la tête en bouillie. Je regrette de ne pas pouvoir indiquer plus clairement de quelle manière ce résultat fut obtenu. Ça aurait fait un beau morceau. Mais ce n'est pas arrivé à ce point de mon récit que je vais me lancer dans la littérature. [...] Il ne me ressemblait plus. (208)

He later covers up the body with branches from his shelter and finds 'une oreille que je jetai dans le bosquet' (210). The emotionless, yet near-pornographic horror of the scene testifies to the unspeakable violence of the attack as well as to Moran's lack of emotion upon realising what he has done.

However it is Moran's unprovoked callous and violent behaviour towards his son that is most evocative not simply of the anal-sadistic complex but also of Sadean practices. The overarching principle of his education seems to consist in instilling fear and obedience in him at the expense of trust and

security: 'Je lui interdisais de m'appeler papa, ou de me témoigner de l'affection, devant autrui, sous peine de recevoir un de ces soufflets qu'il redoutait tellement' (172). Indeed the main expedient in this educational enterprise is physical violence – just like Molloy's means of communication with his mother and, as shall be discussed in the next chapter, the narrator of *Comment c'est*'s education of Pim through torture: 'Car il m'arrivait de dépasser la mesure quand j'attrapais mon fils, qui par conséquent avait un peu peur de moi [...] en lui donnant une bonne claque de temps en temps, avec raisonnement à l'appui' (*Molloy*: 132). Before their departure, he wakes him up and drags him out of bed 'd'abord par le bras, ensuite par les cheveux' (173) before beating him up with his umbrella: 'Devant cette dégoûtante exhibition force me fut d'employer mon parapluie, en le tenant par le bout, des deux mains' (174) – the dispassion with which Moran narrates this sequence is emphasised by a sudden digression about his hat: 'Mais un mot sur mon canotier, avant que j'oublie' (174). He then reflects on the violent effects of anger upon him: 'je deviens aveugle, un rideau de sang se met devant mes yeux et, à l'instar du grand Gustave, j'entends craquer les bancs de la cour d'assises' (174). This arguably conflates the instability of the anal-sadistic character and sadism in its simplest, cruellest sense of undue physical and psychological violence, while also evoking Sade himself tangentially through the allusion to Gustave Flaubert's legal battle against French censorship as a result of the publication of *Madame Bovary* (1856). Indeed

Beckett might easily have cited 'le divin Marquis' instead of 'le grand Gustave', who, relevantly, also had a 'une intelligence hantée par de Sade', 'auquel il revient toujours comme à un mystère et à une turpitude qui l'affriolent' (The Goncourt brothers, quoted in Praz: 153) – Beckett would definitely have known about this, having read some ten pages about it in Praz's chapter on Sade as early as 1931.<sup>63</sup> This passage from *Molloy* is only the beginning of a long series of humiliations inflicted on Jacques by his father, who continues to be seized by fits of 'blinding' rage and physical violence throughout their journey.<sup>64</sup> Also noteworthy is Moran's obsessively controlling attitude towards his son's body and bowel movements, going as far as administering enema by force, in a scene that would not be out of place in a Sadean novel, made yet more unsettling by his falsely suave tone: 'As-tu chié, mon enfant? dis-je tendrement' [...] Je lui fis un lavement, à l'eau salée. Il se débattit, mais pas longtemps. Je retirai la canule. [...] Il se releva tout tremblant' (163). This recalls the libertines' close monitoring of their victims' digestive processes in the *120 journées*.

Adorno and Horkheimer's words on Sade apply fittingly to Moran's parenting style: 'The less the danger to the one on top, the more unhampered the joy in the torments he can now inflict: only through the hopeless despair of the victim can power become pleasure and triumphantly revoke its own

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<sup>63</sup> On Flaubert's pronounced interest in Sade, see also Ferguson: 10, and Wall.

<sup>64</sup> See for instance 213; 215; 220.

principle, discipline' (88). Moran's callousness evokes Sade's libertine ideology due to his tendency to justify the harm he inflicts by invoking moral principles or the desire to inculcate certain values to his son, e.g. his quietist, will-relinquishing ambitions, quoting Goethe's '*Sollst entbehren*' (151) [Thou shalt forego, shalt do without]; he applies this by forbidding Jacques to bring his beloved stamp collection (another copro-symbol) along on their journey: 'Et cette entreprise, dût-elle me rendre odieux à ses yeux et lui faire haïr, au-delà de ma personne, jusqu'à l'idée même de père, je ne l'en poursuivais pas moins, de toutes mes forces' (*Molloy*: 151-52). As in Sade, this amounts to an intellectual justification of the suffering of others. Moran denies his responsibilities towards Jacques, going as far as to pre-emptively wash his conscience of the child's potential death: 'Je réfléchis avec une amère satisfaction que si mon fils venait à crever en cours de route ce ne serait pas moi qui l'aurais voulu. À chacun ses responsabilités' (168). When he realises that Jacques has a fever, he lies and tells him he is well so that his plans to set off in search of Molloy will not be derailed. After the enema episode, Moran ponders: 'M'aimait-il en ce moment autant que moi je l'aimais? On ne pouvait jamais savoir avec ce petit surnois' (164-65). The narcissistic and sadistic connotations are patent in Moran's self-centredness and readiness to belittle Jacques, so that his vague use of the comparative 'autant' here could well be ironic, i.e. meaning 'aussi peu', thus echoing Dolmancé's view that 'il n'est

rien de plus illusoire que les sentiments du père ou de la mère pour les enfants, et de ceux-ci pour les auteurs de leurs jours' (*PB*: 236-37).

Moran's relationship with his son therefore seems far removed from Laios' fear of Oedipus or Oedipus' patricide destiny; in Beckett, when the father and son are at war, it is usually the former who attacks his offspring, not out of fear of usurpation, but in an attempt to ward off existential suffering momentarily through the creation and subsequent persecution of a self-same 'other.' This idiosyncratic pattern, which inverts the Freudian paradigm, also makes perfect sense when understood as a dynamic representation of the horror of birth that runs through Beckett's works: the father abhors his son for embodying the perpetuation of his own misery, and the son resents the mother for delivering him into a world of suffering. Sade's own contempt for procreation and the alleged sanctity of human life in general stands in the vicinity of this Beckettian aesthetics. While, as Weller says, the mother-son relationship is certainly 'rooted in absolute, fantasmatic violence' (2009: 44), the above remarks bring additional nuance to his comment that Beckett's matricidal streak is an 'absolute exclusion of the mother' (45) – which, as we have seen, it is not – and that, '[u]nlike in Sade', this 'opens onto a utopia apparently freed from desire, a utopia governed by the principle of love – but a love of the son for the 'imago' of the father' (44). While both parental 'imagines' do play a major part in the perception and treatment of parental figures in Beckett, we may also interpret the Beckettian

father's 'imago's sadism and deceptiveness as a secondary obstacle to the completion of psychic birth, as well as as a reiteration of the permanence of existential pain.

Ultimately, we may say that, if there is a love for the father's 'imago', it is the father's own narcissistic love for an image of himself as the powerful, law-embodying father, an image likely inherited from his own father and projected onto his son: 'Piètre satisfaction en effet que celle de se sentir supérieur à son fils et insuffisante à calmer le remords de l'avoir appelé à la vie' (*Molloy*: 144). This therefore provides a new interpretation for the cryptic statement from *Textes pour rien* mentioned earlier, 'j'ai été mon père et j'ai été mon fils'. The study of Moran also complicates Weller's view of the father-son relationship as a 'relation without relation in which two "irremediable solitudes" form a combination [...] governed by a principle of love freed from desire' (2009: 44). While the father (being a son himself) shares the son's hatred for the mother, the 'hand in hand' Weller describes seems based on coercion, fear and servitude rather than on a 'harmonious (43) relation that 'compensates for [...] suffering' (44). This remains the case for most of Beckett's career: as shall be argued in more depth in Chapter Four, later texts such as *Assez* (1966) deploy modes of fictionalisation that enact similarly abusive dynamics between the domineering parental figure and the subjugated child.

### Conclusion:

Freud's appropriation of the notion of sadism provided Beckett with opportunities to critique and subvert key concepts in psychoanalytic theory, but also to fashion his own portrayal of subjectivity and interpersonal relationships around Sadean aesthetics of violence and paraphilia. Psychology presents the anal-sadistic stage as a universal aspect of human experience and individual development; this somewhat ironically contributes to 'normalising' sadism and therefore contrasts with the puritan/conservative wish to isolate such instincts (and Sade) as fundamentally devious and dangerously flawed. 'Beckett is often satirizing what passes for normalcy and pointing out how ordinary life is filled with bizarre events that most people choose to ignore' (Rabinovitz, 1989: 67).

As an important plane of interaction between Beckett and Sade, psychoanalysis offers greater perspective on Beckett's positioning with regards to intellectual narratives seeking to elucidate the human mind and condition. Like rationalism, the 'myth' of psychoanalysis places the subject on a linear, positivist journey towards knowledge and understanding; by contrast, Beckett's use of the theme of the 'journey' is essentially subversive, giving his characters quests for well-defined objectives (e.g. his mother for Molloy, Molloy himself for Moran) but actually staging an endless *errance*.

CHAPTER THREE  
COMMENT C'EST AND LES 120 JOURNEES DE SODOME: A CASE STUDY<sup>65</sup>

*relu les notes de l'aïeul histoire de passer le temps*  
[...] *relu nos notes histoire de passer le temps plus question de moi que de lui à peine s'il*  
*bafouille encore [...]*  
*hier dans le cahier de grand-père l'endroit où il souhaite mourir [...]*  
(CC: 126-27)

Beckett's correspondence bears witness to his interest in Sade up to the 1970s (at least), and Sade was likely still very much on his mind when he started writing *Comment c'est* (1961; published in English as *How It Is* in 1964) in 1958. Several critics have noted Sadean undertones in *Comment c'est*. Weller rightly observes that 'while certainly not strictly Sadean, *How It Is* is nonetheless inconceivable without the 1938 reading of *Les 120 journées de Sodome*' (2009: 110). Pilling notes that, like *Fin de partie*, *Comment c'est* explores 'what it might mean to be "inhuman"' (2014: 124). Others, like Paul Kintzele (2002) and Graham Fraser (2009), have drawn this parallel in the context of studies focusing on language and philosophy. James Mays speculates that 'Sade's influence is so obvious in *How It Is* that it might seem attributable to Beckett's chance association, in the nineteen fifties and sixties, with many of the writers associated with Merlin and The Olympia Press' (1974: 277). David Wheatley goes as far as to declare that 'Beckett did go on to write a *120 Days of Sodom* of his own in *How It Is* more than two decades [after he first read it]' (2003: 120).

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<sup>65</sup> A French version of this chapter was published as 'Samuel Beckett, lecteur de Sade: *Comment c'est* et *Les 120 journées de Sodome*' (see Baroghel, 2017).

I believe that Beckett is indeed much more indebted to Sade than is commonly thought, but also that calling *Comment c'est* a 'rewriting' of Sade's novel without a thorough supporting analysis risks drawing misleading conclusions about Beckett's creative method. Textual evidence alone can ratify an intertextual relationship between those two texts and back the argument that Beckett was indeed rereading the *120 journées de Sodome* (or his notes on Sade) while writing *Comment c'est*. We shall investigate the intertextual hypothesis by means of a comparative reading, in the spirit of a case study, and will also pay close attention to the narrative and fictional strategies at work in Beckett's take on the Sadean universe. This will allow for new insights into the writing of this difficult novel and cast a great deal of light on the evolution of Beckett's exploration of violence and alterity.

### 1. Contextualisation

*Comment c'est* was written in French between 1958 and 1961 and later translated into English by Beckett. As his first major prose work since he completed the 'Trilogy' in 1953, *Comment c'est* is the result of a period of creative struggle, as shown in a February 1960 letter: 'Struggling with very difficult and loathsome work in French this past year. End not in sight' (L3: 297). For this reason, *Comment c'est* is often considered to represent a new step in Beckett's search for a form that, as he put it in 1961, could 'accommodate the mess' of the world, language and human psychology, which for him was

'the task of the artist now' (quoted in Driver: 219). It is certainly one of Beckett's most extreme works, combining radical stylistic minimalism with an aesthetic preoccupation with graphic violence and bodily matters; it is therefore significant that, as others have noted, it is also one of the only two works in which Beckett makes an explicit allusion to Sade: 'du sadisme pur et simple non puisqu'on m'empêche de crier' (CC: 99).

*Comment c'est* is a monologue in three parts, with an unconventional typographical form: there are no sentences but a continual stream of words without punctuation or capital letters, where unrelated clauses are juxtaposed, obscuring the syntax. The text is arranged in small blocks of text or 'paragraphs' separated by spaces, and the layout on the page seems almost arbitrary, following no clear semantic logic. The first-person narrator tells the story of his life crawling through mud and darkness, alone until he encounters another being, whom he names Pim and endeavours to 'educate' into learning a form of communication based on physical violence, after which Pim leaves him and he finds himself utterly alone again. These developments correspond to the three parts of the book, respectively identified by the narrator as 'comment c'était avant Pim', 'comment c'était avec Pim', and 'comment c'était après Pim'. As one might expect, the second part is of particular relevance to our study, since we shall see that the violent nature of the narrator's relationship with Pim inspired Beckett to borrow many Sadean motifs from the *120 journées de Sodome*. As is often the case with

Beckett, the narration has a polyphonic quality, since Pim's voice and that of the few passing characters in his story are relayed by the narrator's. Eventually, at the end of the third part, the narrator expresses doubts that there ever was a Pim or anybody else in his life, and implies that others were always voices within himself, thus drawing on one of Beckett's favourite devices, the divided voice: 'jamais eu de voyage non jamais eu de Pim non ni de Bom non jamais eu personne non que moi' (CC: 226).

The *120 journées* follows the depraved and destructive deeds of four powerful individuals, the duc de Blangis, his brother, the Bishop ('l'évêque'), the President de Curval and Banker Durcet. Their philosophy is that existence is nothing but an opportunity to seek constant moral and physical gratification from absolute domination over others. The novel begins as they decide to gather a cast of forty-two men and women of all ages in a secluded castle located in the Black Forest in Switzerland for a period of 120 days, during which designated victims and tormentors are made to enact and satisfy all the four's cruel fantasies. The book is neatly divided into four parts, each corresponding to a period of thirty days. Each month, a 'Narratrice du Mois' is appointed to delight her audience with detailed accounts of 'tous les différents écarts de [la] débauche, toutes ses branches, toutes ses attenances, ce qu'on appelle en un mot, en langue de libertinage, toutes les passions' (120J: 41) based on stories from her own life. The first part describes the 150 'passions simples' ou 'de première classe', and is the only one that is fully-

fledged, as Sade lost his manuscript during the events following the storming of the Bastille, where he was incarcerated. The remaining three parts, in the form of a meticulous writing outline, respectively describe the 'passions de seconde classe' or 'doubles', the 'passions de troisième classe' or 'criminelles', and the 'passions de quatrième classe' or 'meurtrières' in extraordinary detail.

Sade's novel, like – and perhaps even more so than – most of his œuvre, is characterised by its explicit representations of transgressive and violent sex acts, along with murder, blasphemy and atheistic diatribes. This resulted in it being banned from publication until the middle of the twentieth century – we have seen that Beckett himself was wary of the effects of Sade's sulphurous reputation when he considered translating it in 1938. Beckett was already no stranger to the problems of censorship back then, but it is worth noting that *Comment c'est* was written at a time when both Beckett's and Sade's works found themselves in the midst of their toughest respective battles against the censors, for similar reasons of allegedly obscene or blasphemous content. From 1956 to 1958, Jean-Jacques Pauvert, a young publisher in Paris, was put on trial for being the first to publish Sade officially without using a fake name (his edition of the *120 journées* was published in 1948). The end of his trial coincided with the beginnings of Beckett's main battle against the forces of censorship in England. As he was preparing for the English premiere of *Endgame* at the Royal Court Theatre in London, he was informed that the Lord Chamberlain would only allow the play to be

performed if significant cuts to his text were made. Beckett very reluctantly agreed to get rid of 'balls' and 'arses' and to change the line 'I'd like to pee', but the main reason for the ban was the famous 'prayer scene', found to be blasphemous, in which Hamm, having prayed and waited in vain for a sign from God, exclaims: 'The bastard! He doesn't exist!' Beckett refused to suppress the passage, which delayed the production of the play considerably, but eventually consented to change 'bastard' to 'swine' and the licence was finally granted. Soon after this incident, Beckett learned that *Krapp's Last Tape*, his first play in English, had also been refused a licence on grounds of obscenity. The Lord Chamberlain claimed that 'the line "Let me in" on the recording [of Krapp's voice] clearly indicated that the man was [...] "rogering" the girl and that this obvious obscenity could not be allowed to be described on stage' (Knowlson, 1997: 451). By the end of 1958, Beckett was therefore exasperated with the particularly strict censorship rules to which the dramatic medium was subjected. He knew from the publication of his Three Novels nearly ten years earlier that his colourful and irreverent language was much better tolerated in France, especially in the form of a novel, and he turned to prose-writing again with his next piece, *Comment c'est*, in which the Marquis de Sade's infamous *120 journées*, freshly freed from the chains of censorship, was to feature prominently.

## 2. Structural and stylistic debts to the *120 journées*

Formal similarities between the two works already emerge from this brief overview. Despite their apparently chaotic content, both are characterised by the same rigorous, almost mathematical composition – and this is where Beckett’s 1938 remark likening the *120 journées* to Dante’s *Inferno* becomes most relevant, since he was rereading the Florentine author before he started on the writing of *Comment c’est*,<sup>66</sup> which he would himself compare to the *Inferno* during the laborious genesis of the text: ‘Dark as 5<sup>th</sup> Canto of Hell – “d’ogni luce nuto” – and no one in any one’s arms’ (L3: 250).<sup>67</sup> *Comment c’est* has also been described by critics as ‘an exegesis of Dante’s *Inferno* VII.121-26’ (Ackerley and Gontarski: 259) or said to ‘rewrit[e] an inferno with Dante’ (Caselli: 178). Both ‘novels’ are segmented into distinct parts, but since it may be argued that Beckett’s contains three whereas Sade’s contains four, it is worth pointing out that Beckett’s narrator ultimately questions this apparent numerical difference:

impression fugitive je cite à vouloir présenter en trois parties ou épisodes  
une affaire qui à bien y regarder en comporte quatre on risque d’être  
incomplet  
qu’à cette troisième partie qui s’achève enfin devrait normalement  
s’ajouter une quatrième où l’on verrait entre mille autres choses peu ou  
pas visibles dans la présente rédaction (201-02).

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. 12 April 1958 letter to Jacoba Van Velde: ‘Je m’emmerde tellement que je relis le Paradis de Dante’ (L3: 130).

<sup>67</sup> The Italian fragment is a quotation from Canto 5, verse 28: ‘Io venni in luogo d’ogni luce muto’ (‘I came to a place where all light was mute’). As the editors of Beckett’s letters note (251), Canto 5 is where punishments for carnal sins are exposed.

Even the contents of these parts are methodically organised into smaller units. In Sade's book, each day is dealt with separately and the activities or passions on order for that day scheduled with great precision – in parts two to four the passions are carefully numbered from 1 to 150. In *Comment c'est*, the narrator strives to maintain the illusion of a sense of structure in his rambling, by constantly reminding himself of the progress of his story in relation to the three parts: 'premiere partie avant Pim avant la découverte de Pim en finir avec ça plus que la deuxième avec Pim comment c'était puis la troisième après Pim comment c'était comment c'est des temps énormes' (24). In the second part, physical torture becomes a structuring device in its own right: as he endeavours to teach Pim to identify various painful stimuli, the narrator organises his torments into 'lessons' and 'series': 'fin de la première leçon deuxième série repos [...] deuxième leçon donc deuxième série même principe même déroulement troisième quatrième ainsi de suite' (105-06). We also learn, in what is perhaps Beckett's most obvious allusion to Sade's classification of the passions, that these 'lessons' are transposed into a 'tableau des excitations':

tableau des excitations de base un chante ongles dans l'aisselle deux parle  
fer de l'ouvre-boîte dans le cul trois stop coup de poing sur le crâne quatre  
plus fort manche de l'ouvre-boîte dans le rein  
cinq moins fort index dans l'anus six bravo claque à cheval sur les fesses  
sept mauvais même que trois huit encore même que un ou deux selon  
(108-09)

Although the purpose of violence in Sade is far from being didactic, this systematic classification of violent actions is unmistakably Sadean: just as in Sade's book, the 'excitations' are numbered and follow a strict order. In addition, the notion of 'excitations de base' mirrors Sade's category of the 'passions simples' and suggests a gradual increase of the severity of Pim's torments.

That the form and structure of the *120 journées* had considerable impact upon the structure of *Comment c'est* is manifest; however, these similarities with the layout of Sade's novel only serve to highlight the failure of the narrator's efforts to convey a sense of structure and unity to his story. His constant repetitions and digressions muddy his meaning, and rational points of reference such as the 'séries', 'leçons' and 'tableaux' borrowed from Sade are inefficient defences against the disintegration of his ontological security, which contaminates the discourse. What Beckett is doing is presenting us with the vestiges of a Sadean form that no longer holds together. In Beckett's world, the orderly form and implacable logic of the *120 journées* have collapsed under the postmodern gaze, which rejects certainty and metanarratives, and challenges the illusion of united, integrated selfhood. This is evident in the sudden cacophony of voices that follows the narrator's own admission that his strategic system is his 'perte' (or 'undoing' in Beckett's translation):

avoir su comme je le sus le dresser comme je le fis imaginer un système pareil puis l'appliquer je n'en reviendrai pas le faire fonctionner ma perte [...] plus que voix celle de Pim puis quaqua à nous tous enfin à moi tout seul celle à nous tous à moi tout seul à ma manière un murmure dans la boue. (148)

Such formal instability might also be construed as a parodic take on certain stylistic and logical flaws found in Sade, as underscored for instance by Maurice Blanchot: 'On lui reproche de mal écrire et, en effet, il écrit souvent à la hâte et avec une prolixité qui lasse la patience' (47).

Beckett's work on the voice is a central feature of both his dramatic and prose writings; as Daniela Caselli puts it, 'the main fiction of *How It Is/Comment c'est* is that of constructing itself as a voice (communication in progress) while being a written text' (148). In the *120 journées*, the embedded narratives attribute distinct narrative roles and responsibilities to each speaker, and this therefore preserves the general coherence of Sade's meta-diegetic contraption. In *Comment c'est*, however, the multiplicity of voices spliced into the narrator's tale forms a kind of free indirect discourse homogenised by the absence of punctuation, so that the integrity, stability and autonomy of the notions of character and identity are threatened. Pim and the other fragmentary characters summoned are never granted direct access to the narrative; instead, they have to use the narrator's voice as a vehicle for their own, as in this example where the narrator speculates about Pim's thoughts on the harsh treatments he is made to endure: 'mais cet homme n'est pas bête il doit se dire [...] pas que je crie cela tombe sous les

sens puisqu'on m'en punit aussitôt du sadisme pur et simple non plus puisqu'on m'empêche de crier' (99).

*Comment c'est* contains a plethora of expressions and images which are strongly reminiscent of Sade's writing style, but this overt mention of sadism represents much more than a mere allusion to a vulgarised concept; in fact, I argue that it deliberately addresses an audience who is familiar with the *120 journées*, thus creating an internal dynamic space for dialogue between Beckett's voices, Sade and the reader. In the *120 journées*, Sade systematically uses a noun phrase combining the adjective 'lubricious' ('lubrique') and a noun denoting anger or cruelty, e.g. 'colère lubrique' (30; 76; 77), 'lubrique fureur' (28), 'fureur lubrique' (105; 214) or 'rage lubrique' (390; 395) to signal that one of the four Lords has reached the most intense form of sexual excitation, caused by '[l'irritation de la] volupté par l'accroissement d'un désir sans cesse enflammé et jamais satisfait, état qui doit nécessairement conduire à une certaine fureur lubrique que les amis travaillent à provoquer comme une des situations les plus délicieuses de la lubricité' (120J: 63-64). In *Comment c'est*, Beckett revives this typically Sadean combination, which becomes 'cruauté lubrique' (106) and functions as a subtle metonymical equivalent of the term 'sadisme' used a few pages earlier (and, by extension, of Sadean practices), thus dispelling any ambiguity as to where the mention of sadism really stems from. The first 'leçon', in which Pim's cries are sanctioned by a thump on the head, is followed by a second one, then a third and fourth, in

which Pim has to understand that being stabbed in the bottom signifies that, this time, he is expected to cry as opposed to sing. Puzzled, he then reformulates his previous hypothesis and asks himself if it could be 'de la cruauté lubrique' but concludes: 'nous avons vu que non vraiment je ne vois pas' (106). The phrase 'cruauté lubrique' is used as a synonym of 'sadisme', which supports the hypothesis that Beckett's re-reading of the *120 journées* (in which the libertines do indeed revel in their victims' cries) represented an important stage of the writing of *Comment c'est* and informed his own exploration of violence. The importance of this elusive but direct reference to Sade cannot be understated, due also to the fact that the Sadean phrase appears precisely at what could have seemed to Beckett to be the exact centre of the novel before he submitted it for publication – he had very specific ideas about the way the paragraphs should be arranged on the printed page and often complained that his instructions were not followed rigorously by the typesetters; as a result he would only have been able to roughly estimate where the centre of the book would be after printing (cf. Smith: 118-19). The book therefore presents itself as a space for conversation with Sade, rather than the mere product of Beckett's admiration for Sade. The fact that this quotation is a deliberate and important insertion is also visible in the care taken in translating it into English: while most translators might have considered 'lubricious cruelty' a satisfactory equivalent of 'cruauté lubrique', Beckett changed the phrase to 'lubricious ferocity' in *How It Is*, thus moving

yet closer to the Sadean reference ('ferocity' being nearer 'fureur' in meaning than 'cruelty') and emphasising its brutal connotations.

### 3. 'Étrons et rectums ganahuchés':<sup>68</sup> *Comment c'est* and Sadean imagery

I have shown that the *120 journées de Sodome* inspired a number of formal experiments in *Comment c'est* and that Beckett's narrative system and lexical choices corroborate the hypothesis of an intertextual relationship between the two novels. We shall now examine elements that bear thematic and stylistic similarities with Sade's novel. *Comment c'est* abounds with typically Sadean motifs such as crude descriptions of the naked body and bodily matters. In his article 'L'obsession anale de Sade', Michel Delon observes that, in Sade, '[la] préférence donnée au cul sur le haut (le visage, les yeux, les larmes) et sur le devant du corps (les organes génitaux, la réciprocité) s'impose comme un choix esthétique et économique' (131). This may also be said of *Comment c'est*, in which all the characters are described as crawling in the mud naked on their belly, meaning that only their back, thighs and behind are exposed while their faces and front remain unseen; this is evident in the narrator's failure to turn Pim over on his back: 'j'essaie de le retourner sur le dos mais non le flanc droit non plus gauche encore moins mes forces s'en vont bon bon je ne connaîtrai jamais Pim qu'à plat ventre' (84). In Sade and Beckett, this obsession with the anal side of things (and people) embodies the impossibility

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<sup>68</sup> Beckett referring to the *120 journées* in a 3 January 1952 letter to Duthuit (L2: 310).

of reciprocity and communication between two beings – a sombre thought that already haunted Beckett in the early 1930s as a young Proust reader. There are no fewer than 27 occurrences of the word ‘fesse(s)’ or ‘fessier’<sup>69</sup> in Beckett’s narrator’s monologue, as well as 18 occurrences of ‘cul’<sup>70</sup> and countless other ways of referring to backsides. One of these other occurrences presents particular interest in that it can be read as a brief exegesis of the *120 journées*:

encore moi toujours et partout dans la lumière âge indéterminée [sic]<sup>71</sup> vu  
de dos à genoux les fesses en l’air au-dessus d’un tas d’ordures (56)  
rêve viens d’un ciel d’une terre d’un sous-sol où je sois inconcevable aïe  
aucun son dans le cul un pal ardent ce jour-là nous ne priâmes pas plus  
avant (57)  
feu au rectum comment surmonté réflexions sur la passion de la douleur  
(59)

However fragmented and diffuse, this memory is without a doubt that of being sodomised with a red-hot iron pole during the act of prayer. The marked anal fixation, together with the blasphemous connotation and the phrase ‘passion de la douleur’ are strongly reminiscent of the *120 journées*. Nothing is seen of the narrator but his buttocks, inexplicably raised in what Sade’s libertines would no doubt find an inviting position – one notes that the narrator’s ‘arse’ is ‘bare’ in Beckett’s English translation (*HII*: 29). Sodomy using red-hot metal is indeed one of Sade’s favourite forms of torture,

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<sup>69</sup> 28; 35; 46; 56; 57; 59; 70; 75; 80; 81; 83; 105 (x3); 107; 109; 112; 118; 119; 124; 129; 139; 142; 169; 188 (x3).

<sup>70</sup> 44; 57; 84; 94; 96; 105; 106 (x2); 107; 108; 111; 118; 133; 120; 122 (x2); 139; 202.

<sup>71</sup> This gender agreement mistake does not appear in the three preliminary typescripts of the novel held at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (Austin, Texas).

featuring in the criminal and murderous passions in the *120 journées*: 'Il lui enfonce un fer brûlant dans l'anus, et autant dans le con, après l'avoir bien fouettée avant' (397); 'Il lui enfonce un fer chaud dans le con et dans le cul' (433); 'On lui enfonce un fer rouge dans le con et dans le cul' (439). Sade's libertines' preference for sodomy over any other kind of sexual intercourse is obvious from the outset of the novel – '[Les libertins] sont systématiquement sodomites, actifs et passifs. Ils s'en proclament idolâtres. À Dieu et à ses faux-semblants, ils opposent leur idole: [le cul]. [...] Les fesses s'offrent à la fustigation autant qu'à la pénétration. Une telle pénétration n'est pas amour, mais violence' (Delon: 135). It is therefore unsurprising that the narrator of *Comment c'est* should include 'doigt dans le cul' (118) or 'index dans le trou' (142) in the ritual of torments inflicted on Pim. He goes as far as to consider Pim's anus a suitable place to put away his can-opener, which, as we shall see, is one of his favourite instruments of torture: 'cet ouvre-boîte où le mettre [...] entre les fesses de Pim le ranger là peu élastiques mais encore assez là il ne risque rien' (105).

The representation of genital organs in *Comment c'est* is much less prominent than that of behinds, in the same way as acts of sodomy and sheer violence take precedence over sexual acts potentially leading to procreation in the *120 journées*: 'le plaisir complexe y est toujours préféré au simple, l'interdit au licite et la jouissance stérile à la relation considérée comme naturelle' (Delon: 132). For Sade, sexual impotence does not preclude the practice of

libertinage, as is made evident by the fact that two of the four Lords are affected by it: '[chez le président de Curval] cet état [d'érection] n'était plus que fort rare, et il fallait une furieuse suite de choses pour le déterminer' (129); Durcet, the banker, is equally incapacitated: 'son vit est extraordinairement petit [...]; il ne bande absolument plus; ses décharges sont rares et fort pénibles, peu abondantes et toujours précédées de spasmes qui le jettent dans une espèce de fureur qui le porte au crime' (33). Ironically, these two libertines' very names contain morphemes bearing sexual connotations suggesting virility: '-cu' /ky/ in Curval sounds like 'cul' (arse) and '-dur' /dyʁ/ in Durcet sounds like 'dur' (hard); similarly, the narrator in *Comment c'est* decides that Pim should call him Bom, – the paronomastic connection between 'Bom' and 'bum' is immediately reinforced by an actual superimposition of the two: 'BOM gravé à l'ongle à travers le cul la voyelle dans le trou' (94).<sup>72</sup> Descriptions of sexual organs in Beckett's text systematically negate the possibility of natural intercourse or deprive the genitals of their inherent sexual charge altogether, as when the narrator tries to determine Pim's gender: 'ayant farfouillé dans la boue entre les jambes je finis par dégager ce qui me paraît être un testicule ou deux' (85). Two occurrences of the phrase 'éjaculations muettes' (63) signal the same intention to introduce a sexually charged element while simultaneously conveying a

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<sup>72</sup> Bom progressively becomes an independent entity referred to in the third person and endowed with 'sadistic' functions: he 'follows the narrator through the mud, cast in the role of tormenter, as the nameless one is torturer of his victim, Pim' (Ackerley and Gontarski: 69).

sense of impotence. Allusions to the female anatomy are much rarer and preferably include the slang term 'con': 'naissance de l'amour croissance décroissance mort efforts pour ressusciter par le cul [...] par le con' (133) – Sade's favourite expression for heterosexual intercourse being 'foutre en con' or 'enconner'.

While Sade is famous for his praise of sodomy, his obsession with paraphilic behaviours involving bodily waste is equally extensively represented in the *120 journées*. As in Beckett, one would be at a loss to enumerate the occurrences of detailed coprophagia, urophagia and general scatophilia in the novel: 'Si le sperme n'a plus d'utilité pour la procréation, c'est la merde, traditionnellement rejetée comme déchet qui est réinvestie d'une valeur érotique' (Delon: 142). For Sade's libertines, excrement and urine are not only sexual props provided by their partners and victims for their enjoyment but also a valued part of one's body, to be worn like ornaments: Curval 'laiss[ait] toujours cette partie-là dans un tel état de malpropreté qu'on y voyait sans cesse autour un bourrelet de deux pouces d'épaisseur' (29); 'de sa vie Thérèse n'avait, disait-elle, torché son cul, d'où il restait parfaitement démontré qu'il y avait encore de la merde de son enfance' (56). Eugénie has 'un placard de merde d'un pouce d'épaisseur, dont son joli petit cul était entièrement couvert' (196); Desprès has '[un] cul tout merdeux', '[un] orifice bourbeux' (210) and, as he is being sodomised after having defecated, 'il se plonge dans ses propres excréments, il y barbote, il s'en nourrit' (211).

In *Comment c'est*, the narrator displays similar attachment to his own waste: 'les déjections non elles sont moi mais je les aime' (60). As in Sade, the mud is abundant and omnipresent; the parallel between the two substances is confirmed by the narrator's own admission: 'vite une supposition si cette boue soi-disant n'était que notre merde à tous parfaitement tous [...] à ramper et à chier dans [notre] merde' (82). It is primarily through this symbolic amalgamation of mud and excremental matter that coprophagia occurs in *Comment c'est*. The narrator and Pim (re)absorb the mud – 'si ça en est' (103) – through their mouths or else 'par osmose à force à longueur de temps par capillarité' (103), and even wonder about its nutritional properties: 'la boue l'avalier ou la rejeter question si elle est nourrissante et perspectives durer un moment avec ça' (42). Beckett thus fashions a personal and literal version of the Sadean universe, in which excrement pervades every aspect of the libertine way of life and binds together the different parts of the novel, like cohesive glue within the diegetic space. As such, in *Comment c'est*, it comes to represent an immanent condition of existence. The mud forms a continuous flow throughout the three parts of the text, being the only known element of the characters' surroundings, and thus becomes a vehicle for both words and bodies: 'la boue engloutit tout moi seul elle me porte mes vingt kilos trente kilos' (60). It carries narrator and narration forward – 'cette boue je l'ai toujours dit elle vous maintient son homme en vie' (103)<sup>73</sup> and is

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<sup>73</sup> Beckett translated this as 'this mud I always said so it keeps a man going' (*HII*: 56) which

systematically described as the place where language stems from at the beginning of each of the three parts.<sup>74</sup> Ultimately, as in the Three Novels, excrement is associated with the uterine 'tiédeur de boue originelle noir impénétrable' (16) that he longs to return to.

Although a great many of the passions enumerated in the *120 journées* are primarily sexual in nature, it appears that Beckett was even more compelled by Sade's ingenuity in coming up with ways of defiling bodies that do not involve the tormentor's genitals – at least not directly. Sade's libertines delight in stabbing and perforating their victims' flesh with sharp objects such as daggers, needles, pins or forks. Beckett's narrator's personal favourite is to dig holes and furrows into Pim's skin (preferably his buttocks or armpits), which he does repeatedly using various instruments, the most readily available of which are his own nails:

sur la fesse droite de Pim donc premier contact il dut les entendre crisser  
le beau passé que voilà j'aurais pu les enfoncer si j'avais voulu j'en avais  
envie tirer creuser des sillons profonds boire les hurlements le bleu  
l'ombre violente la tête enturbannée courbée sur les poings le cercle  
d'amis en dhoti blanc (83-84)

This is not the first instance of torture involving nails in Beckett's œuvre: one recalls the incongruous appearance of Tchoutchi, the Chinese torturer and professional nail ripper, in *Eleutheria*, armed with pincers, a catheter and 'un

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adds a telling ambiguity to the phrase 'en vie' (alive) since it may also be interpreted as referring to language or speech 'going on'.

<sup>74</sup> 'souvenirs je les dis comme je les entends les murmure dans la boue' (9); 'dans le noir la boue tous bas des bribes' (79); 'je le dis comme je l'entends le murmure dans la boue' (159).

large sourire oriental' (141). Tchoutchi finds an echo in *Comment c'est* in the figure of the unnamed 'sage extrême oriental qui ayant serré les poings depuis l'âge de [sic] plus tendre [...] jusqu'à l'heure de sa mort [...] put enfin les voir un peu avant ses ongles sa mort qui percées les paumes de part en part put enfin les voir qui sortaient enfin de l'autre côté' (82-83). Sade's libertines are fond of ripping off nails and scratching their victims, e.g. '[une fille est] égratignée avec des ongles de fer ardents' (442). Beckett's narrator soon indulges his sadistic fantasy: 'il résiste je lui griffe la main gauche jusqu'à l'os ce n'est pas loin il crie mais ne lâche pas le sang qu'il a dû perdre' (102). Another favoured instrument of torture in Beckett's work is the narrator's can-opener, used to prick holes into Pim's buttocks with the blade<sup>75</sup> or, more infrequently, to pestle his kidney using the handle (142; 145). It is worth noting that, conscious of inflicting as much pain as possible, he prefers lacerating the skin to sodomising him; it is therefore inexact to refer to Beckett's characters' 'addiction to anal torture by tin-opener' (Wheatley, 2003: 121). Rather, we may underline the similarity between the can-opener and another such instrument used in the *120 journées*: 'Il a une machine de fer ronde qui entre dans les chairs et qui coupe, laquelle, quand elle est retirée,

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<sup>75</sup> CC: 105; 107; 111; 116; 118; 119; 132; 134; 142; 147.

enlève un morceau rond de chair aussi profond que l'on a laissé descendre la machine, qui creuse toujours si on ne la retient pas' (400).<sup>76</sup>

#### 4. Written wounds and linguistic violence

Rather than the pleasure derived by Sade's libertines from sodomy, it is precisely the 'mechanical' side of this process of piercing the skin that appeals to Beckett's lonely narrator: Pim's flesh is viewed as a tangible barrier between them, the trespassing of which constitutes a metaphorical promise of company. The need for company is itself actualised into a desire for communication: the narrator seeks to escape the solitude that his own incessant rambling condemns him to by eliciting a form of linguistic response in Pim. The conceptual premise of these attempts is that language is, first and foremost, code, a more or less complex system based on signs understood by speaker and recipient and responses to stimuli. Nails and can-opener are therefore used as props in a process of language acquisition far removed from Sade's libertines' use of violence as a means to experience pleasure.<sup>77</sup> The communication system established between Pim and the narrator in *Comment*

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<sup>76</sup> 120J: 400. It is unclear just what instrument Sade had in mind here (he might have been referring to the ancient corkscrew known as 'vrille à tonneau') but the possibility that this provided Beckett with another 'bit of pipe' cannot be dismissed. Additionally, Beckett's own translation of 'fer de l'ouvre-boîte' (142) as 'blade' (*III*: 78) suggests that he pictured the narrator's can-opener as resembling the first manufactured models, known as 'claw-shaped' or 'lever-type', which, unlike modern openers, had a blade.

<sup>77</sup> This reprises rudiments of the system sketched in the unpublished 1952 piece 'On le tortura bien' (UoR MS1656/3), in which Mat, one of the characters, imagines that he is being stabbed in the rectum with a fork to discourage his propensity to digression.

*c'est* is similar to the system used by Molloy and his mother: 'Je me mettais en communication avec elle en lui tapotant le crâne. Un coup signifiait oui, deux non, trois je ne sais pas, quatre argent, cinq adieu' (*Molloy*: 22). At first, the narrator seems content with establishing a code that is solely dependent on 'mechanical' responses to pain: 'le jour donc où griffé à l'aisselle au lieu de crier il chante [...] voilà c'est gagné [...] et cela de façon quasi-mécanique à bien y réfléchir du moins s'agissant de la parole' (CC: 100).

But while Pim is capable of vocal responses on cue (crying and singing), it soon becomes evident that the lack of spontaneity and complexity of this system makes for a poor model of communication: 'le piquer simplement au cul c'est-à-dire parle il dira n'importe quoi ce qu'il peut alors que la preuve il me faut la preuve donc le piquer de façon spéciale signifiant une fois pour toutes répondez' (111). The narrator then introduces the next stage of his cruel endeavour: 'de l'ongle donc de l'index droit je grave et lorsqu'il se casse ou tombe jusqu'à ce qu'il repousse d'un autre sur le dos de Pim intact au départ de gauche à droite et de haut en bas comme dans notre civilisation je grave mes majuscules romaines' (109). The inflicted wound is no longer a simple signal that language must be uttered, but itself becomes a linguistic phenomenon through the act of writing. According to Paul Kintzele, '[t]his possibility of violence as well as the emphasis on the materiality of the body in Beckett and Sade is the result [...] of a thoroughgoing examination of the status of language; that is, the physical torture described by both writers

simply reenacts the relation of the body to the signifier that represents it' (300). The narrator's flesh carving is at once the objectivation of a power relationship and a cruel caricature of mundane introductions; indeed, after his 'majuscules romaines' (plausibly referring to his own initials), he goes on to carve the name he has chosen for him on Pim's back, forcibly inculcating him with this imaginary identity, and sadistically embellishing the letters with illuminations symbolising evil: 'de l'ongle donc de l'index droit en majuscules très grandes deux lignes entières plus courte la communication plus grands les caractères [...] lui aussi sent la grande lettre ornée les serpents les diabolins [...] TOI PIM un temps TOI PIM' (111). Graham Fraser draws a parallel between this motif, which he calls 'written wounds' (62) and Beckett's interest in the thought of eighteenth-century Italian philosopher and rhetorician Giambattista Vico, about whom Beckett wrote his first published critical essay in 1929; Beckett's essay 'explicated Joyce's use of Vico's model of history and language as "a structural convenience – or inconvenience"' (Fraser: 62) and whose model of the foundation of language, Fraser argues, he parodies in *Comment c'est*: '[I]n *How It Is* – a text that is very much about the foundations of language – Beckett most explicitly adopts Vico as a "structural convenience" of his own' (62). Fraser identifies the three parts in Beckett's novel to Vico's tripartite model of history, i.e. the theocratic/ hieroglyphic, the heroic/poetic, and the human age/discursive language. 'Joyce and Beckett are most interested in the earliest age, the hieroglyphic – where, Vico argues,

word and thing were compressed in glyph or gesture. "In its first dumb form, language was gesture," Beckett wrote in 1929, and that is the situation encountered in *How It Is*' (Fraser: 61). Beckett's fondness for philosophical parody indeed makes for a compelling case for Vico's model as another 'bout de tuyau' – or 'structural convenience'. That being so, there are noteworthy echoes of such 'written wounds' in Sadean imagery that might also have inspired the violence of Beckett's parody, e.g. 'Il lui trace des chiffres et des lettres avec la pointe d'une aiguille sur les tétons, mais l'aiguille est envenimée, la gorge enfle, et elle souffre beaucoup' (120f: 394).

Ultimately, the Sadean and Vician interpretations of Beckett's 'written wounds' complement each other in a denunciation of the failure of linguistic communication; this denunciation banks on a return to the primitive code of violence. Such 'hieroglyphic' violence, applied literally in the act of flesh-carving, is Sadean in its rebellious nature and in the futility of its choice of target – language –, thus evoking Beckett's mocking allusions to Sade's vain ('mièvre') irritation at the 'impossibilité d'outrager la nature'. Pim is but a collateral, faceless victim, saddled for a short while with a rudimentary, made-up identity, like countless others summoned and branded by the narrator in the same way: 'de mortel suivant en mortel suivant ne menant nulle part sans autre but jusqu'à plus ample que le mortel suivant me coller contre le nommer le dresser le couvrir jusqu'au sang de majuscules romaines' (97). This quotation illustrates the ineluctability of the evolution of

relationships towards violence from an encounter with an entity recognised as both self-like and 'other', in a sort of Sadean pastiche of Hegelian master-slave dialectics where the other's self-consciousness and autonomy are never properly acknowledged (cf. Hegel, 1997: 111-19). Attempts at communication and fantasies of company are self-defeating, since others are not considered in their singularity as individuals but as nameless 'mortals', blank canvas waiting to be tormented and branded with the narrator's bloody initials. In the third part, the narrator indeed imagines that himself, Pim and the other torturers and victims summoned in his rambling are part of a million infinitely permutable figures:

et comme nous ne pouvons être que quatre un million et je suis là toujours  
été là avec Pim Bom d'innombrables autres dans une procession sans fin  
ni commencement se déplaçant paresseusement de gauche à droite ligne  
droite vers l'est c'est bizarre dans le noir la boue en sandwich entre  
bourreau et victime (197)

This echoes the eminently Sadean principle according to which the libertine's victims are to be considered purely from a quantitative perspective, as dispensable, interchangeable 'objects' – the libertines are surrounded by 'leurs femmes et [...] plusieurs autres objets dans tous les genres' (120J: 42) – whose sole function is to be available in almost infinite numbers, allowing for the perpetration of an infinite number of crimes: 'tous ces excès mènent au meurtre et [...] ces meurtres commis par le libertinage se varient à l'infini et autant de fois que l'imagination enflammée du libertin adopte de différents supplices' (120J: 42).

## 5. Reading Sade with Blanchot: the critical imagination

Beckett's infinite 'procession' (CC: 74; 193; 219; 226) of tormenters and victims strongly evokes passages from Maurice Blanchot's 1949 essay 'La raison de Sade', which Beckett read in December 1950: 'J'ai lu le Sade de Blanchot. Il y a des choses très bien' (L2: 210). He deemed Blanchot's text far superior to any other study on Sade by either Heine, Lely, Bataille or Klossowski: 'De tous ces types, c'est Blanchot de loin le plus intelligent' (L2: 223) he wrote emphatically to Georges Duthuit on 12 January 1951. He found in the essay '[d]es idées très bien, plutôt des départs d'idées, et quand même pas mal de verbiage, à lire rapidement, pas en traducteur. Il en sort quand même un Sade vraiment gigantesque, jaloux de Satan et de ses supplices éternels, et visant la nature plutôt que les hommes. Ça ne m'ennuie pas du tout [...]' (L2: 216). Beckett even intended to include translations from the essay in his and Duthuit's critical project on Sade for *transition*: 'Quelques citations formidables que je ne connaissais pas, dans le genre de celle que je t'ai bâclée des 120 journées. Difficile d'isoler un passage à traduire, mais j'y suis arrivé et me suis mis à le faire. Je pense que tu seras d'accord' (L2: 210).<sup>78</sup>

Despite the lack of definitive evidence that Beckett was indeed rereading Sade and/or Blanchot's essay while writing *Comment c'est*, there is no doubt that he still knew the latter backwards in 1958. In this essay,

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<sup>78</sup> Beckett produced a 12-page translation to this end, but so far this work has not been found.

Blanchot isolates fundamental elements of Sade's philosophy and explores his conception of the self in relation to others and how this affects the practice of libertinage:

Considérer les êtres du point de vue de la quantité les tue plus complètement que la violence physique qui les annihile. [...] Tous les hommes sont égaux [pour Sade], cela veut dire qu'aucune créature ne valant mieux qu'une autre, toutes sont interchangeable, chacune n'a que la signification d'une unité dans un dénombrement infini. Devant l'Unique, tous les êtres sont égaux en nullité, et l'Unique, en les réduisant à rien, ne fait que rendre manifeste ce néant. (32-33)

This is clearly the dynamic at work in *Comment c'est*, where Pim, Bom, Krim, Kram and other spectral figures summoned by the narrator progressively lose what little humanity and substance they had as characters to this cold system of mechanical permutations where the cruel rituals first performed on Pim are iterated *ad nauseam*, inflicted upon each one in turn without distinction. This regime of totalitarian depersonalisation is reflected in the loss of their names, now replaced with numbers:

derniers raisonnements derniers chiffres le 777 777 quitte le 777 776 se dirige sans le savoir vers le 777 778 trouve aussitôt le sac sans quoi il n'irait pas loin s'en empare et poursuit son chemin le même qu'empruntera à son tour le 777 776 et à sa suite le 777 775 et ainsi de suite jusqu'à l'inimaginable 1 (212)  
derniers chiffres le 777 777 toujours lui à l'instant où il enfonce l'ouvre-boîte dans le cul du 777 7778 et obtient en réponse un faible cri auquel nous l'avons vu il coupe court par le coup sur le crâne qui stimulé au même instant et de façon identique par le 777 776 lâche lui aussi sa plainte à laquelle même sort (218)

It is impossible not to glimpse in this passage the long shadow of the Shoah and the well-known Nazi practice of identifying prisoners by attributing a camp number to each individual. These camp numbers, often tattooed

directly on the skin, find obvious resonances in Beckett's 'written wounds' motif. This parallel with the Shoah indirectly relates Beckett's text back to Sade's and Kant's exaltation of the coldness and inhumanity of systems based on pure logic, in which '[b]eing is apprehended in terms of manipulation and administration' and '[e]verything – including the individual human being, not to mention the animal – becomes a repeatable, replaceable process, a mere example of the conceptual models of the system' (Adorno and Horkheimer: 65). Indeed, the Sadean libertine uses the same system of annihilation of identity as the Nazis: Champville gathers fifteen young women of similar ages and body-types and 'les marque toutes sur l'épaule avec un fer rouge, au numéro de l'ordre dans lequel il veut qu'on les lui fasse passer' (120J: 440).

In *Comment c'est*, the proliferation of nameless creatures is mirrored in the simultaneous proliferation of bags containing the instruments that each victim will need in order to carry out their next 'mission' as torturer, which reaffirms their status as diegetic automatons and negates their existence as autonomous individuals. In short, the entities populating the text are instantly nullified as characters the very moment they emerge into the narrative, starting with the main fictive entity of the novel, this conglomerate of disembodied voices that, for lack of a better word, we call the 'narrator.' His physical existence is tentatively stated through fragmented mentions of his hand fumbling in his bag for the can-opener or reaching out towards Pim's equally disintegrated body. References to his body are often limited to distant

recollections, e.g. 'L'anatomie que j'avais' (8; 85). The only substantial evidence of his existence lies in his panting rambling, painstakingly manifested as broken text on the page (I speak, therefore I am). But even this voice that defines him is unreliable, for he denies from the outset that the words and story are his own, instead claiming that they are a mere rendition of other voices within him:

je le dis comme je l'entends  
voix d'abord dehors quaqu de toutes parts puis en moi quand ça cesse de  
haleter raconte-moi encore finis de me raconter invocation [...]  
souvenirs je les dis comme je les entends les murmure dans la boue  
en moi qui furent dehors quand ça cesse de haleter bribes d'une voix  
ancienne en moi pas la mienne (9)

One is tempted to wonder whether the owner of this 'voix ancienne' might be the same person as 'l'aïeul', the mysterious 'grand-père' whose 'cahier' the narrator claims to have been rereading (cf. quotation in epigraph to this chapter) and, more importantly, whether said individual could be Sade himself: the phrase 'dans le cahier de grand-père l'endroit où il souhaite mourir' is compellingly evocative of Sade's instructions as to where his body should be buried – as mentioned in Chapter One.

These precarious would-be characters, alongside the obscure facts related in the narration, would then be regurgitations from tales already told, reabsorbed at once by the ubiquitous 'merde-boue', and probably destined to re-emerge from it in an endless cycle of whispers: 'ma vie dernier état mal dite mal entendue mal retrouvée mal murmurée dans la boue' (10). In

Beckett's own words, 'the "I" is from the outset in the third part and the first and second, though stated as heard in the present, are already over' (quoted in Knowlson, 1997: 462). Again, it is through the lens of Blanchot's essay that the Sadean subtext is to be found; for Blanchot, Sade's victims have already been stripped of their reality long before their death, having been preemptively annihilated by 'un acte de destruction totale et absolue, qu'ils ne sont là et qu'ils ne meurent que pour porter témoignage de cet espèce de cataclysme originel' (33). This preliminary destruction translates into the narrative and philosophical hegemony of the Sadean principle of negation: 'le monde où avance l'Unique est un désert; les êtres qu'il y rencontre sont moins que des choses, moins que des ombres et, [...] en les détruisant, ce n'est pas de leur vie qu'il s'empare, mais c'est leur néant qu'il vérifie, c'est leur inexistence dont il se rend maître et de laquelle il tire sa plus grande jouissance' (33). Blanchot illustrates his point using Blangis's speech to the women of the castle at the beginning of the *120 journées*:

'Examinez votre situation, ce que vous êtes, ce que nous sommes, et que ces réflexions vous fassent frémir, vous voilà hors de France au fond d'une forêt inhabitable, [...] vous êtes enfermées dans une citadelle impénétrable, qui que ce soit ne vous y sait, vous êtes soustraites à vos amis, à vos parents, *vous êtes déjà mortes au monde.*' Cela doit être entendu au sens propre: elles sont déjà mortes, supprimées, enfermées dans le vide absolu d'une Bastille où l'existence n'entre plus et où leur vie ne sert qu'à rendre sensible ce caractère de 'déjà mort' avec lequel elle se confond. (33)

This passage functions as much an exegesis of *Comment c'est* as of the *120 journées*. Its most startling resonance with Beckett's work lies in its emphasis

on time, particularly on the figurative death of Sade's characters ahead of their physical death. In Beckett, while physical death never actually occurs, it is quite evident that life (or, at least, what is told of it) is always very much a notion of the past. The work evades linear time and the notions of end and beginning or birth and death are depolarised – for the narrator, the end of the novel only represents '[la] fin de la citation' (228) – so that the distinction between the newly born and the nearly dead disappears: 'cette enfance que j'aurais eue la difficulté d'y croire l'impression d'être né plutôt octogénaire à l'âge où l'on meurt dans le noir la boue en remontant en faisant surface comme les noyés' (110). The narrator doubts ever having had a childhood (he even uses the conditional mood to refer to it) or having been born young; as Hamm puts it in *Fin de partie*, 'la fin est dans le commencement et cependant on continue' (89). It is this aesthetics of eternal beginning that generates the homophonic pun with the verb *commencer* in Beckett's French title and situates the fiction of *Comment c'est* on an apocalyptic temporal plane. As in Blanchot's description of the Sadean world, the world of *Comment c'est* is a 'desert' of mud and darkness, and the decayed creatures encountered there lack substance and reality, becoming less than things, less than shadows: for all intents and purposes, they, too, are 'already dead'.

This conflation of the 'already dead' with the 'still alive' is the most Sadean component of the work – even more so than the ritualised torture – since the sadistic dehumanisation of the subject engages the meta-fictional

dimension; Beckett borrows aspects of Sade's 'obscenity of surface', but the 'citadelle impénétrable' in which his own creatures are held captive is the diegetic prison of an endless cyclical tale with no prospect of new developments. In Beckett, Blanchot's 'cataclysme originel' is therefore the fundamental violence aimed at the very notions of character and of conventional narrative configurations, the question of *who* (or *what*) is speaking remaining necessarily without an answer.

### Conclusion

These compelling echoes between Blanchot's views on Sade and Beckett's text have two major implications: firstly, they provide new insight into the formal and narrative dynamics at work in *Comment c'est* (arguably one of Beckett's most experimental takes on fiction); secondly, they allow for a case-specific understanding of Beckett's integration of his sources into his work by locating a conceptual frame of reference (i.e. Blanchot) in the text, therefore supplementing the presence of the primary Sadean source (i.e. 'bits of pipe' from the *120 journées*) with a secondary critical source. What Beckett does in *Comment c'est* is borrow from Sadean imagery to produce a 'dispassionate' critique of institutional inhumanity, largely distancing the violence at play from the sadistic motivations found in the *120 journées* – in this, he remains faithful to his first impressions of the text in 1938: 'If the dispassionate

statement of 600 “passions” is Puritan and a complete absence of satire juvenalesque, then it is [...] puritanical & juvenalesque’ (L1: 607). This also relates to Kintzele’s observation that ‘[t]he factor that allows one to propose an alliance between *How It Is* and Sade’s texts is the way in which in both cases torture is not carried out for the sake of mere idiotic gratification, but more in the sense of a disinterested inquiry’ (299). This is not to say that Sadean sadism does not know itself to be transgressive, but rather that it is ‘reasoned’, principle-based violence, and therefore emotionally removed from its own cruelty. As Blanchot explains, it is precisely from such philosophical detachment that stems the reversibility between torturer and victim: ‘L’homme de Sade [...] rêve d’une mort qu’il puisse éternellement donner, de sorte que le bourreau et la victime, placés éternellement l’un en face de l’autre, se voient également pourvus de la même puissance, du même attribut divin de l’éternité’ (32). This reversibility is a salient motif in the third part of *Comment c’est*, as torturers and victims literally follow one another in an infinite series in which each element alternates between the two roles: ‘les deux couples celui où je figure au nord en bourreau et celui où je figure au sud en victime composent le même spectacle exactement [...] qu’est-ce que ça peut bien foutre [...] qui souffre qui fait souffrir’ (203-204). This represents an evolution from the causal relationship between the amount of existential suffering felt and inflicted by the tormentor (as explained in Chapter Two) in Beckett’s earlier works, and, as shall be discussed in Chapter Four, anticipates

the recurrence of ritualised torture in post-1961 works, culminating in the 1984 play *What Where/Quoi où*.

CHAPTER FOUR  
'FOR GOOD OR ILL / FOR GOOD AND ILL':<sup>79</sup> BOURREAUX, VICTIMS AND THE  
AESTHETICS OF EVIL

After the sadistic stage 'pseudocouples' of the 1950s, Beckett continues to explore the dynamics and aesthetics of sadism, which develop into multiple variations on the master/factotum relationship throughout his late prose and drama. While it is not known whether Beckett returned to Sade's texts after writing *Comment c'est* (1961), there is no doubt that he continued to engage with their legacy, offering advice to his friend, actor Patrick Magee, in his new role as Sade in Peter Weiss' 1963 play *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*, which ran from August 1964 to July 1965 at the Aldwych Theatre in London under the direction of Peter Brook – even borrowing three books on Sade for Magee from art patron Mary Hutchinson.<sup>80</sup> Magee was also to play Hamm opposite Jack MacGowran's Clov in a production of *Endgame* due to open in Paris in February of the same year but rehearsed in London. Beckett went over to supervise the rehearsals, concentrating above all on 'establishing the interdependency of Hamm and Clov and "the love-hate relationship" that exists between them throughout the play' (Knowlson, 1997: 513). Beckett's involvement in the preparation of

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<sup>79</sup> 'one dead of night', in *Poems*: 107.

<sup>80</sup> These included Geoffrey Gorer's *The Revolutionary Ideas of the Marquis de Sade* (1934).

these two plays was certainly conducive to renewed awareness of the dramatic potential of sadism and violence, as suggested by accounts of his conversations with Harold Pinter and Magee, 'when they all sat around in the pub enthusiastically discussing the Marquis de Sade' (Knowlson, 1997: 514). References to Sade became an increasingly common fixture of European artistic production from the 1960s onwards, as demonstrated by the infamous example of Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1975 feature film *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*.<sup>81</sup> The intellectual and political atmosphere in France was also impacted by the wake of the Algerian war (1954-1962). Beckett was deeply affected by the events as a humanitarian but also as a friend of Jérôme Lindon, his editor at the Editions de Minuit, who was trialled for publishing works denouncing the French military's use of torture at home and in Algeria (cf. Knowlson, 1997: 492-95).

This chapter argues for Sade's continued relevance to Beckett throughout the evolution of his own style and aesthetics after 1961. Although the kind of deliberate intertextual borrowings found in *Comment c'est* seem absent from these later works, their examination through a Sadean prism casts a great deal of light on the themes of torture and abject eroticism with which they are suffused and provides new ways to consider their metaphysical implications.

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<sup>81</sup> Although it is not known whether Beckett had seen it, the film came out in France in May 1976, to considerable controversy and publicity.

I begin by outlining the modalities of violence in Beckett's 'torture pieces' (e.g. *Pochade radiophonique*, *As the Story Was Told*, *What Where*, etc.), paying particular attention to the systematic relationship between the motifs of torture and language extortion. The dynamics of coercion and subjugation in Beckett and Sade are then analysed against the backcloth of Hegelian master-slave dialectics, demonstrating that, while Sade evades Hegel's model entirely, Beckett subverts it by focusing on the master's ontological instability and resisting the dialectic reversal of enslavement into self-knowledge through the motif of sexual servitude. The language of Beckett's and Sade's victims and executioners is then analysed by way of Georges Bataille's 1950 preface to *Justine*, which offers useful lines of interpretation of Beckett's focus on the victim's voice and discourse, as well as of his portrayal of the sly absurdity of the power and language of the Law.

In the second part of this chapter, I suggest that Beckett and Sade intersect within what may be described as 'noir' aesthetics, with reference to literary, philosophical and critical works by Franz Kafka, Maurice Heine, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Dante Alighieri. The themes of torture and the absurdity of the law provide compelling parallels with the works of Franz Kafka, with whom Beckett had aesthetic affinities and who admired Sade. Kafka's 1919 story *The Penal Colony* in particular constitutes a meeting ground for Beckett and Sade; I argue that these works may have been influenced by Sade and may in turn have impacted Beckett's 'torture pieces.' I then examine

Beckett's and Sade's works in the light of Heine's 1933 essay 'Sade et le roman noir' (which Beckett had read), arguing that both authors have their place within a literary tradition usually regarded as initiated by the English-language gothic novel. Finally, these remarks lead to Beckett's treatment of the theme of 'evil' in his later works, which I examine in the light of his knowledge of Leibnizian occasionalism and Dante's *Inferno*.

## **I. Bourreaux and Victims: sadism after *Comment c'est***

### **1. Unspeakable confessions: the modalities of torture in late Beckett**

If violence was already a recurrent aspect of Beckett's works in the 1950s, the turn of the 1960s establishes it as a central theme in most of his subsequent works until the end of his career. In the prose and drama alike, the atmosphere is oppressive, disquieting and claustrophobic; this often involves reducing the characters' and audience's ability to rely on the sense of sight to map out the space around them – for instance in the radio plays *Esquisse radiophonique* and *Pochade radiophonique*, but also in plays such as *Not I* and *Catastrophe*, in which the actors' fragmented bodies are partially engulfed in darkness, as well as in the 'closed space' narratives, such as *As the Story was Told*. Such confinement evokes the tropes of imprisonment and seclusion that characterise the Sadean universe – as Barthes puts it: 'Ici comme ailleurs, c'est la clôture qui permet le système, c'est-à-dire l'imagination' (21).

This violence typically consists in the ritualised torture of a subjugated victim who is thus coerced into speaking and expected to produce some mysterious liberating utterance – which, like Godot, never comes. As we have seen, this correlation between physical suffering and language is established in *Comment c'est* and can be traced back to Pozzo's use of Lucky as a 'speaking slave' in *Godot*, as well as to the 1952 unpublished piece 'On le tortura bien', whose narrator and two accomplices force a fourth character to speak by torturing him to death. Like Pim's, his torments primarily involve rectal or genital suffering – e.g. 'l'introduction d'un fil de fer soit dans le rectum, soit [...] dans l'urètre' (UoR BC MS1656/3/2). In keeping with the dynamics observed in *Malone meurt* and *Watt* in Chapter One, torture is orchestrated by a single powerful individual and administered physically by his assistants; this is the case in *Pochade*, *Catastrophe* and *What Where*, for instance, in which the power is held respectively by *Animateur*, *Metteur en scène* and *Bam* – we shall return to this pattern of indirect violence further on.

Until recently, *Pochade* was uncertainly grouped with writings of the early 1960s such as *Words and Music* (1962, written 1961), *Esquisse* (1973, written 1961) and *Cascando* (1963, written 1961-1963), but it may in fact date from the last months of 1958.<sup>82</sup> This would make it closer in time to the beginnings of *Comment c'est* than either *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) or *Words and Music*, thus pointing to the late 1950s as a return to, or consolidation of,

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<sup>82</sup> See Verhulst, 2016.

Beckett's interest in the motif of violent questioning – plausibly influenced by echoes of the sordid methods used by the French military in the Algerian war. The play merges the configurations of a radio production studio, a linguistics laboratory and a torture chamber. The team is led tyrannically by *Animateur* (male), who shouts peremptory commands at the mute torturer, *Dick* (a name with obvious phallic associations), and the submissive *Dactylo* (female) to respectively flog their 'subject', *Fox*, and record his subsequent ramblings. *Fox*'s name evokes his function as mere voice (*vox*) in the experiment, and the animalistic connotation further dehumanises him. Outside of the sessions, he is gagged, 'neutralised' and fed exclusively 'par voie de sonde, [...] per *buccam* ou [...] per *rectum*' (68). Though she is under *Animateur*'s thumb, *Dactylo* is supportive of the experiment and, from *Fox*'s point of view, is on the same side as his aggressors. Her interactions with *Animateur* have sexual undertones, but it is unclear whether she enjoys those or merely endures them – he even has her forcefully kiss *Fox* on the mouth with such violence that the latter faints.

In *Words and Music*, the two eponymous characters compete against each other in their respective genres for the enjoyment of their master, *Croak*. In *Cascando*, the power relationship is rewritten as a mechanical paradigm controlled by *Ouvreur*, a sort of mirror-figure for both the radio listener switching on and off, and the broadcaster, who effectively decides when music or voices are heard on the air. As previously, *Ouvreur* controls the

expression of two characters named Voix and Musique, who simply produce words, music or both whenever Ouvreur chooses to 'open'. Voix's attempts at narration, uttered in gasps and ridden with anacoluthons and aposiopeses, evoke the speech of a trapped victim striving to imagine escape and freedom: 'cinq ans plus tard... dix ans... je ne sais plus... [...] il attend la nuit... qu'il fasse nuit... pour sortir... aller ailleurs... dormir ailleurs... c'est long...' (48). As in *Pochade*, there is the hope that one day the right story will be told at last: 'histoire... si tu pouvais la finir... tu serais tranquille... pourrais dormir... pas avant...' (47). This evokes Sade as the captive storyteller tirelessly mustering the same story (*Justine*) throughout his incarceration, as well as a parallel with the powerlessness of the artist confronted with censorship and the publishing industry.

In *Play* (1964, written 1962-1963), the three characters in their urns are alternately lit by a bright, violent light that triggers them into barely comprehensible logorrhoea: 'the impression was of a spotlight as a single interrogator or torturer' (Knowlson, 1997: 516). In *As the Story was Told*, the first-person narrator is confined in a 'hut' at some distance from a 'tent' in which an unnamed victim undergoes torture 'sessions' of a 'harrowing nature' (255). These sessions recall Pim's 'leçons' in *Comment c'est* and, as in *Pochade*, are used to extort a special utterance from the victim in order for him to be 'forgiven'. The captive narrator, handed a 'sheet of writing' after the session, is paradoxically responsible for this decision: 'I did not know what

the poor man was required to say, in order to be pardoned, but would have recognized it at once, yes, at a glance, if I had seen it' (256). The importance of this dynamics of torturing and questioning is further confirmed in *What Where*, Beckett's last play, in which four characters (and a hypothetical fifth) take turns torturing one another offstage in order to extort information, giving one another 'the works' until they have 'wept', 'screamed' and 'begged for mercy' before 'passing out' without yielding any information – the victims cannot be 'revived' (472-73).

The violence that suffuses Beckett's late drama is directly reflected in the props chosen for each play. While Beckett's increasing concern for minimalism gradually reduces his reliance on theatrical props, it is noteworthy that most of the ones that are used have patent violent and sadistic connotations. This is even true of the radio plays – after all, as Sade writes, 'les sensations communiquées par l'organe de l'ouïe sont [...] les plus vives' (120J: 41). Dominant characters are usually armed with blunt instruments (often phallic, thus conflating violence and rampant sexuality) such as *Animateur's* 'lourde règle cylindrique' – an odd specification for a radio play – which punctuates his orders with loud thuds on *Dactylo's* desk, or *Dick's* 'nerf de bœuf' ('pizzle'), used with an enthusiasm that suggests sadistic tendencies. *Animateur's* ruler evolves into *Croak's* 'club' in *Words and Music*, which also punctuates the master's requests for words or music with 'tremendous thumps' (290). Cohn notes the specificity of the term 'club' and

ponders its function: 'Croak's club is problematic, since its function is not designated. He thumps with it when aroused, but why a club [...]? Obviously, Beckett wanted to punctuate words and music with a hard sound, but why not a cane or crutch? I have no answer, but "club" needs reading' (268-69). It may be that 'club' was chosen for its threatening undertones, since the primary function of a club is that of a weapon, unlike 'canes' or 'crutches'. All these recall Pozzo's 'fouet' in *Godot* and Moran's 'knout' in *Molloy* (cf. Chapter Two), but also the plethora of props found in Sade's universe: in *Les Infortunes de la vertu* (1787), for instance, Bressac plans to murder his mother using 'des cordes, des nerfs de bœuf et autres instruments qui me firent frémir' (94). At the convent where Justine seeks refuge, '[l]a seule correction admise est le fouet' (123). At the end of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, Dolmancé suggests that Mme de Saint-Ange, 'armée d'une poignée de verges' (227), should whip the Chevalier.

Beside the fact that Beckett's torture pieces are suffused with violence and perverse sexuality, what they also have in common with Sade is their paradoxical tendency to delay or deny the event of death, systematically ending on an ambivalent note and leaving open the possibility that the torture process will resume once the victim has sufficiently recovered, or been replaced. *Pochade* ends with the revelation that the three torturers are no freer than Fox himself, all being coerced into an obscure experiment, the success of which they believe conditions the possibility of their release. In *As the Story*

*was Told*, death is never actualised and treated instead as fiction within the fiction: 'As the story was told me the man succumbed in the end to his ill-treatment' (256). The text ends with the narrator's admission of ignorance as to what utterance he is expected to recognise. In Beckett's words, '[i]f life and death did not both present themselves to us, there would be no inscrutability. [...] The key word in my plays is "perhaps"' (quoted in Driver: 220). The linear timelines of Sade's victims' sufferings are also infused with a sense of limbo, timelessness and incertitude: as Omphale tells Sophie/Justine in the Sainte-Marie-des-Bois convent in *Les Infortunes de la vertu*: 'Le plus cruel de nos maux, ma chère amie, est l'incertitude de notre sort; il est impossible de dire ce qu'on devient quand on quitte ce lieu' (121). The delaying of death therefore stands out as an important intersection between Beckettian and Sadean aesthetics: for the former, existential suffering is better conveyed through the motif of ever-lasting agony than through death itself; for the latter, delaying death is simply a way to maximise a victim's sufferings. This, as Beckett knew,<sup>83</sup> explains why Sade was firmly opposed to the death penalty: 'N'imposons jamais au meurtrier d'autre peine que celle qu'il peut encourir par la vengeance des amis ou de la famille de celui qu'il a tué' (*PB*: 215).

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<sup>83</sup> Beckett discusses Sade's stance on the subject in a January 1951 letter to Duthuit, correctly stating that '[i]l faudrait aller chercher ça chez Sade lui-même, dans *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* probablement' (*L2*: 221).

## 2. 'Demain, qui sait, nous serons libres':<sup>84</sup> Beckett and Sade, with Hegel

The systematisation of torture and unbalanced power dynamics in Beckett's later works draws attention to the long-standing motif of the master-slave relationship and raises the question of whether sadistic drives and Sadean aesthetics might be helpful in situating Beckett's take on such relationships with regards to Hegelian dialectics in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) and their twentieth-century reception.

The general critical consensus on Beckett's reception of Hegel's philosophy is that he was largely 'unimpressed' with it (Ackerley and Gontarski: 250), despite its renewed popularity following Alexandre Kojève's historical reinterpretation in the 1930s; as is well known, Beckett felt much more at home with Schopenhauer, Hegel's contemporary – for instance, the 'Philosophy Notes' show that he recorded Fritz Mauthner's view that 'Schopenhauer became [...] one of the greatest philosophical writers because – in contrast to Hegel – he put the world back in its rightful place, because he attempted to think perspicuously' (TCD MSS10971/5). However, this is not to say that Beckett is entirely unconcerned with Hegelian dialectics; as P.J. Murphy notes, 'Beckett seems to have referred to Hegel essentially for ironic counterpoint' (234). Sparse nods to Hegel may indeed be found in his works, such as Neary in *Murphy*, whose fraught aspirations to self-knowledge are

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<sup>84</sup> *Pochade*: 85.

parodically compared to Hegel: “The repudiation of the known,” said Neary, “an operation of unspeakable difficulty.” | “Perhaps you hadn’t heard,” said Wylie, “Hegel arrested his development” (124).<sup>85</sup>

It is relatively easy to see what aspects of Hegel’s thought would have seemed unconvincing to Beckett; firstly, its dialectical form upholds a type of metanarrative seeking to elucidate the mechanics of consciousness, and Beckett was famously wary of progressivist notions such as truth, transcendence or self-actualisation. Ackerley and Gontarski comment that ‘[t]he tripartite structure of *How It Is* implies the dialectical model [...] but there is no synthesis, no transcendence’ (250). A related contentious point concerns the master-slave relationship, specifically the slave’s way out of the bondage of servitude by self-realisation through work and mastery of nature; Beckett did not believe that there is such a thing as a ‘way out’ of existential misery: ‘[Les philosophes] proposent une issue, et moi, je pensais qu’il n’y en avait pas. Une solution, c’est la mort’ (quoted in Juliet: 20).

Certainly, this distance from Hegel is another common point between Beckett and Sade – who never enters Hegel’s system in the first place. Unlike Beckett, Sade does ascribe to an idea of progress, but the libertine idea of progress is, by definition, perverse. As Marty observes, the main contrast between Sade and Hegel’s master-slave dialectic has to do with Hegel’s master’s ontological crisis once he realises the failure of his initial victory to

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<sup>85</sup> See also Ackerley, 2010a: 182.

lead to self-knowledge and assertion as subject: 'Le Maître sadien, lui, ne vit pas l'échec et la tragédie du maître hégélien, il ne souffre nullement d'être reconnu par quelqu'un qu'il ne reconnaît pas (l'esclave) et l'oisiveté ne lui pèse pas' (58-59). This is because, unlike the Hegelian master, the Sadean master's own 'struggle' to the death is not oriented towards the individual death of a single rival, but towards 'la mort elle-même [...] comme jouissance sexuelle, c'est-à-dire comme perte et comme suprême maîtrise' (59). Paradoxically, this very intangibility of death in Sade (which finds clear echoes in Beckett) brings him closer to Kojève's reading of Hegelian dialectics as a statement of the philosophical impossibility of the future of human civilisation: 'since the serious business of human struggle, labour, time, and philosophy was in principle complete, man henceforth had nothing further to do except to while away his time at play. In either case, the lesson was the same: the human future was empty' (Hill, 2001: 13). As Hill argues, this allows for a parallel with Sade, who also paradoxically addresses the future while dismissing it – for instance through his will that physical traces of his presence be erased after his death (cf. Chapter One).

Crucially, Sade's main difference from Hegel (i.e. the absence of an ontological/existential crisis) highlights what may be Beckett's only fundamental intersection with Hegel; namely, Hegel's intuition of selfhood as a condition defined by lack, by want: 'Each [individual] is indeed certain of its own self, but not of the other, and therefore its own self-certainty still has no

truth' (113). Hegel's master 'has no secure identity; to be acknowledged by a slave as the slave's master has little enduring effect since only an equal can properly guarantee a relationship of mutual recognition' (Hill, 2001: 40). While Beckett's works exude scepticism about the notion of 'self-certainty', existential frustration at the lack of 'truth' is one of the few constant ontological parameters of the Beckettian condition. This does indeed stand closer to the dynamics of alterity at work in Beckett; as discussed in Chapter Two, in Beckett, the suffering of the self is projected onto a self-same other in an attempt to form the illusion of integrated selfhood – with moderate success.

Beckett's master-servant relationships play out the Hegelian master's ontological misery while turning the servant's narrative of self-realisation into a caricature, in a deflating parody of dialectics; this is evident in Pozzo and Hamm's blindness and Lucky's and Clov's uncertain fates in the earlier drama. More importantly, approaching the motif of torture in Beckett through the Hegelian master's misery also provides a possible reading of the pattern of the 'unspeakable confession' discussed earlier in the later texts. Indeed, the 'torture pieces' may well stage the master's futile search for evidence of the slave's self-awareness in order to assert himself as subject and master once and for all – but, crucially, *without* having to resume their 'battle to the death'. Such a quest would be equally unconstructive, aporetic and absurd in Beckettian and Hegelian terms, and this therefore makes a case for an

interpretation of violence in Beckett as a kind of poetics of Schopenhauerian reversibility, by which the notions of master and slave, *bourreau* and victim, selfhood and otherness, are but polarised manifestations of the same 'will.'

Beckett's awareness of the conceptual reversibility of the 'bourreau'/victim couple is stated ironically in *Le monde et le pantalon* (first published in *Les cahiers d'art*, Winter 1945-1946), Beckett's essay on painters G. van Velde and A. van Velde, whose works he salutes for addressing the impossibility of finding a subject allowing for truthful representation:

Qu'est-ce qu'il leur reste, alors, de représentable, s'ils renoncent à représenter le changement? [...] Il leur reste, à l'un, la chose qui subit, la chose qui est changée; à l'autre la chose qui inflige, la chose qui fait changer. | Deux choses qui, dans le détachement, l'une du bourreau, l'autre de la victime, où enfin elles deviennent représentables, restent à créer. [...] Elles ont leurs racines dans la même expérience. (38-39)

The active/passive taxonomy of change and the analogy with torture evoke Sadean imagery and terminology, and recall Beckett's early assessment of Sade's language as 'dispassionate'.<sup>86</sup> Ultimately, in Hegel and Beckett, neither the master nor the slave is free – in *Animateur's* words at the end of *Pochade*: 'Demain, qui sait, nous serons libres' (85).

There is, however, one Beckettian configuration of the master-slave relationship that absolutely (and uncharacteristically) conforms to Hegelian dialectics while managing to spare the master his ontological crisis: sexual enslavement – in particular in *Assez*, whose entire premise is a disturbing

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<sup>86</sup> The next subsection will return to the implications of dispassionate language in Beckett's 'torture pieces.'

conflation of sexual abuse and mindless servitude. In other words, I argue that *Assez* imagines a Hegelian couple in which the 'battle to the death' never occurs due to one subjectivity neutralising or absorbing another whose self-certainty is not yet sufficiently developed for rivalry to occur. The narrator of *Assez* has apparently been 'nurtured' into the identity of a consenting victim by an older man: 'J'étais d'une tout autre génération. [...] Je devais avoir dans les six ans lorsqu'il me prit la main. Je sortais de l'enfance à peine. Mais je ne tardai pas à en sortir tout à fait' (34-35). The narrator's litotes in this last sentence clearly alludes to paedophilic abuse endured in the early days of subjection. The sexual (and habitual) nature of the man's demands is conveyed with a candour that suggests that this 'lifestyle' is all the narrator has ever known: 'Quand il me disait de lui lécher le pénis je me jetais dessus. J'en tirais de la satisfaction. Nous devons avoir les mêmes satisfactions' (34). This use of 'devoir' is ambiguous, carrying both deontic and epistemic modal values, and further suggests that the speaker's grasp of the reality of her/his<sup>87</sup> situation is conditioned by and limited to the master's 'education.' The sexual overtone of the relationship is reflected in the description of the master's language, which seems to consist mostly of 'éjaculations' (38; 46). The narrator's passivity is another indicator of assimilated coercion: 'De la main

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<sup>87</sup> On the intractability of gender in *Assez*, see Hill (1990: 156-58) and also Germoni and Sardin. Though gender is not a direct factor in the present discussion of Hegelian dialectics, I find Ackerley and Gontarski's claim that '[t]he phrases "lick his penis," "mucous membrane," and "my old breasts" [in *Enough*] imply a female companion' (178) unsubstantiated.

supérieure il me tenait et touchait où il voulait. [...] L'autre se retenait à mes cheveux' (46).

All signs of distress or trauma appear to have been stifled through repression and negation of the narrator's own interests and desires: 'Je faisais tout ce qu'il désirait. Je le désirais aussi. Pour lui. Chaque fois qu'il désirait une chose moi aussi. Pour lui. Il n'avait qu'à dire quelle chose. Quand il ne désirait rien moi non plus. [...] S'il avait désiré une chose pour moi je l'aurais désirée aussi. [...] Je n'avais que les désirs qu'il manifestait' (34). This alleged 'harmonisation' of desires seems a deliberately grotesque, distinctly un-Beckettian explanation for the fact that the narrator remains unquestioning and uncritical of the master throughout the piece, especially in the light of Beckett's view that, in human relationships, the object's mobility is 'independent and personal', and that couples involve 'two separate and immanent dynamisms related by no system of synchronisation' (*Proust*: 17). It is therefore baffling that most critics should take the narrator's claims seriously or literally; Cohn, for instance, writes that '[i]n contrast to most of Beckett's fiction, [...] this narrative's lean prose teases us with the subliminal sexuality between the two figures, and with their compulsive companionship in motion and at rest. [...] Unusually for Beckett, calm reigns over the couple and in the account' (297). Enoch Brater describes the couple in *Assez* as 'strange, [and] possibly homosexual' (260) and fails to acknowledge the perverse foundation of this strangeness, arguing instead that the couple 'has

ambitions as sidereal as those of any romantic' (253). David Houston-Jones' comment that they 'overcome [bodily disgust] by concentrating on what they imagine to be the other's desire' (139) is equally problematic, since there is no trace of such reciprocity in the text.

Rather, the atypical picture of identity that emerges from *Assez* may be interpreted as a Beckettian take on what a utopian version of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic might look like, i.e. a scenario of subjugation in which the victim somehow remains unaware of its own enslavement – 'On voit des questions sans se les poser' (34). Transposed to a more Kojevian perspective, this would be a close equivalent to totalitarian societies in which the rulers prevent uprisings and revolution through institutionalised indoctrination of the people. This indirectly confirms Sade's incompatibility with Hegel, since the Sadist's ideal victim must be painfully aware of the horror of their condition – 'Jamais un vrai sadique ne supportera une victime masochiste' (Deleuze: 36).

### **3. Bourreaux, victims and the Law**

While a comparison of the modalities of torture and enslavement in Beckett and Sade with Hegelian dialectics helps to situate their respective aesthetics within the history of modern thought, Hegel fails to provide a satisfactory critical framework for what these aesthetics accomplish in the linguistic context of a work of literature. We have seen how central language is to

Beckettian torture and the motif of the 'unspeakable confession', and so we now turn to Georges Bataille's 1950 preface to the *Soleil Noir* edition of *Justine*, a preface with which Beckett was well acquainted and which analyses torturer-victim relationships in Sade from a linguistic perspective. Bataille establishes a distinction between the victim's volubility and the 'sly' institutional language of the executioner; ultimately, we shall see that Sade's and Beckett's respective blurring of these categories contribute to their common portrayal of human law as fundamentally absurd.

'La violence se tait alors que la raison discourt': this is the title and summary of Bataille's analysis of the Sadean language (xii). For Bataille, the archetypal victim is typically voluble, finding it nearly impossible to accept injustice without revolt and protestation. Beckett and Sade intersect in their exploration of the volubility of the victim. *Justine* is all discourse; she cries, begs, argues, reasons with her aggressors, cites the law and the Bible, to no avail. The type of language used by *Justine* has something in common with all of Beckett's victims: it is a language which is not understandable by the outside world and which can therefore provide neither the master nor the slave with the self-recognition they need. This coincides with the Beckettian victim in the later works, whose sole function is to produce language. While, on the face of it, the explicit purpose of violence in Sade (i.e. sexual gratification) seems to have little to do with language, the victim's pleas are

themselves a source of delight for the libertines. In both Sade and Beckett, therefore, the victim's illusory search for a word that would set them free is as vain as the libertines' search for a crime so absolute as to bring about permanent destruction (cf. Blanchot: 34-35). The focus on the language of the victim is a uniting thread between Beckett's later works; as in *Pochade* and *As the Story was Told*, it often takes the form of urgent, cryptic logorrhoea, with *Not I* and *Play* offering dramatic variations on the theme of the 'unspeakable confession' discussed previously, as when Mouth recalls what sounds like a conflation of a court hearing and a Christian 'last judgement' (we will return to the Kafkaian connotations of this combination): 'she was being punished... for her sins... a number of which then... [...] flashed through her mind... one after another... then dismissed as foolish...' (377). *Esquisse* also draws attention to the language of the victim. The protagonist, plagued with invasive words and music from within, wearily explains his torments to a compassionate female visitor, but she is no more able to comprehend his predicament than he is able to convey it to her; as Cohn writes, it is 'a world that is irrelevant to the pain of the protagonist [...], [whose] pain exceeds its (unwritten) cause' (271).

The world's indifference to individual suffering is a major common characteristic in Beckett's and Sade's visions of the dynamics of torture and violence, which brings us to Bataille's views on the language of the 'bourreau', which 'n'est pas celui d'une violence qu'il exerce au nom d'un

pouvoir établi, mais celui du pouvoir, qui l'excuse apparemment, et lui donne une raison d'être élevée' (xv). In other words, established power has no need to speak in order to exercise its authority, and neither does the figure of the executioner, who simply embodies this institutional power: '[L]a fonction de bourreau légal représente la facilité: le bourreau parle [...] le langage de l'État. Et s'il est sous l'emprise de la passion, le silence où il se complaît lui donne un plaisir plus sournois' (xv). For Bataille, therefore, the archetypal executioner does not narrate the violence s/he perpetrates, because the 'sly' language of the Law or State has pre-empted any need for it to be spoken – 'un silence sournois, silence de la violence mais en fait parole sans fin où le bourreau, s'adressant à ses semblables, tient le discours de la justification étatique et de l'alibi' (Marty: 81). Bataille means, therefore, that even Sade's libertines' tireless justifications of their ideology are a kind of institutional silence. As Pilling says, '[t]he paradox of a language which is not a language almost certainly caught Beckett's eye' (2014: 124). Bataille's observations do indeed seem coherent with the recurrent motif of the silent 'bourreau' who indirectly represents the Law in Beckett's works: in *Pochade*, the executioner, Dick, is 'mute', and the torture experiment (like the 'sessions' in *As the Story was Told*) is orchestrated by unnamed, unseen, and unsympathetic authorities. Similarly, the cylindrical world of *Le dépeupleur* is governed by 'des conventions d'origine obscure qui dans leur précision et par la soumission qu'elles exigent des grimpeurs ressemblent à des lois' (18); this may convey

the deceptive impression of a well-oiled machine, but effectively legitimises casual violence among the inhabitants.

Since the beings populating the cylinder do not speak, such violence is their only form of communication. This echoes Bataille's comment that '[l]a violence est contraire à la loyauté à l'égard d'autrui, qui est la base du langage' (xvii) and may explain why the beings that populate Beckett's text have no concept of fraternity – which 'en-dehors des flambées de violence leur est aussi étrangère qu'aux papillons' (18). Instead of mutual respect, the rules normalise violence against those who dare breach them: 'Il est des infractions qui déchaînent contre le fautif une fureur collective surprenante' (18). Trespassing on others' personal space has dramatic consequences: 'Comme un seul corps la queue se jette sur lui. Cette scène dépasse en violence tout ce que dans le genre le cylindre peut offrir' (48-49); '[u]n chercheur sédentaire à qui l'on marcherait dessus au lieu de l'enjamber peut se déchaîner au point de mettre tout le cylindre en émoi' (24). The 'vanquished' bodies of those who have lost their 'passion' to search and climb lie prostrate on the floor, to general indifference: 'On peut leur marcher dessus sans qu'il réagissent' (24) – this implies both probability and permission, and therefore, like the Sadean and Kantian law, legitimises violence and inhumanity. In fact, the dynamics at work in *Le dépeupleur* are neatly summarised in Pierre Klossowski's comments on Sade: 'le peuple se livre à l'extermination de ceux qui lui sont contraires avec une satisfaction

profonde; la collectivité flaire toujours ce qui lui est nuisible [...] et c'est pourquoi elle peut confondre, avec la plus grande sûreté, les crimes et la justice sans en éprouver le moindre remords' (86).

In *Le dépeupleur*, the silence of the Law therefore operates on a dual level: the first level is intradiegetic, it is that of the 'conventions d'origine obscure' that justify interpersonal violence and indifference to the sufferings of others. The second level is at work in the coldness of the narrative; in this speechless universe, words are the exclusive prerogative of the narrator, whose detached, unemotional description evokes Bataille's paradox of a language that is somehow silent. There are comparable distinctions within the Sadean discourse; the diegetic plane contains two types of 'talkative silence' (or 'non-language'): the libertines' constant philosophical dissertations are set against the official state law, which prohibits any violence not prescribed by itself and whose discourse is in constant effect in society whether spoken or not.

Bataille's text unveils a further dimension of Sade's language: unlike Beckett's narrator in *Le dépeupleur* (but similarly to the narrator of *Comment c'est* or to Mouth in *Not I*), Sade's own eloquence does not come from a narrative position of power; his narrative voice is not secured by the silent certainty of a pre-existing establishment. Sade's voice is in fact the opposite of that of the silent Law or the mute 'bourreau', which leads Bataille to conclude that Sade's language is really that of a victim: 'Ceci est frappant: à l'extrême

opposé du langage tricheur des bourreaux, le langage de Sade est celui de la victime. Il l'inventa à la Bastille, quand il écrivit les *Cent vingt journées*. [...] Sade révolté dans sa prison, la révolte en lui devait parler, ce que la violence ne fait pas' (xviii-xix). As Beauvoir also puts it: 'Sade ne nous livre pas l'œuvre d'un homme libéré: il nous fait participer à son effort de libération' (65). As we have seen, Beckett's take on master-servant relationships does incorporate a potentially dialectical awareness of the reversibility of the conditions of tormentor and victim (as the closing lines of *Pochade* show); but it is in the irredeemable solitude that Sade's revolt betrays that his writing sits closest to Beckett's.

Beckett's and Sade's writings show a common preoccupation with the sense of alienation and powerlessness that befalls the individual faced with the State's incomprehensible and uncomprehending legal machine. Sade's unwavering outrage at the legal system to which he fell victim translates literally into his many allusions to 'ces lois absurdes [qui] sont l'ouvrage des hommes' (*PB*: 61). The law seems equally cruel and absurd to Beckett's characters, whose subjective experience engulfs the textual universe to an extent that makes 'external' conventions and regulations unfathomable to them – as Molloy puts it in Beckett's translation: 'To apply the letter of the law to a creature like me is not an easy matter. It can be done, but reason is against

it' (24).<sup>88</sup> Both authors convey the felt incoherence of the contrast between the law and individual notions of justice: 'les lois ne sont pas faites pour le particulier, mais pour le général, ce qui les met dans une perpétuelle contradiction avec l'intérêt personnel' (*PB*: 146).

Sade criticises the legal structure and the government, 'qui voit tout en grand [et] s'embarrasse fort peu des individus, pourvu que la machine se conserve' (*Infortunes*: 62). The courts are 'composées d'idiots, de rigoristes imbéciles ou de brutaux fanatiques' (*Infortunes*: 179). He condemns the hypocrisy of punishing individuals for actions (e.g. murder) that are legal when carried out in the name of the State: 'un souverain ambitieux pourra détruire à son aise et sans le moindre scrupule les ennemis qui nuisent à ses projets de grandeur... des lois cruelles, arbitraires, impérieuses, pourront de même assassiner chaque siècle des millions d'individus' (*PB*: 81-82). This quotation, which nowadays reads like a chilling omen of the Holocaust, once more highlights the inner contradictions of Sade's self-serving logic, which sees the notion of universal law as 'une absurdité palpable' (*PB*: 177) akin to expecting the blind to tell colours apart (*PB*: 177) or an entire military regiment to wear the same size uniform (*PB*: 177). But at the same time it refuses to consider that, if 'exiger que des hommes de caractères inégaux se

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<sup>88</sup> The original French for 'letter of the law' and 'reason' is respectively '[c]hâtier de façon systématique' and 'sagesse' (31). Beckett therefore juxtaposes the notions of punishment/cruelty and the Law, which he further complicates, with much irony, by invoking the fraught philosophy of Enlightenment rationalism.

pliant à des lois égales' is 'une injustice effrayante' (*PB*: 177), then so is asking a community to accommodate individual murderous inclinations. Sade therefore addresses the absurdity of the law through an absurdity of his own.

Ultimately, in both Sade's and Beckett's portrayals of the law, it matters little whether one is an innocent victim or a guilty perpetrator, since all are condemned to threat and torture from the moment they get entangled in the legal machine, as though tainted by default by an unknown primordial sin, in a pseudo-biblical paradigm with no prospect of salvation. In *Not I*, for instance, Mouth reflects on 'that notion of punishment... for some sin or other... or for the lot... or no particular reason... for its own sake... thing she understood perfectly... that notion of punishment' (377). There is little comfort to be found in language, which comes to mirror the indifference of the external world and betrays the meaninglessness of existence; there is no place of safety for the victim. From this emerges an important parallel between Beckett's and Sade's depictions of the world as a series of unreliable refuges from which characters are inevitably expelled sooner or later. This is a well-known and long-standing theme in Beckett, where it is often associated with the trauma of birth and longing for the womb (as discussed in Chapter Two). In Sade, this is best epitomised by Justine's desperate wanderings from place to place, each time encountering further persecution instead of safety. In *Les Infortunes de la vertu*, she halts in the French city of Sens, south of Paris, but soon has to flee again – a possible wordplay suggesting that meaning ('sens')

offers no viable refuge, or that there is no sense in hoping for safety; it is tempting to see a similar pun in the title of Beckett's short piece 'Sans' (1969), a text incidentally punctuated by allusions to an enigmatic 'vrai refuge sans issue' (69; 71; 72; 73; 74; 75; 76; 77).

We have seen that the motif of torture and its variations in Beckett and Sade engages dynamics that place language at the centre of the 'bourreau'/victim relationship. While Hegelian and Bataillean critical frameworks allow for different angles of approach, they both highlight the collapse of categorical boundaries in such relationships, which ultimately points to a portrait of existence as an issueless struggle between language and silence. This felt absurdity of the law and the world's indifference to human suffering point to new planes of intersection between Sadean and Beckettian aesthetics: Franz Kafka, the *noir*, and the concept of evil.

## II. *Noir* Beckett and the aesthetics of evil

### 1. Beckett and Kafka, with Sade

The themes of torture, fundamental guilt and absurd judiciary persecution provide compelling parallels with the works of Franz Kafka, with whom Beckett had aesthetic affinities and who shared his admiration for Sade – whom Kafka reportedly described as 'the veritable patron of the modern age' (quoted in Ihab Habib: 43). The short story *The Penal Colony* (1919) in

particular presents uncanny similarities with Beckett's own recuperation of Sadean themes nearly sixty years later. Beckett's interest in Kafka is clear from a number of books on his work in his personal library (cf. Nixon and Van Hulle: 101-02). He was rereading Kafka in August 1982 (Knowlson, 1997: 827) and also had some Kafka in the hotel and medical retirement home he moved to after a fall in July 1988 (Knowlson, 1997: 701). Beckett had long been aware of the similarity of their respective aesthetics and world-views, and, earlier on in his career, had tried to deter himself from getting too familiar with Kafka; as he wrote in 1954: 'Je m'y suis senti chez moi, trop, c'est peut-être cela qui m'a empêché de continuer. Je me rappelle avoir été gêné par le côté imperturbable de sa démarche. Je me méfie des désastres qui se laissent déposer comme un bilan' (*L2*: 462). Indeed the main (perhaps the only) poetic point that radically separates the two authors is the problem of form, as he told Cohn: 'What struck me as strange in Kafka was that the form is not shaken by the experience it conveys' (quoted in Nixon and Van Hulle: 101).<sup>89</sup> Increasingly, in his late works, Beckett uses formal abstraction – 'donner forme à l'informe' (cf. *Juliet*: 36) – to convey the 'mess' of the world, while Kafka's form never gives out, remaining 'imperturbably' coherent so as to highlight the absurdity of bureaucracy and human justice by contrast.

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<sup>89</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of the parallels and contrasts between Beckett and Kafka from a formal point of view, see Mays.

Even in that sense, however, Beckett's writing occasionally intersects with Kafka's, for instance in *Le dépeupleur*. Adelman, one of the few critics to notice the strong parallels between Kafka's story and Beckett's art (see also Tajiri: 58) dedicates an entire article to the Kafkian undertones of *The Lost Ones*, in which he repeatedly expresses his 'bafflement' at critical descriptions of the narrative voice as 'restrained' and 'impenetrable' (2003: 164). What is considerably more baffling, however, is that Adelman, who counters this by claiming that the voice is sarcastic and 'witty' and that even its 'matter-of-factness' is 'adoring' (166), overall fails to relate Kafka's story to the motif of linguistic torture that is reiterated throughout so many of Beckett's other late works. He also does not widen his focus from *The Lost Ones/Le dépeupleur* – which, strictly speaking, is not even one of the 'torture pieces', and sits much less comfortably next to Kafka's story than *Comment c'est*, *Pochade*, or *As the Story was Told*. Adelman's only acknowledgement of the link between Kafka's and Beckett's interest in the torturer/victim relationship is relegated to a footnote in a previous article on *How It Is* – rightly comparing the motif of 'written wounds' with the torture machine in Kafka's story (2001: 87). Rather, I propose that Sade can be regarded as a common ground between Beckett and Kafka – and even, as it were, as an allegorical intertextual model.

Part of the mediation between Sade, Kafka and Beckett is effected by Maurice Blanchot's reception of all three in his criticism, but also in his literary works, such as *L'arrêt de mort* (1948): '[Blanchot's] author, like Kafka,

[...] is a vacancy that speaks, and occupies a space that is at one and the same time both empty of words and full of them, mysteriously effaced but infinitely loquacious' (Hill, 2000: 77). As we have seen through Bataille, the paradox of an empty loquaciousness rings both Beckettian and Sadean bells. Rabaté comments that Blanchot's essay 'La raison de Sade' is 'a text that echoes deeply with the major preoccupations of Beckett in *Watt*' (2012: 57) and, as argued in Chapter Three, it resonates equally strongly with *Comment c'est*. For Blanchot, Sade and Kafka can be seen as antagonistic poles in the Western history of modern thought, and it is precisely from within the distance between those poles that it becomes possible to form an understanding of the history and literature of the twentieth century:

[P]lus qu'avec Lautréamont, c'est avec Kafka que Blanchot va [...] dessiner une sorte de contrepoids à Sade, qui n'est nullement son élimination. [...] La conciliation entre l'indestructible sadien, celui de la destruction sans limites, et l'indestructible kafkaïen, celui de l'impossibilité de mourir, ne représente nullement un fantasme propre à Blanchot. Cette conciliation est en quelque sorte objective, et dit tout le XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, celui de Sade et celui de Kafka. (Marty: 125-28)

This consolidates the parallel between Beckett and Kafka, while reiterating how useful and crucial the Beckettian prism is in thinking about Sade's rehabilitation in the twentieth century. Let us now examine Beckett's, Sade's and Kafka's cohabitation within the latter's story *The Penal Colony*.

The premise of Kafka's text is the following: a 'researcher' from Europe visits an independent penal colony in order to observe their legal customs and procedures. Much of the story consists in his being introduced, by the

enthusiastic 'officer', to the elaborate machine used to torture (and eventually kill) offenders. Also present are a condemned man, whose sentence the researcher is expected to watch as demonstration, and a mute soldier who assists the officer. The researcher listens to the explanations respectfully, but with growing horror: 'There was absolutely no question that the proceedings were unjust and the method of execution barbaric' (128).

As in Kafka's *The Trial*, the judiciary 'machine' follows an inscrutable logic that presumes fundamental guilt; the researcher is shocked to learn that not only is the 'officer' currently responsible for all judiciary decisions in the colony, but he also does not allow the accused to defend themselves: 'The principle on which I base my decision is this: there is never any question of them not being guilty' (120). This strongly evokes *Not I* and Mouth's recollection of 'that time in court what had she to say for herself... guilty or not guilty... stand up woman... speak up woman... [...] something she had to tell... [...] guilty or not' (381), as well as the victim's impossible confession or pardon in *As the Story was Told*.

Kafka's torture machine carries out the sentence as follows: '[t]he regulation that the condemned man has contravened is inscribed into his body by the harrow' (118), which is 'the same shape as the human body' (121) and ends with fine needles made of steel. Fraser helpfully identifies the 'harrowing nature' of the torture sessions in *As the Story was Told* with the 'harrow' in *The Penal Colony* (77) – 'It's actually a very good name for it', adds

Kafka's officer (116). 'As they vibrate, the needles embed themselves in the body, which is also being shaken about by the bed' (122). The torture is 'not supposed to kill the man immediately, but over the course of about twelve hours on average' (124) during which it 'writes deeper and deeper' (125). 'For the first six the prisoner is alive much the same as before, except from the pain he experiences' (125). Due to the duration of the procedure, 'a lot of embellishments have to be added to the text itself; what is actually written only forms a narrow band round the body, the rest is covered in decorative flourishes' (124); there is a direct (Sadecan) equivalence between Kafka's illuminations of the flesh and the sadistic flesh-carving of *Comment c'est*: 'plus courte la communication plus grands les caractères [...] lui aussi sent la grande lettre ornée les serpents les diabolins' (CC: 111). Around the six-hour mark, the man begins to be able to 'read' the sentence through his wounds: 'it finally dawns on even the most stupid ones' (126). After six more hours, 'the harrow skewers him right through and throws him into the pit, where he lands among the blood, water and cotton wool [...]. The sentence has been carried out, and we – the soldier and I that is – cover him with earth' (126). The sadistic delaying of death has clear resonances in Beckett and Sade, especially as the methodical, lengthy torture protocol is aimed at inflicting understanding (educating) on the victim by making language an act of physical aggression – again exactly as in *Comment c'est*: 'Oh, how we would drink down the expression of enlightenment on those tortured faces' (131).

The thematic and tonal echoes between *The Penal Colony* and the Sadean and sadistic elements of Beckett's late works are therefore significant. The disposal of the dead body is not without evoking Sade's testament and the fate of Murphy's ashes. In *Pochade*, Animator's eloquent cruelty and relative power evoke Kafka's 'officer'; both characters put on a performance to reach their objective, and both, despite not having a clear status as researchers, conflate the dynamics of theatre drama with that of a scientific experiment. The officer's sadism stems from his enthusiasm for the legal doctrine he defends; as he describes the victim's dawn of understanding come the sixth hour, he comments: 'And that's when the fun starts' (122).

Kafka's text, like Beckett's 'torture pieces' and many of Sade's writings, raises the question of the ethical legitimacy of the death penalty; the officer attempts to pre-emptively counter the researcher's arguments against his machine by reducing the ethics of the death penalty to a cultural difference: 'your world view is typically European, you may well be opposed to the death penalty and to executions carried out by machines [...]. On the other hand, you have come across and learnt to respect all manner of idiosyncrasies in many different people' (132-33). Sade was opposed to the death penalty because it is a system that presumes a reciprocity between individuals in which he simply did not believe – 'leurs existences ne sont pas commensurables' (Beauvoir: 75), and because 'il n'y a aucune analogie entre un meurtre accompli impulsivement par passion ou besoin, et l'assassinat

froidement prémédité par des juges' (75-76). Growing up in the early twentieth century, the death penalty was a frequent topic around Beckett, from the arguments around state practices in Ireland (cf. McNaughton: 35-36) to World War II and the Algerian war; Beckett would have debates over this with his friends in 1958: 'As Pinget remembers the conversation, Beckett was not entirely against the death penalty, depending on the circumstances, which drew violent reactions from the group' (Verhulst: 150). At all events, Kafka's officer completely misunderstands how unlikely the researcher is to sing his and the torture machine's praise at an upcoming meeting with the new Commandant: 'Whatever you say, don't hold back: proclaim your truth loudly, lean forward over the balustrade and bellow, yes, bellow your opinions at the commandant, bellow your unshakeable convictions at the top of your voice' (137). As Beckett knew from reading the Apollinaire, Sade engaged in precisely this sort of bellowing when imprisoned in the Bastille, haranguing the crowd and possibly, as some have surmised, single-handedly causing the iconic storming of the prison (cf. Apollinaire: 4-5).

It is striking how well Bataille's complex linguistic categorisation of 'bourreaux' and victims applies to all three of Beckett, Sade and Kafka. Like Sade himself, the officer delivers urgent epistles explaining and justifying the inhuman procedures in which he believes; it soon transpires that his position is defensive, as he fears that the new Commandant and his entourage will soon reclaim control of the judiciary and ban the use of his once much-

admired torture machine; as Beauvoir says of Sade: 'sa tentative est plus vraie que tous les instruments qu'elle utilise' (65). Even though he lives by the cruel (sly) principles that once had the support of official powers – 'the brilliant glow of this act of justice that was finally being accomplished' (131) – the officer's language is clearly that of a victim: 'there's no time to lose: even as we speak they are plotting against me and my jurisdiction; there are already meetings [...] to which I'm not invited. Even your visit strikes me as symptomatic of the situation – being cowards they send you, an outsider, to observe' (130).

In fact, the entire mechanical contraption is associated with a brutal interplay between the notions of sound and silence, language and non-language, understanding and incomprehension. As in Beckett and Sade, the language of the law is obscure to the victim, like a kind of silence: the officer addresses the researcher in French, 'a language that neither the soldier nor the condemned man were likely to understand' (116) – it is not stated that the researcher is French, but we know he is European, which therefore makes it possible to interpret this choice of language as a veiled reference to Sade. Like Justine, Pim, Fox and many other Beckettian and Sadean victims, the condemned man is unable to comprehend his fate: 'it was clear that he didn't understand a thing' (119). It then transpires that the poor man does not even know what his crime is or what sentence he has been given – as the officer

observes sadistically '[a]fter all, he's going to feel it clearly enough in his flesh' (119).

The deafening sound of the machine in action is an even closer objectivation of the impenetrable silence of the Law: when running, it 'tends to squeak quite loudly as it goes round, which makes it difficult to understand what [others are] saying' (116). The 'harrow' is made of glass, so that 'everyone can look through the glass and watch the sentence being inscribed into the man's flesh' (122); like the Bataillean paradox of a silent language, there is some kind of opacity to the harrow's transparency, which is really the false transparency of the law, diverting attention from its inhuman discourse to a brutal spectacle. Tellingly, the previous Commandant's preparatory sketches for the conception and building of the machine (which are symbols of his defunct power) are utter gibberish to the researcher: as the officer proudly holds them up for him to read, 'all he [can] see [is] an incomprehensible mass of criss-crossed, intersecting lines that covered almost the entire page' (124).

The powerful sense of disquiet and uncertainty engendered by the fundamental impossibility of understanding therefore resonates with Sade's and Beckett's representations of a world that is indifferent to victims' suffering and governed by laws that are incomprehensible to them.

## 2. 'pour vexer les Angliches': Beckett 'et le roman noir'

In 'Sade et le roman noir' (1933), Heine makes a case for a reassessment of Sade's significance in European literary history as the pioneer of the genre of the 'roman noir' and a precursor of gothic and horror aesthetics, which are traditionally considered to have begun in English-language literature. Beckett, who read the essay in January 1951, comments: 'Et un essai sur Sade et le Roman Noir bien fait pour vexer les Angliches' (L2: 223). The aspects of Sade's writing that Heine highlights in this way draw attention to corresponding patterns and aesthetics in Beckett's later works; I therefore propose to explore 'noir' as a further terrain of interaction between Beckett and Sade.

Sade introduces the manuscript of his *Contes, historiettes et fabliaux* with the following declaration: 'Il n'y a ni conte ni roman dans toutes les littératures de l'Europe où le genre sombre soit porté à un degré plus effrayant et plus pathétique' (quoted in Heine: 131). As he was working on the collection, Sade also drew lists categorising his tales according to their genres or subjects, apparently paying close attention to tone: 'La lettre S y marque les contes sombres et une mystérieuse lettre L désigne ceux où l'auteur a introduit ce qu'il nomme "dénouement de lumière"' (Heine: 137). The first version of *Justine (Les Infortunes de la vertu)* was initially listed among the 'contes sombres' and later taken off the list as it developed into a novel.

‘Le lecteur qui voudra bien comparer entre elles les deux versions de 1787 et 1791 nous accordera sans doute que Sade, dans l’intervalle, a transformé son conte sombre en “roman noir”’ (Heine: 137). Sade’s *Idées sur le roman* (1800) testifies to his knowledge of and enthusiasm for the English literature of his time. Heine, noting the ‘simultanéité remarquable dans l’apparition des œuvres caractéristiques [du genre noir], tant anglaises que françaises, à partir de 1791’ (141) also observes that Sade’s *120 Journées* (1785), as well as *Les Infortunes de la vertu* (1787-88), predate the English-language works normally regarded as having initiated the multifarious gothic aesthetics that took off during the next century, e.g. Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) or Matthew Gregory Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796). Heine even speculates that Lewis, travelling to Paris in 1792, might have come across a copy of *Justine* there, and also regards Sade as having anticipated Edgar Poe.

In France, Heine adds, Sade and Laclos were already dominating the inception of the *noir* genre for the last two decades of the eighteenth century: ‘Terrifier pour émouvoir, n’est-ce pas tout le secret de l’art [du roman noir]?’ (131). The reasons for what Heine calls ‘cette éclatante supériorité’ lie, according to him, in ‘une conception philosophique, systématiquement pessimiste, que ces deux écrivains ont fondée sur une sérieuse connaissance du monde et des hommes’ (144). Systematic philosophical pessimism cannot fail to evoke Schopenhauer, pessimist extraordinaire, and his tangible

influence on Beckett's works – as well as Kafka's.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, both Beckett and Kafka may be placed within the legacy of the gothic *noir*, which reinforces their filiation with Sade. In Beckett's case, it seems particularly telling that the *noir* dimension of his writing should have caused the prestigious Éditions du Seuil to reject his work for publication in 1947, when Jacoba Van Velde delivered typescripts of what would become *Premier amour*, 'La Fin', 'L'expulsé' and 'Le calmant' for the consideration of reader Louis Pauwels. Pauwels noted the stories' merit, but he declined: 'personnellement, je n'ai pas voulu le prendre, car ce noir absolu, je n'y crois pas. Cela m'a paru systématique... mais je n'en dénie pas la valeur' (quoted in Serry: 61). His reader's review concluded that Beckett 'tout de même, c'est Kafka avec la lourdeur et les enfantillages américains. Il y a de l'éléphant qui marche sur un service de cristal là-dedans' (quoted in Serry: 55). Though Pauwels's comparison with Kafka (deemed equally difficult to sell in the aftermath of the war) is sound, this 'récusation de la noirceur beckettienne' (Serry: 63) grounded on criticism of his systematic form, becomes somewhat ironic since Beckett himself would go on to criticise Kafka's 'imperturbable' formal realism. As Serry puts it, '[l]'absence de référence directe à la réalité, enfermée dans les limites infranchissables de la conscience, tétanise Pauwels' (60). Beckett's stories were then passed on to a second reviewer, who deplored

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<sup>90</sup> Kafka was familiar with Schopenhauer, whom he first read 'seriously' in 1917 and would also have encountered indirectly earlier on through Nietzsche (cf. Robertson: 109).

their vulgarity and 'simplistic' take on style, and to a third, who described 'une littérature odieuse' in which '[l]es obscénités ne sont pas le pire', 'un système, une série de trucs à répétition' and 'un piège pour amateur de langage' (quoted in Serry: 56). Seuil director Paul Flamand stated that he was 'D'accord, mot pour mot, avec [ce dernier]' and describes 'l'ennui que donne une telle littérature fabriquée, réécrite, calculée, [et qui] en devient encore plus révoltante. [...] [E]n dépit du talent "vicieux" de Beckett, en dépit de ses ruses, cela n'échappe pas tout à fait au ridicule' (quoted in Serry 58-59). It is striking how easily every one of these comments could be (and indeed were at some point or other) applied to Sade's works.

Despite contrasting takes on form, Beckett, Kafka and Sade do indeed share a flawed, problematic relationship with 'reality', if only in the fundamental alienation of their characters from the incomprehensible world they inhabit, governed by a 'sournoise et inexorable cruauté' (Heine: 135). The implacable slyness of the Law results in a kind of absurd narrative fatalism, within which lie 'les véritables ressorts du "roman noir" à la Sade. C'est bien plutôt parmi les vices humains et les iniquités sociales que se recrutent les éléments de cette fatalité qui s'acharne sur la vertu malheureuse' (Heine: 139-40). This is equally true of the sadistic institutional setting of *The Penal Colony*, as well as of the inexorable violence and decline of the beings populating Beckett's cylinder in *Le dépeupleur*. In all three universes, the uncertainty that comes from incomprehension contributes to an experience of the world as

hostile and thus generates an element of fear; as Heine comments, in Sade 'ce microcosme infernal exclut tout élément impropre à la synthèse de l'effroi' (134).

Fear and disquiet are key elements of gothic aesthetics, whose influence is 'si manifeste dans [l']œuvre de conteur [de Sade]' (Heine: 132). These aesthetics are traditionally characterised by a particular topography, often involving sinister, secluded places such as abbeys, dungeons or castles in ruins, potentially haunted vestiges of an unknown history. Sade's world, in particular that of the *120 journées*, is replete with such environments and paints a 'tableau des bâtisses féodales inquiétantes et presque inaccessibles' (Heine: 139). The Château de Silling, surrounded by 'un mur de trente pieds de haut' (*120J*: 59), days of perilous travel across precipices, mountains and other dangers away from the nearest village, is clearly such a place – '[t]out le décor du gothique anglais paraît se retrouver ici' (Heine: 134). This resonates with elements of Beckett's late works, such as the '[g]othic setting, suggestive of a castle' of *Words and Music*, in which '[t]he master-and-servant motif familiar from other Beckett works here appears in recognizably feudal costume' (Zillacus: 105-106). This 'castle', with its 'stairs' and 'tower', is evocative of the Sadean topography – not only of Silling, but also the Fort de Versailles and the Bastille where the Marquis was incarcerated for eleven years.

The gothic shares its fearsome component with the horror genre, in particular through such tropes as revenants, ghosts or haunted houses – perhaps the ultimate illustration of Kristeva’s abjection, since it stages the cross-contamination of life with death and the ordinary with the extraordinary. Elements of Beckett’s late prose works undoubtedly cultivate such ambiguity and uncertainty as to whether the beings fleetingly brought to the fore of the fragmented narration may be considered alive, dead, or indeed as ever having been either, as with the woman in *Mal vu mal dit*: ‘Elle serait morte déjà que cela n’aurait rien de choquant. Elle l’est bien sûr. Mais en attendant cela ne fait pas l’affaire. Elle gît donc encore en vie sous la couverture’ (51-52). This is also true of the spectral figures of *Rockaby* and *Footfalls*. The narrative abstraction of *Mal vu mal dit* contributes to creating a threatening atmosphere that is almost cinematic in its silence and specular intensity; twelve mysterious figures – or ‘gardiens’ (53) – loom threateningly throughout: ‘Les autres sont là. Tout autour. Les douze. Au loin. Immobiles ou s’éloignant. Elle lève les yeux et en voit un autre. Voilà qu’elle se fige encore’ (18). ‘She’ only has time to catch a glimpse of ‘un début de voilette noire’ (18-19) – a garment associated with mourning. These figures are ambivalent, it is never clear whether they are friends or foes, imagined or ‘real’, dead or living, and some recall previous Beckettian characters, like ghosts from a distant past, i.e. Vladimir and Estragon: ‘Manteau sombre jusqu’à terre. Chapeau bombé du temps jadis’ (27).

In these late works, Beckett continues to represent the body in its abject eroticism, but the gradual movement towards abstraction modifies the texture of these representations, which no longer focus on the purulent affirmation of diseased life oozing through broken skin but, rather, take on mineral characteristics, with stone-like bodies fading into their vague surroundings, as in 'Bing' – 'tout blanc corps nu blanc [...] jambes collées comme cousues' (61) – or 'Sans': 'Terre ciel confondus infini sans relief [...] [p]etit corps petit bloc cœur battant gris cendre' (77). Bodies in *Le dépeupleur* have the appearance of corpses, and their mindless attempts at sexuality conflate gothic and grotesque aesthetics: '[les peaux] se parchement. Les corps se frôlent avec un bruit de feuilles sèches. Les muqueuses elles-mêmes s'en ressentent. Un baiser rend un son indescriptible. Ceux qui se mêlent encore de copuler n'y arrivent pas. Mais ils ne veulent pas l'admettre' (8). This further relates to Sade via Lacan's 'Kant avec Sade', in which he observes that 'l'objet du désir là où il se propose nu, n'est que la scorie d'un fantasme où le sujet ne revient pas de sa syncope. C'est un cas de nécrophilie' (259). This applies equally to perverse and non-perverse desire, and indeed may be a fitting allegory for the interactions of Beckett's ghostly 'characters.' Needless to say, cases of literal necrophilia are not uncommon in Sade, e.g. the fate of Justine's remains (cf. Chapter One).

Such superimposition of the movements of life upon a body that looks dead is arguably another defining feature of the gothic, as famously

epitomised by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). This associates the gothic with scientific preoccupations, methods and settings; as Heine notes, 'le romanesque terrifiant trouve déjà chez Sade un de ses organisateurs scientifiques' (135), and his characters 'ne jouent d'autres rôles que ceux d'aides ou d'animaux de laboratoire' (135). Scientific discourse certainly occupies an important place in Sade's militant atheism: 'Perfectionne ta physique et tu comprendras mieux la nature, épure ta raison, bannis tes préjugés et tu n'auras plus besoin de ton dieu' (*Dialogue*: 39-40). As mentioned previously, some of Beckett's later works do indeed incorporate elements that evoke a dramatised scientific experiment – for instance the passivity of Protagonist in *Catastrophe*, or the repetitive protocol of torture for the sake of some mysterious proof or truth in *Pochade* and *What Where*.

The tropes of transgressive science and the search for an elusive truth evoke the dynamics of 'looking in', of exposing what is normally hidden, which brings us to the horror of introspection and self-revelation in Beckett's late works. In their respective ways, Beckett and Sade share an awareness of literature as figurative evisceration – a frightening operation for both writer and reader. As Heine puts it, '[si Sade] veut terrifier [...] [i]l lui suffira d'inviter son lecteur à contempler la vérité nue et, son dernier bandeau arraché, hideuse. Sade découvre donc, en un domaine qui deviendra celui de la psychologie et de l'introspection, des éléments de terreur respectueux des lois naturelles' (145). In Beckett – who, as is well known, drew inspiration

from Berkeley's '*esse est percipi*',<sup>91</sup> – the terror of seeing oneself and the terror of being seen ultimately amount to the same existential horror of being. The terror of perception is a concept that necessarily encapsulates the victim/torturer couple, together with a metatextual allegory as the reader as prey; as Mays puts it: 'Sade's model of the world in terms of masters and slaves translates Berkeley's *esse est percipi* in a way very obviously relevant to the cosmic systems of monsters and their prey which Beckett explores' (279). Though, as Caselli notes, the 'I/eye' pun is 'well-worn' (187), the motif of the eye as a source of ontological terror is recurrent in the late works, for instance in the hide-and-seek horror of *Film*, but also in *Le dépeupleur*, whose narrator describes, in frightening detail, the ocular transformation that occurs in the 'vanquished': 'deux yeux donnés bleus de préférence en tant que plus périssables on les verrait s'écarquiller toujours davantage et s'injecter de sang de plus en plus et les prunelles se dilater progressivement jusqu'à manger la cornée tout entière' (32). This spectacle – for indeed it is one – has deliberately frightening meta-specular implications, both for the 'vanquished' who are becoming blind, and for the reader, whose own imagination and field of vision are metaphorically assaulted and engulfed by this monstrous, bloody pupil; Hudhomme comments: 'Le spectacle de l'écarquillement s'offre sous un mode fantasmatique [...]: l'initiation à une nouvelle forme de regard semble de fait passer par une torture de l'œil' (108).

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<sup>91</sup> For a synthesis of Berkeley's relevance to Beckett, see Matthews (2012).

The themes of the 'roman noir' and of the fear of self-perception point to the idea of textual creation and human consciousness as modes of existence carrying their own destruction within themselves. The terror of introspection, which is at once a theme and a narrative strategy, is suggestive of a fearsome constitutive element within the self that the text strives to bring to the fore while paradoxically resisting its emergence. As we shall now see, this resonates with Beckett's interest in intellectual justifications of 'evil' as necessary or inevitable; these of course include Sade, but also philosophical and religious traditions such as Manichaeism and occasionalism.

### 3. Satirising occasionalism with Manichaeism

Bataille titles the fifth section of his foreword to *Justine* 'LE VICE EST PEUT-ÊTRE LE CŒUR DE L'HOMME' (x). In this section, he evokes the possibility that sadism, which 'nous pourrions porter en nous [...] comme une excroissance, qui peut-être jadis eut son utilité, qui n'en a plus' (x) may be an inherent part of what it means to be human: 'S'agit-il [...] d'une part souveraine et irréductible de l'homme, mais qui se déroberait à sa conscience?' (x). This a question that the reading of Sade raises constantly and that, as Bataille goes on to point out, leads to further questions regarding the notion of normality. For Sade, vice is the only epistemological certainty, and underlies all human passions and desires: 'la thèse sadienne par excellence [...] pose que le Mal est plus réel que le bien, [...] [ce] qui revient à dire que le seul réel est le Mal' (Marty: 122). Vice

and violence, like all things found in Nature, have inherent legitimacy and purpose. All that is natural, however abject or perverted, is held to be truer and better than morality and religion, seen as fallacies. These principles, relentlessly repeated from work to work, are summed up in the opening of Sade's *Dialogue*, in which the dying man justifies his refusal to repent for his crimes: 'Créé par la nature avec des goûts très vifs, avec des passions très fortes; [je fus] uniquement placé dans ce monde pour m'y livrer et pour les satisfaire' (36-37). Such suggestions of the possibly constitutive nature of violence in human societies certainly find echoes in Beckett, for instance in the mindless violence of *Le dépeupleur*, whose narrator admits that 'dans ce vieux séjour tout n'est pas encore tout à fait pour le mieux' (50), and asks: 'Le cylindre n'est-il pas voué à plus ou moins longue échéance au désordre sous la seule loi de la rage et de la violence?' (42).

While it is difficult to define the archetypal notion of 'evil', it may be identified with the wicked, the violent and unruly, or what Bataille describes as 'l'irréductible négation de ce qui, sous les noms de raison, d'utilité, et d'ordre, a fondé l'humanité' (x). But, for Bataille, this inherent principle of disharmony does not normalise or exonerate Sade, whose cult of destruction is not so much excess as 'une sorte de déraillement' or 'irrégularité' (xxi). On the contrary, other readings of Sade, most notably Pierre Klossowski's *Sade mon prochain* (1947) – which Klossowski later retracts in *Le philosophe scélérat* (1967) – seek to re-establish Sade as the emblem of a kind of Manichaeism

articulated around a theological revolt that is not so much the negation of God as it is a paradoxical return to 'une pensée chrétienne archaïque, celle de la gnose manichéenne et sa théologie du Dieu méchant' (Marty: 64). It is worth noting that, while Beckett was intellectually unimpressed by Klossowski's first Sadean reading and reticent to include it in his and Duthuit's critical compilation on Sade – 'Ça m'a l'air d'un fumisme sans égal' (L2: 223) – he did have an interest in the complex theological and philosophical history of Manichaeism, which deploys motifs that find aesthetic echoes in his works, in particular later ones. This trope of the 'God-hating man' appears perhaps most clearly in 'Sans': 'Il maudira Dieu comme au temps béni face au ciel ouvert l'averse passagère' (69; 77). These words hark back to the myth of the Flood and God's deliberate destruction of his creation; while, in the Book of Genesis, the Flood is known as God's righteous punishment for man's wickedness, in Gnostic mythology, it is an act of pure aggression, an 'attack on human beings who according to *The Secret Book of John* were spiritually superior to him' (García Martínez and Luttikhuisen: 115). The 'théologie du Dieu méchant' has strong resonances with the sadistic absurdity of the Law discussed earlier in relation to Beckett and Kafka; in *The Penal Colony*, for instance, the 'previous commandant' described by the officer is a totalitarian despot whose Justice is based on terror, like the Gnostics' malevolent creator: 'Well, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the organization of the entire penal colony is his creation' (115). In *Not I, Mouth*

dismisses God's love for his creation as a fallacy: 'brought up as she had been to believe... with the other waifs... in a merciful... [Brief laugh.] ...God... [Good laugh.]' (377).

Beckettian variations on the theme of evil may be said to encapsulate the tension between the gnostic view of the world as a conflict between light and dark, or good and evil, and the occasionalist concept of pre-established harmony, according to which 'evil' is a constitutive limitation of the human condition – a limitation regarded as being of divine origin and which, therefore, operates a reversal of 'evil' into 'good' – or, rather, 'perfect.' There is a similar tension at the heart of Sade's theology and its modern reception – which may have lead Klossowski, quoting from *Juliette*, to comment that 'evil' is "un être moral et non pas un être créé: un être éternel [...] qui existait avant le monde, qui constituait l'être monstrueux, exécration qui pût créer un monde aussi bizarre" [et par conséquent] ne peut soutenir l'univers que par le mal; ne le perpétuer que pour le mal; et ne permet à la créature d'exister qu'imprégnée de mal' (104-05). This impalpable, imperturbable and immanent evil operates within humans, animals and matter alike and, as Sade claims, drives them to the selfishness and destruction required for their own preservation. Sade's argument for the necessity of evil therefore has occasionalist, specifically Leibnizian undertones; it seems likely that Beckett would have appreciated the irony of this connection.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) attempted to reconcile religious faith and the methods of rationalist enquiry by positing God not as 'good' or 'evil' but as 'perfect.' Beckett read *La monadologie* (1714) in 1933 (around the same time he discovered Sade), describing it as 'a great cod, but full of splendid little pictures' (*L1*: 172); this comment is in keeping with Beckett's analogy between his use of his reading as 'bits of pipe' he happens to have with him. Drawing on the Greek philosophers' prescience of modern physics, but also on Descartes' *cogito*, *La monadologie* seeks to prove the existence of God by proposing an atomistic view of the world according to what is known in philosophy as the 'principe de raison suffisante', which postulates that nothing exists without reason and states that the concept of God suffices to explain everything in the universe.<sup>92</sup> For Leibniz, all things are made up of single entities ('monades') of varying degrees of sentience and self-awareness. The relationship and dynamics of the 'monads' between themselves is predetermined by the divine principle of 'pre-established harmony', which, like Sade's 'nature', necessarily plans for destruction and creation in equal measures: 'ce globe, par exemple, doit être détruit et réparé par les voies naturelles, dans les moments que le demande le gouvernement des esprits, pour la récompense des uns et le châtement des autres' (1884: 31-32). This recalls the introduction of *Les Infortunes de la vertu*: 'puisqu'il y a dans la

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<sup>92</sup> Other philosophers also put forward this argument, including the Presocratics, medieval theologians, Spinoza and later Schopenhauer in *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* (1847).

constitution imparfaite de notre mauvais monde une somme de maux égale à celle de bien, il est essentiel pour le maintien de l'équilibre qu'il y ait autant de bons que de méchants' (50). In Leibniz's system, not only are God's will and Justice indistinguishable, but he also employs the kind of *langage étatique* which Bataille denounced as the sly, self-legitimising language of the law: 'Dieu comme architecte contente en tout Dieu comme législateur, et [...] les péchés doivent porter leur peine avec eux par l'ordre de la nature, et en vertu même de la structure mécanique des choses' (1884: 32).

Like Sade's, most of Leibniz's comments about the workings of the physical world are based on the fundamental observation that matter is not inert, and must therefore be animated or driven by *something*; however, unlike Sade, a series of syllogisms leads him to conclude that this *something* is necessarily God. The implications of Leibniz's reasoning encapsulate the conflict between modern science and creationism, in terms of their contrastive approaches to the quest for Truth: on the one end, ignorance leads to curiosity and pragmatic investigation; on the other, it leads to theism.<sup>93</sup> But it is striking how close Leibniz's use of the word 'God' is to Sade's use of the concept of 'nature', for instance in his earlier *Discours de Métaphysique* (1686): 'Dieu ne fait rien hors d'ordre. [...] Ceci est si vrai que non seulement rien n'arrive dans le monde qui soit absolument irrégulier, mais on ne saurait même rien

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<sup>93</sup> Richard Dawkins's militant atheism provides a fitting example of the contemporary use of this argument: 'Areas where there is a lack of data, or a lack of understanding, are automatically assumed to belong, by default, to God' (128).

[imaginer] de tel' (1907: 32-33). In other words, nothing exists outside of Leibniz's God, or Sade's 'nature', and it follows that both must be impossible to outrage, since they already encompass all things, including 'necessary evil.' For all intents and purposes, Leibniz's argumentation falls back on Sade's Priest's in *Dialogue*, whose theism is portrayed as fuelling his ignorance and making him uncurious of the laws of physics. Yet more ironically, the Moribund's own justification for his crimes may be described as a solipsistic variation of the principle of sufficient reason: the presence of vice within him is proof enough of his right to act upon it.

The notion of 'necessary evil' is central to another major name in Beckett's library, this time a literary one: Dante. Dante's *Divine Comedy* implies from the outset that sin was always to be a constitutive part of divine creation, due to the eternal existence of Hell as a provision for punishment. Beckett's later works demonstrate increased aesthetic sensitivity to this idea, in particular in *Le dépeupleur* and *Mal vu mal dit* (1980), where Dante and Sade meet in a reimagined kind of hell, half-way between Dante's 'Purgatory' and Sade's *boudoirs*. Intellectually, Sade was hostile to the idea of Hell – 'ce dogme effroyable de l'enfer' (*Justine*, t. 6: 292) – however his works repeatedly stage the ambition to emulate the evil creator and reinvent Hell on Earth, not only through destruction but through the creation of new monsters such as Juliette or Eugénie. As Beckett's early comment that '[h]ell is the static lifelessness of unrelieved viciousness' (*DBVC*: 33) also suggests, we shall now see that such

contrastive visions of evil as Dante's and Sade's can coexist within Beckett's aesthetics.

In Sade and Beckett, the notion of 'evil' is often associated with that of location, particularly enclosed places, within which this evil is concentrated, e.g. the Château de Silling, the cylinder of *Le dépeupleur* or, as we shall see, the mysterious 'cabanon' in *Mal vu mal dit*. Dante's *Inferno* was a major source of inspiration in designing such places. The inscription, or warning, found on the Gate of Hell in Canto III before Dante enters the underworld, made a particularly strong impression on Beckett: 'Par moi l'on va dans la cité des larmes; par moi l'on va dans l'abîme des douleurs; par moi l'on va parmi les races criminelles. La justice anima mon sublime créateur: je suis l'ouvrage de la divine puissance, de la haute sagesse et du premier amour [...]. Ô vous qui entrez, laissez toute espérance!'<sup>94</sup> As in Leibniz's philosophy, God and Justice are made equivalent; the inscription therefore represents a similar type of 'langage étatique' to that identified in Sade by Bataille. The Gate of Hell makes recurrent appearances in Beckett's works, for instance in 'Long after Chamfort', a collection of seven short maxims rhymed and adapted between 1972 and 1976 from a contemporary of Sade, French aphorist Nicholas

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<sup>94</sup> Quoted from a French translation of the *Commedia* (1925: 11), which Beckett owned and may have inspired the title of *Premier amour* (cf. Nixon and Van Hulle: 106). British translator Henry Francis Cary – whose translation Beckett also owned (cf. Nixon & Van Hulle, 267) and re-read in July 1971 (cf. Knowlson, 1997: 583) – challenges Montor's translation of 'la perdura gente' as 'les races criminelles', writing 'the people lost for aye'.

Chamfort (1741-1794). The sixth, and first published, maxim<sup>95</sup> (reproduced below alongside its French original) refers to Dante's Gate as a metaphor of perdition and hopelessness:

L'espérance n'est qu'un charlatan qui nous trompe sans cesse; et, pour moi, le Bonheur n'a commencé que lorsque je l'ai eu perdu. Je mettrais volontiers sur la porte du paradis le vers que le Dante a mis sur celle de l'enfer: Lasciate ogni speranza etc.

Hope is a knave befools us evermore  
Which till I lost no happiness was mine.  
I strike from Hell's to grave on heaven's door:  
All hope abandon ye who enter in. (*Poems*: 160-75)

As Caselli (184) has shown, *The Lost Ones* (1972), Beckett's translation of *Le dépeupleur*, owes its title not to Lamartine, but to Dante's Gate, the incessant 'rekindling of hope' paradoxically dooming the creatures in the cylinder to eternal perdition. The Gate as a physical structure can also be identified as the 'Shepherds' Gate' in 'Le calmant' and *Molloy* (cf. Caselli: 127; 145-46). In *Mal vu mal dit*, the Gate is transposed to a 'cabanon' located, like Dante's Gate – which is reached through 'a gloomy wood, astray | Gone from the path direct' (1909: 5) – quite literally in the middle of nowhere, '[à] l'inexistant centre d'un espace sans forme' (8-9).

In an echo of the inscription above Dante's Gate, the 'cabanon' is introduced into the narration with its own warning: 'Le cabanon. Son emplacement. Attention' (8). This emphasises its spatio-temporal nature, which is a defining feature of Dante's Gate of Hell, since it is at once a

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<sup>95</sup> Published as 'Kottabista' in *Hermathena: a Dublin University Review* (summer 1973).

physical crossing into another realm and predates Time itself, having come into existence at the same time as divine power; as the inscription proclaims: 'rien ne fut créé avant moi, que les substances éternelles, et moi je dure éternellement' (1925: 11). The Gate thus metaphorises the notion of threshold and, as such, is an instance of what Bakhtin has termed the literary chronotope, in which 'spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought out, concrete whole' (84). The 'cabanon' seems to radiate a deathly toxicity that gradually causes its surrounding environment to deteriorate: 'Des cailloux y abondent toujours plus nombreux. L'herbe la plus mauvaise s'y fait toujours plus rare. Enclave au milieu d'une maigre campagne elle gagne lentement sur celle-ci. [...] [À] l'époque lointaine de son érection la luzerne venait jusqu'à ses murs' (9-10). These toxic, possibly malevolent connotations, as well as the cabin's spatio-temporal permanence and primacy, are reinforced in the clear aura of fatality that emanates from the cabin:

Sans que personne s'y oppose. S'y soit jamais opposé. Comme s'il s'agissait d'une fatalité. [...] En sous-entendant qui plus est que c'est [le cabanon] le fautif. Et à partir de lui comme d'un foyer maléfique que le comment mal dire que le mal s'est répandu. Sans que personne en ait jamais préconisé la démolition. Comme si une fatalité le protégeait. (9-10)

Bakhtin's application of the chronotope principle on his reading of Dante yields compelling similarities with *Mal vu mal dit*: in the *Inferno*, '[e]verything that on earth is divided by time [...] coalesces into eternity, into pure simultaneous existence [...] in the synchrony of a single moment' (157). For

Bakhtin, the true meaning of eternity and timelessness can only be revealed 'under conditions of simultaneity – or [...] in an environment outside time altogether' (157); this corresponds to Dante's and Beckett's respective Gate and cabin, which exist in a spatio-temporal limbo and fictionalise ambivalence and uncertainty.

This 'nowhen' and 'nowhere' also characterises the Sadean 'refuge sans issue'; the prisons in which his victims are held captive are invariably so remote and impenetrable that, as they are told at the start of the *120 journées*, they are 'déjà mortes au monde'. The location of the Château de Silling precludes all possibility of return: 'Durcet a fait réunir [...] un précipice de plus de mille pieds de profondeur, par un [...] pont de bois, que l'on abattit dès que les derniers équipages furent arrivés: et, de ce moment-là, plus aucune possibilité quelconque de communiquer au château' (58-59). It is this very impossibility that situates Silling not only outside mappable space but also outside conventional time, since the victims, like Dante's damned, are effectively 'lost' by the time they reach it. The duke's introductory harangue to the prisoners of Silling serves the same narrative and diegetic function as the words of warning that come with Dante's Gate and Beckett's cabin in the woods.

Beckett's continued reception of Sade in his late works may be seen as part of a poetic and metaphysical reflection on creation and destruction as

two constitutive and equally violent aspects of reality; as Sade puts it, 'si notre merveilleuse espèce venait à s'anéantir sur ce globe, [...] en rendant à la nature la faculté créatrice qu'elle nous cède, [elle] lui redonnerait une énergie que nous lui enlevons en nous propageant' (*PB*: 81). Transposed to the poetic plane, this depolarisation of the positive and the negative coincides with the Beckettian aporia of a textual art that tends at once towards language and silence, fear of being and fear of not-being. In Beckett and Sade, therefore, like constitutive evil in the occasionalist world, the text carries its own potential destruction within itself.

The 'seat and germ of all [evil]' (*MVMD*: 100; 105) in late Beckett is after all the seat, not of reason, but of consciousness, imagination and the impulse to write, i.e. the head, the skull; this is implied repeatedly in *Mal vu mal dit*: 'Seat of all. Germ of all' (91); 'the head said seat of all. Germ of all. [...]' There in the sunken head the sunken head' (97). These comments resonate with Sade's compulsive reliance on language and writing as (vain) outlets for his impossible lubricious desires; from this perspective, these words by Klossowski make for a fitting theological allegory of Beckett's and Sade's poetics: 'L'acte de créer étant une conséquence même de la chute parce qu'elle n'est que la révolte d'un démiurge contre le Dieu pur des esprits, c'est la création tout entière qui porte le sceau de la malédiction' (140).

Sade's necessarily perverse relationship with language – which Blanchot describes as 'la folie propre de Sade' (quoted in Marty: 328) – is

arguably what doomed him to a life of incarceration. It is indeed through an aesthetics of writing and literary production as categorical imperatives or necessarily evil – in short, a curse of sorts – that Beckett's and Sade's poetics are most strongly connected. Mays writes: 'Beckett's achievement rests upon failure, as de Sade's does, and both acknowledge the disproportion between imagination and what imagination can realise' (281). Creative inspiration is felt as a kind of madness, a drive entirely unconcerned with 'reason', as implied in *Mal vu mal dit*, in which such comments as 'La folle du logis s'en donne à cœur chagrin' (21) obliquely evoke a personified imagination through the vision of the ghostly protagonist – who, neither dead nor alive, also challenges rational categorisation.

Ultimately, the 'mind achieving creation' of *Dream* (16) and the 'eye'/'I' of the later works connect under the rule of the compulsive madness of imagination: 'sous sa [l'œil] paupière champ libre à la déraison' (*MVMD*: 27). As shall be argued in the Conclusion, the centrality of the role of imagination and introspection in Sade and Beckett points to a common poetics of 'looking.'

CONCLUSION  
METADISCOURSE AND THE POETICS OF LOOKING

This thesis has sought to demonstrate Sade's enduring impact upon Beckett's works throughout the considerable evolution of his style and aesthetics over time. Going further than merely situating Sade's significance within Beckett's documented and demonstrable interactions with his writings, this research has provided a reconstitution of Beckett's reception of Sade, which I have delineated by way of a cross-examination of Sade's relevance to Beckett's known aesthetic and intellectual preoccupations, in particular philosophy, psychology and literature. While Beckett's concerns with the transgressive, the perverted, the obscene, or with violence and sexuality stand out as some of the most obvious parallels between their respective *œuvres*, one of the objectives of this project has been to give equal weight to the fact that Beckett's reading of these texts was from the outset one that placed Sade in his own intellectual and historical context. My aim was in part to show that, from his first reading of the *120 journées*, Beckett saw Sade as an epitome of contradiction: a man born an aristocrat but praising the Republic (possibly out of self-preservation), who lived in the eighteenth century and died in the nineteenth; a 'philosopher' upholding the powers of Enlightenment rationalism but inexorably failing to sustain the logic of his own self-justifying system, praising the rule of 'natural' libidinous impulses but ultimately

victimised by his own; and, what is certainly most in tune with Beckett's poetics, a man fundamentally dissatisfied with writing as a catharsis for existential suffering, whose logorrhœic language is really a kind of silence.

Indeed, the metalinguistic, metatextual and metadiscursive aspects of Beckett's interest in Sade with regard to his own exploration of paradox and aporia in his works have serious implications in terms of understanding why, as Apollinaire predicted, the twentieth century was to be the one in which Sade became recognised as a literary figure. The 'seriousness' with which the twentieth century came to treat Sade lies in the gradual willingness to engage with his works in one way or another rather than banning or ignoring them, and to see that, for good or ill, there may be something profoundly human – and therefore worth reflecting upon – to be found in Sade's monstrosity. 'La condition du sérieux', Marty writes, 'c'est la réflexivité: pas de sérieux sans réflexivité, sans retour de la chose sur elle-même, sans retour de la chose réfléchie sur le sujet qui est en rapport avec elle, sans retour de la lecture sur le lecteur, de la lecture sur elle-même' (69). Beckett's 'seriousness', therefore, is not articulated around a rejection of laughter – as we have seen, he frequently uses Sade as an instrument of parody – but around a principle of introspection, which arguably governs both Beckett's and Sade's works.

At the beginning of the thesis, we asked what Beckett's incorporation of Sadean motifs in his own literary and dramatic production can tell us about the evolution of his creative process and aesthetics over time. We have seen

that the explicit references to Sade of his early period all but disappear as Beckett becomes more familiar with the works and better able to exploit their inner themes and dynamics in less ostentatious, more personal (less Joycean) ways. After *Comment c'est*, the long-standing motif of the suffering body begins to take precedence over the abject, grotesque physicality of the early and middle periods, thus illustrating a new, increasingly abstract phase in Beckett's experiments with the complex relationship between language, sexuality and violence.

The body as literary metaphor is a long-standing element of Beckettian aesthetics, and a Sadean approach draws attention to important aspects of its evolution over time; in Chapter One, we have seen how the motif of autoeroticism is used as a solipsistic allegory of artistic creation in the early works and the Three Novels. Through an investigation of anal-sadistic patterns, Chapter Two has shown the importance of the dynamics of digestion and excretion in the economy of Beckett's world; such scatological motifs often come together to form metaphors and allegories of the act of creation. *Watt* features a Beckettian 'picture of the artist' tormented by the creative impulse and ill-equipped to satisfy it, i.e. the painting in Erskine's room, showing a 'man about to be delivered, after many days, of particularly hard stool' (251): retention of the creative impulse is impossible, but expression is equally excruciating. Similarly, Molloy apologises for dwelling on the subject of his anus, 'ce honteux orifice' (108), adding 'c'est ma muse qui

le veut' (108). In *L'Innommable*, the narrator summons fictive figures from previous works, to be 'shat' on as though each new thought were but a stratum in a large heap of dung: 'Mais achevons notre pensée, avant de chier dessus. Car si je suis Mahood, je suis Worm aussi. Plof. Ou si je ne suis pas encore Worm, je le serai, en n'étant plus Mahood. Plof' (84). By doing so, the narrator of *L'Innommable* illustrates the dynamics of alterity also delineated in Chapter Two, in which the 'self' seeks to alleviate its suffering through the creation, instrumentalisation, and later torture of a self-same other: 'Murphy, Molloy et autres Malone, je n'en suis pas dupe [...]. J'ai cru bien faire, en m'adjoignant ces souffre-douleur. Je me suis trompé. Ils n'ont pas souffert mes douleurs, leurs douleurs ne sont rien, à côté des miennes' (27-28). Creation is thus explicitly likened to a form of metatextual sadism deployed in a fruitless attempt at palliating existential pain and ontological insecurity – the parallel with Justine, Sade's most iconic avatar and 'souffre-douleur', is striking here. As Chapter Three has shown by way of a comparative case study of *Comment c'est* and the *120 journées*, Beckett consolidates the link between suffering and language, devising a Sadean system of linguistic torture inflicted to a (potentially fictional) victim by a narrator whose ontological grounding is from the outset at what can only be described as an advanced stage of dilapidation. Chapter Four has continued to analyse the enduring motif of torture in the later works as an allegory of the agonising process of linguistic creation. Parallels were drawn between the functions of

language and silence in their respective works, and the motif of linguistic torture that is so prominent in Beckett was related to Kafka's *The Penal Colony*. Torturers and victims in Beckett and Sade may be seen as iterations of a dramatised split pseudo-authorial self caught in a vicious circle of suffering, perpetually at war with itself and doomed to vain and violent attempts at expressing the fearsome visions within. For both authors, ultimately, whether creation is associated with sexuality or violence (which, in a Schopenhauerian sense, are really the same thing), 'art is the apotheosis of solitude' (*Proust*: 64).

### **The right to write: poetics of realism and obscenity**

As Beckett knew – if only from reading Apollinaire's book (15) – Sade encapsulated his defensive justification of his controversial writings in the epigraph to the *Nouvelle Justine*: 'On n'est point criminel pour faire la peinture | Des étranges penchants qu'inspire la nature.' Nearly half a century before Émile Zola was born, Sade's argumentation was essentially a naturalistic manifesto: as he puts it in *Idées sur les romans*, '[les romans,] hommes hypocrites et pervers [...] servent à vous peindre, et à vous peindre tels que vous êtes, orgueilleux individus qui voulez vous soustraire au pinceau, parce que vous en redoutez les effets' (34). While it could of course be doubted whether Sade truly believed that it was possible to represent 'nature' realistically in the absolute sense of the term, or that this was the sole function of novels in general (and his in particular), such poetics clearly seem quite

alien to Beckett's art, which sought to foster a visceral, Artaudian immediacy between the artwork and its audience, an art tending towards the suppression of the discursive and didactic powers of language. As the very titles of *Imagination morte imaginez* or *Mal vu mal dit* suggest, the artist can no longer operate on the assumption that language should be used to 'promote [an] understanding' of reality (L3: 306).<sup>96</sup> By contrast, Sade was in no way perturbed by the inherent inadequacies and limitations of language: 'On n'a jamais le droit de mal dire, quand on peut dire tout ce qu'on veut' (*Idées*: 38) – of course, for Beckett, the artist has no choice but to 'mal dire'.

Beyond the apparent theoretical differences of their poetics, however, Beckett's and Sade's works do share a complex relationship with the concepts of reality and verisimilitude. In *Idées*, Sade characteristically contradicts himself shortly after having defined the function of the novel as a faithful depiction of the world, addressing a hypothetical artist and stating: 'on ne te demande point d'être vrai, mais seulement d'être vraisemblable' (37). The unstable distinction between the two categories is somewhat ironic, considering the extraordinary circumstances Sade invokes in order to stage most of his murderous orgies. Sade's debatable success in achieving verisimilitude evokes Beckett's consternation at Balzac's 'chloroformed work' and 'clockwork cabbages' (quoted in Ackerley and Gontarski: 37), in particular his remark that '[t]he bathos of style & thought is so enormous that

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<sup>96</sup> February 1960 letter to Patrick Magee discussing the language of *How It Is*.

I wonder is he writing seriously or in parody' (*L1*: 245), which could certainly apply to Sade's works as well. It follows that the inner paradox (or fundamental limitation) of realism may lie in the fact that obsessive application of its principle ultimately confers an unreal character to the work. To Maurice Girodias's comment that 'Beckett attaquait non pas la moralité, mais la réalité, ce qui allait dans le même sens et était bien plus grave' (238), we could therefore add that Sade, in his own way, also carries out a kind of attack on reality, by reinterpreting it as wholly perverted and vicious: 'le romancier est l'homme de la nature, elle l'a créé pour être son peintre; s'il ne devient pas l'amant de sa mère dès que celle-ci l'a mis au monde, qu'il n'écrive jamais, nous ne le lirons point' (*Idées*: 36). This statement makes for a telling illustration of Sade's perverse poetics, conflating as it does the discourses of realism and incestuous possession.

Beyond questions of realism and verisimilitude, Beckett's and Sade's respective poetics are strongly connected through their common faith, or trust, in the artwork's right to exist and be seen/read no matter how obscene and irreverent it may seem. Both regarded censorship as an obscurantist threat to art and liberty; as Beckett writes in *Le monde et le pantalon*: 'L'œuvre soustraite au jugement des hommes finit par expirer, dans d'effroyables supplices. L'œuvre considérée comme création pure, et dont la fonction s'arrête avec la genèse, est vouée au néant' (13). Crucially, Beckett felt that the

worst effect of censorship was to deny individuals the simple right to derive enjoyment ('jouir') from art in the name of morality:

[L]'inoffensif loufoque qui court, comme d'autres au cinéma, dans les galeries, au musée et jusque dans les églises avec l'espoir – tenez-vous bien – de jouir. Il ne veut pas s'instruire, le cochon, ni devenir meilleur. Il ne pense qu'à son plaisir. C'est lui qui justifie l'existence de la peinture en tant que chose publique. [...] Il ne demande qu'à jouir. L'impossible est fait pour l'en empêcher. (14-15)

There is a distinct Sadean ring to Beckett's advocacy of art as a democratic source of emotional, aesthetic or sensual pleasure – or indeed 'metaphysical ecstasy'; the average art consumer is a 'pig', or 'swine' whose entitlement to gratification is fundamentally innocuous and quite divorced from any moral considerations. It is enough, he says, for one 'amateur (éclairé)' (13) to find 'jouissance' in the artwork for the work to be 'saved' from oblivion, which necessarily calls to mind the slow excavation of Sade's works at the beginning of the twentieth century.

### **The poetics of looking**

The aesthetics and poetics of obscenity in Beckett and Sade, together with their works' complex relationship with the concept of reality, bring us back to their main common poetic principle as mentioned at the end of Chapter Four: the notion of introspection or, from the perspective of the writer, the compulsion to show, expose and reveal what is normally hidden or unseen – that to which the reader/audience would not normally have access. It must be

noted that, especially in Beckett's case, the notion of exposition as understood here by no means necessarily implies an effort to make sense of the 'big blooming buzzing confusion' (*Murphy*: 6) of the world within. Rather, it is the effort to bring that confusion forth into the textual/dramatic universe through the acts of looking and opening; as Beckett once said: 'The only chance of renovation is to *open our eyes* and *see* the mess' (quoted in Driver: 218 – emphasis mine). Indeed, the poetics of looking in Beckett become increasingly central to his writing as it takes on more and more abstract aesthetic characteristics in the later works: '[t]he particular literary quality that is shared by all of Beckett's later prose [...] is produced in part by this sense that the invisible has been brought out of hiding' (Boxall: 41). The linguistic and formal implications of such an endeavour were already essential to Beckett's poetics in the 1930s, as formulated explicitly in his famous 1937 letter to Axel Kaun: 'To bore one hole after another in [language], until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today' (*Disjecta*: 172). The dynamics of looking for what 'lurks' behind the surface of language were indeed also central to Beckett's first reading of the *120 journées* only a few months later, as is evident from his remark that 'not 1 in 100 will find literature in the pornography, or beneath the pornography' (*L1*: 604).

The notions of opening, looking and disclosing condition every stage of the Sadean enterprise, from the very act of putting pen to paper to the act

of publishing (i.e. inviting to read). Sade's novels, though dependent on discursive logic to fit the needs of his 'dissertations philosophiques', are economically nearly equally concerned with staging and enacting the libertine philosophy, striving to convey the impression of a theatre play (in the etymological sense of theatre as a space for showing and viewing); the 'narratrice du mois' in the *120 journées* sits on a throne, 'placée comme est l'acteur sur un théâtre, et les auditeurs, placés dans les niches, se trouvaient [...] comme on l'est à l'amphithéâtre' (60). As Lacan observes, *La philosophie dans le boudoir* is a '[p]amphlet [...] dramatique, où un éclairage de scène permet au dialogue comme aux gestes de se poursuivre aux limites de l'imaginable' (246). While such strategies are admittedly not specific to Sadean literature, his poetics of disclosure are certainly remarkable in that what is exposed is specifically that which is obscene, taboo and cannot normally be shown (on stage or otherwise) – indeed, it even seems plausible that Sade, had he lived in the age of 'talking' cinema, might have produced a version of Pasolini's *Salò* himself – the numerous pornographic engravings commissioned as illustrations for his works testifying to his interest in the visual arts. Even the discursive element of his writing is usually framed by dramatic devices such as dialogue and embedded narrations.

Within the artwork, the strategies of exposition inform the creation of a secondary, embedded representation, either through positive description of the object of the reveal (we might call this exposition *in praesentia*) or through

evocative or suggestive means, by summoning a mental image of the object by refusing to describe it (exposition *in absentia*). Exposition *in praesentia* in Beckett and Sade frequently involves direct narrative injunctions to the reader to look or watch – in short, to imagine. *More Pricks* opens with ‘Behold Belacqua’ (1) – as Pilling notes, ‘[n]ot so much the “Ecce homo” (Behold the man) of Pontius Pilate and Christian tradition’ (2004: 16) but the phrasing conjures him up as though ‘whistled up out of nowhere like a figure in a dream might be’ (2004: 16). *Imagination morte imaginez* is another obvious, much later example of this; these dream-like figures connect imagination and introspection by directing the narrative gaze inwards. In *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, Sade mocks compassionate attitudes towards the poor by having the Chevalier paint a pathetic picture of misery interspersed with injunctions to look: ‘Quand ton corps [...] repose languissamment sur des lits de duvet, vois le leur, affaissé des travaux qui te font vivre [...]; jette un regard sur eux [...] vois ce misérable [...]; regarde-le, [...] regarde-le, te dis-je [...]; jette les yeux sur sa famille désolée’ (220). There is palpable sadistic delight in the creation of such *tableaux*.

The specular quality of the Sadean ‘scene’ indeed points to the notion of *tableau* as a common narrative strategy in Beckett and Sade; as Barthes comments, ‘le groupe sadien est un objet pictural [...]: le discours saisit les figures de débauche, non seulement arrangées, architecturées, mais surtout figées, encadrées, éclairées; il les traite en *tableaux vivants*’ (158). It is easy to

come across explicit examples of this in Sade; Dolmancé, assuming the role of master of ceremony, organises the orgy unfolding in the *boudoir* as would a painter his models and their scenery: '(La posture s'arrange.) Oui, c'est cela; tout au mieux, mes amis! En vérité, c'est un plaisir que de vous commander des tableaux; il n'est pas un artiste au monde en état de les exécuter comme vous!' (*PB*: 227-28). Juliette narrates her orgies in similar terms: 'Trois tableaux s'arrangent ensuite sous [l]es yeux [de Delcour]' (*Justine*, t. 6: 225). While the poetics of the *tableau* are more central to Beckett's later works, they were already associated with the dynamics of 'looking in' in *Murphy* for instance, particularly in the description of the enclosed, private space of the mental asylum, in which Murphy beholds an 'emaciated schizoid, petrified in a toppling attitude as though condemned to 'an eternal *tableau vivant*' (96).

As discussed in Chapter Four, *Le dépeupleur* revolves around the act of looking in; the corpse-like figures teeming inside the cylinder offer a visual superimposition of *tableaux* from the Sadean orgy and the Dantean hell – here the irony of merging the dynamics of lust and violence with Christian imagery is at once typically Sadean and Beckettian. This extends to the narrator's meticulous and orderly description of the abode and its architecture; like Sade, he begins with an overview before going into detail: 'Voilà un premier aperçu du séjour' (11) – the pleasant, leisurely connotations of the term 'séjour' contrasting ironically with its hellish referent. As Brienza comments, '[his] concern with visual impressions makes the text dramatic and

cinematic. [...] We can speculate that Beckett was working on *Film* concurrently and that he merged the form of a film script with that of a short story' (153-54). These strategies find clear precedence in Dante's successive descriptions of each circle of his Hell as well as in Sade's methodical exposition of the indoor layout of the Château de Silling, guiding the reader through a succession of 'salons', 'cabinets d'assemblée' and 'garde-robes' as though giving an actual visitor a tour of the premises: 'Qu'on observe que je vais peindre les appartements [...] comme ils venaient d'être arrangés et distribués relativement au plan projeté' (59).

The concept of exposition, like that of the obscene, exists only as defined by the inherent contrast with its own opposition, in the same way that the positive necessarily implies the negative. In Beckett and Sade, this means that some of the most powerful *tableaux* or visual representations are provided *in absentia*, relying on the powers of suggestion to stimulate the reader's/audience's imagination. Imagination in Beckett and Sade is at once a perverse principle and a dramatic device; for Sade, imagination is the abstract counterpart to physical *jouissance*: 'L'imagination est l'aiguillon des plaisirs; [...] n'est-ce pas par elle que l'on jouit? N'est-ce pas d'elle que viennent les voluptés les plus piquantes?' (PB: 74). Despite Sade's evident delight in obscene descriptions, he often employs this strategy when attempting to bring a nuance of mystery and suspense to the decor he has taken pains to set up, for instance in the depiction of the prison and torture chambers in the

basement of Silling: 'Je ne sais ce qui s'y passera, mais mais ce que je puis dire à présent sans blesser l'intérêt du récit, c'est que, quand on en fit la description au duc, il en déchargea trois fois de suite' (62).

In Beckett's *Happy Days*, exposition *in absentia* occurs when Willie hands Winnie a pornographic postcard, which, though it remains unseen by the audience, monopolises the dramatic atmosphere for a few moments. Stewart speculates that the card depicts 'a couple in a (perhaps unusual) sex act with a masturbating voyeur looking on – [...] is a recognizably Beckettian sexual scene, mixing scopophilia and masturbation with coitus' (134). There is therefore an embedded negative exposition in this scene, whose voyeuristic dynamics are not unlike Proust's 'Montjouvain' episode in which the narrator spies upon the two 'sadists' through a window; as mentioned in Chapter One, Beckett emphasises the specular nature of this passage in his comments in *Proust*: 'the sea is a veil that cannot hide the horror of Montjouvain, the intolerable vision of sadistic lubricity and a photograph defiled' (52-53). As Stewart observes, '[j]ust as Malone watched a couple from his bedroom window, Winnie cannot at first imagine what is actually occurring, but once she does realize she provides the supposedly necessary moral indignation of "just genuine pure filth"' (134). While Winnie's feigned shock at the picture confers a comic element to the episode, the poetics of negative or suggestive exposition in the theatre may also become purveyors of more disquieting dramatic tensions; for instance in *What Where*, in which the ritual

interrogations and torture are carried out off stage, leaving the audience to imagine what is being done to the three torturers-turned-victims.

Beckett's 'dramaticule' *Come and Go*, written in 1965, uses exposition *in absentia* as a structural and dramatic device; three times over the course of the play, one of Flo, Vi and Ru exits the stage in turn, leaving the other two to converse in hushed tones about the absent one:

FLO: What do you think of Vi?

RU: I see little change. (*FLO moves to centre seat, whispers in RU's ear. Appalled.*) Oh! (*They look at each other. FLO puts her finger to her lips.*) Does she not realize? God grant not. (257)

The play can be seen as enacting a reflection on the notion of obscenity which stages the act of disclosure while at the same time withholding the information exposed, as in *Happy Days*. There are no clues in the text as to what the whispered secrets entail, or even as to the tone of the dramatic sequence: the shock of the 'reveal' could conceivably be performed as funny, unsettling or as puritan indignation – indeed, Cohn writes that in the first typescript of the play, 'the three women [...] engage in lubricious dialogue' (290). This resonates strongly with the end of Sade's *Philosophie*, when Dolmancé declares that he is leaving the orgy to retire in private with Augustin; this disappoints Eugénie and Saint-Ange, who demand to know what requires such privacy that they should be excluded:

DOLMANCÉ, bas et mystérieusement: Non; il est de certaines choses qui demandent absolument des voiles. [...] Vous voulez le savoir? [...] Eh bien, mesdames, je vais... mais, en vérité, cela ne peut pas se dire. [...]

LE CHEVALIER: [...] [J]e vais vous le dire. (Il parle bas aux deux femmes.)

EUGENIE, avec l'air de la répugnance: Vous avez raison, cela est horrible.  
MME DE SAINT-ANGE: Oh! je m'en doutais.  
DOLMANCE: [...] [V]ous concevez à présent qu'il faut être seul et dans  
l'ombre pour se livrer à de pareilles turpitudes. (229-30)

In Beckett and Sade, ultimately, the strategies of exposition, whether *in praesentia* or *absentia*, on the page or on stage, reaffirm the centrality of the perverse imagination to their poetics, and open up a paradoxical dialogue about the wordless violence that underlies all representation and which the process of dramatisation brings forth into the theatrical or textual space.

This poetic dialogue between Sade and Beckett engages theoretical considerations about the complex relationship between dramatic art and subjective reality, a question explored by Antonin Artaud in his seminal work *Le théâtre et son double* (1938), in which he reassesses the stage poetics of exposition and compares the powers of dramatic tension to the violence of the plague: 'comme la peste, [le théâtre] est la révélation, la mise en avant, la poussée vers l'extérieur d'un fond de cruauté latente par lequel se localisent sur un individu ou sur un peuple toutes les possibilités perverses de l'esprit' (44). From this particular perspective, Beckett and Sade meet within the theoretical space of the 'theatre of cruelty' delineated by Artaud: 'Dans l'état de dégénérescence où nous sommes, c'est par la peau qu'on fera rentrer la métaphysique dans les esprits' (153). For Artaud, and for Beckett, what is thus exposed in the theatre must get 'through the skin' rather than through the intellect; for Sade, as argued in Chapter One, the essentially sensual

foundations of the intellect mean that even his 'philosophical' drama may be seen as a form of 'theatre of cruelty'.

However, Artaud viewed dramatic 'cruelty' as a means to revive the possibility of Aristotelian catharsis, the elicitation and subsequent purgation of 'impure' passions in the audience: 'un gigantesque abcès, tant moral que social, se vide; et de même que la peste, le théâtre est fait pour vider collectivement des abcès' (45). In Beckett's and Sade's poetics of looking, no such catharsis is at stake, or indeed desirable; on the contrary, both authors dramatise the very impossibility of catharsis for the modern subject. Sade 'ridiculise la catharsis classique en renversant ses fonctions: selon lui, le spectacle des vices humains, loin de nous débarrasser des passions, a pour but de nous inciter au Mal' (Marty: 69); in other words, what Artaud calls the 'poison du théâtre' (45) only contaminates the audience further by revealing and fuelling individual perversity. The mythical 'dénouement' of catharsis is equally ludicrous in Beckett, who, in true sadistic fashion, once described his vision for *Fin de partie/Endgame* as 'a full evening's agony' (1999a: 16).

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