

*A Witness to Pain:
Samuel Beckett
and Post-War
Francophone Drama*

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Abstract

This thesis examines how Beckett stages physical pain in his early theatre plays, arguing that *Eleutheria* (1947, pub. 1995), *En attendant Godot/Waiting for Godot* (1952/1954), *Fin de partie/Endgame* (1957), *Happy Days/Oh les beaux jours* (1961/1963), *Play/Comédie* (1964) and *Not I/Pas moi* (1972/1975) generate intensely sceptical readings of sympathetic or redemptive forms of witnessing. These plays raise questions about our capacity both to communicate our own physical suffering, and to comprehend – or in some cases even to perceive – another’s pain. They prompt us to interrogate the utopian ideas of empathetic witnessing and of the theatre auditorium as a site of intimate communion, which were popularised after World War II and which still linger in public consciousness and contemporary criticism. Bringing together Anglophone and Francophone scholarship, this project resituates Beckett’s early plays in the long aftermath of World War II in France, reading them as part of a post-war drive in Francophone literature to formulate new ways of negotiating the extreme wartime and post-war experience of witnessing others’ pain. I offer a comparison of Beckett’s plays with the work of four contemporary Francophone artists: Albert Camus, Pablo Picasso, Eugène Ionesco, and Marguerite Duras, each of whom, like Beckett, lived out World War II in France as non-native non-combatants. I explore how these plays construct a live encounter with the human body within the paradoxically intimate distance of the theatre auditorium, drawing the spectators’ own responses unsettlingly into question. This comparative examination combines close textual analysis with consideration of recorded audience responses to the staging details of specific productions, ranging from Roger Blin’s 1953 première production of *En attendant Godot* at the Théâtre de Babylone through to Vahid Rahbani’s unlicensed 2005 staging of *Eleutheria* in Tehran and Jess Thom’s 2018 staging of *Not I* at the Battersea Arts Centre.

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Introduction

“PAIN PAIN PAIN”:

Samuel Beckett’s Stage Plays and World War II

“Nothing will ever be sufficiently against for me, not even pain”, Beckett wrote to Georges Duthuit on 11 August 1948, in response to reported complaints about the relentlessly gloomy tone of his 1947 play *Eleutheria*: “Let them take aspirin, or go for long walks, before breakfast” (*Letters II* 2012, 97). This statement reveals something of the essential conundrum of physical suffering that lies at the heart of Beckett’s stage plays. Beckett characterises pain here with the rather cryptic attribute “against”, emphasising its aversive quality, or what literary scholar and pain theorist Elaine Scarry would some decades later describe as pain’s “immediate sensory rendering of ‘against’, of something being against one, and of something one must be against” (1985, 52).¹ The spectacle of pain, the reminder of the experience of pain, is typically one from which the witness recoils – and yet it is precisely this reaction that Beckett seeks to replicate as he turns to writing for the theatre in the long aftermath of World War II. In deeming even pain itself not “sufficiently against” for him, Beckett indicates his corresponding effort to cultivate this quality in his own work, figuring pain as the most likely means of stimulating the aversive response which he hopes to provoke in his spectators. This thesis examines how Beckett stages physical pain in his theatre plays following the mass suffering of World War II, and argues that Beckett’s turn to the theatre medium after the war sees him confront the spectator with an intensely embodied shock of witnessing, a live encounter with the human body present and suffering (or seemingly suffering) in the same

¹ The oddity of Beckett’s phrasing here may be in part explained by his admission to Duthuit that he was writing to him in a drunken state, “after what a day, back early, nine o’clock, after survey of all the possible clubs, all the possible pubs” in Dublin (*Letters II* 2012, 96). The original French phrasing of the letter retains this idiosyncratic adjectival use of “contre” (“against”): “Rien ne me sera jamais assez contre, pas même la douleur” (*Letter II* 2011, 95).

proximate space as their own body, drawing the audience member's own passive or even amused spectatorship unsettlingly into question.

This project thus also positions World War II as a central line of influence on Beckett's dramatic writings, and particularly on the bleak vision of pain and of the vulnerable human body which they stage. The mass conflict of World War II imposed an intense and protracted encounter with physical pain on France's occupants that left post-war artists grappling with the task of "creating new strategies for representing this massive overdose of pain" in the conflict's long aftermath (Patraka 1999, 87). I explore Beckett's plays as part of a post-war drive in Francophone literature to formulate new ways of negotiating this extreme experience of bearing witnessing to others' pain. Seeking to disrupt the more typical (and often misleadingly binary) categorising of post-war French theatre into the set categories of *le théâtre engagé* and *le théâtre de l'absurde*, I resituate Beckett's early plays in the long aftermath of World War II in France, reading them alongside the comparable responses of several of his contemporary Francophone playwrights: Albert Camus, Eugène Ionesco, Pablo Picasso, and Marguerite Duras. Chapter One explores *Eleutheria*'s foregrounding of an explicitly post-war indifference to another's pain, in comparison with the similar visions offered by Albert Camus's *Caligula* (1944), *Le Malentendu* (1944), and *L'État de siège* (1948). Chapter Two examines how *Waiting for Godot* underlines the obstacles to a shared or empathetic experience of physical pain, with particular focus on how the play provokes both recoil and laughter in its spectators. Chapter Three traces what I term the "aesthetic of the anaesthetic" in *Endgame* and Pablo Picasso's two plays *Le Désir attrapé par la queue* (*Desire Caught by the Tail*, 1944) and *Les Quatre petites filles* (*Four Little Girls*, 1949) – that is, the deliberately muted expression of the constant physical suffering that these plays stage. Chapter Four draws together *Happy Days* and *Play* alongside Ionesco's *Amédée, ou Comment s'en débarrasser* (*Amédée, or, How to Get Rid of It*, 1954) and *Le Piéton de l'air*

(*A Stroll in the Air*, 1963), examining the yearning to transcend the pain-stricken corporeal body as juxtaposed against a pessimistic reiteration of the inevitability of human physical suffering. Chapter Five explores the concealed bodily suffering in *Not I* and Marguerite Duras's *L'Amante anglaise* (1968) through the framework of trauma theory. The epilogue chapter briefly examines *Breath* (1969) and the concept of empathic unsettlement to offer a final perspective on the impact of physical pain as framed by these stage plays.

Critical commentary has not yet comprehensively explored the significance of physical pain in Beckett's theatre – and even where localised attention has been paid to the phenomenon of bodily suffering in Beckett's plays, scholars have typically ignored the specific circumstances of Beckett's beginning to write for the theatre in a post-World War II Francophone context. Beckett's plays probe the experience of witnessing to another being's pain, generating intensely sceptical readings of sympathetic or redemptive forms of witnessing. *Eleutheria* (1947, pub. 1995), *En attendant Godot/Waiting for Godot* (1952/1954), *Fin de partie/Endgame* (1957), *Happy Days/Oh les beaux jours* (1961/1963), *Play/Comédie* (1964) and *Not I/Pas moi* (1972/1975) all raise questions about our capacity to communicate our own physical suffering, and to comprehend – or even in some cases to perceive – another's pain. These questions of communication, perception and relational response lead to related issues of the affective power of the human body, the doubtful capacity of language as a means of communication, and the specific functioning of the theatre medium: all matters which lie squarely at the heart of Beckett's work. These plays repeatedly show the individual responding with indifference, withdrawal, or even outright cruelty in the face of another's pain. Indeed, the texts – and particularly the texts in performance – often seem deliberately calculated to incite such reactions in the reader or spectator herself. They accord with Diane Lüscher-Morata's description of Beckett's work more broadly, which, she says, “semble faire face aux ‘maux du monde’ sans pour autant manifester de signes

d'empathie. Son regard peut paraître totalement dénué de compassion parfois" ("seems to face the 'world's ills' without manifesting any sign of empathy. At times, its gaze can seem totally stripped of compassion"; 2005, 187). Fuller recognition of this aversive dynamic, both illustrated in and prompted by these post-war plays, can productively trouble the easy assertions of how Beckett's body of work demonstrates "the extraordinary capacity of human beings" for "compassion and empathy with human suffering" that have arisen in Beckett criticism over recent decades (Shepherd-Barr 2015, 270). These are plays that prompt us to interrogate the more utopian ideas of empathetic witnessing, and of the theatre auditorium as a site of "la solidarité des corps, l'unité au milieu de la chair mortelle et souffrante" ("the solidarity of the body, unity in the midst of mortal suffering flesh"; Camus 2013, 327-38), which were popularised in the long aftermath of World War II and which still linger in public consciousness and contemporary criticism.

I focus attention on these earlier plays as exemplifying what director Pierre Chabert has identified in Beckett's theatre as "a deliberate and intense effort to make the body come to light, to give the body its full weight, dimension, and its physical presence" (1982, 24). This is an apt description of the earlier plays under discussion here, particularly *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Happy Days*, which stage exaggeratedly visceral fleshly forms which are plainly susceptible to corporeal harm. By contrast, in many of Beckett's later stage dramaticules, such as *That Time* (1976), *Footfalls* (1976), *A Piece of Monologue* (1979), *Rockaby* (1981) and *Ohio Impromptu* (1981), the body on stage is rendered progressively more ghostly or *disembodied*, hovering somewhere "between the visible and the invisible, between absence and presence" (McMullan 1993, 59) and more vulnerable to psychic than physical forms of suffering.² This project thus examines Beckett's earliest plays as

² As is perhaps inevitably the case with any attempt to summarise the scope of Beckett's body of work, this is a necessarily generalised outline of the progress of Beckett's treatment of physical pain. While holding broadly true, it elides attention to certain variants, such as the psychic suffering of the women in *Come and Go* (1966), the presumably agonised body of the Protagonist in *Catastrophe* (1982), and the focus on physical torture

representative of his post-war attention to the dynamics of witnessing physical pain, and *Play* and *Not I* as pivotal points of juncture between this and his later focus on forms of predominantly psychological suffering.

Beckett, Camus, Ionesco, Picasso, and Duras each lived out the course of World War II in metropolitan France, but the justification for drawing Beckett's post-war theatre into comparison with these artists' writings goes beyond their geographical proximity during the war. It also goes beyond the simple fact of Beckett's being aware of the work of each of these four playwrights during much of his own writing career, although this is a dimension that we will touch on briefly in each chapter where relevant. Rather, I read a particularly close parallel between their experiences of witnessing physical pain from the specific perspective of distanced 'outsider' among all these playwrights. Despite enduring the war within the country's borders, none of these five artists were natives or even lifelong residents of metropolitan France. Camus grew up in Algeria, Picasso in Spain, Ionesco between France and Romania, Duras in Indochina (now Vietnam), and Beckett in Ireland. Each, then, witnessed France's suffering from a liminal position of insider-outsider, intimate strangers, closely sharing in their neighbours' pain and simultaneously situated as distanced observers. None were combatants during the invasion of France (although Camus, Duras and Beckett all participated in the French Resistance to varying degrees) and all escaped Vichy-Nazi imprisonment and deportation (although Beckett, Duras, and Picasso would come particularly close to arrest). Thus all found themselves more frequently observing, from the distanced position of external witness, the extreme pain of others – while nevertheless enduring their own distinct bodily suffering under wartime conditions, and living in fearful anticipation of Nazi violence. These post-war plays, then, demonstrate a concern with a proximate yet

(although not the depiction of said torture on stage, it must be noted) in *What Where* (1983). For further exploration of this evolution in how Beckett presents the human body between his earlier and later theatre, see McMullan 2010, 1997, and 1993.

distanced witnessing of pain, the experience of the outsider-observer facing a paradoxically close encounter with another's intense suffering.³ It is in part from this historical grounding that these post-war plays recurrently draw their dramaturgical – and, in some cases, translingual – structures of unsettling confrontation with another's physical pain.

Finally, all these 'playwrights' worked often or even primarily within other literary or artistic media. Like Beckett, who had published only prose and poetry before the outbreak of the war, Camus, Duras, and even Ionesco were more established as prose writers prior to the end of World War II, and both Camus and Duras would, like Beckett, return to prose writing periodically throughout their careers; Picasso, of course, is far more famous as a painter than as a sometime playwright and poet. I contend that the post-war focus on the experience of witnessing another's pain is a neglected factor, particularly for Beckett, in the decision to begin writing in the theatrical medium. This is not to suggest that Beckett wrote only for the stage following World War II, since he would, of course, continue to write both prose and poetry in the war's aftermath, including the poem "Saint-Lô 1945", the novel *Mercier et Camier*, and the short stories "L'Expulsé" ("The Expelled"), "Le Calmant" ("The Calmative"), "La Fin" ("The End") and "Premier Amour" ("First Love"), all published in 1946. What I emphasise here is the fact that Beckett would begin writing plays in earnest only after the end of World War II; he had previously abandoned both of his pre-war attempts at writing for the stage, *Mittelalterliches Dreieck* (*Medieval Triangle*, 1936) and *Human Wishes* (1936), without completing them. This turn to the theatre offers a means of staging a live encounter between the body of the spectator and the pained or seemingly pained body on stage, a flesh-and-blood confrontation rather than the more abstract mediation of the body via printed words on a page. Anna McMullan has commented on "the specificity of the theatre"

³ Indeed, just as Beckett's self-othering turn to writing in the French language during World War II replicates this idea of liminal or proximate 'distance' within the textual dynamics of the post-war plays, so too do Ionesco's and Picasso's comparable shifts to writing in a French language which was not their native tongue.

as a medium for a heightened bodily encounter between spectator and performer: “the spectators share the space and time of performance with the actors, and the live spectacle of the constrained or distorted body of the performer/persona is therefore like to impact viscerally on them” (2010, 107). The affective resonance thus transmitted between staged and spectating bodies within the theatre auditorium has intense and often unpredictable consequences for the process of witnessing pain within the auditorium. On one hand, the theatre medium allows for susceptible forms of intercorporeal sympathy, the type of responsive bodily encounter that medical sociologist Arthur W. Frank has emphasised as necessary in the context of bearing witness to another being’s physical suffering: “This reciprocity of witnessing requires not one communicative body but a *relationship of communicative bodies*” (2013, 143; original emphasis). On the other hand, the plays under discussion here often provoke a shocked or disgusted recoil away from the spectacle of abject pain, a hardened indifference bred by the mid-century horizon of expectations, or even an amused gratification or enthrallment faced with the virtuosic performance of suffering. Similar reactions are frequently dramatised through the plays’ onstage spectator-figures – Beckett’s “Shower or Cooker” couple and the *Not I* Auditor, Camus’s emperor Caligula, Duras’s Interrogator, and so on – thus further generating a “mise en relief du public et implication de la salle dans la problématique” (“emphasising and implicating the audience in the problem”; Engelberts 1998, 183). For each of these artists, the theatre medium offers a generative mode of reconstructing the challenging encounter with the spectacle of another being’s physical pain.

This project also resituates Beckett’s post-war writing back in its Francophone context, and fosters conversation between the Francophone and Anglophone schools of critical writing on Beckett’s theatre. By acknowledging the influence of the French literary context within which Beckett studied, read, wrote, and produced work for the stage – what

Ann Beer calls his “artistic sympathy with the contemporary scene in Paris” (1994, 215) – we stand to achieve a fuller and more nuanced perspective on the resultant plays. Similarly, drawing together the Anglophone and Francophone fields of scholarship into mutually informing conversation offers an enlarged scope for informed multi-perspectival scholarship, as particularly demonstrated by the ongoing work of the *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd’hui* journal. Andrew Gibson has argued convincingly in recent years against reading Beckett’s immediate post-war works as “an indirect rendering of Anglophone preoccupations displaced into another language”, suggesting instead that “the concerns that powered it were immediately contemporary and French” (2014, 103) – and indeed, he still more specifically argues that the “large measure of harsh disenchantment, even strains of populist brutality and cynicism” that he reads in Beckett’s post-war prose find their corollary in a dissident French population sceptical of Gaullist claims of regeneration that risked eliding the sufferings of the war’s victims (2014, 113). However, there has been some resistance – on both sides of the Channel – to reading Beckett within a specifically Francophone literary context. Shane Weller, for example, has argued that “it would be a mistake to see Beckett’s switch to French in March 1946 as an attempt to locate himself squarely within a French literary tradition” (2013, 170), citing Pascale Casanova’s argument that, for many post-war writers, Paris represented an “international capital of artists who refused to submit to a national vision”, and to base oneself there in the war’s aftermath “was not in itself a choice in favour of France” in any narrow political sense, but rather “a demand for international (or anti-national) autonomy” (2006, 83). Certainly, this project is in many ways as interested in Beckett’s enduring sense of alienation from as well as loyalty to France – and it is notable that rather scattered analysis of the mutual correspondences between Beckett’s work and historical and contemporary French writers still markedly outweighs the very little work that has been dedicated to Beckett’s shared ground with fellow Francophone (rather than metropolitan

French) artists. Yet this does not depreciate the value of careful attention to influence of the literary, social, and political Francophone context in which Beckett wrote many of his most eminent works. Alys Moody's recent analysis of Beckett's post-war writing in *The Art of Hunger: Aesthetic Autonomy and the Afterlives of Modernism* (2018) has, for example emphatically demonstrated the value of repositioning Beckett's work within an explicitly French or Francophone context; as Weller himself goes on to admit, "Beckett read, view[ed] and appreciate[d] the works of writers and artists in post-war Paris" and "his œuvre also shares with theirs a number of major preoccupations" – including, specifically here, the experience of witnessing wartime and post-war pain – and "the reception of his post-war works in the early 1950s was so positive not least because those works seemed particularly relevant in the context out of which they came" (2013, 170-71).

Nevertheless, whereas scholarly criticism drawing on the influence of the historical and political context of Ireland on Beckett's work has flourished in recent decades,⁴ comparable work probing the influence of the cultural and political state of affairs of France – the country in which the vast majority of his post-war theatre was composed – has been less forthcoming. Scholarship exploring the intersection of Beckett's work with French historical, political, or literary context has tended to focus almost exclusively on the prose texts, such as James McNaughton's *Samuel Beckett and the Politics of Aftermath* (2018), Alys Moody's chapter on Beckett in *The Art of Hunger* (2018), Andrew Gibson's "Beckett, Vichy, Maurras, and the Body: *Premier amour* and *Nouvelles*" (2015), and Leo Bersani's *Balzac to Beckett: Center and Circumference in French Fiction* (1970). The short chapters by Anthony Cordingley, Jean-Michel Rabaté, Garin Dowd, Julian Murphet, Lois Gordon and Shane Weller in Anthony Uhlmann's *Samuel Beckett in Context* (2013) provide detailed

⁴ For recent examples, see Graham and Hamilton 2017, Kiberd 2017, Boxall 2002, Kennedy 2010, Kim 2010, Morin 2009, Lloyd 1992, and Harrington 1991. While acknowledging the value of such scholarship, Nadia Louar offers a convincing intervention against any too-dominant reading of Beckett as a solely 'Irish' author in her article "Reconfiguration du champ des études Beckettiennes: le règne du 'Beckett irlandais'" (2013).

biographical information regarding Beckett's residency in France, but given the volume's remit must confine themselves to brief references to Beckett's written work within a primarily historicising scope. Gibson's brief biography *Samuel Beckett* (2010) offers a few exceptional pages (95-108) on Beckett's World War II experience and its transmutation into *Waiting for Godot*, but these pages are exceptional in both senses of the word; while the analysis based on historical context is masterly and offers a powerful example that this project follows, Gibson's work is first and foremost a biographical one, and he moves swiftly on from the subject of World War II. His short chapter "French Beckett and French Literary Politics 1945-1952" in S. E. Gontarski's 2014 volume *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts* offers a further tantalising glimpse of the perspective to be gained by resituating Beckett's work within its French context, although its constricted scope means that it by necessity restricts close analysis to Beckett's prose works. Similarly, Marjorie Perloff's "'In Love with Hiding': Samuel Beckett's War" (2005) provides a valuable overview of the influence of Beckett's wartime experiences on his later work, but the essay's consideration of *Waiting for Godot*, while convincing, is relatively brief and overshadowed by the focus on Beckett's biography and his early post-war prose texts. Diane Lüscher-Morata's *La Souffrance portée au langage dans la prose de Samuel Beckett* (2005), one of the only other full-length critical works to probe Beckett's presentation of physical pain, situates its reading productively within the French literary and critical context, but confines its analysis to the prose works.⁵ It is my contention that our understanding of Beckett's theatrical practice more broadly and these post-war plays specifically can be illuminated by careful comparison with the work of his Francophone contemporaries. In theatrical aesthetics

⁵ Beckett's plays are regularly included in survey-style volumes on modern French theatre, demonstrating his decisive position within the field broadly defined – see, for example, Hubert 2008, Aslan 1988, Cohn 1987, and Guicharnaud and Guicharnaud 1975 – but this genre of critical work does not typically aim to trace the connections between Beckett's theatre and that of his Francophone contemporaries in any profound depth.

as well as submerged biographical experience, “la France” and “la souffrance” are intimately bound up in Beckett’s post-war theatre.

Samuel Beckett and World War II

Samuel Beckett witnessed a marked proportion of the twentieth century’s suffering over the course of his lifetime. As a youth he saw widespread sectarian and military violence in Ireland and Northern Ireland in the early decades of the 1900s, including the sight of Dublin burning during the Easter Rising in 1916 which he watched from the Glencullen Road with his father, and the daily publication in the Dublin newspapers of the names of Irish rebels executed by the British Army (Cronin 1997, 36). His childhood friend Gerald Stewart recalls him returning to their student rooms at Trinity College Dublin one day “with an aluminium strip [...] on which he had inscribed the words ‘PAIN PAIN PAIN’ and which he affixed to the wall” (Knowlson 1997, 68). Even before the beginning of his career as a published writer, Beckett was engaged by questions of bearing witness to pain.

However, it was during World War II that Beckett would witness physical suffering on a wider scale than ever before. By October 1937 Beckett was living permanently in Paris, and in April 1939 had declared his intention to “place myself at the disposition of this country” in the case of war (*Letters I* 2010, 656). After intense carpet bombing from the German *Luftwaffe* and a brutally effective Panzer Corps land invasion, France formally surrendered to the Nazi armed forces on 22 June 1940. As the Nazi troops entered Paris that month, Beckett and his partner Suzanne Deschevaux-Dusmesnil joined an estimated two million other refugees in an exodus out of the French capital, enduring a painful journey of more than four hundred miles southwards to Arcachon. Following their return to a more settled – although still Nazi-occupied – Paris in September that year, they lived off meagre food and fuel rations, at a time when Vichy’s nutrition experts were warning that the official

ration provisions would lead to the slow starvation of French civilians (Reggiani 2007, 106-07). Life in Paris became “pretty well impossible”, as Beckett later described it in a letter to George Reavey (*Letters II* 2012, 24), as tuberculosis, typhus and diphtheria spread through the country. During this period in Paris, Beckett would witness Vichy and Nazi atrocities committed on the bodies of the French people, including the Nazis’ periodic retaliatory execution of hostages in response to Resistance action (Reid 1968, 15), and “random manifestations of peremptory and brutal power” by the occupying German forces (Gibson 2010, 106). Beckett would also see his Jewish friends, including Robert Desnos and Paul Léon, abused, assaulted, and eventually arrested and deported by the Vichy and Nazi authorities. That Beckett was to some degree aware even in the early war years of the suffering of those imprisoned in the Nazi camps is evidenced by Léon’s wife Lucie recollecting how Beckett would routinely give her his bread and cigarette rations to send to Léon, despite the ongoing struggle to procure either in occupied Paris (Knowlson 1997, 304; Morin 2017, 157-61). Neither Desnos nor Léon would survive their respective imprisonments in Auschwitz and Buchenwald and in Drancy internment camp (*Letters II* 2012, 19; Knowlson 1997, 304).

Beckett’s exposure to both the menace of pain and to the extreme pain of others increased still further when he and Deschevaux-Dusmesnil began working for the Paris-based cell of the British Special Operations Executive “Gloria SMH” in September 1941. The cell worked under the constant threat of torture if they were captured; each member knew as little as possible about the others, for the pragmatic reason that they could then reveal no identifying information if tortured by the Gestapo. When the cell was eventually betrayed in August 1942 by Robert Alesch, twelve members were immediately executed, and another ninety members were deported to the Mauthausen, Ravensbrück, and Buchenwald camps (Morin 2017, 147). These ninety included Alfred Péron, Beckett’s translator and friend since

their time together at Trinity College Dublin, who was captured by the Gestapo, deported to Mauthausen concentration camp, and died on his return home May 1945 as a result of malnutrition and exhaustion. Following the cell's betrayal Beckett and Deschevaux-Dusmesnil, narrowly evading arrest, fled to Roussillon in August, where they helped the *maquis* sabotage the German army in the Vaucluse mountains. During this period they continued to struggle with the French food and fuel shortage. Beckett's memories of his time in Roussillon were "of sharp extremes of winter cold and summer heat, as well as the hard drudgery of the work [...] in the fields", and Knowlson records that Beckett arrived in Foxrock to see his family at the war's end in 1945 "looking emaciated" from lack of food (1997, 234, 344). Although military conflict had now ceased, Beckett's time in post-war Ireland was marked by the ongoing revelations of wartime atrocities throughout Europe, perhaps most notably the mass repatriation of French prisoners from the Nazi concentration camps between April and August. Emilie Morin records the dissemination of press reports and images across the globe documenting the camps, dead victims, and survivors while Beckett was in Dublin (2017, 168), and Knowlson details Beckett's own memory of the full revelation of the "terrible" conditions in the camps, and the rumours of cannibalism among the desperate survivors (2007, 86).

On leaving Ireland, Beckett was denied re-entry to France on the grounds of his not being a French national, and so in order to be permitted return he joined the Irish Red Cross, working as a volunteer in the war-devastated Saint-Lô as the hospital's "interpreter store-keeper" between August and December 1945 (*Letters II* 2012, 15). The work brought him into perhaps the most intense and profoundly distressing confrontation with wartime pain that he had encountered thus far, in a town that had acquired "the unenviable distinction of being the most heavily destroyed town in France" during World War II (Gaffney 1999, 1). In early June 1944 Allied bombers began a week-long series of air raids on Saint-Lô, attempting to

liberate it from German occupiers in order to open up crucial routes to and from the Normandy beaches. Over 1,000 civilians were killed in the bombing, and over ninety percent of the town's buildings were razed. The municipal hospital and the town's six pharmacies were all destroyed in the air raids, leaving the town's doctor to perform amputations with a scavenged butcher's saw (Gaffney 1999, 8) before the Irish Red Cross opened a hospital there. Beckett detailed the suffering he witnessed first-hand in his short radio piece "The Capital of the Ruins" (1946, pub. 1995), describing a city "bombed out of existence" and a desperate vision of "humanity in ruins" (1995, 277, 276). Alongside devastating war injuries, widespread illnesses such as scabies and roundworm exacerbated by malnutrition, and new injuries caused by still-collapsing buildings and children "play[ing] with detonators" left behind by the conflict were rife (Beckett 1995, 276).

Beckett's description of the horrors of "humanity in ruins" that he witnessed in Saint-Lô have been prey to a number of bizarrely redemptive critical readings over the years. Lois Gordon's account of "The Capital of the Ruins" as "exalt[ing] both the comfort to be drawn from the inward human capacity to surmount circumstances of the utmost gravity and the sustenance to be given and gained in moments of camaraderie" (1996, 201) offers one of the more strikingly optimistic interpretations of Beckett's post-war perspective. Darren Gribben similarly relies on a superficial reading of the text's multi-toned complexities in order to claim that Beckett's essay "demonstrates that, just as cultural differences could be overcome, so too could the devastation wreaked by one human being on another" (2009, 269), a reading that awkwardly elides the continued human suffering which "The Capital of the Ruins" in fact recurrently foregrounds. By contrast, William Davies more convincingly traces how Beckett's text undermines its own heavily ironised evocation of "such rhetoric of heroism, like that of humanistic unity" to refuse any easy sense of post-war recovery (2017, 181-82), and Dúnlaith Bird critiques "overly idealistic" readings of the essay by pointing out how the

text's ironic inflections counterbalance its gestures towards compassion (2012, 239).

Beckett's account of Saint-Lô emphasises not only what Steven Matthews has termed the "non-relationship" of "misapprehension" between French residents and Irish volunteers (2009, 135, 130) – the enduring division of French and Irish into "us" and "them" – but also the marked imbalance between the two coteries of direct sufferers and the 'proximate distanced' Irish witnesses, as Beckett framed it:

What was important was not our having penicillin when they had none, nor the unregarding munificence of the French Ministry of Reconstruction (as it was then called), but the occasional glimpse obtained, by us in them and, who knows, by them in us (for they are an imaginative people), of that smile at the human conditions as little to be extinguished by bombs as to be broadened by the elixirs of Burroughes and Welcome, – the smile deriding, among other things, the having and the not having, the giving and the taking, sickness and health.

(1995, 277)

Where Gordon reads the text's smile here as "reconciliatory", a smile "extolling the human impulse to give of oneself to the suffering" (1996, 200-1), Lüscher-Morata finds instead "[u]ne certaine froideur teintée de cruauté", "un mouvement de recul pour mieux voir un monde qui fait naufrage plutôt qu'un élan d'empathie" ("a certain coldness tinged with cruelty; a step backwards in order to better observe a wrecked world rather than an impulse of empathy"; 2005, 189). The curious choice of the word "deriding" to describe the smile that responds to the pronounced asymmetries within the Franco-Irish relationship in Saint-Lô – "sickness" and "health", the "having penicillin" and the not having penicillin⁶ – invokes, if perhaps not quite the imposition of active "cruelty", then certainly a distinct philosophical "coldness" via the easy elision of the Other's intense suffering into a universalised

⁶ Phyllis Gaffney records that the need for penicillin in Saint-Lô was so great throughout 1946 that the Irish Hospital ambulance drivers were advised to "carry a loaded pistol with them as a precaution against theft" when travelling with the drug (1999, 34-35). As the hospital's storekeeper often tasked with transporting new supplies back to Saint-Lô, Beckett was likely familiar with this practice, which adds an additional layer of imbalance to the already uneven relationship between the Irish volunteers and the Saint-Lô residents.

“condition”. Laura Salisbury likewise disputes the idea that there is a kind of redemptive “ethical stance” in positioning pain as something that can be mitigated or “transcended” by means of the witness’s smile (2015, 141). Even if we read the gesture as offering “the sense of a non-violent mutuality” rather than “an assertion of masterful superiority”, Salisbury points out that nevertheless the “passivity” of the smile as a response to pain frames it as a markedly inadequate response, “inattentive to pain, inequality and need” (2015, 141) – and we might also note the important caveat that the Saint-Lô distress which Beckett presents in “The Capital of the Ruins” is by no means a mutually endured suffering. Beckett’s account places particular emphasis on the difficulty of establishing even a functioning understanding between the Irish volunteers and the French inhabitants, since “their way of being we, was not our way and that our way of being they, was not their way” (1995, 277). Alongside cross-cultural differences, sufferers and the witnesses to suffering are separated by a fundamental difference in their states of being: suffering and not-suffering, “this absolute split between one’s sense of one’s own reality and the reality of other persons” that Elaine Scarry identifies as a consequence of physical pain (1985, 4). Already, then, in this text written specifically to report on a historical case of extreme physical suffering, Beckett emphasises pain as a significant challenge to interpersonal understanding – and one to which he offers only “an inkling”, “the occasional glimpse”, of a distinctly curtailed hope (Beckett 1995, 278, 277).

“The Capital of the Ruins” offers a unique example of Beckett writing explicitly about wartime pain. In contrast to the essay’s direct journalistic approach, Beckett’s subsequent post-war plays elide any direct comment ‘about’ the suffering occasioned by World War II; wartime pain is “vaguened”, to use Rosemary Pountney’s term (1988, 149), its specificities erased in these later writings. Despite Beckett’s expunging the war from his texts, however, scholars have nevertheless noted its pervasive influence on his writing. The post-war public’s inclination to read intimations of the recent conflict and their attendant

trauma into Beckett's stage plays – as we will examine in subsequent chapters – was overlooked by Formalist- and New Critical-inflected schools of cultural criticism, but recent scholarly texts such as William Davies's *Samuel Beckett and the Second World War: Politics, Propaganda, and a 'Universe become Provisional'* (forthcoming 2020), James McNaughton's *Samuel Beckett and the Politics of Aftermath* (2018), and Emilie Morin's *Beckett's Political Imagination* (2017) have re-established Beckett's work as crucially inflected by the fact of World War II. Indeed, some of the most generative analysis of the influence of the war on Beckett's work reads this careful erasure of specific war references as indicative of Beckett's concern with foregrounding the very difficulty of testifying to wartime experience and particularly to its most extreme forms of suffering. Most notably, David Houston Jones's *Samuel Beckett and Testimony* (2011) and Joseph Anderton's *Beckett's Creatures: Art of Failure after the Holocaust* (2016) both draw on the post-Holocaust theorising of Theodor Adorno and Giorgio Agamben to explore the recurrent failures of communication in Beckett's writings despite a felt pressure to testify, what Houston Jones describes as an "unverifiable sense of atrocity which is articulated through residuality" (2012, 141), or what Anderton terms "Beckett's alternative type of testimony to the crisis facing the act of bearing witness after Auschwitz" (2016, 31). As Houston Jones's and Anderton's work indicates, the intense, widespread and yet unevenly distributed suffering of World War II, and the post-war debate over the appropriate means of its representation, was crucial to the evolution of Beckett's post-1945 writing. Over the following chapters, we will trace the impact of this sense of incommensurable suffering, of the epistemological abyss that separates sufferer and witness, in his post-war stage plays.

Witnessing Pain in the Theatre: Theoretical and Conceptual Contexts

There has already been some scattered but insightful commentary on the subject of physical pain within Beckett scholarship. However, with the exception of the edited volume *Samuel Beckett and Pain* (2012), which is discussed in more detail in the following section, most of this somewhat sporadic scholarly attention to physical suffering in Beckett's stage plays has been subsumed under broader primary concerns at hand. Mary Bryden, for example, observes that "one does not have to look far for pain in Beckett's work" but that his writings tend to present this pain as "deep but unfathomable", deliberately resistant to easy analysis or interpretation, within her larger consideration of the influence of Christian thinking and iconography on Beckett's work (1998, 148-49). Seán Kennedy points out that "it is remarkable how much of Beckett's post-war work is taken up with the physicality of suffering, and the conditions under which it is imposed" in his exploration of the concepts of the "embodied" and the "disembodied" in Beckett's writings (2018, 3), and Anna McMullan likewise highlights the role of pain in her study of embodiment in Beckett's plays, arguing that Beckett's "vision of intercorporeality" is "grounded in the vulnerability of the body to hunger, pain and malfunction, and to the tenderness or cruelty of others" in *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama* (2010, 31). The phenomenon of bearing witness to the physical pain of others has similarly received some infrequent but perceptive commentary. Patrick Bixby, for example, has noted the recurrence of "the very real ethical problem of how we are to give witness to other who may or may not be suffering" in Beckett's writings as part of his analysis of disability performances of Beckett's plays (2018, 122). David Houston Jones stands as perhaps the principal forerunner as regards the question of 'witnessing' as it pertains to Beckett's work by dint of his extended reading of the idea of "testimony" in Beckett's post-war (or, more specifically, post-Holocaust) writings in *Samuel Beckett and Testimony* (2011), "the deep, pervasive and yet unlocalizable presence of atrocity

in Beckett's work" which tests the limits of the witness's communicative capabilities (2011, 1-2). Yet although they provide sensitive and insightful points of departure or complementary reflection, none of these scholarly works offer specific extended focus on the representation of physical pain in Beckett's stage plays, nor indeed the broader Francophone context of Beckett's post-war playwriting.

I have suggested that writing for the theatre offered Beckett a new means of engaging emphatically with physical pain, a medium in which he could confront the spectator with the human body, living flesh present and suffering (or seemingly suffering) in the same geographical and temporal space as their own body. The prose works often present instances of physical pain – Belacqua's "stiff and aching bones" and "raw and sore feet" in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (2012, 240), and "pain so redoutable" as Camier's cyst, fistula and chancre in *Mercier and Camier* (2010, 86), for example – but these textual constructions of an imagined body do not demand a live, embodied confrontation with the spectacle of physical suffering in the way that the theatrical inscription of suffering on a performer's body does. Theatre is a "bodied space" and Beckett's is a particularly "intensely embodied theatre" (Garner 1993, 449), and thus the medium immerses the spectator into an intensely visceral encounter with the spectacle of physical suffering. As Katherine M. Gray observes, "In a good performance of a Beckett play, the audience member becomes acutely aware [...] of her or his own body and its materiality (that is, its discomforts – the need to cough or to readjust the spine or relieve the straining eyes and ears)"; that is, "We become aware of our own materiality and that of those around us" (1996, 10-11). The theatre auditorium thus lends itself in several ways to the sense of bearing witness to another's pain. As a shared space of spectatorship, the theatre auditorium is a communal and to some degree participatory activity. Coming together to watch the performance of physical pain in the theatre space, then, offers

one of the nearest possible experiences of more closely comprehending or even sharing in another being's pain.

However – and this is a central contention of this project – to read the staging of pain as offering an opportunity for connection and communion may be a legitimate move, but to read the staging of pain as offering *only* connection and communion is disingenuous. This is particularly true in the case of Beckett and his post-war contemporaries' theatre. The characters in these plays do not tend to react with understanding, sympathy, or kindness to their compatriots' sufferings; rather, they look on indifferently, or with a cold or playful curiosity, or they withdraw in horror from the spectacle before them, “sans fixer aucune communauté des semblables” (“without establishing any community of fellow beings”; Noudelmann 1998, 101). Similarly, we cannot ignore the moments in which the spectator is driven to recoil from the physical suffering on stage before them – or, at the other end of the affective spectrum, in which they are encouraged to respond with indifference, witnessing physical pain as a necessary and even invisible part of the performance meriting no affective response.⁷ These plays frequently seem designed to evoke specifically these forms of resistant or distancing responses in their spectators, rather than a universalising, identificatory empathy. They recurrently block any possibility of empathetic response, by obscuring the other's pain, performing it as comic, or occasionally rendering it so aversive as to push the spectator away. These plays thus probe both the difficulty of perceiving or understanding another's pain, and the troublingly frequent impulse to turn away both physically and emotionally from another individual's suffering.

⁷ Following both pain studies and theatre and performance studies, this thesis uses the term “affect” to indicate forms of embodied or unconscious awareness located outside rational and emotional processes, “visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion” which are “found in those intensities that pass from body to body (human, non-human, part-body, and otherwise)”, as Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg have eloquently described it (2010, 1).

The interplay between empathy, recoil and indifference to pain, both demonstrated and stimulated by these plays, reflects recognisable modes of responding to another's physical suffering that can be observed beyond the theatre auditorium. Many neurologists and psychiatrists have reflected on the evolutionary advantage provided by a "sensitivity to states of distress in others" that might signal danger to the witnessing individual (Craig 2009, 27), the "ability to synchronize with sensory and affective states of other people [which] makes such an alarm system an efficient mechanism able to detect physical injury or distress in others and ourselves" (Betti and Aglioti 2016, 203). In fact, as we will examine in more detail below, the experience of witnessing another's pain can trigger the same neural mechanisms that respond to the experience of undergoing pain oneself, the spectator's nervous system reacting as if their own body was enduring the witnessed physical distress. Simultaneously, however, physical pain retains a "quality of aversiveness" (Porreca and Navratilova 2017, S43) – the quality of being "against", as we saw Beckett describe it (*Letters II* 2012, 97). Bodily suffering typically triggers "an unconditioned drive for behavioural responses that terminate it" (De Peuter et al. 2011, 891), an automatic impulse to escape from the pain. Comparably the recoil from another's pain retains its roots in "survival mechanisms" that work to protect the witnessing individual from harm (Meng et al. 2013, 165), and thus we find the impulse to turn away from the sight of another's suffering – particularly when the witness's nervous system responds as though experiencing that pain itself. The spectacle of pain can provoke a discomforting tension between felt empathy and self-protective recoil in the witness.

The theatre medium offers particular scope to play on this dynamic of empathy-recoil in the face of witnessed bodily pain – particularly the small Parisian 'pocket theatres'⁸ in

⁸ Ruby Cohn defines the term "pocket theatre" as follows: "[It] denotes small size, but it connotes experiment for a discriminating audience. [...] Most modern pocket theatres barely lasted through a theatre season; actors performed bravely in ill-equipped rooms that accommodated fifty to three hundred spectators" (1987, 6).

which much new Francophone playwrighting was staged in the aftermath of World War II. The theatre spectator is more or less trapped in the typical indoor theatre auditorium, faced with the spectacle of another individual's physical suffering. Spectator and actor bodies are brought into live and sometime very close confrontation, allowing for moments of intensely felt responsive sympathy and even the unsettling sense of pain's intercorporeal contagion, but also breeding the potential for hardened indifference and frightened or disgusted recoil. The actor may be actually enduring physical pain during the performance – as when mimicking a limp for an extended period of time produces leg pain for an actor playing Clov in *Endgame*, for example – or they may be enacting the experience – as (presumably) when the actor playing Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot* complains of the pain he suffers when urinating – and it is usually difficult for the spectator to perceive which is the case. Thus the theatre constructs a liminal space between expression and concealment, reality and representation, distance and proximity, empathy and recoil, providing an intensely generative space for the provocation of the spectator's discomfort in witnessing another being's suffering. Beckett's post-war theatre testifies to pain's threatening potential for contagion, but also simultaneously to the twentieth-century anxiety about physical pain's "incommensurability", its "unsharability", in the aftermath of World War II (Patraka 1999, 87). This project thus establishes a framework for reading these stagings of pain that can acknowledge and interrogate moments of discomfort, of resistance and recoil, as well as of empathetic or empathic identification with the pained body on display.

In order to explore the function of physical pain on Beckett's stage, I employ a methodological framework that draws from current scholarship on pain and on empathy, as detailed below. These two fields each deal with bodily experience, and particularly with the

For example, the Théâtre de Babylone, site of the première production of *En attendant Godot*, had a total of 230 seats (Morash 2002, 200); the Studio des Champs-Élysées where *Fin de partie* eventually had its French première consisted of "two banks of five-seat rows stretching back for fourteen rows from the narrow proscenium stage" (Cohn 1987, 14).

ways in which these bodily experiences are mediated beyond the individual body. One particular nexus of connection across the two fields is how each engages with the idea of both communion with and resistance to another's pain. This broad question informs many of the more localised issues pertaining to the possibility of expressing, communicating, and responding to physical pain successfully between individuals, which I will examine throughout the following chapters. In brief, empathy scholarship offers a grounding for thinking about how we respond to the body of the other. Importantly, it is also beginning to interrogate the failures of empathy – moments when we do *not* respond with empathy to the other's experience – and this focus provides a framework for thinking about how and why Beckett's and his contemporaries' works are often scripted to block the spectator's sense of immersion or communion. Similarly, current pain scholarship wrestles with physical pain's simultaneous allure and aversiveness, querying the potential for expressing one's own pain or recognising another's, and whether pain is an isolating or communal experience. A combined framework drawn from both fields allows a close examination of how these post-war plays are scripted to repulse or reject the spectator, and to query why these playwrights appeared to strive for this effect in the aftermath of World War II.

Pain and Language

Almost every individual will experience physical pain over the course of their lives.⁹ Maria Pia Di Bella offers the Pozzo-esque observation: “We – as humans – all feel pain. Possibly in the same way. It is true that we express it in different cultural modes” (2013, 202). Yet despite the near-universal experience of physical pain, wide-ranging debates continue across many fields of scholarship as to the pain's functioning, its significance, its felt experience–

⁹ Congenital insensitivity to pain (CIP) or congenital analgesia is estimated to affect fewer than one in one million people worldwide.

and even its very definition. The International Association for the Study of Pain defines pain as “An unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage” (*IASP Taxonomy*, ‘Pain’). The length and careful revisionary clauses of this definition, and the still lengthier and somewhat defensive “note” added to the definition, signals the extensive debate over the nature of pain that has marked, and continues to mark, pain scholarship. Even a brief analysis of this medical industry definition highlights the multidimensional nature of physical pain, its “polyvalence” (Boddice 2014, 1). Pain is both “sensory and emotional”, according to the IASP; it is not a purely physical responsive sensation, but an “experience” composed of combined physical, cognitive, and affective elements. This expression “pain experience” has gained popularity in pain scholarship in recent decades, as a term that emphasises “the distinction between pain and nociception” (Porreca and Navratilova 2017, S43) – that is, between a more comprehensive felt experience of pain (including cognitive and affective elements) and the limited scope of the sensory nervous system’s response to a physical stimulus. As Joanna Bourke neatly summarises, the word “pain” describes “the *way* we experience something, not *what* is experienced” (2014, 7; original emphasis).

The IASP’s appended definition note reiterates this point: “This definition avoids tying pain to the stimulus. Activity induced in the nociceptor and nociceptive pathways by a noxious stimulus is not pain, which is always a psychological state, although we may well appreciate that pain most often has a proximate physical cause.” The outdated understanding of physical pain as an exclusively physiological process – a unidirectional sensory model whereby a physical stimulus in one area of the body is relayed along the nervous system to the brain where it is recognised as pain – has been replaced by the biopsychosocial model of the pain experience, which holds that “the experience of pain is influenced by complex and dynamic interactions among multiple biological, psychological, and social factors” (Fillingim

2017, S11). Physical pain is thus better understood as an experience or perception, one in which “consciousness, emotion, meaning, and social context all play an important part” (Morris 1991, 268-9), rather than a fixed, objective, or universal entity. As a consequence of this medley of sensory, affective, and cognitive factors that condition its lived experience, “[p]ain is always subjective”, the IASP definition note emphasises. The pain experience is a uniquely personal and oft-changing phenomenon, being “a product of the way the subject perceives it and gives meanings and reasons to it” (Avila 2013, 2571). Pia Di Bella’s claim that we all feel pain “[p]ossibly in the same way” but “express it in different cultural modes” thus seems short-sighted. We do not just “express” pain differently, but moreover *experience* it, “feel” it, in distinctly personal subjective modes. Pain seems paradoxically “universal” and yet also “stubbornly personal” (Fifield 2015, 117). This modern understanding of physical pain as being moulded by the suffering individual’s own personal history, genetics, and cultural training as well as by physiological stimulus, and of physical pain as consequently being an intensely subjective experience, is crucial to this project’s examination of the post-World War II playwrights’ negotiation of pain’s presentation on stage.

One of the most immediately pertinent implications of pain’s subjective nature, both for this project and more broadly in clinical and experimental pain treatment, is the manner in which this subjective quality poses a challenge to the observer attempting to perceive, comprehend, or evaluate another individual’s physical pain. Pain psychologist Roger B. Fillingim observes, “A well-recognized challenge resulting from the subjective nature of pain is that direct measurement of pain is impossible[;] rather we must rely on individuals’ self-report, and to some extent their behavior, to provide a glimpse into their experience” (2017, S11). Beneath Fillingim’s breezy reference to “self-report” and “behavior” observation here lies a long history of clinical attempts to refine the imperfect process of pain observation: the Multidimensional Pain Inventory, the McGill Pain Questionnaire, the repeated oscillations

between patient self-report and clinician observation being used as the gold-standard for pain diagnosis.¹⁰ The IASP note to their definition of pain engages directly with the difficulty of comprehending another individual's inherently subjective pain experience, advising that if patients "regard their experience as pain [...] it should be accepted as pain." Many practitioners claim to follow this suggested approach to pain diagnosis, in the absence of any more objective means of measurement: "Pain is what the patient says it is", Dorothy Helme asserts (2012, 79). Physical pain, in this context, quickly become both defined and perceived by way of the patient's successful verbalisation of the experience.

However, a reliance on the self-reporting of pain seems to prove inadequate as a method of recognising and responding to physical suffering. Tim Seers et al.'s 2018 review of the medical industry's approach to pain management presented damning findings as to how "[p]ain is underestimated" across the Western world (2018, 811). The reliance on verbal report in particular has led to the pervasive under-diagnosis and under-treatment of physical pain in neonates and people with cognitive and developmental disabilities which impede speech or language development – that is, in individuals whose modes of verbal expression of pain do not match widely recognisable or socially sanctioned modes of expression of pain.¹¹ Consequently, Barbara S. Shapiro has argued forcefully against establishing too close an alignment between the experience of pain and the ability to verbally communicate it, pointing out that:

the state [of being in physical pain] exists before we learn what our families and cultures deem appropriate uses of the words. Words do not bring a basic state into existence. Rather, they bring that state into the realm of verbal communication, providing a means for further elaboration, communication, and understanding.

(1999, 100)

¹⁰ For a more detailed overview of the history of the medical reporting of patient pain, see Bourke 2014.

¹¹ For further detail, see Seers et al. 2018, Rattaz et al. 2013, Craig 2009, Kopelman 1999, Rollin 1999, and Anand et al. 1999.

Indeed, even when individuals manage to verbally articulate their pain in accordance with their society's expectations, full communication may still not be achieved: women's reported pain, for example, is still routinely under-diagnosed and under-treated in comparison to that of men, as is the reported physical pain of BAME patients in the UK.¹² As Kenneth Craig observes, "Even those with effective language and social skills" can find it challenging "to describe the complexities of multidimensional experiences [such as pain] in a direct and representative manner" (2009, 26). The attempt to verbalise pain is so fraught with challenges and obstacles as to often appear a nearly hopeless task.

Language philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and literary scholar and pain theorist Elaine Scarry offer two contrasting views on the potential for pain's communication which, while often challenged by more recent scholarship, nevertheless neatly articulate the two poles of the debate. Wittgenstein, primarily interested in the philosophy of language and linguistic communication, takes a broadly functional view of the potential to verbally express pain in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), published in English in the same year as *En attendant Godot* premiered at the Théâtre de Babylone. He allows that pain may be a private or essentially subjective experience; that is, that "nobody knows whether other people also have *this* or something else" when considering their own experience of physical pain (2009, 102 e§272; original emphasis). However, Wittgenstein insists that pain is nevertheless an observably communicable experience. What is crucial is that we do indeed "talk about sensations every day" (2009, 95e §244); human beings, trained in socially recognised pain-behaviour and pain-expression from an early age, do regularly succeed in communicating the fact of their own physical pains to each other. He demonstrates this idea by way of the following 'beetle in a box' thought experiment:

¹² See Cavalier et al. 2018, Bernandes and Lima 2011, Weisse, Sorum and Dominguez 2003, and Hoffman and Tarzian 2001.

Suppose that everyone had a box with something in it which we call a ‘beetle’. No one can ever look into anyone else’s box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle. – Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. [...] But what if these people’s word ‘beetle’ had a use nonetheless? – If so, it would not be as the name of a thing. [...] [T]he object drops out of consideration as irrelevant.

(2009, 106e-07e §293)

The linguistic terms we use to describe physical pain are intersubjective, even if the individualised experience of pain itself is not, Wittgenstein argues; as Mark D. Sullivan summarises, “we are mistaken to infer from the subjectivity of pain to the privacy of pain” (1995, 3). Thus Wittgenstein dismisses uncertainty over the fact of another person’s pain, in characteristic dialogic fashion:

Well, only I can know whether I am really in pain; another person can only surmise it. – In one way this is false, and in another nonsense. If we are using the word ‘know’ as it is normally used (and how else are we to use it?), then other people very often know if I’m in pain.

(2009, 95e §246)

K. J. S. Armand et al. offer a modern-day clinical version of Wittgenstein’s perspective, arguing that since language “is public in nature” it is quite capable of indicating both the presence and the inherent quality of the pain experience, as demonstrated by the fact that, otherwise, “we would be trapped in sophistic conundrums like ‘Does my pain resemble your pain?’ Or, ‘Even if his body is behaving just like mine when I feel pain, how do I know that he *is* feeling pain?’” (2013, 65). Yet I would argue that this is exactly the position in which many people, from medical clinicians to theatre spectators to witnesses of pain in the ‘outside’ world, find themselves when faced with the task of interpreting another human being’s subjective physical experiences. Moreover, it is precisely this experience of bearing uncertain witness to the potential pain of another being that many of these post-war Francophone plays demonstrate – and indeed generate. Three decades after the publication of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, Elaine Scarry published her own more sceptical

account of the obstacles to communicating pain in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985), which remains today the seminal account outside the clinical sphere of pain's apparent resistance to linguistic verbalisation. Pain is incommunicable, according to Scarry, not only because of its subjective quality, but also because of how it "does not simply resist language but actively destroys it" (1985, 4). As well as casting doubt upon verbal language's capacity to fully communicate the subjective experience of pain, "that fundamental level of bodily experience which language encounters, attempts to express and then fails to encompass" (Good et al. 1992, 7), Scarry is also sceptical about language's ability to even simply indicate pain's very existence when not situated within the individual's own body, describing the experience of pain as being simultaneously undeniable to its sufferer but unconfirmable to its witness and thus engendering an "absolute split between one's sense of one's own reality and the reality of other persons" (1985, 4). According to Scarry, then, verbal language retains little capacity to communicate either the experience or even the very existence of bodily pain between sufferer and witness.

In fact, the problem of relying on language as a means of identifying the presence of physical pain (let alone its subjective felt-experience) arises at the very outset of this project, both in terms of a close reading of the playscripts and in framing our consideration of Beckett's beginning to write for the theatre. Agreeing on accurate verbal indicators for pain has long proven challenging; as medical historian Rob Boddice notes, the word "pain" "is at best a confusing label; at worst a hopelessly inadequate one" (2014, 1). Sandra R. Chaplan and Linda S. Sorkin demonstrated some decades ago that pain terminology is frequently unreliable even as employed by medical clinicians and clinical scientists, concluding, "Too often people use the same word to mean mechanistically different things or avoid the dilemma by coining their own terms" (1997, 81). Comparably, it can often be difficult to ascertain whether words such as "pain" and "suffering" as employed in the plays under

discussion here are intended to indicate physical suffering, mental suffering, or some combination of the two.¹³ When Hamm muses, “I am willing to admit they suffer as much as such creatures can suffer” in *Endgame* (2006, 93), is he acknowledging Clov, Nagg, and Nell’s physical suffering, or something more abstract? When M in *Play* contemplates “a kind of peace, and all that pain as if... never been” (2006, 312), is he anticipating an end to the sort of bodily suffering that the performers’ awkward positions in their urns suggest, or is he referring to the emotional anguish of his marriage and affair? Likewise, the French word “douleur”, while commonly employed to indicate physical pain, can also mean mental grief or sorrow (although the plural form “les douleurs” indicates specifically the intensely physical experience of labour pains), as can the noun “souffrance” and the associated verb “souffrir”. Occasionally, the noun “mal” is used in the French language and in these plays as well to denote physical suffering, most typically in the phrase “avoir mal” meaning “to be in pain” or “faire mal” meaning “to hurt, as in “Tu as mal?”, “Mal? Il me demande si j’ai mal!” in Beckett’s *En attendant Godot* (“It hurts?”, “Hurts? He wants to know if it hurts!”; 1952, 11) and “Jouons à nous faire mal” in Picasso’s *Les Quatre petites filles* (“Let’s play at hurting ourselves”; 1968, 13). However, its primary meanings “evil” or “damage” (or “wrong”, “bad” in adjectival form, or “badly”, “poorly” in the adverbial) more typically remains uppermost for the Francophone ear in other syntactic constructions. Finally, the *faux ami* “peine” is more commonly understood in French as denoting “mental pain” or “punishment” and so, although it pulls on the same etymological root as the English word “pain”, it is rarely employed in these plays to indicate physical suffering. Following Michael Edwards’s observation that

¹³ Several pain theorists draw a distinction between the terms “pain” and “suffering” as indicating physical versus emotional distress respectively, where “pain” denotes “a sensory impulse communicated by the nervous system”, and the “suffering” indicates “our emotional *response*” to pain (Morris 1991, 143, original emphasis; see also Hovey, Khayat and Feig 2018, Cassell 2008, and Sullivan 1995). Since it is in practice very difficult to trace any such clear-cut separation between physical and emotional distress, and given that none of the playwrights under discussion in this thesis seem to make any such distinction in their own writings, I will be using the terms “pain” and “suffering” interchangeably throughout the following chapters.

“Beckett entre doublement en cette contingence du langage, en choisissant d’écrire dans une langue étrangère” (“Beckett entered doubly into language’s contingency by choosing to write in a foreign language”; 1998, 17), we might speculate that Beckett’s, Ionesco’s and Picasso’s turn to writing in a non-native language emphasised to them the difficulty of inscribing the concept of pain in any ‘reliable’ linguistic mode. Even at this relatively elementary level, these plays engender doubt as to language’s ability to communicate the presence of physical pain – and, consequently, as to the spectator’s ability to perceive or bear witness to another’s suffering.

Nevertheless, the fact that these plays employ various linguistic forms to treat the problem of pain – and that this project does likewise – demonstrates that pain and language are not utterly incompatible phenomena. Several notable modern theorists have opposed Scarry’s intensely sceptical reading of pain and language. In *The Culture of Pain* (1991), for example, David B. Morris acknowledges a Scarry-esque idea of a certain level of physical pain defeating pain’s linguistic verbalisation, not only in spoken language but also in cognitive comprehension. Citing World Wars I and II and their “warfare, concentration camps, massacres, and famine” (1991, 51) as examples of the incalculable level of suffering encountered on a mass scale during the twentieth century, Morris argues:

Pain on such an immeasurable order of magnitude will very likely defeat or cancel thought. The mind simply blocks what it cannot comprehend, casting us back as a culture on doomed escapes into amnesia, repression, and denial. Quite literally, we can make nothing of it.

(1991, 151)

However, Morris cites this as one particular (and not necessarily inevitable) state of affairs that has resulted from a specific historic moment, and he counters it with an extended examination of how the human individual more typically learns to recognise pain through socially-mediated codes of conduct. Given that our cultural milieu sculpts our experience of

pain, physically suffering remains a “deeply social” experience in Morris’s eyes (1991, 37), “something we experience not simply as private individuals but also as members of a culture or subculture” (1991, 198), and this social and cultural construction permits corresponding social and cultural modes of communication. If we are taught to enact and recognise pain in certain specific, local cultural codes of behaviour, then these codes of behaviour must consequently be both communicative and communal, according to Morris.

In *Pain: A Cultural History* (2012), Javier Moscoso develops this concept of the many cultural forms “that enable the configuration of pain into an intersubjective reality” (2012, 7) into a reading of pain’s communication based specifically on the idea that “pain is a drama” (2012, 6). Moscoso identifies theatre, broadly conceived to include the idea of “performance” both within and beyond the auditorium, as the paradigmatic form of the expression of pain. He argues that “those who express their pain make it, in accordance with learned rhetorical forms, at the same time patent and public” (2012, 7). Like a theatrical performance, successfully communicating pain requires “the strict observance of persuasive rules” according to Moscoso (2012, 7), since it is primarily by enacting culturally learned linguistic, para-linguistic and bodily codes, “norms, conventions, and ritualized acts” such as weeping, groaning, flinching, etc., that pain is recognised (2012, 11). Moscoso’s concept of “the drama of pain” (2012, 55) is one that recurs with telling frequency across modern pain scholarship. Paul E. Brodwin has theorised a similar “relationship between performance and pain” (1999, 90), observing that where the symptoms of pain do not neatly accord with the “dramatic conventions” expected by the sufferer’s immediate society, then sufferers “must actively say and do things before specific audiences to reveal their suffering” (1999, 91) in order to obtain sympathy or treatment. Joanna Bourke likewise notes that, for the pain sufferer, “correctly adhering to highly esteemed scripts is most likely to generate a desirable response in terms of medication, care, and compassion” (2014, 17). In order to achieve expressive potential or

communicative validity, “[t]he private, immediate sensation of pain thus becomes an occasion for public ‘performance’” (Brodwin 1999, 92). Although Moscoso’s theorising of “the drama of pain” bears obvious relevance to this project’s reading of staged pain in post-war theatre, his conception of spectator response to witnessed pain deviates radically from that suggested by analysis of Beckett’s and his contemporaries’ plays. In discussing pain’s communication as a performance, Moscoso clings tightly to an idea of pain automatically generating compassion in the witness, claiming that “sympathy is always obligatory” for pain’s spectator and that “there is no scene of excruciating suffering that leaves us indifferent” (2012, 55). Yet, although this project will examine some moments that engender fellow feeling in the spectator, the plays under discussion here give rise far more frequently to instances of indifference or aversion than they do to sympathy. We will repeatedly find instances in which onstage pain is not recognised, is comically deflated, is rendered so aversive as to prompt the spectator’s horrified recoil, or is accepted as a non-affective necessity of performance.

The important distinctions between sympathy and empathy in relation to witnessed pain will be addressed in the next section of this chapter; for now, it is important to recognise that, despite Moscoso’s claims, doubt concerning any intrinsic or reliable connection between pain and fellow feeling runs through both modern pain theory and through Beckett scholarship in particular. In the recent volume *Samuel Beckett and Pain* (2012), for instance, Mariko Hori Tanaka’s essay draws on the long-established recognition that the sensation of physical pain frequently catalyses a sense of one’s own body as something “Other”. While Tanaka somewhat unconvincingly uses this observation to argue that the actor’s experience of physical pain will allow her to recognise her body as Other is integral to the creation of “poetic beauty” on the theatre stage (2012, 110), others within the volume bring a more cynical perspective to the question of spectatorial responses to witnessed pain within

Beckett's work. Peter Fifield follows Tanaka in focusing on how pain renders the body as "Other", but links the "alien quality of bodily experience [...] as it is manifested in pain" to the curious phenomena in Beckett's early prose works that sees the sufferers themselves doubt whether they are actually in pain (2012, 119) – in stark counterpoint to Scarry's assertion the experience of pain is undeniable to its sufferer. So effectively is pain seen to render the body "Other" in Beckett's work, Fifield suggests, that it "can be blocked, overlooked, even misrecognised" by not only the sufferer's witness but by the sufferer themselves (2012, 121). Still more pessimistically, Jonathan Boulter identifies the "dark heart" of *How It Is* as being the essential "unknowability" of another's pain (2012, 197), which keeps the suffering other "always at a distance" and so prevents both sympathy and the successful ethical encounter with another (2012, 198). Garin Dowd likewise worries at the idea of the sympathetic response to pain within Beckett's work, but he does so using a radically different framework to Boulter and Fifield, and one that is markedly pertinent to our focus here on the intense intercorporeal affect that can be generated within the theatre medium. Dowd traces how, in Beckett's work, pain isolates the sufferer often not by dint of going unrecognised, but rather by being too strongly recognised. His argument is not that there is never a sympathetic or empathetic response to pain, but rather that this response frequently "produces a countermanding force" (2012, 71), a self-protective recoil from the suffering Other and the threat of their pain's contagion. Thus, according to Dowd, Beckett's work demonstrates pain's near-simultaneous engendering of empathy *and* aversion: empathy generated by pain is precisely the reason why perceived pain can generate aversion.

Samuel Beckett and Pain thus leaves us caught between contradictory claims: pain in Beckett's work is both unperceivable and too strongly perceived; it generates an alluring beauty and also an anxiogenic aversion. The volume's weakness lies in its failure to reconcile – or even to draw into more mutually informing conversation – these rich yet conflicting

views on how pain is presented in Beckett's texts. The volume's unfinished questions, however, offer stimulating provocation to this project's interrogation of the representation of pain in Beckett's and his contemporaries' post-war theatre. Before moving on to close examination of the plays in question, however, we must review relevant current scholarship on empathy – where our discussion of pain scholarship has already inevitably begun to lead us – as the other foundational framework that this project employs to interrogate these plays' effects, particularly in relation to the theatre spectator's body.

Empathy and the Body

The subject of empathy has already emerged in the above review of pain scholarship, since to probe the question of communicating pain or of an observer's response to another's pain is inevitably to confront questions of sympathy and empathy. To make a brief but important distinction between the two terms as they will be employed here: sympathy is commonly understood as the relatively detached feeling of pity or sorrow for another, a feeling *for* another being, whereas empathy implies a feeling *with*, the recognition or imaginative identification with another's state of being that is so intensely felt as to stimulate the vicarious experiencing of their emotions or sensation along with them. The term "empathy" was introduced into the English language by Edward Titchener in 1909 as a translation of psychologist Theodor Lipps's 1903 German term *Einfühlung*, which both men used to describe "the idea of the self projected into the perceived object" (Wispé 1986, 316), feeling one's way into another entity. Our current use of the word "empathy" retains this idea of "feeling with" or "feeling in tandem" with another being, whether as a result of past personal experience, imaginative projection, or neurological response within the observer's body. It is this latter version that we will review in most detail here, since the phenomenon of

intercorporeal responsiveness speaks most pertinently to this project's focus on the effects of staging pain in the medium of theatre.

The physiological variant of empathy, termed kinaesthetic empathy, has long been of interest to theatre and performance theorists who intuitively recognised its existence on the basis of their own experiences in the auditorium. The dance critic John Martin, an early proponent of kinaesthetic empathy, identified its effect as “the inherent contagion of bodily movement, which makes the onlooker feel sympathetically in his own musculature the exertions he sees in someone else’s musculature” (1946, 105). More recent work on kinaesthetic empathy has revised Martin’s inaccurate understanding of human biology, but retains the idea of the “contagion of bodily movement”. Current neuroscience scholarship explains the phenomenon by way of the neural mimicry model, which contends that perception and action rely on the same neural circuits, and so produce the same internal state, within the body’s nervous system.¹⁴ The neural mimicry model has drawn legitimacy from neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese’s identification of mirror neurons in the anterior cingulate, the anterior insula, the cerebellum and the thalamus, which fire in an identical manner both when the individual performs a certain action and when the individual witnesses that action being performed (Gallese et al. 1996; Gallese and Goldman 1998). Consequently, the observer’s nervous system responds as though she is “actively participating in [the observed motion] and directly experiencing both its movements and their associated emotion” (Reason and Reynolds 2010, 54). At its most extreme, kinaesthetic empathy can suppose a near-total experiential union between subject and object, a “breach of individual separateness” (Langer 1972, 129) in which the observer no longer distinguishes clearly between their spectating self and a witnessed other, but rather becomes “invested in both subject and object in a shared

¹⁴ For further detail, see Preston and Hofelich 2012, Jackson, Meltzoff and Decety 2005, and Preston and de Waal 2002.

materiality” of sensation (Reynolds 2012, 129). Further recent neuroscience work has established that physical pain specifically can be “transmitted” between sufferer and observer’s bodies following the neural mimicry model. Rütgen et al., for example, cite the “compelling and convergent” evidence that “empathy for pain is grounded in similar neural and even neurochemical processes as the first-hand experience of pain” (2018, 12), and Botvinick et al. have demonstrated that even the “observation of pain-related *behaviour*” such as wincing or grimacing by test subjects simulating the pain experience, was “sufficient, on its own, to activate pain-related neural structures” in observers (2005, 318; original emphasis).¹⁵ That is, a witness’s responsive bodily discomfort may be stimulated not only by the sight of physical suffering, but simply by the *apparent* sight of physical suffering – a crucial factor when considering the unsettling affective impact of performed pain in the theatre medium.

I have discussed kinaesthetic empathy in some detail here because the concept offers an explicit focus on the body as a means of communicating pain, rather than verbal language – and one that is particularly pertinent to the manner in which these plays script a live confrontation between performer and spectator bodies. Yet, just as they undermine the capacities of verbal language, so too Beckett’s plays cast doubt on the body’s role in communicating physical pain. In response to the scepticism surrounding language’s capacity to convey the experience (or even the existence) of physical suffering, bodily language is often cited as a more reliable alternative, one which is “more spontaneous and automatic, rather than under the control of conscious deliberation and planning” (Craig 2009, 26), and thus read as more authentic, more credible. The context of theatrical performance emphasises the somewhat obvious contention that the bodily expression of pain can be faked as easily as the verbal expression, and Beckett’s plays further complicate any easy assumptions about the

¹⁵ See also Betti and Aglioti 2016, and Lamm, Decety and Singer 2011.

human body's communicative potential by refusing any clear understanding of what degree of pain the spectator is in fact witnessing. These plays often ask their performers to undergo physical suffering in order to fulfil the script's demands; many of the instances that we will examine in the ensuing chapters, such as Jean Martin's trembling rendition of Lucky's speech in *Waiting for Godot* and the close physical constraining of the actors in *Play*, *Happy Days*, and *Not I*, entail actual physical pain for their performers. It is impossible for the uninformed spectator to know with any certainty whether the bodies on stage before them are expressing actual live pain, or simulating the sensation. These plays underline that observing another's bodily response may in fact provide little certainty as to the other's bodily experience, involving the audience in what McMullan identifies as "a complex play of identification and difference" in which they are caught "between perception and imagination", uncertain which is which (1998, 138). The spectator remains suspended in epistemological doubt, responding viscerally to and even seemingly in sync with the bodies before them, yet still lacking any verifiable or conclusive understanding of the bodily experience they are witnessing.

This question of imagined or felt identification in turn challenges the determinedly humanist readings of Beckett's and his contemporaries' plays that strive to find an affirmation of human compassion in literary renderings of intense suffering. This is an affirmation that sits rather awkwardly in the context of World War II's aftermath, when "un théâtre engage qui exalte les valeurs humaines et prouve qu'il n'est pas vain de croire en l'homme" ("a politically engaged theatre that exalted human values and demonstrated that it was not in vain to believe in humankind") ceded to "un désenchantement brutal et profond" ("a profound and brutal disenchantment") faced with "le détail de la diabolique horreur organisée des camps d'extermination nazis" and "les ravages de la bombe atomique lancée sur Hiroshima" ("details of the diabolical organised horrors of the Nazi extermination camps", "the devastating effects of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima"; Chalaye 1998, 8). Yet there remains a marked

strain in modern literary criticism towards redemptive readings of these texts. David Palumbo-Liu, for example, argues that “literature should mobilize (or even instantiate) empathy for others and enhance our ethical capabilities” (2012, 2), that at the heart of all “great art” lies “the call to embrace others” (2012, 11, xi). A comparable inclination in Beckett criticism is exemplified in its extreme by the Karl Ragnar Gierow’s paean to Beckett’s work on behalf of the Nobel Prize Committee in 1969, praising “writing which – in new forms for the novel and the drama – in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation”, reaching to “the utmost bounds of suffering to discover that compassion has no bounds” (1993, 17, 20). However, a reading of the post-war drama grounded in close attention to the staging of pain and the effects of kinaesthetic empathy destabilises these optimistic interpretations of Beckett’s post-war work, in which Gibson more convincingly identifies a marked “revulsion from humanism” and “a fierce conviction that human realities are recalcitrant to elevated conceptions of justice, fraternity, reason, human grandiosities in general” (2014, 112). Suspended uncertainly “between perception and imagination” (McMullan 1998, 138), the witness’s ‘empathetic’ response to another’s suffering may prove more a response to their own distress than to the sufferer’s ordeal. Empathy scholar Meghan Marie Hammond observes that the intensely empathetic response risks “prevent[ing] us from apprehending the foreignness of the foreign object”, which becomes “understood not as an other, but rather as the locus of another self” (2014, 72).¹⁶ The empathetic reaction, so routinely vaunted as both locus and signal of compassion, can often ultimately indicate simply a response to our own spectatorial distress. As ethics philosopher Martha Nussbaum

¹⁶ C. Daniel Batson distinguishes between what he terms the “imagine-self” variant of empathy, in which the observer imagines how she would feel in the observed sufferer’s position and thus elides the self-other experience, and the “imagine-other” variant, in which one strives to imagine how the other is feeling in her place rather than how oneself would feel, thus retaining clear boundaries between the self and other (2009, 7). Max Scheler has elsewhere defined this distinction as “idiopathic” and “heteropathic” identification, the former being “the total eclipse and absorption of another’s self by one’s own” (1970, 18), and the latter when “my formal status as a subject is usurped by another’s personality” (1970, 19). See Conclusion for further discussion of Jill Bennett’s interrogation of such distinctions by way of the terms “empathetic” and “empathic”.

cautions, “empathy can have its own narcissism” (2014, 146), an insight which raises awkward questions as to the spectator’s motivation for watching scenes of staged – or actual – physical suffering.

Moreover, the fact that the spectacle of pain may often catalyse recoil rather than empathetic response, as demonstrated by a number of the plays under discussion in this project, further undermines assertions of a certain humanistic ‘good’ that might be realised by bearing witness to the spectacle of pain. Kristen Ringelberg sounds a similar note to Palumbo-Liu in her claim that “what art perhaps should do in dealing with war, murder, torture, pain” is “make us look more than once, make us think beyond our own feelings, and, ideally, make us change” (2013, 37). Ringelberg merges into one automatic chain of consequential events the spectacle of suffering, observer empathy, and the observer’s ethical response. Yet as pleasing as this vision of suffering-stimulating-good might be, we must more honestly probe spectator response to the presentation of human pain. The agony-ridden bodies in these plays provoke resistance and rejection (from both onstage characters and spectators in the auditorium) at least as often as they occasion identification or compassion. An understanding of kinaesthetic empathy allows us to more clearly understand how Dowd’s theory of spectator recoil in the face of pain might come about. Pain is an aversive phenomenon, as Beckett’s description of it as “against” cited above underlines; the more intensely it is experienced, the more likely the individual is to recoil from it. As it becomes too painful to “feel with” the sufferer, the spectator may block any empathetic projection onto the performer before her, to ensure that “cognitive and affective demands [are] diminished and vicarious traumatization of the observer is less likely” (Craig 2009, 28). These, then, are theatrical works that seem determined to repulse the spectator’s immersive empathy as often as they engage it, to elicit identificatory engagement only to block it. They emphasise to their spectators that another’s suffering does not necessarily stimulate automatic compassion, but

rather issues a claim “which may be given or denied” (Das 1997, 70). Where Ringelberg expects us to “look more than once”, we are as likely to look away; where she asks us to “think beyond our own feelings”, we may find ourselves overwhelmed, paralysed, by the intensity of our own responsive feeling.

Crucially, however, in focusing on the challenges to interpersonal understanding and response posed by the representation of physical pain in these plays, I am not arguing for a nihilistic or defeatist vision of undiluted human antipathy – nor do I think that the work of Beckett or his Francophone contemporaries should necessarily be read as such. Rather, these plays offer a rigorously insistent focus on the fact of witnessed suffering, mercilessly repudiating all facile consolations, in the aftermath of a war that has occasioned such unprecedented levels of physical pain. Marina MacKay’s observation that “any claim for the redeeming and compensatory power of literary art has to be humble and hesitant in the face of a war that spanned the globe, destroyed a continent and killed sixty million people” offers an instructive perspective on the value of these plays’ ruthless spotlight on physical suffering – and on the value in our refusing to read them otherwise (2009b, 8). If post-war Europe saw a boom in Holocaust testimony literature which confronted the reader with the survivor’s lived experience of suffering,¹⁷ then Beckett’s post-war plays form the mirror image of this genre, testifying grimly not to suffering itself but rather to the experience of witnessing this suffering – and to a stringent refusal to efface the war’s victims.

These plays, then, are symptomatic rather than curative. They do not offer any manageable or easily negotiable encounter with physical suffering; the pained bodies they present are sufficiently abject as to repel the spectator as often as they elicit fellow feeling.

¹⁷ For example, Primo Levi’s *Se questo è un uomo* (*If This is a Man*, 1947) and *La tregua* (*The Truce*, 1963), Jean Améry’s *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* (*At the Mind’s Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*, 1964), and Charlotte Delbo’s *Auschwitz et après* (*Auschwitz and After*, 1965-94) all refuse to conceal or transmute the stark horrors of their authors’ experiences within the concentration-camp system. See Chapter Five for further analysis of Beckett’s and Duras’s position within this literary context of resistant Holocaust testimony.

Rather than a comforting transcendence or redemption of historically endured pain, they offer a starkly sceptical, even pessimistic probing of what it is to witness another's suffering. In raising questions about the spectator's capacity to perceive, comprehend, or respond satisfactorily to another human being's agony, Beckett's and his Francophone contemporaries' post-war plays starkly embody the "pressing, but fraught, need to bear witness" to others' suffering (Houston Jones 2012, 144), in all its distressing and morally murky dimensions, in the long aftermath of World War II.

Note on Translation

Lori Chamberlain has noted the tendency in Beckett scholarship "to cite Beckett's texts either in original or in translation, depending on audience, for example, or the speaker's own linguistic affiliation" (1987, 18), in contrast to the conventional quoting of foreign-language texts in their original language for the purposes of close reading. I too cite Beckett's texts here in their original English (in the case of *Happy Days*, *Play*, and *Not I*) or in their English translation (in the case of *Eleutheria*, *Waiting for Godot*, and *Endgame*). I provide French quotations in cases where the Francophone rendering offers a notably different or additional reflection on questions of physical pain or, in the case of Chapter 1's discussion of *Eleutheria*, where the lack of an English text as translated by Beckett himself raises questions over the validity of the current English translation.

Where a reputable English translation exists of other French primary and secondary texts, I cite and quote from these translations. Where no such translation exists – or where the current English translation in circulation proves inadequate – I provide the original French along with my own translation in parentheses.

Chapter One

Cruelty and Indifference:

Eleutheria and Albert Camus

In a play full of prevarication and deceit, it is significant that two of the very few sincere attempts at communication in *Eleutheria* relate to aversive responses to physical pain: Victor's confession that "he is afraid of getting hurt" (1996, 150) and Dr Piouk's belief "that we try to avoid pain as necessarily and, let's be fair, as blindly as the moth tries to avoid the dark" (1996, 136). *Eleutheria* presents the reclusive Victor Krap's attempts to escape from his bourgeois family, and from the trappings of the world more broadly, while fending off interference from characters including the "Glazier", a scripted "Spectator" who invades the stage from the audience, and the menacing Dr Piouk, who offers Victor an ostensibly painless means of suicide. Beckett wrote *Eleutheria* in French between January and February 1947, and although a number of French theatre directors, including Jean Vilar and Roger Blin, considered mounting a production of *Eleutheria* during Beckett's lifetime, all finally rejected the idea, and Beckett would eventually withdraw the manuscript from circulation altogether.¹ The play is commonly dismissed in Beckett scholarship as a piece of sensibly suppressed juvenilia, and *Waiting for Godot*, written between October 1948 and January 1949, would quickly eclipse it as Beckett's first professionally staged play. However, as Elsa Baroghel observes, "Beckett's first completed play contains, *in utero*, some of the problems that would preoccupy him throughout his ensuing career as a dramatist" (2010, 124). *Eleutheria* is

¹ *Eleutheria* was published posthumously in 1995, simultaneously in French by Jérôme Lindon's Éditions de Minuit and in a much-maligned English translation by Michael Brodsky by Foxrock Books. A new English translation was commissioned from Barbara Wright by Faber & Faber in 1996, which quickly became the new standard English text, and this is the version cited here. The play has not been licensed by Beckett's estate for performance. A public 'reading' of the play was organised by Beckett's long-time US publisher Barney Rosset in New York in 1994, but the Beckett estate intervened and forbade any further readings or stagings. *Eleutheria* has subsequently been staged once in Tehran in 2005 by director Vahid Rahbani. For further details of *Eleutheria*'s chequered publication and performance history, see Graf 2014 and 2017.

integral to this project as Beckett's first completed playscript written in the immediate aftermath of World War II, and thus as his first post-war negotiation with the issue of confronting physical pain in the dramatic medium. *Eleutheria* is also particularly significant as a play that frames physical pain – both one's own and another's – as a fundamentally aversive phenomenon, and rejects any idea of empathetic witnessing of or compassionate response to another being's suffering.

This chapter reads *Eleutheria* alongside Beckett's close contemporary Albert Camus's plays, focusing on those which sit most closely in composition and in staging date to the period of World War II: *Caligula* (1944), *Le Malentendu* (*The Misunderstanding*, 1944), and *L'État de siège* (*State of Siege*, 1948).² Like *Eleutheria*, these three plays present characters who respond with cold indifference or outright cruelty to the pain of others. *Eleutheria* and Camus's 1940s plays draw a distressingly close connection between physical suffering and the failure – or, more specifically, the refusal – of interpersonal connection, and offer a particularly bleak vision of an endemic lack of intercorporeal empathy in wartime and post-war France. This chapter explores how and to what ends *Eleutheria* foregrounds the individual's refusal to sympathise with the spectacle of another being's physical pain – the dark side of the quest for “freedom” from suffering – and the comparable sensibility in Camus's post-war plays. In doing so, it counters critical readings that interpret *Eleutheria* as demonstrative of an empathetic response to others' suffering, and that read Camus's post-war theatre as presenting a consistent vision of human compassion.

² This chapter quotes from Stuart Gilbert's 1958 translations of *Caligula*, *Le Malentendu*, and *L'État de siège*. Gilbert works from the original 1944 French edition of *Le Malentendu* and the original 1948 French edition of *L'État de siège*. His translation of *Caligula* is based on Gallimard's 1958 version of *Caligula*, commonly accepted as Camus's definitive 'final' version of the play, and which differs only slightly and occasionally from the 1944 edition. Where the 1944 version differs substantially enough from the 1958 to affect a close reading, this will be highlighted here; some reference to the 1941 manuscript, published by Gallimard in 1984, will be made where relevant. (I ignore David Greig's 2003 translation of *Caligula* for the Donmar Warehouse, given the extensive liberties that Greig takes with the original text.) I provide my own translations for Camus's *Réflexions sur la guillotine*, his *Carnets*, and his *Combat* writings.

Both Beckett and Camus were better known as prose writers in the 1940s. Beckett had published “Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce” in 1929, *Proust* in 1931, *More Pricks than Kicks* in 1934, *Murphy* in 1938, and “L’Expulsé”, “Le Calmant”, and “La Fin” in 1946. Following the publication of some collections of essays in the 1930s, including *L’Envers et l’endroit* (1937) and *Noces* (1938), Camus had published *L’Étranger* and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* to great acclaim in 1942 and 1943 respectively, and after France’s liberation from the Nazi occupiers in June 1944 was revealed to be the previously anonymous editor of the Resistance newspaper, *Combat*. Although Camus had been involved in amateur theatre productions in Algeria since his youth, as had Beckett at Trinity College Dublin,³ the scripting of the plays under consideration in this chapter marked for both men their first foray into professional theatre – or rather, in Beckett’s case, was intended to do so. For both writers, the shift to writing for theatre marked a new and more confrontational engagement with the French public, situating the theatre auditorium as “a space of contestation between the play and its audience”, as Peter Boxall has aptly described *Eleutheria* (1998, 254). Both Beckett and Camus turned to theatre as a means of grappling with not only the spectacle of pain, but more specifically with the display of cruelty and indifference to others’ suffering. Each interpellates his spectators directly, rendering them complicit in the spectacle of suffering before them, and offering a striking critique of the comparable indifference or active cruelty presupposed by their imagined spectators’ voluntary presence in the theatre auditorium to watch these suffering beings. This chapter thus also challenges the critical commonplace that sees *Eleutheria* as an atypically dramaturgically conventional play within Beckett’s corpus. In fact, *Eleutheria* pays careful attention to the intercorporeal dynamics of its intended staging, repeatedly manipulating the boundaries between stage and auditorium and between

³ Beckett participated in Georges Pelorson’s play *Le Kid*, a pastiche of Pierre Corneille’s 1636 tragicomedy *Le Cid*, while at Trinity College Dublin. He also produced two unfinished play fragments in 1936: *Mittelalterliches Dreieck (Medieval Triangle)* and *Human Wishes*. Camus founded an amateur theatre troupe, “Théâtre du Travail” (later “Théâtre de l’Équipe”), in 1935, for whom he would write the initial 1938 draft of *Caligula*.

performer and spectator bodies, offering an early example of how Beckett's post-war plays work to "figurer la rupture des lignes de communication dans le dispositif dramaturgique lui-même" ("represent the rupturing of the lines of communication in the play's very staging"; Salado 1998, 76).⁴ In contrast to Camus's more conventional dramatic strategies, *Eleutheria* sees Beckett beginning to manipulate the theatre medium in order to interrogate the experience of witnessing physical pain.

There is, however, a still more crucial distinction between Beckett's and Camus's depictions of human responsiveness to another's pain in these plays. Although both playwrights emphasise the individual's instinctive rejection of, rather than sympathy with, another being's physical suffering, Camus ultimately proffers a guarded glimpse of potential optimism that is markedly absent from Beckett's *Eleutheria*. *Le Malentendu*, *L'État de siège* and even *Caligula* all finally demonstrate – and even to some degree encourage – an understanding for those characters who find "solace" in their own "imperturbability" (Camus 1962, 38, 58), who retreat self-protectively from the barrage of witnessed pain before them to seek temporary relief in a "splendid, sterile happiness [...] beyond the frontier of pain" (Camus 1962, 71). Moreover, Camus's plays ultimately position both shared pain and the medium of theatre as interlinked sites for potential communion between human beings. By contrast, *Eleutheria* allows no hint of any such optimism. Beckett's play implicates its spectators fully in the cruel indifference demonstrated by his most unlikeable characters, and offers no alternative relationship between beings beyond the final unforgiving image of his protagonist Victor "turning his emaciated back on humanity" (1996, 170). *Eleutheria* constitutes a markedly cynical beginning to Beckett's post-war exploration of the spectacle of physical pain in the theatre.

⁴ Salado here echoes Beckett's own phrasing from his 1934 essay "Recent Irish Poetry" concerning "the new thing that has happened again, or the old thing that has happened again, namely the breakdown of the object, whether current, mythical, or spook. [...]. It comes to the same thing – rupture of the lines of communication" (1984, 70).

“We are no longer living in the Third Republic”: Beckett, Camus, and World War II

The parallels between Beckett’s and Camus’s experiences of World War II are striking. Both lived out the conflict as non-nationals in France, Beckett as an Irish national and Camus as a *pied-noir* from French Algeria. Both men would join the punishing June 1940 exodus from Paris ahead of the approaching German army, Camus carrying his manuscript of *L’Étranger*, and Beckett his French translation of *Murphy*. After moving south into the occupied zone to escape the worst violence of the Nazi defeat of France, both would eventually return to Paris and undertake work for the French Resistance – Beckett for Gloria SMH, and Camus for Combat – each risking arrest walking the city streets with incriminating Resistance papers. Both men would have their Resistance work cut short by betrayal: Camus fled Paris again in July 1944 after someone informed on Combat, just as Beckett had done in August 1942 after Abbé Robert Alesch informed the Gestapo of Gloria SMH’s work. Both would lose members of their Resistance groups: only thirty of the original eighty members of Beckett’s Gloria SMH would survive the war (Gordon 1996, 144), and from Combat, Camus’s close friend René Leynaud would be shot by the Gestapo, Claude Bourdet and Jacqueline Bernard would be sent to concentration camps, Jean-Guy Bernard would die in Auschwitz, and the printer André Bollier would commit suicide just before being arrested by the Gestapo. Eventually, both Camus and Beckett would receive the *Médaille de la Résistance* (or *Médaille de la reconnaissance française*) for their Resistance work.⁵

⁵ Beckett demonstrated a keen awareness of Camus’s work from the immediate post-war period onwards. He recommended Camus’s 1942 novel *L’Étranger* (*The Stranger*) to George Reavey in May 1946 (*Letters II* 2012, 32) and to Pamela Mitchell in August 1954 (*Letters II* 2012, 493), and attended performances of Camus’s theatrical adaptations of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Demons* and William Faulkner’s *Requiem for a Nun* (*Letters II* 2012, 676; *Letters III*, 205). Dirk Van Hulle and Shane Weller have traced how genetic details in the 1949 manuscript of *L’Innominable* support the seeming likelihood that Beckett read Camus’s 1942 essay *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* either during or shortly after World War II (Van Hulle and Weller 2014, 119-20, 159-60), and Pim Verhulst has explored in detail the influence of the same essay on *Molloy*, *Waiting for Godot*, and *All That Fall* (2019); we might add Beckett’s depiction of Victor hesitating over the option of suicide in *Eleutheria* to this list of the influences of Camus’s essay on Beckett’s work.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, *Eleutheria* and Camus's plays make similar repeated references to specific war-related forms of physical suffering, which would have echoed significantly for a French audience still scarred by the horrors of World War II. In fact, Beckett and Camus's recurrent evocations of the spectre of wartime cruelties as a source of physical suffering seem deliberately calculated to play on the anxieties of the post-Liberation French public, and Anna McMullan has identified *Eleutheria* in particular as "a bitter critique of the failure of postwar bourgeois society [...] to adequately acknowledge or respond to the traumas of the recent war" (2008, 169). In *Eleutheria*, the antagonist Dr Piouk's declaration that "We are no longer living in the Third Republic" (1996, 119) places the play squarely in the Vichy France or immediate post-Vichy period,⁶ and Emilie Morin argues that "[e]very snippet of dialogue in *Eleutheria* is indexed to the three years of intense political turmoil that preceded the conception of the play" (2017, 145), citing the play's references to barbed wire, possible military "agents", the bodyguard Joseph's similarity to members of the French militia, and "a landscape that persistently recalls occupation, internment and deportation" (2017, 162). M. Krap quotes "*Nimis sero, imber serotinus*" (1996, 20) or "Too late, the belated showers" as he contemplates his approaching death, a blackly parodic alignment of the Latin word for "shower of rain" with the twentieth-century term for the Nazi gas chambers.⁷ Similarly, Camus's *L'État de siège* sees the town's citizens threatened with "being packed off to the incinerator" and being "concentrated" by the dictatorial "Peste" ("Plague") figure (1962, 172, 182). Indeed, on the play's first performance run at the Théâtre Marigny in Paris in October 1948, the "Peste" figure appeared in a Nazi uniform complete with a small black moustache (Grigore-Muresan 2009, 208), underlining the implicit reference in his name to "la peste brune" or "the brown plague", the colloquial term used to

⁶ The Third Republic was the French system of government from 1870 until 10 July 1940, when the Nazi invasion of the country led to the formation of the Vichy government. This detail discredits Marius Buning's claim that *Eleutheria* is set in a pre-World War II Paris (Buning 2000, 50).

⁷ See also Jackie Blackman's reading of the Biblical resonance of this phrase (Blackman 2008, 333-34).

refer to the Nazis in occupied France (Hughes 2015, 85). Comparably, the actions of Camus's Roman emperor in *Caligula* bears a more than passing resemblance to those of Adolf Hitler, as he “convert[s] his philosophy into corpses” (1962, 21) and instils a fear of randomly dictated death that replicates the “chaos and arbitrary inconsistency” that French Resistance worker Agnès Humbert describes as “the order of the day” in Nazi-occupied France (2008, 2).⁸ Indeed, one contemporary reviewer remarked that *Caligula* made him “songer des S.S.” and praised the play as an example of a “[t]héâtre vivant tout près des sources de notre inquiétude” (“think of the SS”, “a theatre drawing its living force straight from the sources of our anxieties”; Kemp, 28 September 1945, n.p.).

Camus and Beckett also proffer instances of physical cruelty that could be indexed to Vichy as well as to Nazi conduct during World War II, bringing their depictions of suffering unsettlingly closer to home for a post-war audience. Nick Wolterman suggests that Dr Piouk's plan in *Eleutheria* to “‘solve’ the problem of humanity, which amounts to a disturbing well-organised procedure for eliminating that human race” evokes “the ruthless efficacy of Nazi death camps” (2018, 10) – yet we might also read a parody of the Vichy social eugenicists in the malevolent doctor's plan to “ban reproduction”, “drown all newborn babies” and “establish teams of abortionists, controlled by the State” (1996, 44), which offers a suggestively precise inversion of the Third Republic and Vichy France's drive to reinvigorate the French nation through an increased birth rate. Where Dr Piouk “would apply

⁸ Much scholarly energy has been expended on arguing how far *Caligula* can or should be read as a direct analogy to Nazi rule. Philip Thody points to Camus telling a *Franc-Libre* journalist in September 1945 that “any political implications which might be read into *Caligula* were wholly accidental” (1973, xiv); however, Camus had in fact admitted his own anxiety as to the “scandale” likely to be provoked by a proposed staging of *Caligula* in Nazi-occupied France in a letter to Francis Ponge in November 1943 (Gleize 2013, 105). Pierre-Louis Rey contrasts the 1941 and 1944 versions of the script and identifies a crueller reworking of the emperor's character that gives him “une plus forte resonance” with “la folie du Führer” (“a stronger resonance”, “the Führer's madness”; 2011, 78), indicating that, although a Nazi analogy might not have been uppermost in Camus's mind when he began the play, the experiences of the Nazi occupation of Paris may have significantly inflected its subsequent drafts. Regardless of Camus's exact intentions, we can at least join with Christine Magerrison in observing that *Caligula*'s vision seemed “to chime with audiences who had undergone the horrors of Nazi occupation” (2007, 67).

the death penalty to any woman guilty of giving birth” (1996, 44), for example, the Vichy French government in fact “issued a medal ‘for the French family’ to productive mothers – bronze for five children, gold for ten” (Mazower 1999, 84). Vichy’s social eugenics also saw the *Centre d’Études de la Fondation Heucqueville* and Alexis Carrel’s *Fondation Carrel* promoting more directly destructive “negative eugenicist” practices, including the sterilisation of individuals with congenital illnesses or physical and mental impairments, and the creation of a genetic archive to identify the *souches saines* or “healthy strains” of the population and to allow the “unhealthy” strains to be “prevented, contained, or eliminated” (Reggiani 2007, 139). Dr Piouk’s vision for humanity, “his abortions and his euthanasia” (1996, 51), bear a strong and blackly parodic resemblance to this Vichyite drive to ‘improve’ the nation. In Camus’s original French in *Caligula*, “*La Glaive*”, the reported title of the book that the emperor is writing, offers a similar vacillation between possible Nazi or Vichy reference (1958, 65).⁹ The word “glaive” in post-war France might have evoked the Fascist group “Les Chevaliers du Glaive” founded by Joseph Darnand, leader of the feared *milice française* and eventual member of the Waffen-SS; it might equally have suggested to the post-war Francophone ear the *thèse du glaive et du bouclier* or “theory of the sword and shield”, in vogue during and following the Occupation with Vichy and collaboration apologists, which claimed that Général de Gaulle (the “glaive”) and Maréchal Pétain (the “bouclier”) were acting in concert to protect France during the Nazi occupation. In either case, the evocations of physical violence and distress in these plays recurrently play on the specific traumas of a post-World-War-II Francophone audience.

However, despite the extended emphasis on wartime cruelty and suffering that *Eleutheria* exemplifies, Beckett’s role as a member of the French Resistance has unhelpfully

⁹ Stuart Gilbert’s English translation “*Cold Steel*” retains the menace of physical violence (1962, 28) but lacks the historical specificity of Camus’s original French.

influenced a species of determinedly optimistic interpretations of his post-war works. Beckett's Resistance work has typically been read as demonstrating his responsive compassion for the suffering of the war's victims. Morin voices a common opinion when she remarks that during the war "Beckett abided by [a] general principle of solidarity" (2017, 151), quoting the playwright's 1977 explanation to Richard Stern that he became involved in the French Resistance work as a direct result of witnessing the suffering of others: "The yellow star and everything. It wasn't politics. Just a human thing. I couldn't stay detached from that" (Morin 2017, 152). The relatively few critical responses to *Eleutheria* that locate the play in its historical and political post-war context have thus tended to commit a certain biographical fallacy, extending the recognition of Beckett's apparent engagement with the suffering of others into an expectation that his dramatic works will evince a comparable compassionate empathy. Jackie Blackman, for example, reads Beckett's Resistance work as an "individual and ethical", essentially empathetic response to suffering, explicitly contrasting it with "the prevailing culture of complacency and indifference" to the Vichy and Nazi atrocities in occupied France (2009, 68, 80).¹⁰ In reading Beckett's own response to the war as one of compassionate engagement, Blackman consequently interprets his post-war texts as examples of similarly empathetic communion with others' suffering.

Similarly, many recent readings of Camus's plays have emphasised the concept of "heroism and solidarity in the face of contemporary political horror" (McLemee 2012, 21) to the point of eliding a more uncomfortable acknowledgement of the excesses of indifference and cruelty with which these plays confront their spectators. Perhaps most strikingly, Philip Hallie's exaltation of Camus as "one of the few good men in a broken world, a lay saint" leads him to summarise the author's writings as ultimately "only trying to remind people that,

¹⁰ Positioning a quickly waning post-war faith in humanist ideals as "perhaps the central debate in post-Liberation France", Kevin Brazil has convincingly argued for a reading of *Eleutheria* as "explicitly attack[ing] post-war discourses of humanism" (2013, 32, 94).

no matter how high our abstract principles may fly, the flesh-and-bone individuals who utter these principles count, and count heavily” (2012, 104). Rather as Blackman equates Beckett’s own compassionate engagement in the war to an automatic expectation of empathy in Beckett’s post-war works, so too Hallie equates Camus’s late post-war pacifist politics with a similar expectation of a vaunting of the sanctity of the human body in his literary works – conveniently forgetting Camus’s sustained support of retaliatory military action and corporal and capital punishment during World War II and its immediate aftermath. Without attempting to debate the relative ethics of either Beckett’s or Camus’s own personal involvement in the war, I resist the impulse to seek any precisely comparable ethics of empathy in these plays. We might turn to Camus’s description of his post-war state of mind, in his 1946 *Combat* editorial entitled “Le Siècle de peur” (“The Century of Fear”), as a counter to overly idealist readings of Camus’s post-war work:

Quelque chose en nous a été détruit par le spectacle des années que nous venons de passer. Et ce quelque chose est cette éternelle confiance de l’homme, qui lui a toujours fait croire qu’on pouvait tirer d’un autre homme des réactions humaines en lui parlant le langage de l’humanité. Nous avons vu mentir, avilir, tuer, déporter, torturer, et à chaque fois il n’était pas possible de persuader ceux qui le faisaient de ne pas le faire[.]

The years we have just lived through have destroyed something in us. And that “something” is the unending faith man had in himself, which always led him to believe that he could elicit human reactions from another man if he spoke to him in the language of a common humanity. We have seen people lie, degrade, kill, deport, torture – and each time it was not possible to persuade them not to do these things[.]

(*Combat* 2002, 637)

Camus’s impassioned words suggest that the expectation of a confident idealism regarding human nature is misplaced in the context of Camus’s – and, I suggest, Beckett’s – 1940s plays. This was a period in France’s history that saw “une véritable crise de conscience” with regard to pre-war humanist thinking, as “les victimes d’hier sont [devenus] les bourreaux d’aujourd’hui, idéaux et valeurs humaines apparaissent comme de piètres illusions” (“a real

crisis of conscience”, “yesterday’s victims [became] today’s executioners, human values and ideals came to seem like paltry illusions”; Chalaye 1998, 9). Revealingly, Camus’s contemporary audience would largely interpret his plays as agonised and agonising expressions of a specifically post-war disillusionment – Robert Kemp, for example, speaking explicitly “[p]our nous, de 1945”, described Caligula as a figure “empoisonné par nos malheurs, déchiré par nos négations, vidé, comme nous le sommes aux mauvaises heures” (“for us, of 1945”, “poisoned by our afflictions, ripped apart by the negation of our own beings, worn out, as we are, by these difficult times”; Kemp, 13 October 1945, n.p.) – and there seems little reason not to assume, had *Eleutheria* been staged in post-war France, that Victor would have been likewise recognised as “un homme de maintenant [...] à qui l’on a révélé l’horreur de la condition humaine [...] et des abominations de la guerre moderne” (“a man of our times [...] to whom has been revealed the horror of the human condition [...] and the abominations of modern war”; Kemp, 13 October 1945, n.p.).

“It’s not worth worrying about”: Indifference to others’ pain

Although *Eleutheria* is filled with bodily pain from its opening scenes, this suffering is not met with any corresponding sympathy or compassion. Instead, chilly indifference typifies the response to physical pain here, a cold disregard for any suffering that is not one’s own.

Throughout the first act, each sufferer’s complaints are met with a marked lack of compassion or even acknowledgement:

M. KRAP: I have a slight pain in...
 MME KRAP: Marguerite, you’ve taken my place.
 (1996, 42)

M. KRAP: Promise me. I’m dying.
 (*Silence.*)

(1996, 53)

Indeed, the general lack of sympathy that the characters show for each other's aches and pains at times develops into outright scorn:

M. KRAP: (*Seats himself painfully in the armchair.*) I shouldn't. (*Ensnoces himself.*) I shan't be able to get up again.

MME KRAP: Don't talk nonsense.

(1996, 20)

DR PIOUS: Are you ill?

M. KRAP: I'm dying.

MME MECK: Really, Henri, do calm down.

(1996, 27)

The resistance to any shared or compassionate feeling is emphasised in the play's scenographic staging directions, which asks for "a split set, with two very different décors juxtaposed [...] without a dividing wall" (1996, 5); there is simultaneous action across both sides of the stage throughout the play, but these events "never encroach on each other, and barely comment one on the other. The movements of the character towards each other are brought to a halt by a barrier, which only they can see. This doesn't prevent them from almost touching one another at moments" (1996, 6). *Eleutheria's* imagined actors must create this unseen yet palpable demarcation between the Kraps' and Victor's respective apartments through their own movements – or rather, through the restriction of their own movements, never crossing the imagined 'dividing line' between the two spaces and exhibiting a studied indifference to the action on the other side of the stage. The split stage grants a visual emphasis to the play's lack of any intercorporeal sympathy, offering a staged representation of Elaine Scarry's theory of how pain can "bring about, even within the radius of several feet, this absolute split between one's own sense of one's own reality and the reality of another person" (1985, 4). The "profound ontological split" that Scarry observes between one's own and another's pain (1985, 56) is dramatised on *Eleutheria's* stage. Just as "[t]he main action and the marginal action never encroach on each other" on *Eleutheria's* stage (1996, 6), so too

no sense of shared pain ever unites the various characters. The individuals on either side of “the invisible barrier” find themselves “almost touching at moments”, yet remain separated (1996, 6-7); correspondingly, although all are in physical pain, none of *Eleutheria*’s characters demonstrate any sense of empathy with each other. Beckett’s play repeatedly underlines its characters’ indifference to each other’s bodily suffering.

Rather than condemning the characters’ lack of sympathetic feeling, however, *Eleutheria*’s spectator might well find themselves responding in kind. The characters’ pains are markedly repetitive. The Kraps, Mme Meck, and Mme Piouk all seem to suffer from a restricted and interchangeable range of symptoms: Mme Krap and M. Krap both claim to suffer pain in their rear ends and an inability to stand up, and Mme Meck and Mme Krap both have prolapsed wombs, for example. The very monotony of the characters’ complaints seems deliberately scripted to catalyse a spectator’s own indifferent turn away from the spectacle of suffering confronting them – particularly a post-war audience already wearied by the prolonged witnessing of wartime suffering after four years of Occupation, and situated within living memory of the horrors of World War I, exhausted by what Marina MacKay identifies as “the sheer secondness of the Second World War” (2008, 5). Fuyuki Kurasawa has summarised how an “overexposure” to the spectacle of physical pain, the “incessant repetition” or “saturation” of such images within one’s daily consciousness, can lead to “compassion fatigue”, a seeming “indifference, or callousness” that speaks pertinently to the experience of the average Francophone citizen during World War II (2014, 31-32) – and indeed, the factual brevity of Beckett’s own references to several friends’ deaths in his letters during the war’s aftermath seems to testify to this same emotionally overwhelmed exhaustion faced with the continuing record of suffering, as for example, “Alfred Péron is dead. Arrested by Gestapo 1942, deported 1943, died in Switzerland, on his way home May 1st 1945” (*Letters II* 2012, 16). Camus lamented precisely this phenomenon in May 1945, describing

how the “monotonie” of continued suffering meant that the French people “commence à se lasser de tant d’atrocités” still being uncovered in Occupation’s aftermath (“monotony”, “are beginning to tire of the sheer number of atrocities”; *Combat* 2002, 534), including the localised violence of the *épuration sauvage* and the shocking revelation of the details of the Nazi extermination camps. In turn, he stages a similarly monotonous spectacle of physical suffering in *L’État de siège*: the victims of the plague, who “writhe convulsively” in pain before dying, fall with repetitive regularity, typically in pairs or groups, throughout the play, until the “[d]ull thuds” of falling bodies become disregarded background noise (1962, 154, 213). Lacklustre audience response over the years to “la composition trop systématique” of *L’État de siège* (“the overly systematic arrangement”; Touchard 1960, n.p.) emphasises how the “[n]on seulement des scènes courtes mais enchaînées l’une à l’autre si étroitement, sans ouverture” worked in performance to detach the spectator from any intense extended emotional engagement, and “a manifestement lassé nombre de spectateurs” (“brief scenes following one another in rapid succession, without pause”, “wearied many spectators”; Autrand 1992, 64-65), and thus replicated the numbing “overexposure” to seemingly endless suffering that Kurasawa theorises. By rendering their own depictions of physical suffering repetitive to the point of tedium, both Beckett and Camus encourage their spectators’ own indifferent response to the spectacle of pain before them.

For Beckett’s anticipated audience, this potential indifference is likely to be exacerbated by the fact that, compared to the sufferings of soldiers, camp prisoners, or even most civilians during the war period (or even the stabbings, stranglings, and plague-stricken bodies that Camus stages), the sufferings of which the characters complain in *Eleutheria* are relatively domestic, even trivial. McMullan points out that although the play is infused with “traces of war” and its “traumatic events”, *Eleutheria* “foregrounds their exclusion from the blinkered middle-class world of the play” (2010, 124). Even for non-combatant civilians in

occupied France, wartime food and fuel shortages, alongside the increased taxes levied on the French population in order to pay the demanded ‘reparations’ to the Nazi occupiers, rendered life distressingly difficult; this suffering would continue in the post-Liberation period as a result of “the damage caused to the infrastructure and the economy by the fighting; the acute shortages of food, fuel, clothing and shelter; the priority in reconstruction given to heavy industry over consumer goods; the widespread unemployment; and the unusually bitter winters” (Kelly 1994, 237; see also Kyte 1946).

Beckett’s letters from Paris in 1947 bear testimony to his own direct experience of this struggle for survival in post-war France: “The annual struggle against cold & restrictions has well begun. Things here get daily worse. I expect there will be some trouble before the end of the winter”; “Things are very bad [...] Life even for margin people like me is increasingly difficult” (*Letters II* 2012, 64-65). The Kraps’ elegant salon and supplies of port and cigars, and Mme Meck’s being “laden with furs”, suggest that the characters we meet in *Eleutheria*’s first act have not been exposed to occupied or post-war France’s suffering to any significant degree (1996, 14). Even the Maréchal Meck’s death – which offers the group’s closest potential connection to the brutal consequences of the conflict, since the Maréchal Meck is presumably a member of the French military forces, his title evoking the Vichy Chief of State Maréchal Phillipe Pétain – is not explicitly a direct result of combat, and is glorified by his wife into a jingoistic vision that, although offering a fanatical patriotism conceived through the body, elides any actual or graphic bodily distress: “His dying breath was for France” (1996, 26). The characters’ affluent ease recalls Beckett’s own alleged condemnation of Ireland’s apparent indifference to post-war France’s misery in 1945, his remonstrance that “My friends eat sawdust and turnips while all of Ireland safely gorges” (Cronin 1996, 343). However, it also suggests a still more pointed critique of a potential post-war French audience’s detachment from their less-fortunate compatriots’ misery. In comparable fashion,

L'État de siège's final scene sees the return of "the triflers, smooth-tongued, comfortable" government leaders who fled the city before the plague struck; one survivor's incredulous exclamation, "Do you see what they're up to? Conferring decorations on each other! [...]" The blood of those you call the just ones still glistens on the walls – and what are these fine fellows up to? Giving each other medals!", offers an acerbic reference to the return to liberated France of Général de Gaulle and his Free French Forces government-in-exile from England, and de Gaulle's careful suppression of all Resistance leaders from positions of political power (1962, 230). The preceding lines, "So now we can start all over again, and what a relief for everyone! From zero naturally" (1962, 230) similarly evoke Général de Gaulle's post-conflict return to France, and specifically his ordinance declaring that all Vichy's legislation was "null and void" alongside his refusal to announce the successful restoration of the French Republic "on the grounds that it had never ceased to exist [...]" history would resume where it had stopped in 1940" (Jackson 2001, 1). The Gaullist post-war drive to restore France repeatedly saw the attempted erasure of the past suffering of many of occupied France's inhabitants.

Caligula opens with a similar indictment in the guise of the Patricians, whose glib dismissal of the suffering of others – "For one girl dead, a dozen living ones" (1962, 5) – suggests the much-maligned "Gaullist narrative of triumphant resistance" (Sicher 2005, 30), the erasure of the memory of the war's tragedies by post-war Gaullist politicians seeking the recovery and reunification of the French nation at any cost. "Anyhow – thank goodness! – grief never lasts forever. Is any one of us here capable of mourning a loss for more than a year on end?" one Patrician demands, to a chorus of agreement from the others (1962, 5); *Caligula*'s premiere date of September 1945 would have aligned this reference to the impossibility of mourning for "more than a year" with the end of the Nazi occupation of France, given the Liberation of France on 25 August 1944 and the establishment of the

Provisional Government of the French Republic in Paris on 9 September 1944. Beckett would similarly criticise the short memory of members of the Gaullist government, describing them in a 1946 letter to Arland Ussher as “Flourishing, particularly the military representative, they are happily engaged in reorganising the salvation of the country. They are quite prepared to forget and forgive – the so rude interruption” (*Letters II* 2012, 47), and it is this same condemnation of a post-war insensibility to suffering that we can trace in his depiction of the Kraps and their friends in *Eleutheria*. Where the Kraps and the Patricians are indifferent, even scornful, faced with the pain of others, the spectator is encouraged to respond to these characters’ own sufferings with corresponding indifference or scorn.

In fact, *Eleutheria* and Camus’s plays depict an indifference to others’ suffering so extreme as to enable the actual infliction of pain on others. In *Caligula* we hear of the emperor wreaking horrific violence on his subjects, including torturing innocent victims “nearly to death” and deliberately drawing out the process of execution so that his victims can “feel” it more intensely (1966, 57-58). This behaviour is imputed to Caligula’s self-identified “imperturbability” in the face of others’ suffering, rather than any expressly sadistic pleasure, to the extent that he apparently “yawns” following most spectacles of pain (1962, 58); Camus positions intense indifference to another’s pain as the bedrock of the emperor’s cruelty, rather than active delight in that pain. Other instances of physical brutality are framed in similar terms across the other plays under discussions here: in *Le Malentendu*, for example, the protagonist Martha and her mother mercilessly rob and kill any lone man who lodges at their inn, and in *Eleutheria*, Dr Piouk fantasises about drowning “all newborn babies” and declares himself willing to watch his new wife die in labour in order to obtain the child he desires (1996, 44-45); later, the Spectator character and Chouchi prepare to torture Victor by having his fingernails pulled out – and with some unspecified business with a

catheter – in order to make him talk (1996, 141-43).¹¹ As in *Caligula*, all these instances are framed as a means to an end, a signal of extreme indifference to another's suffering rather than an active desire to witness pain. A number of modern pain theorists have explored how the infliction of physical pain can be understood as a form of distancing or detaching from another's suffering, of blocking one's recognition of the fact of another's pain, by interpreting it instead as a signal of one's own power or agency. Perhaps most influentially, Elaine Scarry has described how, for the torturer, the process of inflicting pain on another human being can act "to deny, to falsify, the reality" of that individual's suffering: instead of being acknowledged as another's suffering, "the objectified pain is denied as pain and read as power" from the torturer's perspective (Scarry 1985, 27-28). The infliction of pain as depicted in these plays can likewise be understood as the refusal to acknowledge the other's pain as *pain*, substituting instead the interpretation of it as a mark of the inflictor's own power or agency; the fact of the victim's pain in fact becomes secondary to the witness's or perpetrator's proven immunity. As Camus's *Caligula* puts it, "I haven't so many ways of proving I am free. One is always free at someone else's expense" (1962, 28). Even active cruelty here bespeaks a radical form of indifference to another's suffering.

We must make a crucial distinction, however, between Beckett's and Camus's framing of the infliction of pain in these plays. Camus's plays present learned indifference to another's pain as a self-defensive measure, a means of indicating an insensibility to one's *own* potential suffering. Thus, where *Eleutheria* leaves its characters' unfeeling conduct open

¹¹ In fact, there are hints that the euthanasia tablet that Dr Piouk offers Victor may not be quite as "strictly painless" as he claims (1996, 161), and indeed may not be the "morphine" that he makes causal reference to earlier in the scene. On first mistakenly offering Victor an aspirin, Dr Piouk snatches it back and offers in its place "something different... (*he displays it*) something completely different!" (1996, 162). Since aspirin, as a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug, is most commonly used as an analgesic to treat bodily pain, the characteristics of "something completely different" would strongly imply something not "strictly painless", and certainly not the analgesic morphine. In fact, other than the brief and rather underwhelming moment of farce created by Dr Piouk's handing over the wrong pill, his mistake seems without any notable dramatic effect – other than to underline the second pill's dissimilarity to the analgesic aspirin. The death that Dr Piouk offers to Victor, we might surmise, is anything but painless.

to condemnation, or as grounds for the spectator's self-righteous retraction of any concern for these characters' own suffering, Camus encourages his spectators' understanding, and even sympathy, for his most brutally indifferent characters; as the Secretary puts it in *L'État de siège*, "Who could need pity more than those who themselves have none?" (1962, 225). *Le Malentendu* presents a post-war Czechoslovakia in which many men have not returned from the conflict and the women have been left to survive as best they can, and positions World War II itself as a crucial catalyst for this self-numbing. Camus wrote *Le Malentendu* between 1942 and 1943 at the height of World War II – although the play would not be staged or published in France until 1944 – and Edward J. Hughes argues that the compositional context of World War II "shaped the moral climate of *Le Malentendu*" profoundly, specifically its depiction of "the banality of killing" (2015, 82). Martha and her mother demonstrate "l'indifférence des gens qui ont trop vu", as Camus would describe the French people in the Resistance newspaper *Combat* in May 1947 ("the indifference of people who have seen too much"; 2002, 701); they have been overwhelmed by their exposure to war's cruelties to the point that they no longer respond to suffering, be it their own or another's, and now bring "neither anger nor pity to our task; only the indifference" bred by years of witnessed pain that have, in Camus's original French, "nous ont enlevé le goût de la sympathie" ("taken from us the taste for sympathy"; 1962, 99, 188).¹² Camus's careful tracing of the pair's brutal indifference to others' pain as a defensive survival mechanism, a form of "freedom" from suffering (1962, 121), reaches its apotheosis when it is revealed that the pair have unknowingly murdered the family's estranged son, who had returned to the inn without revealing his identity in an ill-fated attempt to regain his family's affection. The mother's self-defensive indifference crumbles: "My old heart, which seemed indifferent to everything,

¹² Stuart Gilbert renders the phrase as "They have killed any desire for friendliness" (1962, 96), which elides the connotations of a more invested sense of fellow feeling in the alternative translation "sympathy".

had learned again today what grief means” and, unable to bear “the pain of feeling love rekindled in my heart” she commits suicide (1962, 120, 122). By scripting the protagonists’ two options faced with the spectacle of suffering as being either cold detachment or desperate self-destruction, *Le Malentendu* emphasises how a learned indifference to others’ suffering, the self-protective refusal to engage with and potentially be infected by another’s pain, might offer the only defence against overwhelming responsive anguish. Significantly, both *Caligula* and *Le Malentendu* were published during a period in which Camus was declaring his support for particularly brutal measures on the part of Allied and Gaullist leaders. Perhaps as a result of his close experience of Nazi and Vichy atrocity in occupied France, including the murder of his friend and fellow Combat member René Leynaud by the occupying forces in June 1944, Camus initially pronounced himself in favour both of harsh retaliatory measures on the German people and of the death penalty for French collaborationists and traitors in the aftermath of the Liberation: “Il y a quatre ans qu’on nous force à durcir quelque chose en nous”, he declared in a *Combat* editorial in October 1944 (“Over the last four years, we’ve been forced to harden something in ourselves”; 2002, 305). Faced with the blunt realities of the *épuration légale*, however, Camus would soon become disillusioned with state-sponsored ‘retaliatory justice’, and by November 1946 he was ready to renounce his support for capital punishment in a series of editorial essays later collected under the title *Ni victimes ni bourreaux*. In many ways, then, *Le Malentendu* replicates Camus’s own experience of an initial but ultimately temporary ‘hardening’ of oneself to others in the aftermath of great suffering.

Similarly, *Caligula* frames even the tyrannical emperor’s brutality as motivated by a self-defensive struggle, a desperate search for temporary relief in a “splendid, sterile happiness [...] beyond the frontier of pain” (1962, 71). Early in Act I, the poet Scipio reminisces about the young Caligula’s gentle and compassionate character: “He often told me

that the only mistake one makes in life is to cause others suffering” (1962, 10); in contrast to his primary source Suetonius’s depiction of a Caligula who is monstrously brutal from his very earliest youth, Camus carefully contextualises Caligula’s cruelty as the sudden result of his sorrow at the death of his sister and lover Drusilla. Caligula describes this new grief following Drusilla’s death in markedly corporeal terms – “it’s my body that’s in pain. Pain everywhere, in my chest, in my legs and arms. Even my skin is raw, my head is buzzing, I feel like vomiting” (1962, 15) – drawing a direct line of correspondence between his own suffering and his inflicting pain on others, his attempt to prove his freedom from the former by way of the latter. The closing scene of *Caligula* sees him renounce this form of “freedom” from suffering as not “the right one” (1962, 73), and, similarly overwhelmed by his renewed sensibility to suffering, he surrenders to death as Martha and her mother do at the end of *Le Malentendu*, here in the form of an assassination attempt by his courtiers. As Sophie Doudet notes, “Camus établit donc avec tous ses personnages un lien de solidarité: il ne sait tout à fait les détester, ni les mépriser” (“Camus thus establishes a bond of solidarity with all his characters; he is unable to despise or disdain any of them wholeheartedly”; 2014, 109). Camus’s wartime plays court a sympathetic understanding for their cruelly indifferent and indifferently cruel characters, and in doing so they enact the very sympathy with suffering that these characters so fatally lack.

There is a marked contrast between this sympathetic framing of even the characters most lacking in sympathy in Camus’s plays, and the stringent condemnation in *Eleutheria* of its characters’ indifference to the suffering of others. Victor’s diatribe midway through Act III takes explicit aim at the other characters’ ability to wilfully distance themselves from others’ distress: “Saints, madmen, martyrs, victims of tortures – they don’t bother you in the least [...] You turn away from them. You don’t want to think about them” (1996, 145). That this suffering is predominantly physical is implied by the examples that Victor lists –

“victims of torture” most obviously, but also the figure of the martyr put to a painful death and of the saint canonised in recognition of their suffering for their beliefs.¹³ Victor’s tirade emphasises that it is fear of pain’s contagion, a shared distress born of “fellow-feeling” (1996, 146), that drives this recoil in *Eleutheria*: “Nothing to do with you. [...] They are strangers, you will never be one of them, at least you hope you won’t” (1996, 145).¹⁴ The determined segregation of ‘witnesses’ and ‘victims’ of pain and the revisionary clause “at least you hope you won’t” stress the wilful resolution of most of *Eleutheria*’s characters to refuse any possibility of “fellow-feeling” with the suffering other, and this gives new perspective to the play’s observation that “we try to avoid pain” (1996, 136). *Eleutheria* depicts not only the individual attempting to evade pain being inflicted on their own body, but also the individual evading the recognition of *another*’s pain, since to acknowledge that pain would be to threaten one’s own freedom from suffering. *Eleutheria* thus traces a very similar fear of contagious suffering as Camus’s *Le Malentendu* and *Caligula* do, but in place of Camus’s sympathy for the sympathy-less, the play employs Victor’s voice to explicitly condemn the self-interested impulse that would refuse any connection with another suffering human being.

¹³ There is perhaps also an echo here of the popularity of the figure of the martyred Joan of Arc, claimed as a symbol by both Vichy and Resistance members during World War II. For further scholarship on the use of the figure of Joan of Arc during the period, see Jennings 2004, and Riding 2010, 213-14.

¹⁴ Victor’s less readily comprehensible – and so less readily contagious – existential suffering does not offer the same degree of recognisability as the physical variant, and instead of “turn[ing] away from it in disgust”, the other characters “keep prowling round it”, eager to probe a phenomenon that does not seem to menace them with the same risk of contagion (1996, 144). Victor’s suggestion that physical suffering was to some degree more intelligible than an “incomprehensible” mental or emotional suffering (1996, 144) may have rung particularly true in a period of history that had seen numerous advances in battlefield medicine but which did not yet fully recognise PTSD or other associated acute stress disorders (Herman 2015, 23-28), and which was in particular struggling to respond appropriately to the influx of often profoundly traumatised Nazi camps survivors (Wormser-Migot 1976, 721-38).

“Ask yourselves”: Implicating the audience in onstage pain

Eleutheria also mercilessly implicates its imagined audience members in its condemnation of this cruelly detached response to others' suffering. Victor's prolonged denunciation of the other characters very quickly morphs into what feels like a direct address to the projected audience – particularly since it has been the probing of the proxy “Spectator” character that has provoked Victor's outburst. “I obsess you. Why? Ask yourselves. It isn't me you should be interrogating, it's yourselves” (1996, 144): *Eleutheria* demands an interrogation of the audience's own motivation for watching the spectacle of suffering before them. Indeed, the specific terms of Victor's criticism reinforce the sense of him describing the projected theatre audience alongside the bourgeois milieu of the play's world. His contempt for those who “stop and stare” calls to mind the seated and staring theatre spectator (1996, 144) – in Beckett's original French the phrase “acharnés à y voir clair” retains this specular focus (1995, 141) – and his observation of the cushioning “gap between you and me” likewise evokes the arrangement of the typical proscenium stage and auditorium seating (1996, 147). The theatre spectator is positioned “on the other side” – of the stage boundary, of the footlights – from the spectacle of suffering, and thus, Victor implies, can coolly detach themselves from it and its implications (1996, 144). Victor's reproach anticipates drama theorist Martin Meisel's theorising of how the theatre spectator's position as a “privileged witness [...] usually entails assigned, separated spaces for playing and witnessing” to ensure that “some form of authorization and conferred immunity is attached to the witnessing” of potential painful material (2007, 232-33) – which can as a result be approached as nothing more than a detoxified form of “public relaxation and entertainment”, as *Eleutheria* puts it (1996, 70).

However, as part of its broader implication of spectators of suffering, *Eleutheria* does not permit the audience to remain in this position of detached and privileged witness, ‘on the

other side' of staged suffering, for very long. Midway through Act II, a new character referred to in the script only as the "Spectator" climbs onstage to interrupt the action; "I'm not just one, I'm a thousand spectators", he informs us by way of introduction (1996, 128), implicating the entire projected audience in his sudden appearance. Thus, as Peter Boxall observes, *Eleutheria's* imagined spectator is "drawn into the space of the drama, as the boundary of the play widens to assimilate the space of the audience into its field of meaning" (1998, 255). The Spectator's invasion of the stage thus challenges, both physically and psychologically, the comforting membrane between stage space and auditorium. Vahid Rahbani, director of an unauthorised 2005 staging of *Eleutheria* in Tehran, has testified to the unsettling impact of the Spectator's invasion of the stage in performance, recalling that the other audience members were "shocked at the time. It wasn't expected. They were like, 'Oh my god, what is this? Someone just ran on the stage!'" (Graf 2014, 90). The distressing effect of the appearance of the Spectator onstage in *Eleutheria* derives precisely from this sudden destruction of the reassuring boundary between the staged spectacle of suffering and the spectators in the auditorium, "to brush aside spectatorship as a shield resting on an acknowledged distance and difference" (Meisel 2007, 124). No longer distanced, innocuous and inoculated bystanders, we become implicated in the pain before us, "despicable" in our "curiosity" to watch the spectacle, as the Spectator confesses himself to be (1996, 133). Beckett's first full-length play pointedly interrogates the role of the projected auditorium spectator as part of its foregrounding of the non-compassionate witnessing of pain.

In fact, *Eleutheria* goes still further in the implication of the projected audience in the onstage suffering by having the Spectator himself menace Victor with further bodily pain. When denied a satisfactorily savage interrogation of Victor, the Spectator takes the lead onstage, playing on his realisation that Victor is "afraid of getting hurt" (1996, 138) by threatening Victor with the Chinese torturer Chouchi if he doesn't obey their demands for

information.¹⁵ World War II had “reveal[ed] what ordinary individuals living in Europe in the middle of the twentieth-century were capable of doing” (Mazower 1999, 177) – indeed many of Beckett’s friends, including George Duthuit’s wife Marguerite and other members of Gloria SMH, would be tortured by the Gestapo (Morin 2017, 147) – and the unnerving disclosure of the Spectator’s willingness to torture Victor emphasises the influence of a subsequently widespread anti-humanist sentiment in the war’s aftermath in France. The inclusion of the threat of torture in *Eleutheria* speaks powerfully to the play’s post-war pessimism as regards human interaction. The play’s imagined spectator is implicated along with the staged Spectator in this dark vision of “the human capacity for instrumentalizing and brutalizing other people” that Marina MacKay has identified as one of World War II’s particularly troubling revelations (2009a, 158). Detached from the reality of the suffering he threatens to inflict, the Spectator is concerned only with his desire to learn more about the reasons behind Victor’s behaviour. The spectator in the auditorium – who at this point would have waited through nearly three full acts without learning much more about Victor’s mysterious motivations, only to discover that he apparently revealed all “*off-stage* to a half-

¹⁵ *Eleutheria*’s unpalatable depiction of Chouchi as some form of threateningly incomprehensible “Oriental” figure has been for the most part uncomfortably avoided in Beckett scholarship, with the exception of Anna McMullan’s description of the character as “an orientalized stereotype of menacing otherness” and part of the “blinkered ethical framework of the play” (2008, 171). Chouchi’s characterisation reflects the broader racist trends virulent in France in the years preceding the play’s composition, racism that “was not just anti-Semitic” but also “reinforced and legitimised broader theories of biological exclusion” (Lackerstein 2012, 217), including eugenicist invective against a broadly understood ‘Asian’ race. In *Français, qui es-tu?* (1942), for example, René Martial rails against the immigration from the East that was increasing “la proportion de sang asiatique” in metropolitan France’s population, warning that “il n’y a aucun accord possible entre la psychologie orientale et la psychologie occidentale” (“the proportion of Asian blood”, “no understanding is possible between oriental and Western psychologies”; 1942, 83, 98). *Eleutheria* replicates Martial’s catch-all use of the term “oriental” to describe Chouchi (1996, 141), whose sinister silence and constant smile do much to generate the sense of what Martial terms “[c]ette psychologie asiatique incompréhensible pour les Occidentaux” (“this Asian psychology, incomprehensible to the Western races”; 1942, 98). The single line that Chouchi does speak is translated in the script by the Glazier, suggesting that Chouchi is intended to be in every way incomprehensible to a contemporary European audience:

CHOUCHI: Jlust a flew nlaills flirst.

GLAZIER: (*to Victor*) You hear? Just a few nails first.

(1996, 155)

Kirsten Shepherd-Barr has observed that *Eleutheria*’s “language reflects the contemporary discourse of race and racial purity, but falls short of embracing it” (2015, 269). The two-dimensional depiction of Chouchi implicates *Eleutheria* in a post-Vichy context rather more than Beckett scholarship has thus far been willing to admit.

wit of a lackey” between Acts II and II (1996, 134; original emphasis) – may recognise something of the proxy Spectator’s frustration in herself. The promise of stage action following the lengthy dialogue-heavy scenes, and the faintly comic presentation of Chouchi’s threat (“Is he a Taoist?” “A staunch Taoist”; 1996, 142) seem carefully designed to render the prospect of torture unsettlingly appealing to the auditorium spectator. Across the play moments of violence, threatened or actual, often act as much-needed moments of dramatic excitement and even comic relief: M. Krap’s threat to kill Mme Krap with a razor blade following Act I’s lugubrious parlour room visit, or the Glazier striking Joseph on the head with a hammer in Act II, for example. Throughout *Eleutheria*, the spectator is encouraged both to take pleasure in the promise of pain inflicted, and to reflect uncomfortably on that pleasure.

Thus *Eleutheria* undermines any clear distinction between a detached spectatorial position and a more dubious complicity in the face of staged suffering; as performance theorist Peggy Phelan describes in metatheatrical forms of theatre more broadly, “the *opposition* between watching and doing is broken down; the distinction is [...] made to seem ethically immaterial” (Phelan 1993, 161; original emphasis). The Spectator’s role as the catalyst for the threatened torture of Victor implicates the spectator as a corresponding (if more indirect) determinant of Victor’s suffering onstage. In this intensely metatheatrical play, the need to “keep the punters amused” remains always at the forefront of the characters’ stated priorities (1996, 33), and the projected spectator becomes complicit as the driving force behind the spectacle of suffering onstage. The audience member who might be tempted to defend herself on the grounds that she is merely a passive observer is met with the pointed exchange between the Spectator and the Glazier:

GLAZIER: We can’t torture him.

SPECTATOR: Why not?

GLAZIER: It’s not done.

SPECTATOR: Since when?

GLAZIER: I couldn't.

SPECTATOR: Nor could I.

GLAZIER: So?

SPECTATOR: You'll see.

(1996, 141)

The individual who does not directly perform the torture is not necessarily absolved of all responsibility, this exchange stresses, anticipating what Paul Sheehan has dubbed the compulsive “need, as it were, to outsource the torture to minions” in Beckett’s later writings (2009, 95). The visual emphasis in the Spectator’s response to the Glazier’s “We can’t torture him”, “You’ll see”, underlines the imagined spectator’s complicit role as the silent but central witness to the anticipated torture scene; in Beckett’s original French, the phrase “Vous allez voir” again retains this specular emphasis (1995, 141). This oblique indictment of the imagined spectator becomes particularly pertinent if we consider it within its originally intended post-war context of “appeasement and silence in the face of atrocity” (Meisel 2007, 125). The lines “It’s not done”, “Since when?” offer a bleakly ironic reminder of the very recent instances of torture carried out during World War II, some in the name of Allied citizens and some on French soil. Both the Nazi Gestapo and the French *milice* “used torture systematically” on Gaullists, Communists, and Resistance members during the French occupation (Jackson 2001, 216; see also Boyd 2012, 30, 63-64). As Morin describes, “The flow of news footage and press reports in late 1944 and 1945 articulated what many had known for years: for example, the existence of torture chambers in the Paris buildings that had housed the Gestapo and the Nazi administration” (2017, 146). Members of the French Resistance themselves lived under the constant threat of torture from the French *milice* or the Gestapo if captured; Lois Gordon records “the accepted rule that if a [Resistance member] were caught (and it was assumed that no one was invulnerable to torture), he or she was expected to say nothing for two days, even under duress of having teeth pulled one by one.

The two days' delay would give companions time to escape" (1996, 160).¹⁶ Indeed, Aidan Higgins has suggested the long-lasting effect of this awareness on Beckett, describing how among certain occupation memories that "festered in his mind" over later years was "the knowledge that an authentic torture chamber was operating in Paris at X. In those years he lived in the sixteenth [*sic.* fifteenth] arrondissement at Y, and would have passed it on his way to Z" (1995, 16): Higgins is likely referring here to the Gestapo headquarters, complete with functioning torture chamber, that was located on the Rue des Saussaies during the occupation (Morin 2017, 195). In striking parallel to this residual post-war guilt, *Eleutheria* stresses the connection between the seemingly passive spectatorship of physical pain and the spectator's complicity in the victim's suffering.

Similarly – and counterbalancing the reassurance it offers by generating sympathy for its characters – Camus's *Caligula* also metatheatrically implicates its own spectators in the physical violence that it stages. Camus remarked in 1957 that, following World War II, the French people "savent que, derrière les visages les plus paisibles, et les plus familiers, dort l'instinct de torture et de meurtre" ("know that behind the most placid and familiar faces there lies the instinct for torture and murder"; 2008, 28). *Caligula* not only reveals this "instinct" within the emperor himself, but in fact turns the accusation around on the spectators themselves within his theatre auditorium. The play stages graphic scenes of horrific violence, in contrast to what Doudet identifies as Camus's more typical habit of confining scenes of violence to 'offstage' action, "rarement un acte visible au moment de son déroulement. Il y a un avant- et un après-crime mais rarement un « pendant » explicite et évoqué avec réalisme" ("rarely made visible at its moment of occurrence. There is a 'before'

¹⁶ The use of torture was of course not limited to the Axis military. In the aftermath of France's liberation, the *épuration sauvage* resulted in many recorded instances of French citizens torturing those accused of collaborating with the Nazi occupiers (Gibson 2010, 112; Boyd 2012, 163-67), and notable examples of Allied torture of Axis combatants include the US military torture of the German crew from the *U-546* in May 1945 (Lundeberg 1994, 224; Bair 1998, 687), and the "London Cage" torture in the MI19 prisoner of war facility in England (Fry 2018, 63-76).

and an ‘after’ period for each crime, but rarely a ‘during’ rendered explicit or realistically evoked”; 2014, 114). Perhaps the most shocking breach of this classically informed *règle de bienséance* in *Caligula* is the emperor’s murder of a man by forcing a glass phial down his throat: “*He forces the phial between his lips and smashes it with a blow of his fist. After some convulsive movements MEREIA dies. His face is streaming with blood and tears*” (1962, 32). There is a sizable audience of courtiers onstage during this scene who watch the struggle between the two men in horrified silence and, as with *Eleutheria*’s Spectator, the auditorium spectator’s probable distress faced with such graphic violence is exacerbated by the implicit link drawn between themselves and this proxy ‘onstage audience’. The spectators in Camus’s auditorium are pushed to recognise themselves, like the courtiers, as complicit witnesses, watching the spectacle of another’s suffering without moving to intervene. As Jean Daniel notes, “*Devant le pouvoir, tous sont coupable parce que tous sont lâches. Le spectateur rit de ses propres lâchetés et il n’en guérit pas*” according to *Caligula*’s moral framework (“*In the presence of power, everyone is guilty because everyone is weak. The spectator laughs at his own weaknesses and is not rid of it*”; 2011, 75). Unsettling for any potential spectator, *Caligula*’s implicating its audience in the cruelty it stages posed a particularly pointed accusation in a post-war France still sensitive to issues of complicity and collaboration.

Moreover, *Caligula* both stages bodily suffering as a form of entertainment, and implicitly denounces the spectator who engages with it as such. The emperor implicates the auditorium spectator as much as he does his own courtiers when he calls his ‘audience’ into being at the end of Act I:

I invite you to the most gorgeous of shows [...] a whole world called to judgment. But for that I must have a crowd – spectators, victims, criminals, hundreds and thousands of them. (*He rushes to the gong and begins hammering on it, faster and faster.*) Let the accused come forward. I want my criminals, and they are all criminals. [...] I must have my public.

(1962, 17)

“Spectators, victims, criminals” are all one in the auditorium crowd, “all criminals” at heart, damned by their presence in the auditorium, by their willing decision to come to the theatre to watch enacted spectacles of suffering as a form of entertainment. Again, this accusation carries an extra weight for the post-war French audience specifically. The inclusion of “a whole world called to judgement” in Caligula’s call – which does not appear in the 1941 manuscript of the play, which describes simply a “beau spectacle” (“beautiful spectacle”; Camus 2011, 25) – evokes the *épuration sauvage* and *épuration légale* in post-war France. The *épuration sauvage* saw spontaneous eruptions of retaliatory “justice” – which included beatings, mutilations, and murder – by French citizens against those accused of collaboration or treason; the *épuration légale* organised by the Gaullist government passed some 6,700 death sentences on accused Nazi sympathisers in courthouses frequently packed with baying spectators. Julian Jackson provides the illustrative example of Vichy government minister Pierre Laval’s highly publicised trial during the *épuration légale*, in which the presiding judge found himself “incapable of keeping order” over the loudly abusive spectators and jurors, to the point that Laval eventually refused to appear in court any longer (2001, 588). The lines between victim and criminal, spectator and accomplice, horror and entertainment, were often blurred in a Gaullist France torn between *résistencialisme* and collective collaborative guilt. Later, in his 1957 essay against the death penalty, *Réflexions sur la guillotine*, Camus would reflect on what he perceived to be the average French citizen’s continued ability to read the spectacle of physical suffering as legitimate, detoxified entertainment, citing the “grande foule [qui] se pressait à Versailles” to see the last publicly staged criminal execution in France in June 1939 and the subsequent publication of “une page d’illustrations sur cet appétissant événement” in the daily newspaper *Paris-Soir* to “flatter les instincts sadiques de ses lecteurs” (“the great crowd that rushed to Versailles”, “a photo-feature of this appealing event”, “pander to its readers’ sadistic instincts”; 2008, 12-13). In

Eleutheria and *Caligula*, then, Beckett and Camus proffer critiques of the theatre medium's potential to play to its spectators' worst instincts. Both plays draw a correspondence between the theatre medium and a cruel, voyeuristic detachment from another's suffering, "se moqu[ant] de l'art dramatique, en tant que moyen de communication, et mépris[ant] les hommes en tant que spectateurs" ("mock[ing] the medium of theatre as a means of communication, and show[ing] contempt for people as spectators"; Laillou-Savona 1975, 89). Cherea's description of Caligula's self-satisfied composure in the face of corporeal suffering – "After an execution he yawns and says quite seriously, 'What I admire most is my imperturbability'" (1962, 58) – reflects pointedly on the audience member in the auditorium, as does Victor's accusation of the unmoved Spectator and spectator of *Eleutheria*: "Such people are far removed from your own distress. [...] You are at ease. It's not worth worrying about. Nothing to do with you" (1996, 145). Modern performance theorists have elsewhere noted how "the relative safety of the deliberately unreal excesses of the stage", founded on the understood unreality of the theatre medium, "actually create[s] a distance between the audience and the horrors they watch" (Martin and Allard 2009, 9), but *Eleutheria* and *Caligula* offer a still more pointed critique of the ability of the "spectator of pain" – and particularly the post-war spectator – to detach themselves from another's suffering both within *and* beyond the theatre auditorium.

"There is a gap between you and me": Pain and the Theatre as Sites of Communion

However, *Caligula*'s moments of audience critique belie Camus's broader concept of physical pain as a potential site of communion, which sits in stark contrast to Beckett's bleaker vision in *Eleutheria*. More typically, Camus's plays encourage the spectator to "perçoit dans la douleur le gage ultime de notre humanité" which "lie les êtres entre eux" ("recognise pain as the ultimate expression of our shared humanity", which "links human

beings together”; Morisi 2015, 240). At the close of *L’État de siège*, for example, Diego conquers his early fear of the plague victims’ suffering, realising, “They are with me [...] These men are entitled to compassion” (1962, 222). Camus elsewhere defines “compassion” – in line with its Latin root “compati”, “to suffer with” – as “le sentiment d’une souffrance commune” (“the feeling of shared suffering”; 2002, 46); Diego demonstrates that the plague victims are “with” him by voluntarily accepting the painful plague symptoms and death himself, a very literally compassionate gesture that ultimately rids the city of the plague altogether.¹⁷ In both *L’État de siège* and *Le Malentendu*, the protagonists draw on a discourse of shared physical pain to describe their love:

VICTORIA: Yes – speak our language, even though to others it may sound crazy. Tomorrow you will kiss my mouth. I look at you, and my cheeks burn.
[...]
DIEGO: [I]t burns me too. [...]
VICTORIA: Ah, it hurts, loving you so much, so fiercely much! Come nearer!
(1962, 146)

MARIA: My love for him.
MARTHA: What does that word mean?
MARIA: It means – it means all that at this moment is tearing, gnawing at my heart [...] you’d learn the meaning of that word, when you felt my nails scoring your cheeks.
(1962, 128)

Physical pain is coded as a shared point of intense communion between human beings, what Camus calls “la solidarité des corps, l’unité au milieu de la chair mortelle et souffrante” (“bodies in solidarity with each other, unified by their suffering mortal flesh”; *Carnets III* 2013, 327-28). In fact, even *Caligula* gestures repeatedly towards the potential for intercorporeal communion offered by the experience of physical pain. Scipio, “le double pur de Caligula” (“Caligula’s virtuous double”; Nancey-de-Gromard 2011, 60), also turns to the

¹⁷ See Cooke 2009 for a fuller reading of how the motif of the plague functions in Camus’s writing as an analogy for forms of social prejudice and rejection specific to the post-World War II period in France.

language of physical suffering to describe his sense of solidarity with the emperor, even after witnessing the horrific mutilation of his father's body on Caligula's orders: "[S]omething inside me is akin to him. The same fire burns in both our hearts. [...] I have my own sorrow, but I suffer with him, too; I share his pain" (1962, 56). Similarly, in the play's final scene, Caligula renounces his deliberate detachment from the world around him by turning his violence on his mirrored self – "*watching the reflected movement of his reflected self, [he] hurls the stool at it*" (1962, 73) and by accepting the blows of his conspiring assassins – "*The mirror breaks and at the same moment armed conspirators rush in. CALIGULA swings round to face them*" (1962, 73) – in a final renunciation of his indifference to the world around him, a return to "friendship and love, common human solidarity" (Camus 1962, v) by way of the experience of pain. Camus may criticise the audience of *Caligula* for a detached spectatorship of another's suffering, but his plays extol a specifically and literally 'compassionate' form of 'suffering with' another being as a means of finding redemptive solidarity in pain.

Moreover, Camus frames the medium of theatre specifically as one of the most promising domains for generating this sense of shared pain. Scholars have repeatedly observed how "le théâtre pour Camus est par essence un acte de communion collective" ("the theatre for Camus was an act of collective communion"; Autrand 1992, 63), and indeed Robert Mallet recorded Camus as having told him, "Le roman vous isole, tandis qu'une pièce vous fait communiquer avec les autres, même quand vous l'écrivez" ("The novel isolates you, whereas a play puts you into communication with others, even while you're still only writing it"; 1960, 445.) More specifically, however, Camus indicates how the theatre medium can encourage an intense intercorporeal communion by putting the spectator into a closer engagement with the body in pain. He positions the likewise embodied spectacle of public execution as another similar means of combatting a "de plus en plus abstrait" idea of

another's physical suffering: "[Q]u'on montre la machine, qu'on fasse toucher le bois et le fer, entendre le bruit de la tête qui tombe" ("increasingly abstract", "Show them the machine, make them touch the wood and the steel, make them listen to the noise of the head as it falls to the ground"; 2008, 9). Like the concrete specificity of the public execution, Camus envisions the stage play as an event that offers the potential for an embodied, sympathetic recognition of the other's suffering, live body speaking to live body, as theorised by proponents of kinaesthetic forms of empathy.¹⁸ He offers this revealing description of his experience at a 1956 play rehearsal for his stage adaptation of William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun*:

[J]e suivais, fasciné, sur ce petit visage éclairé de l'intérieur par une autre lumière, un jour de souffrance, toutes les émotions que la douleur de vivre peut faire naître sur la face humaine. J'étais là en face de ce qu'il y a de plus profond, blessé, solennel, désarmé, chez l'homme.

On this little face, lit up from within by another light, the light of suffering, I watched, mesmerised, all the emotions that the pain of existence can produce on the human face. I was right there, facing the most profound, wounded, solemn, defenceless thing that there is in man.

(*Carnets III* 2011, 231)

Here, Camus emphasises "la consolidation communautaire" that theatre-makers "qui ne sont pas oublieux de la douleur peuvent accéder" ("the collective strengthening", "can achieve if they remain mindful of pain"; Morisi 2015, 241). The embodied confrontation with another's physical pain that the theatre medium offers can recall to the spectator the physical reality of that suffering, catalysing a recognition of another's pain that can bridge the disjuncture between victim and observer. For Camus, the theatrical mode offers a closer mediation of witnessed pain, a means of recognising the reality of physical suffering, and thus of re-awakening his audience to a newly visceral sense of the other's experience of pain.

¹⁸ See Introduction and Chapter Two for a more detailed investigation of kinaesthetic empathy and its relation to the theatre medium.

By contrast, in *Eleutheria* Beckett permits no such redemption or relief by way of intercorporeal compassion. Neither the experience of suffering nor the medium of theatre succeeds in establishing any elevating form of communion in this early play. Where Camus's Diego and Caligula end their onstage appearances committed to forms of physical pain that testify to their compassionate engagement with the suffering beings of their worlds, the final scene of *Eleutheria* sees Victor dedicating himself to a continued suffering that only isolates him further from those around him:

GLAZIER: Give me your hand. (*Silence.*) Victor!

VICTOR: What is it?

GLAZIER: I'm going. Give me your hand.

VICTOR: My hand? Here it is.

(He holds out his hand. The glazier takes it, shakes it, kisses it, lets go of it, and exits quickly. Victor looks at his hand, which is still outstretched, raises, opens and looks at his other hand, sees the tablet, throws it down.)

(1962, 167)

Victor rejects the supposed morphine pill that would end his suffering entirely, and remains uninterested in the compassionate communion with others symbolised by the Glazier's proffered hand. He returns instead to his attitude of near-total detachment as a means of seeking – if not quite achieving – freedom from the world of suffering around him.

He stands up and starts pushing his bed to the back of the room, as far as possible from the door and the window, that's to say towards the footlights on the side of the spectator's box. He finds it very difficult, He pushes and pulls, with pauses to rest, sitting on the edge of the bed. It's obvious that he isn't very strong. He finally makes it. [...] [He] goes and sits on the bed again, facing the audience, scrutinises the audience, the stalls, the balconies (if there are any), to the right, to the left. Then he lies down, turning his emaciated back on humanity.

(1996, 170)

Left totally alone on the stage, moving gradually closer to the seated audience, Victor's lengthy struggle with the bed reinforces the link drawn throughout the play between Victor's suffering and the audience's complicit spectatorship. The emphasis on Victor's physical

vulnerability, and the excruciatingly slow pace of his progress towards the front of the stage, indicate the potential for this scene in performance to produce a marked discomfort in an audience watching his struggle. In turn, Victor's prolonged scrutiny and ultimate rejection of this audience, "turning his emaciated back" on them, signals a final denunciation of the imagined theatre spectator's detachment from staged suffering – or more particularly what Nick Wolterman identifies as "not only a rejection of the conventions of theatre, but also a sign of frustration with French postwar audiences themselves" (2018, 12). Where Wolterman emphasises *Eleutheria*'s critique of the "shallowness" of a post-war theatre industry that welcomed known collaborators back into its midst, we might also see here the rejection of a post-war audience willing to watch any spectacle of suffering in the pursuit of "profit and entertainment" (2018, 12). In a telling coincidence, Camus employs the same image of "le dos tourné (non par malice, mais par indifférence)" ("its back turned (out of indifference, not malice)"; 2002, 78) in early 1943 to describe a wartime France hardened by the seemingly endless parade of extreme suffering. In *Eleutheria*, however, the spectacle turns its back on the spectators. Neither pain nor theatre is offered as a site of communion in Beckett's first post-war play.

Conclusion

The horrors of World War II and the consequent post-war sense of the "inadequacy of humanistic values to historical reality" (MacKay 2009a, 158) are crucial influences on Beckett's *Eleutheria* and on Camus's earliest published plays. *Eleutheria*, *Le Malentendu*, *Caligula* and *L'État de siège* all stage not simply physical suffering, but, still more unnervingly, the spectacle of human beings left unmoved by the sight of others' physical suffering. Both playwrights emphasise this capacity for detachment from another being's pain as a breeding ground for continued suffering. Dr Piouk's belief that "we try to avoid pain as

necessarily and, let's be fair as blindly as a moth tries to avoid the dark" takes on a singular resonance in this context (1996, 136): just as the moth risks wounding itself on the flame in its attempt to "avoid the dark", so too the cruel detachment from others' pain results in a society unwilling to work to end that suffering – or, indeed, willing to exacerbate that suffering for their own gain, "the violent corporeal effects of epistemological interrogation" which will, McMullan observes, recur throughout Beckett's later plays (2008, 172).

However, Camus's plays also indicate his inclination towards a more hopeful response to this interrogation of human relationships. In his own words, the ostensibly "very dismal image" presented in his stage plays can still "be reconciled with a relative optimism as to man" (1962, vii). His early plays work through the suspicion that "[p]ain is solitary" (1962, vii), but offer the cautiously optimistic conclusion that, in fact, "[i]l n'est pas sûr que la douleur soit forcément solitaire", as he mused in his diary in May 1945 ("Perhaps pain isn't inevitably solitary"; *Carnets III* 2013, 513). Camus ultimately suggests that both physical pain *and* the theatre that dramatises this physical pain can function as sites of enriching communion between individuals. By contrast, "[d]ans cette tension solitaire/solidaire, Beckett reste dans le premier pôle" ("on this spectrum between the 'solitary' and solidarity, Beckett remains firmly at the former end"; Bastien 2009, 260) – at least as far as *Eleutheria* is concerned. In his first post-war play, Beckett presents a dark spectacle of human responsiveness to another's pain. In a 1948 letter to Georges Duthuit, he revealingly complained, "Young people, after reading *Eleutheria*, have said to me, but you are sending us away discouraged. Let them take aspirin, or go for long walks, before breakfast" (*Letters II* 2012, 97), refusing to disavow the play's bleak conception of physical suffering and human relations. *Eleutheria* confronts us with a deliberately relentless provocation that criticises the detachment from another's pain, and yet offers this detachment as the only way to survive the unremitting excess of potentially contagious suffering in the world, a defensive mechanism

that is offered as the only “aspirin” or anaesthetising relief available to the post-war human being. His next play, *Waiting for Godot*, would radically rework this “impasse of alienation” by “transforming the boundaries of theatrical space and [...] the boundaries of the body itself” (McMullan 2010, 30), exploring the transmission of felt pain between suffering and witnessing body. Where *Eleutheria* criticises an unsettlingly impenetrable disconnect between sufferer and spectator, *Waiting for Godot* would stage an equally distressing vision of pain’s contagion, spreading across the stage and out into the auditorium itself.

Chapter Two

Pain's Contagious Affect:

Waiting for Godot

Waiting for Godot is often discussed in modern theatre criticism as a somewhat more upbeat play than many of Beckett's later stage works, concerned as it is with human resilience and friendship forged against adversity, and inflected with an invigorating strain of humour.¹ Yet it is also a play full of bodily pain, "a place of suffering", as Beckett himself described it to Georges Duthuit (*Letters II* 2012, 218). From Estragon's aching feet and wounded leg and Vladimir's inflamed prostate, to Lucky's running neck sore and Pozzo's painful falls, all the characters suffer physically over the course of the play. Moreover, in sharp contrast to *Eleutheria*'s vision of cold spectatorial indifference, the pain staged here is a markedly contagious one. Physical suffering spreads insidiously between the onstage characters' bodies, and pain's affect infects the audience members with its unsettling corporeal impact. Indeed, the very humour with which the play inflects its depictions of physical suffering often exacerbates rather than assuages the spectator's discomfort faced with such scenes. Following *Eleutheria*'s indictment of spectatorial impassivity faced with another's suffering, *Waiting for Godot* marks a new stage in how Beckett's post-war theatre work probes the dynamics of witnessing pain: one which interrogates the susceptibility of the witnessing body to the felt pain of the suffering body. As Ruby Cohn observes, "Before the end of the play, we know that it hurts, and we know that we hurt" (2005, 181).

¹ Examples of this focus on the ostensibly lighter or more optimistic dimensions of *Waiting for Godot* range from Kenneth Tynan's early 1957 reflection that "the tramps survived and did so with gaiety, dignity, and a moving interdependence; a human affirmation was made" (1957, 15), to contemporary director Benjy Francis's claim that "Ultimately, *Waiting for Godot* is a very positive play, which talks about the resilience of human beings" (Smith, Carter, and Carnwath 2009, n.p.).

Crucially, however, this shared or responsive suffering is not necessarily an affirmative or redemptive communal experience. Director Xerxes Mehta has remarked that the Beckettian performance tends to “bring performer and spectator into a unique and unbearable confrontation” (1994, 179) – and the key word here is “unbearable”. In stagings of *Waiting for Godot*, the aversive nature of pain’s contagious affect often catalyses a repudiatory response in the spectator, an attempt to block this disquieting form of communion with the suffering other. We might return to Garin Dowd’s idea of an intensely empathetic response to another being’s pain as “produc[ing] a countermanding force” (2012, 71), a self-protective recoil away from the source of affect. Thus, the spectator can frequently find herself engaged in a disconcerting state of tension between empathy with and recoil from the suffering bodies onstage. This tension is repeatedly simulated onstage, as, for example, in the tramps’ first argument about the pain that Estragon suffers in his feet and Vladimir in his prostate and genitals. The same exchange is repeated, a few seconds apart, with the interlocutors reversed:

VLADIMIR: It hurts?

ESTRAGON: Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!

[...]

ESTRAGON: It hurts?

VLADIMIR: Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!

(2006, 12)

On one hand, the paralleled exchange emphasises the similarity in the two characters’ conditions: both are in physical pain. On the other hand, both men remain isolated in their shared-but-distinct suffering. They do not address each other directly, but refer to their interlocutor in the third-person – “He wants to know if it hurts! – and so the potential for intimacy or understanding born of a shared physical experience is denied. Each queries, even doubts, the other’s pain – “It hurts?” – recalling Elaine Scarry’s influential theory that the pain of another is unknowable: “[O]ne may remain in doubt about its existence or may retain

the astonishing freedom of denying its existence” (1985, 4). The shared “it” of Vladimir and Estragon’s “it hurts” discussion may seem to unite them in a shared referent, but this is misleading; this “it” is deictically unstable, offering an “identity of linguistic form but not of reference” (Griffith 1992, 101). Scarry in fact uses the same ambiguous “it” to communicate the unknowability of another’s physical pain: “[I]f with the best effort of sustained attention one successfully apprehends it, the aversiveness of the ‘it’ one apprehends will only be a shadowy fraction of the actual ‘it’” (1985, 4).² Vladimir and Estragon’s pains parallel each other only in the strictly mathematical sense, existing side by side but never touching. Neither character fully comprehends, or perhaps even fully believes in, the other’s pain; the potential for empathy is replaced by doubt and rejection. Simultaneous experiences of bodily suffering in *Waiting for Godot* – on the stage, or across the footlights – are just as likely to catalyse a sense of aversion rather than of affinity.

Waiting for Godot thus poses challenging questions about the relationship between witnessing suffering and testifying to suffering, or, as Colin Davis observes of twentieth-century war writing more broadly, “how we can speak about others, how we can understand what their pain means to them, when it is not commensurable with our own” (2018, 9).

Written between October 1948 and January 1949,³ at a moment in which the French nation was grappling with the need to bear witness to the unthinkable extent and unbearable

² Sam Slote reads this passage as indicative of each man’s inability to clearly affirm even his own pain to himself, let alone each other’s: “It is as if, more than simply an inability to express pain to others, they cannot even express pain to themselves. Even the person in pain cannot state with certainty that he suffers” (2014, 56). The implication of Slote’s reading runs directly counter to Scarry’s theorising of pain as undeniable to its sufferer. However, Slote’s reading does not fully take into account the fact that all we have access to here are Vladimir and Estragon’s spoken dialogue, intended at least to some degree as intersubjectively communicative, rather than the internal reflection of an interior consciousness. By turning to the theatre rather than the prose medium when he writes *En attendant Godot*, Beckett necessarily foregrounds the expressive rather than the introspective dimension of the pain experience.

³ Beckett began writing *En attendant Godot* in October 1948, and finished in January 1949. An excerpt was broadcast on French radio in February 1952 while director Roger Blin sought a theatre and funding for a full staging. The play was published by Les Éditions de Minuit in October 1952, and première at the Théâtre de Babylone on 5 January 1953. Beckett would translate the play into English the same year. *Waiting for Godot* was published by Grove Press in August 1954, and première at the Arts Theatre, London, on 3 August 1955, directed by Peter Hall.

intensity of the suffering of World War II's victims – one seemingly incommensurable with any prior understanding of pain – *Waiting for Godot* engages in an unsparing interrogation of the troubled and frequently troubling relationship between the suffering and the witnessing body. The bodily pain that spreads across the stage and into the auditorium in *Waiting for Godot* reflects on the broader issue of what it is to confront the fact of mass suffering – the suffering that is another's and not one's own, but that threatens its witness with its distressing contagious affect – in the post-war period.

This chapter also argues for the singularity of *Waiting for Godot*'s markedly cynical inquiry into the limitations of empathetic feeling for another's suffering, at a relatively early point in the post-war period in France.⁴ Preceding and contemporaneous stage works tended instead to vaunt impassioned sympathy with the suffering being. Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Mouches*, for example, staged in Occupied Paris in June 1943, emphasised the value of the individual who engaged in intense fellow feeling with, and even undertook ultimate responsibility for, another's suffering. In doing so, they established an approach that would come to typify the approach to another's pain in post-Liberation Francophone theatre, including Simone de Beauvoir's *Les Bouches inutiles* (1945), Jean Giraudoux's *La Folle de Chaillot* (1945) and *Pour Lucrèce* (1953), Henri de Montherlant's *Demain il fera jour* (1949), and Sartre's own *Morts sans sépulture* (1946) and *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* (1959). In rejecting this engrained notion of sympathy with suffering as an unequivocal force for good in favour of a more sceptical examination of the pragmatic and ethical limitations of one's sense of affinity with another's pain, *Waiting for Godot* instantiates a new post-war idea of

⁴ Several reviewers of the original French production of *En attendant Godot* remarked on the lack of any clear relation between Beckett's play and the theatre of the day. Gabriel Marcel, for example, observed that "il n'y a là à peu près rien qui ressemble à ce que nous appelons d'habitude le théâtre" ("there's scarcely anything here that resembles what we would usually call theatre"; *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 15 January 1953, n.p.); *Réforme*'s Hubert Engelhard admitted "Je ne vous dirai pas à quoi ressemble cet *En attendant Godot*. Cela ne ressemble à rien" ("I can't tell you what *En attendant Godot* is like. It's not like anything"; *Réforme*, 17 January 1953, n.p.); and *Opéra*'s semi-anonymous theatre critic "M.B." noted that the play "semble aux antipodes du théâtre" to which he was accustomed ("seems like the antithesis of the theatre"; 20 January 1952, n.p.).

the dynamics of witnessed suffering. In fact, it bears closer resemblance to the later 1960s and 1970s prose work of Francophone Holocaust survivors such as Charlotte Delbo, Jorge Semprún, and Elie Wiesel, which repeatedly refute the idea that individuals who had not experienced the Nazi camps were able to bear witness to – or indeed capable of fully conceiving of – the prisoners’ own extreme wartime suffering.⁵ *Waiting for Godot* of course broke new ground formally in mid-century European theatre, as has been well explored in previous scholarship, but the play’s disquieting evocation of the tension between empathy and recoil that frequently characterises the experience of witnessing another’s suffering has been overlooked as a significant development in post-war Francophone literary culture more broadly. This is thus the only chapter in this project that does not read Beckett’s theatre against that of another contemporary Francophone playwright, drawing instead on the Francophone theorising of Henri Bergson and Charles Baudelaire to read the play’s comic treatment of physical pain.

“You’ve forgotten already?”: *Waiting for Godot* and the Elision of World War II

Among all of Beckett’s theatre plays, *Waiting for Godot* has most frequently been recognised as “une entreprise littéraire des lendemains de la Seconde guerre mondiale, de l’après Hiroshima, de l’après Holocauste” (“a post-World War II, post-Hiroshima, post-Holocaust literary undertaking”; Casari 2000, 17). As early as 1957, the author Kay Boyle would describe *Waiting for Godot* as “Beckett’s evaluation of the situation in France during the war”, reminding her readers that “Beckett’s casual remark that he stayed in Paris until 1942 covers more peril, more pain, and more actual hunger than many of us have ever known”

⁵ Charlotte Delbo published her autobiographical recollections of her time in Auschwitz and Ravensbrück *Aucun de nous ne reviendra* in 1965, *Une connaissance inutile* in 1970, and *Mesure de nos jours* in 1971; Jorge Semprún published his memories of Buchenwald in *Le Grand Voyage* in 1963 and *Quel beau Dimanche!* in 1980; Elie Wiesel began his long publishing career as a Holocaust survivor with *La Nuit* in 1958, *L’Aube* in 1960, and *Le Jour* in 1961. For further comparison of Beckett’s post-war plays and Holocaust testimony literature, see Chapter Five.

(*Letters III* 2014, 56). On reading Boyle's analysis, Beckett would call it "one of the most sensitive, imaginative, inseeing, painstaking comments I've read" about the play, confirming Boyle's intuition as to the importance of wartime suffering to *Waiting for Godot's* affective framing (*Letters III* 2014, 55). The play's evocations of hunger, homelessness, tyrannical power relations, and mass death have encouraged readings that emphasise, as Terry Eagleton puts it, "not some timeless *condition humaine*, but war-torn twentieth-century Europe" (2006, 69). Garin Dowd has linked the play's "palimpsest of enforced peripateticism and deprivation" to the war's aftermath in Europe (2013, 83), and Andrew Gibson has noted that the experience of 'waiting' that the play stages was a common condition of life during the war itself, when "one waited interminably, whether it was for *cartes d'alimentation* or parachute drops" ("ration cards"; 2010, 103); even the verb "attendre" itself, so prominent in the title of the French version of the play, evokes the *attentiste* attitude of so many French residents during the Occupation, "concerned with their own survival and well-being and largely sympathetic to Vichy" (Lackerstein 2012, 3). Many critics have also read the play's recurrent instances of physical torment in line with Gestapo cruelty: Carlo Pasi goes so far as to declare that "on ne peut pas comprendre le degré de souffrance inimaginable qui s'attache à cette imbrication du pouvoir et de terreur [...] si on ne la replace pas dans la grande blessure historique représentée par le « puits » (*pozzo*) honteux des camps d'extermination" ("you can't understand the degree of unimaginable suffering evoked by this intertwining of power and terror [...] unless you put it in the context of the great historical scar represented by the 'pits' (*pozzo*) of the extermination camps"; 1998, 55). And indeed, the recorded responses of post-war spectators across Europe and America throughout the 1950s testify to the repeated recognition of a specific wartime affect in the play. Pierre-Aimé Touchard recalled the shock of recognition he felt when he saw the play staged in 1953:

Il est important de rappeler la date. Nous étions alors beaucoup plus près qu'aujourd'hui de la fin de la guerre, et du coup de massue qu'avait apporté à l'humanité la prise de conscience du péril atomique. Il semblait à beaucoup d'entre nous qu'une ère nouvelle avait commencé après les explosions d'Hiroshima et de Nagasaki. [...] Or, comme il arrive souvent, le théâtre n'avait rien traduit de cette révolution des esprits. Il continuait l'avant-Hiroshima. Il semblait que l'horreur de cette réalité était trop importante, trop affreuse, trop monstrueuse pour qu'il pût oser se collecter avec elle. [...] [*En attendant Godot*] exprimait avec une vigueur inouïe ce que nous pensions que jamais une voix humaine contemporaine n'aurait été capable de crier. Par la bouche des misérables héros mis en scène par Samuel Beckett, s'exhalait le soupir d'horreur muette que l'humanité retenait depuis des années.

It's important to acknowledge the date. We were much closer then to the end of the war, and to the blow that the sudden recognition of atomic peril had wrought on humankind. It seemed to many of us that a new era had begun after the explosion at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. [...] Well, as often happens, the theatre hadn't translated anything of this spiritual revolution. It continued as it had before Hiroshima. It seemed that the horror of this reality was too great, too terrible, too monstrous for the theatre to dare to approach. [...] [*Waiting for Godot*] expressed, with unbelievable vigour, what we thought no contemporary human voice would ever be able to cry out. Samuel Beckett's miserable heroes sighed forth the mute horror that humanity has been holding on to for some years.

(*La Revue de Paris*, February 1961, n.p)

Normand Berlin reacted similarly when he saw the play performed in 1956: "How could I not – as part of a post-Holocaust audience – [...] think of all the homeless tramps, the uprooted wanderers, the dispossessed, when I saw the wretch Lucky carrying a bag and walking so slowly, head down, across a desolate landscape?" (1986, 49). *Waiting for Godot*'s visions of suffering repeatedly raised the spectre of World War II for its early audience members.

Despite this generally acknowledged evocation of wartime suffering in *Waiting for Godot*, however, there is little explicit reference to World War II within the playtext itself. Historical references are painstakingly blurred or erased, and it has taken careful biographical and genetic manuscript scholarship to uncover some of the most notable wartime echoes in the script, such as the original presence of the Jewish name "Lévy", which appears in Act I of the first French manuscript and is changed to "Estragon" by Act II (Van Hulle and Verhulst 2017, 173; Cohn 2005, 177). Elsewhere, Dirk van Hulle and Pim Verhulst have traced the

origins of Vladimir's already unsettling "A dog came into the kitchen" song from the beginning of Act II to Beckett's encounter with a group of German Hitler Youth in January 1937: "Beckett heard the German original on which this translation is based in Weimar, when he was eating in the *Stadhausrestaurant* on a Sunday evening, where he witnessed a Nazi party" and which he noted in his German diary as "Hitlerjugend [...] revelry" that included the singing of "Der Hund kam in die Küche" (2017, 225). When Beckett translated his original French text into English in 1953, he elided the wartime references still further. *En attendant Godot* makes specific reference to Vladimir and Estragon's time in the south of France, where Beckett and his partner Suzanne Deschevaux-Dusmesnil had fled during the war: "Nous avons fait les vendages, tiens, chez un nommé Bonnelly, à Roussillon" ("We picked grapes, damn it, for a man named Bonnelly, in Roussillon"; 1952, 86); as James Knowlson explains, M. Bonnelly was a farmer "for whom Beckett and Suzanne actually did pick grapes" while hiding in Roussillon from the Gestapo (1996, 766; see also Knowlson and Pilling 1979, 24, and Perloff 2005, 81-82). In the English text, the explicit references to Roussillon and the Vaucluse have been erased, hinted at only by Vladimir's recollection that "down there everything is red!" (2006, 57), which evokes the red clay of the Roussillon area caused by the high levels of ochre in its soil.⁶ Similarly, the reference in the French text to the Ariège (1952, 114), which Marjorie Perloff points out was "the chief World War II escape route from France to Spain – a route chosen to avoid all official checkpoints and likely contact with German patrols" (2005, 76-77), vanishes in the English text, replaced by the Pyrenees (2006, 76). "I'm not a historian", Estragon complains to Vladimir (2006, 61);

⁶ In the English version of the play, Beckett ostensibly relocates the event in Vladimir's memory to "the Macon country", which lies north of Roussillon, but various textual details undermine this ostensible location and underline the deliberately distorted identification here. Estragon does recall "that day I threw myself into the Rhône" while they were grape-harvesting (2006, 51), for example; Mâcon lies not on the Rhône but on the Saône-et-Loire. Moreover, the text hedges the identification of Mâcon with a particularly clear example of Vladimir's unreliable memory: "for a man called... (*He snaps his fingers*) ... can't think of the name of the man, at a place called... (*Snaps his fingers*) ... can't think of the name of the place, do you not remember?" (2006, 57). Beckett comically underlines his own "erasure of place" here (Ross 2001, 67), signposting how he has almost-but-not-quite expunged the play's precise post-war context from its script.

Waiting for Godot itself likewise shies away from any too-explicit representation of recent history or specific forms of historical suffering.

Thus, in comparison to the gruesome physical suffering and explicit World War II references of many other mid-century Francophone plays, such as Sartre's *Morts sans sépulture* and *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* or Montherlant's *Demain il fera jour*, *Waiting for Godot* eschews graphic depictions of extreme physical pain or its precise historical reconstruction. As David Houston Jones observes, the "articulation of atrocity is accompanied by a countervailing movement of erasure [...] leaving the reference half-buried but still residually present in the text" (2011, 1). This near-elision of wartime references from the script constitutes a defining characteristic of Beckett's approach to the war and wartime suffering in this and later post-conflict plays. Rather than seeking to pinpoint or 'prove' its presence in *Waiting for Godot*, we might more productively turn our attention to the play's semi-erasure of this very pain. There is a certain squeamishness in the play's treatment of wartime suffering, a refusal to look too directly or for too long at its spectacle. Where previous critics have emphasised how the play stages wartime and post-war pain, we might instead ask: why does *Waiting for Godot* not confront us with *more* of such pain?

The answer, I would suggest, lies in the manner in which this "vaguening" – as Rosemary Pountney seminally termed Beckett's process of semi-erasure (1988, 149) – engenders a shift in focus from the direct experience of suffering to the act of witnessing a suffering that is not one's own, and which consequently is not wholly 'knowable' to the non-sufferer. The play's elliptical approach to wartime suffering emphasises the crucial distinction between experienced and observed pain, and indicates the play's more dominant concern as being with the spectator's often ambivalent response to witnessed suffering, rather than with the sufferer's own response to their pain. Here, then, is a particularly significant instance of what Ciaran Ross has identified as the play's "problématisation de l'existence du

rapport à l'autre, ou, autrement dit, *la mise en question de la proximité et de l'éloignement du rapport à l'autre*" ("problematising of the nature of one's connection to another being, or rather, of *the relative intimacy with or distance from another being*"; 2004, 76; original emphasis). The play's own performative recoil away from any graphic spectacle of explicit wartime suffering embodies the instinctive recoil away from a too-close engagement with another's pain that threatens the spectator with contagion. It offers a subtler, more consummate version of *Eleutheria*'s similar staged recoil, a dramaturgical replication of the "sheer aversiveness" which Elaine Scarry categorises as "the most essential aspect of pain" (1985, 52) and which stimulates not only the flinch away from the threat of physical pain but also the "negation and rejection" of the suffering being, "the social equivalent of the physical aversiveness" that typifies the pain experience (1985, 56).

Simultaneously, this recoil from the representation of specific or extreme wartime pain demonstrates an emergent historical anxiety about presuming to testify to another being's encounter with suffering. *Waiting for Godot* was written at a cultural moment that saw the beginning of intense debate concerning the ethical and epistemological status of literature that sought to testify to the pain of others. Alongside the more pragmatic concerns as to factual accuracy during a period that was still engaged in piecing together and proving the extent of the conflict's worst war crimes, such anxiety also spoke to the contested idea that although there might be "something legitimate about survivors' desire to tell their stories [...] because suffering requires the expiation that comes with the anguished utterance", conversely "there must be something illegitimate, we feel, about those who tell stories about an event that they could not possibly know first-hand" (Bernard-Donals and Glejzer 2001, 79-80). There was an increasing anxiety that to appropriate the story of the war victim was to risk trespassing upon what Marianne Hirsch has identified as a "sense of ownership and protectiveness", a necessary idea of "guardianship", over a still unstable record of suffering

(2012, 1), a possessive gesture grounded in the conceit that one has viable access to another's experience. Counterbalancing the slowly developing drive to bear witness to others' suffering was the post-war (and particularly post-Holocaust) anxiety about "over-hastily appropriating the other's pain" by taking on the task of its representation, the vicarious witness purporting "to speak on behalf of the victims of trauma in order to tell us the meaning of their experience" (Davis 2018, 12, 20). Given the recognition that one individual's experience of physical pain is essentially unknowable to another being, "that is it difficult to share pain, that one person cannot really understand the pain of another" (Siebers 2010, 183), the individual's experience of extreme, even historically unprecedented, forms of wartime suffering can likewise be understood as inaccessible to the non-victim, or even to the direct witness. In place of an attempt to testify to a pain that he himself did not undergo, Beckett instead structures *Waiting for Godot* to self-consciously replicate "the fundamental epistemological instability of the witness's position" in relation to the victim's experience (Houston Jones 2011, 4). With the "cries for help still ringing" in the ears of the post-war audience, as Vladimir puts it (2006, 74), Beckett positions his post-war play as a 'literature of the witness' rather than a 'literature of the victim', and *Waiting for Godot*'s tentative engagement with wartime suffering is a crucial element of this troubled enquiry as to the 'right' mode of relation between witness and sufferer.

We can return to the elision of the Jewish name "Lévy" from the French manuscript draft as an illuminating example of this doubly significant mode of erasure with which *Waiting for Godot* approaches the issue of wartime pain, here in the specific context of the Holocaust. In first writing and then excising the name "Lévy" from the play, Beckett not only replicates the recoil away from a too-close engagement with witnessed suffering, but also reflects the scepticism concerning vicarious testimony to another's pain. The elision of a specifically Jewish suffering from the script reflects the manner in which post-war French

society recoiled from the acknowledgement of a specifically Jewish suffering during World War II. The Vichy government abetted the deportation of 76,000 French and foreign Jews, of whom fewer than three percent would survive (Rousso 1991, 7), and the establishment of a number of Jewish internment camps on French soil, most infamously Drancy and Compiègne, which housed Jewish prisoners and were run by Vichy rather than Nazi personnel during the early years of the Occupation (Curtis 2002, 160). Nevertheless, in the immediate aftermath of the Occupation the French Fourth Republic attempted to have the memory of France's collaboration with Nazism erased from public memory, and encouraged an idea of the Nazi government targeting only the "heroic Resistance" for deportation, "using a rhetoric that obscured the political ethnic, and religious dimensions of the Holocaust" (Morin 2017, 155). Thus, despite Vichy France's complicity in the mass imprisonment and deportation of Jewish individuals, it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that the Jewish people were widely recognised in France as specific victims of the Nazi Holocaust. As Renée Poznanski observes, "The Jews of both French and foreign nationality who had been victimized by antisemitic legislation on French soil and had then been hunted down [...] were totally hidden from public view" (2014, 209). From this perspective, the excision of "Lévy" from the play's manuscript parallels both the attempted literal wartime erasure of the Jewish people by way of the Nazi Holocaust – and indeed the literal bodily erasure of many – and the post-war cultural erasure of Jewish suffering that characterised the immediate aftermath of the war in France. Simultaneously, the elision of a specifically Jewish character from *Waiting for Godot* suggests a textual resistance to testifying on behalf of the Jewish people's wartime pain. Although Beckett was often taken for Jewish in France (Gibson 2010, 102; Knowlson, 1997, 320), and although his position as a Resistance member left him vulnerable to Vichy or Gestapo punishment, his was nevertheless not the plight of the Jewish people of Europe, threatened with the Nazi plan for their total annihilation, and he would never directly

experience the concentration camps, as several of his Jewish friends would; again, Beckett's position in relation to this dimension of wartime suffering was one of semi-distanced observer. Given the prolonged period of time it took for information regarding the scale of the Holocaust to reach the European public at large, Beckett's knowledge of the Nazi camp conditions was likely a fragmented or hazy one for some time, gleaned from personal correspondence with the families of friends who had been deported, and possibly also from public information campaigns, such as the immensely popular Grand Palais exhibition entitled "Les Crimes de guerre hitlériens" which displayed photographic evidence of Nazi war crimes throughout the summer of 1945. That Beckett was at least to some degree aware early in the war years of the physical hardship undergone in the Nazi camps is evidenced by Paul Léon's wife Lucie recollecting how Beckett would routinely give her his bread and cigarette rations to send to Léon, despite the ongoing struggle to source either in occupied Paris (Knowlson 1997, 304).⁷

In renouncing the attempt to script the representation of an explicitly Jewish character's wartime suffering in *Waiting for Godot*, then, Beckett speaks through the lens of the *witness* rather than the *victim* of historical suffering, with all the epistemological uncertainty which this perspective entails. As Jackie Blackman has noted, unlike the more traditional formal strategies of Jean-Paul Sartre's and Simone de Beauvoir's post-war works for the stage, Beckett:

felt the pressure not only to express the unspeakable horror of the Holocaust [...], but also to find a new form of writing for it, something which was necessarily different from personal testimony of the camps, yet would convey his experience as witness to the war and its aftermath.

(2009, 81)

⁷ See Chapter Three for further analysis of the difficulties encountered in communicating Holocaust suffering in the war's aftermath.

This “new form of writing” is grounded in the near-elision of specific and extreme forms of wartime suffering in much of Beckett’s post-war work, the limited ‘testimony’ of the witness to rather than the victim of pain. “We are not the victims; we do not share or feel their pain”, Colin Davis warns the reader of Holocaust survivor testimony (2018, 28), and a like recognition shapes Beckett’s post-war perspective on pain and pain’s representation. The full comprehension of specific instances of pain belongs only to the immediate victim; pain’s witness cannot testify personally to the victim’s experience.

“O, I have suffered / With those I saw suffer!”: The Contagious Affect of Physical Pain

The structuring of *Waiting for Godot* as ‘witness literature’ rather than ‘testimony literature’ means that the play’s focus falls less on the experience of suffering than on the experience of confronting another’s suffering. Crucially, however, the refusal of any exact understanding of another’s physical pain is counterbalanced by that pain’s often intensely contagious affect. Thus, despite the impossibility of a precise replication of the observed experience, witnessing pain frequently catalyses an intense bodily response in the play’s onstage and offstage spectators. If Beckett avoids the arrogation of direct testimony, he nevertheless emphasises the impact of witnessed suffering, in what Rhys Tranter identifies as “a strange transmission of affect, the partial reproduction of spectral representation of traumatic content that addresses and accounts for history, whilst simultaneously resisting the problematic authority of a linear, sovereign account” (2018, 37). The witness may not ever fully fathom the sufferer’s own experience of physical pain – “the likeness is an imperfect one”, as Pozzo remarks (2006, 25) – but she may respond viscerally to its contagious affect. Thus, while the lived experience of a particular instance of pain is unknowable for the witness, *Waiting for Godot* acknowledges the markedly contagious nature of pain’s affect. “Performer and spectator experience each other viscerally, sensually, intuitively, immediately”, Xerxes

Mehta observes (1994, 184) – and often profoundly troublingly as a result, we might add. Pain’s contagion rarely entails an affirmative communal experience, either on *Waiting for Godot*’s stage or in its auditorium. In contrast to *Eleutheria*’s vision of a self-possessed detachment from the spectacle of pain, *Waiting for Godot* plays on the transmission of physical feeling between pained and spectating bodies, shifting suffering between the onstage characters’ bodies and framing its auditorium spectators as distinctly vulnerable to the affect generated by its performance, “reminding the audience of their own embodied existence as witnesses in the auditorium” (McMullan 2010, 33). The experience of witnessing pain, while not precisely commensurate with the suffering of that pain, is nevertheless intensely interlinked with a corresponding embodied distress.

Recorded audience responses to performances of *En attendant Godot* and *Waiting for Godot* reveal the frequency and intensity of the spectators’ physically felt response to the play. Harold Hobson drew tellingly on violent corporeal imagery in his review of the 1956 première revival at the Théâtre Hébertot: “*En attendant Godot* is as unforgettable as a knife twisted in the ribs. [...] [T]he wound is still in my entrails” (1956, 4). Kenneth Tynan described the same production as having “pricked and stimulated my own nervous system” (2007, 72). French theatre critic Gabriel Marcel, watching the Théâtre Hébertot’s revival in 1956, admitted that “la pièce, cette fois-ci plus que précédemment, m’a causé un malaise qui à la fin est devenu presque intolérable” (“the play, still more strongly than last time, provoked a malaise in me that became intolerable by the end”; *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 23 June 1956, n.p.), and Pierre Marcabru similarly emphasised the visceral impact of the 1961 Théâtre de l’Odéon production: “Tout est charnellement ressenti [...] Ce qui domine, c’est une horreur physique, et non pas métaphysique” (“Everything is felt in the flesh [...] It’s the physical and not the metaphysical horror that dominates”; *Arts Spectacles*, 10 May 1961, n.p.). Jackson Pollock’s mistress Ruth Kligman recorded the painter’s extreme response to Herbert

Berghof's 1956 New York production: "Every line made him cringe. [...] He started to cry, really cry, and then the crying turned into sobs and then it went into heart-breaking moans. He was out of control" and eventually needed to be helped out of the auditorium before the end of the performance (1974, 68-69); Peggy Phelan records that Jackson returned to the theatre on at least two subsequent dates in the attempt to watch the play in its entirety, but never managed to endure the full performance (2004, 1281-82). Pain's affect in *Waiting for Godot* persistently spreads beyond the stage and into the auditorium, blurring the boundaries between performer and spectator, between the body performing pain and the body witnessing pain.⁸ Given this frequently reported disruption of affective horizons during the play in performance, Sam Slote's contention that in Beckett's work "pain reveals the boundary between self and world, thereby individuating the body: *my* body, *my* pain" (2014, 54) does not seem to hold true for most spectators of *Waiting for Godot*.⁹ Rather, the contagious nature of pain's affect more frequently draws bodies together into an unsettling relation of distanced recognition, as Anna McMullan observes:

Such instability involves the audience in a complex play of identification and difference which undermines the myth of spectator detachment from the world of the stage, and begins to erode the boundaries between the spectacle and the spectator, between interior and exterior perspectives.

(1998, 138)

⁸ The typically small size of the auditorium in early productions of the play stood to heighten this visceral impact. The Théâtre de Babylone, site of Roger Blin's 1953 French première production, had a total of 230 seats (Morash 2002, 200). The Arts Theatre Club in London, site of Peter Hall's 1955 English-language première, was a comparably small venue with the stage "so close up to the front row audiences that the actors could read their programmes" (Eltis 2016, 99), allowing the impression, as Hall described it, that "the performer and the audience inhabit[ed] one space not two" (2010, 153; original emphasis). The Pike Theatre in Dublin, the converted coach house that would accommodate the first production of the play in Ireland, had only fifty-one seats, with no seat situated "more than four rows from the stage" (Lüscher-Morata 2002, 202).

⁹ Slote's observation may be applied more convincingly to Beckett's earlier prose work. Diane Lüscher-Morata has argued convincingly that "il y dans l'œuvre [de Beckett], avant la guerre, une souffrance plus individuelle, singulière ou intrapersonnelle; après la guerre, la souffrance apparaît comme étant plus collective et fondamentalement extra-personnelle" ("in Beckett's work before the war we find a suffering that is more private, singular or intrapersonal; after the war, suffering appears to be more collective and fundamentally extrapersonal"; 2005, 18).

This spectatorial tension between “identification and difference” speaks directly to the complex dynamic between observed and experienced pain that operates within the play. The staging of suffering demands a corporeal response from its audience that shifts us unpredictably and unsettlingly “between interior and exterior perspectives” on physical pain. Direct perception of the other’s pain is inaccessible to the witness, but pain’s contagious affect can nevertheless engage her in a distressingly intimate reciprocal experience.

Jean Martin’s performance as Lucky in the première production of *En attendant Godot* at the Théâtre de Babylone in 1953 offers a particularly striking example of the contagion of physical affect in the play. The director Roger Blin foregrounded the physical pain of the play’s characters in his direction of his actors’ respective movement styles:

Estragon suffers from his feet and always tends to his stone where he may sit down to rest. Vladimir has urinary problems and [...] Pozzo has heart troubles and therefore waddles about with recurrent involuntary constraints [...]. Lucky suffers from general decrepitude and tends to remain fixed but trembles constantly.

(McMillan and Fehsenfeld 1988, 71)

Relative to the other characters’ more clearly signalled bodily pains, Lucky’s trembling might seem to be the least indicative a specific physical suffering, but Martin’s own description of how he achieved this trembling in performance reveals an actual and intense physical distress underlying the spectacle. Martin recalls:

I made him stand on one foot, this Lucky, and, as the other foot doesn’t rest on the ground, this makes him tremble and that leads to a trembling of the arms, then of the whole body, and to a tremor in his voice, finally to a sort of delirium.

(Knowlson and Knowlson 2007, 118)

Martin’s asymmetrically weighted stance placed his body in a physical stress position that occasioned his body’s trembling; this staging of physical distress was corporeally generated in Martin’s own body, rather than simply mimicked, and the fact that this bodily trembling

“remained with him for weeks after he relinquished the role of Lucky” (Cohn 1987, 152) and, according to Roger Blin, “affected him when he played other parts later (Oppenheim 1994, 313) further demonstrates the actual physical distress shaping Martin’s performance.¹⁰

Trembling, or what Laura Salisbury calls “shuddering’s potential to move something into being beside itself” (2015, 233), provides a particularly clear demonstration of the physical state of one body eliciting a reciprocal response in another. Ulrika Maude observes how a trembling entity “infects its surroundings” by spreading its tremor to objects it touches; its shaking “is contagious and spreads over anything that comes into its vicinity” (2009, 96). Trembling explicitly breaks down boundaries between perceiving subject and trembling object, providing a particularly clear example of corporeal contagion. Steven Connor has likewise noted how the nature of trembling “is to communicate itself” even in the absence of direct contact: “Watching the twitching of an eyelid, the trembling of a pair of hands, it is hard to retain our composure. We seem to feel the action incipiently, as a sensation, a ghostly ripple of sympathy at work in us” (2008, 209). Martin’s painful trembling performance was to provoke an acute physical response in his earliest spectators, as his recollection of one particular rehearsal demonstrates:

[F]our or five days before we were due to open, the costume lady of the theatre was there with her husband [...] and as I worked up to my frenzy, because I started calmly, just trembling a little, then at the end finishing in a state of real delirium, at that point the costume lady started to cry out and vomit, saying, “I just can’t stand this.” And Roger Blin said, ‘Well, if it has an effect like that, you must keep it!’ And we did.

(Knowlson and Knowlson 2007, 118)

The unfortunate costume designer’s response to Martin’s performance illustrates how the physical distress embodied onstage can call forth a responsive physical distress in the

¹⁰ The oft-cited link between Martin’s trembling and the symptoms of Parkinson’s disease reveals another form of physical suffering – although this time a mimicked one – underlying the performance. For further analysis of the link between Parkinson’s disease and Beckett’s work more broadly, see Bixby 2018, Charlier and Deo 2017, and Salisbury 2015.

spectator's body. Blin's performance provoked not merely an emotional but a corporeal affect in the costume designer's own body, a strength of feeling so intense as to apparently prompt her to cry and vomit. The moment strikingly demonstrates how the witnessing of bodily suffering can entail the witness's own corporeal distress.

Moving from the corporeal to the more figurative, Elisabeth Loevlie has drawn on the terminology of "trembling" to describe the disintegration of the barrier of critical distance between reader and literary text at certain moments of particularly intense engagement: "It is a moment of a certain 'trembling' between reader and text, a dissolution of roles as the reader is no longer the interpreting subject and the text no longer the object to be interpreted" (2003, 88). Where Loevlie speaks more broadly of the relation between the reader and the printed text, we can trace this same "trembling" dynamic of contagion within the specific context of the theatre performance, when the reassuring barrier between spectator and performer falters, and the spectator is no longer permitted a comfortable hermetic perspective on the stage action. In fact, Lucky's allusion in his monologue to one who "suffers like the divine Miranda" (2006, 42) recalls, among other possible referents, Miranda of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610), whose first lines in that play include the lament "O, I have sufferèd / With those that I saw suffer!" (1.2.5-6; 2005, 1223). Beckett evokes the same referent in *Proust* with a more explicit foregrounding of its relation to witnessing pain: "So, unlike Miranda, he suffers with her whom he has not seen suffer" (1965, 45); Lucky's invocation offers a veiled literary echo of pain's affective spread between sufferer and witness. Recent neuroscientific studies of how mirror neurons in the brain "respond both to action execution and observation of the same action performed by another human", meaning that "[w]hen people witness or imagine the pain of another person, their nervous system may react as if they were feeling that pain themselves" (Betti and Aglioti 2016, 192, 191), have helped to explain this unstable boundary between witnessing and suffering bodies. Since

observing somebody in pain activates the same neurons in the spectator's brain "as if the observer was feeling pain himself" (Goubert et al. 2005, 286-87), the witness to suffering may feel as if she is actively participating in the observed state of pain.¹¹ The initially cheerful Vladimir manifests his own responsive reaction on encountering Estragon's beaten and bruised body again in Act II:

VLADIMIR: (*Joyous*) There you are again... (*Indifferent*) There we are again... (*Gloomy*) There I am again.

ESTRAGON: You see, you feel worse when I'm with you.

(2006, 55)

The confrontation with Estragon's physical suffering infects Vladimir with an answering distress, and indeed Vladimir's shift in deictic focus from "There you are" to "There we are" to "There I am" also suggests that the sight of Estragon's pained body recalls him to the embodied recognition of his own responsive corporeality. Both on stage and in the auditorium, *Waiting for Godot* persistently emphasises the spread of affect between witnessing and suffering bodies; such contagion draws attention to the embodied vulnerability of not only the observed sufferer but also of the witness.

Moreover, it is precisely the witness's embodied vulnerability to pain's contagious affect that can catalyse a recoil away from the observed suffering of another, in terms we see played out on Beckett's stage. As an essentially aversive phenomenon, physical pain "is virtually never motivationally neutral" for either sufferer or witness to suffering (Fields 2018, S4), and frequently results in the witness's attempt to turn away from the spectacle of suffering in order to spare her own sensibilities. In *Waiting for Godot*, the other characters' onstage responses to Lucky's monologue demonstrate how the affective spectacle of physical distress can compel the spectator to refuse to bear any further witness to the distressing

¹¹ For further detail on mirror neuron function, see Preston and Hofelich 2012, Jackson, Meltzoff and Decety 2005, and Preston and de Waal 2002.

display of suffering. “*Pozzo’s sufferings increase*” as Lucky’s tirade continues (2006, 41), Vladimir and Estragon begin to “*protest violently*” against the continued spectacle (2006, 42), and all three characters eventually launch themselves bodily onto Lucky in an effort to halt his monologue (2006, 42); although Lucky does nothing to threaten the other men physically, the contagious affect of his own physical state is distressing enough to catalyse their extreme repudiatory reaction. Likewise, the Beckettian spectator often demonstrates an earnest desire *not* to bridge the gap between their physicality and that of Beckettian performers. As Jean Onimus observes, Beckett’s work is often marked by “la violence des réactions qu’elle suscite: elle trouble, elle blesse même si profondément que nous en avons presque peur et que certains la rejettent pour n’avoir pas à l’affronter” (“the violence of the reactions that it elicits: it troubles, it even wounds us so profoundly that we become afraid of it, and some of us reject it in order to avoid confronting it”; 1968, 15).¹² To vomit, in the manner of Martin’s costume designer, is an excretive gesture, a rejection or expulsion, an attempt to purge one’s body of something damaging or upsetting; Pollock’s repeated escape from the *Waiting for Godot* auditorium indicates a similarly self-defensive retreat from the contagious spectacle of suffering. When the physical distress on an observed body infects the witness’s through

¹² We might compare here the wonderfully melodramatic story that French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu records in his ‘bibliobiography’ *Beckett* (1998), a book based on his experience of reading Beckett’s work – a practice which he queries himself, wondering, “Pourquoi mon attachement à Beckett quand il me fait mal?” (“Why this fondness for Beckett when he causes me pain?” (1998, 36). Anzieu reports a confrontation with an acquaintance whom he describes as “inquiète que je puisse prendre plaisir à cet auteur” (“worried about my capacity to take pleasure in this author”; 1998, 86):

Il ne faut pas, me confie-t-elle, qu’elle lise un de ses textes plus d’une heure. Sinon, elle risque d’aller avaler une boîte de médicaments, tellement ils la mettent mal à l’aise avec elle-même. [...] Ses grands yeux apeurés, blancheur du teint, tremblement des genoux. « On devrait inscrire de tels livres à un Index moderne, qui signalerait les écrits nuisibles à la santé publique. »

She confided in me that she was unable to read one of his books for any longer than an hour at a time. Otherwise, she risked swallowing a box of pills, so much did they disturb her. [...] Her large eyes were frightened, her face was pale, her knees trembled. “We should record such books in a modern Index [of banned texts] that would document writings harmful to public health.”

(1998, 86)

“vicarious projection”, then, “[i]n the same way that the body seeks pain relief” (Reyes 2016, 77), the witness often seeks to safeguard herself from the distressing spectacle.

Thus, the combination of responsiveness to another being and aversion away from the spectacle of their suffering produces a discomforting tension between sympathy and recoil in many spectators. As Estragon and Vladimir put it, “You don’t have to look”, “You can’t help looking” (2006, 60); pain’s affect drags us closer and pushes us away simultaneously. This tension is replicated on *Waiting for Godot*’s stage; it is very tangibly established, in fact, during Lucky and Pozzo’s very first appearance. Their arrival is signalled by the “*noise of Lucky falling with all his baggage. Vladimir and Estragon turn towards him, half wishing half fearing to go to his assistance*” (2006, 23). This early example of Lucky being in physical pain demonstrates the mingled impulse to turn sympathetically towards a sufferer and yet to keep one’s distance from the pained body and its contagious affect. This tension is an enduring one within the play, resolved by neither any successful separation of the self from the other nor the attempted expression of sympathy. When Estragon does approach Lucky in the attempt to comfort him, “*Lucky kicks him violently in the shins. Estragon drops the handkerchief, recoils, staggers about the stage howling with pain*” (2006, 32). Approach, pain, and retreat coalesce in this moment on Beckett’s stage; the attempt to sympathise with a sufferer leads only to pain, and then to retreat. Yet the outright refusal of sympathy, the pendulum swing into cruelty, yields no better result: when Estragon approaches Lucky again in Act II, to kick rather than to comfort him this time, he still ends up hurting himself: “*With sudden fury Estragon starts kicking Lucky, hurling abuse at him as he does so. But he hurts his foot and moves away limping and groaning*” (2006, 82). Pain is seemingly inevitable as soon as any form of human contact is made in *Waiting for Godot*. The implications of this dynamic counter overly optimistic readings of the play as one that “explores the power of friendships forged against adversity” (Cumper 2012, n.p.) or that presents “[l]’amitié de

Vladimir et Estragon es un refuge contre la peur, la mort, la souffrance” (“Vladimir and Estragon’s friendship is a refuge against fear, against death, against suffering”; Raclot 2000, 121).¹³ In fact, pain pervades every relationship in *Waiting for Godot*, and such unrelenting suffering undermines more sentimentalised interpretations of the play. Beckett himself would criticise what he interpreted as the “redemptive perversion” of Peter Hall’s 1955 production at the Arts Theatre (*Letters II* 2012, 573); by contrast, “the French production was more like what I wanted, nastier” (*Letters II* 2012, 611). To stage the play in such a way as to elide such “nastiness” is to deny the actual torment of witnessing physical suffering, as so many of the play’s original post-war audience would recognise from painful personal experience.

“You shouldn’t laugh. But you will”: Laughing at Physical Pain

Further complicating this tension between the “redemptive” and the “nasty”, between affinity and aversion, is the manner in which *Waiting for Godot* frequently encourages the spectator to laugh at the spectacle of physical pain. “[N]’a-t-elle pas provoqué des hoquets de rire chez plus d’un spectateur et d’un lecteur alors même qu’elle met en scène et en images une humanité souffrante?”, observes Jacques Casari (“Hasn’t it provoked hiccups of laughter in more than one spectator or reader, even though it stages and describes images of a suffering humanity?”, 2000, 17). The play follows a long historical precedent of treating physical pain as a source of humour, “conspicuously and self-consciously aspir[ing] towards comic effect” by way of “the knowing manipulation of recognisable comic forms and strategies” (Salisbury 2015, 3-4), and we have so far overlooked comic aspects in several of our previous instances

¹³ Several scholars have pointed out how World War II undermined any easy notion of ‘friendship’. Marjorie Perloff has observed that “the uniqueness of the French war experience, as compared to the English of German, was that there was no sure way of differentiating between friend and enemy. Collaborator and Resistance fighter, after all, looked alike” (2005, 81). The double agent Robert Alesch’s betrayal of Beckett’s own Resistance cell Gloria SMH to the Gestapo offers one pertinent example of the narrow line between friend and foe in Occupied France – and one that Beckett himself was not likely to forget. Likewise, the devastation that Beckett would witness in Saint-Lô was the result of ‘friendly fire’, saturation bombing by the Allied forces in preparation for the D-Day advances in July 1944. ‘Friend’ was as likely as ‘enemy’ to cause pain in wartime France.

of bodily suffering in the play. For example, the paralleled “It hurts?” exchange discussed at the beginning of this chapter ends with Estragon telling Vladimir “You might as well button it all the same” and Vladimir replying, “True, never neglect the little things of life” while zipping his fly (2006, 12): Scarry’s ambiguous “it” of incommunicable pain now becomes, comically, Vladimir’s “little thing” or presumably diminutive painful penis. Given the often distressing nature of the physical pain depicted on Beckett’s stage, it may seem paradoxical that laughter is a commonly-observed spectator response to the depiction of physical pain in *Waiting for Godot*, both on its stage and in the auditorium. As Peter Crawley observed in his review of Garry Hynes’s 2016 production of *Waiting for Godot*, “You shouldn’t laugh. But you will” (*The Irish Times*, 13 July 2016).

Although numerous scholars have turned their attention to the subject of laughter provoked in and by Beckett’s writings more broadly, there has been little sustained focus on the specific phenomenon of laughter provoked by another’s physical pain, with the partial exception of Laura Salisbury’s work on the post-war ethics of comedy and comic representation more broadly across Beckett’s writing (2015). Instead, the laughter provoked by another human being’s physical state has typically been theorised – both in Beckett scholarship and in laughter theory more broadly – as alternatively refuge or redemption: a mode of spectatorial disassociation, or a triumph of communal recognition that neutralises any threat of negative affect. In either variation, laughter acts as a form of safeguard for the witness. Laughter “cements union, seals a tacit compact, creates and celebrates the kind of unison on which group lives thrive”, Marcel Gutwirth writes (1993, 37), and yet “there is a certain coldness at its core”, Simon Critchley affirms (2002, 87). Laughter has “a therapeutic power to relieve our pain, to heal and to restore us” by uniting all present together in a shared state of being (Morris 1991, 94), and simultaneously “few forms of dismissal are as painful

and effective as laughing at someone” (Houck 2007, 50). Laughter, it seems, both isolates and unifies.

The extreme variance of these two approaches replicates the similarly contrasting impulses of sympathy and recoil in the witness’s response to the spectacle of pain that we have been tracing more generally in this chapter. That is, laughter provoked by the sight of another’s bodily suffering in *Waiting for Godot* sends the spectator into an often uncomfortable oscillation between two seemingly opposed modes of affinity and aversion, in which each ultimately undermines the other: a series of “trembling and interruptive forms” that reveal sufferer and laugher to be “shuddering echoes of one another” (Salisbury 2015, 32, 223). This laughter simultaneously embodies the spectator’s attempt to resist the negative affect of observed pain, while underlining the laugher’s own vulnerability to physical suffering. The attempt to distance oneself from the spectacle of suffering through laughter is only ever partially successful, not entirely dissipating altogether the contagion of distress, and the acknowledgement of a shared state of embodied vulnerability tends to distress rather than comfort. The laughing spectator attempts to distance herself from the observed pain – or at least from the negative affect of observed pain – but ultimately only reinforces her own susceptibility to corporeal suffering.

The post-war context of *Waiting for Godot*’s composition does much to explain the play’s refusal of laughter as either a redemption of or a distancing from suffering. As Salisbury observes, “Beckett’s comic work traces out a historically specific anxiety of modernity – an anxiety that is suspicious of what it would mean to make ethical claims for art, while remaining aware of how it feels to be claimed by that compulsive necessity” (2015, 34). World War II and its aftermath saw a degree of physical suffering so extensive and so intense as to negate the idea that laughter could alleviate or redeem its impact. When we take this context into account, Simon Critchley’s influential reading of laughter in and at Beckett’s

work as “a form of liberation or elevation” with a “redemptive messianic power” (2009, 9, 16) stands in marked contrast to Beckett’s own criticism of the “redemptive perversion” of Hall’s *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett’s writing in the aftermath of World War II tended towards the troubling rather than the redemptive or affirmative, and in periodically insisting on “the curative virtues of laughter” (Gutwirth 1993, 10), Beckett scholars have perhaps been misled by the manner in which *Waiting for Godot* exploits various comic forms that more traditionally presuppose pain’s neutralisation. *Waiting for Godot* draws on a long-established practice of pain as a source of comedy that includes farce, slapstick, *commedia dell’arte*, and pantomime, so much so as to inspire Jean Anouilh’s famous description of the play in his review of Blin’s première production: “Le sketch des *Pensées* de Pascal par les Fratellini” (“the *Pensées* of Pascal played by the Fratellini Clowns”; *Arts*, 27 February 1953). Indeed, the original French playscript contained explicit reference to the clowns Bim and Bom,¹⁴ and which survive indirectly in the finished playtext in Estragon’s repeated references to the circus (Van Hulle and Verhulst 2017, 29; Ackerley 2009, 158; Cohn 1980, 177). Alongside the French tradition of farce and *guignol* theatre embodied in Molière, Georges Feydeau, Laurent Mourguet and Beckett’s contemporary Marc Camoletti, moments such as Estragon hurting his own foot while attacking Lucky and the continuous tumbles that all four characters take on stage also evidences Beckett’s debt to American slapstick figures such as Buster Keaton, Laurel and Hardy, the Marx Brothers, and the Three Stooges. In fact, Roger Blin has recorded that “while writing *Godot* Beckett was, as far as his four characters were concerned, under the influence of the great American comic actors of the time” and that he himself saw them as, “ideally, Charlie Chaplin for Vladimir, Buster Keaton for Estragon, and

¹⁴ The names “Bim” and “Bom” also appear as incidental names referring to clowns in “Yellow” in the pre-war prose texts *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934) and “Bim” again as the head nurse *Murphy* (1938); more pertinently, the names recur in two of Beckett’s post-war writings in the context of intense and extended physical suffering: both Bim and Bom appear in the long series of bodily penetrations and mutilations in the novel *How It Is* (1964), and in the similarly serial course of torture in the late play *What Where* (1983).

Charles Laughton for Pozzo” (McMillan and Fehsenfeld 1988, 69) – and Beckett expressed “bitter” regret at having to refuse permission for a production of *Waiting for Godot* at the New York New Repertory Theatre that would have starred Buster Keaton as Vladimir (*Letters II* 2012, 524).¹⁵ Traditionally in slapstick-style comedy, physical pain’s affect is neutralised; violence or accident is “characterised as having no lasting effect on, or causing no lasting pain to, its victim” and thus “we can laugh because there are no consequences and therefore no need for empathy or analysis” (Nevitt 2013, 16, 17). In *Waiting for Godot*, however, Beckett refuses us this comforting neutralisation of pain, his characters undergoing pronounced bodily suffering “instead of displaying comic resilience to injury, as a circus clown might” (Salisbury 2015, 188). After Lucky kicks Estragon in Act I, for instance, the latter “howl[s] with pain” and his leg bleeds – there is no blood in traditional slapstick – and in Act II, the resultant “wound” is still visible on Lucky’s leg and “[b]eginning to fester” (2006, 62): both bodily pain and pain’s contagious negative affect are fully in evidence throughout the play, regardless of the suggestion of slapstick that inform the action. In fact, by lulling the spectator into a false sense of security that is quickly confounded by the re-emergence of physical pain, the play’s residual slapstick elements only heighten the shock of the staged suffering. Pain in *Waiting for Godot* remains disturbing, rather than being neutralized; the spectator is permitted little or no relief by way of slapstick or knockabout humour.

¹⁵ Beckett’s debt to American slapstick figures and early Disney shorts reflected the rapid Americanisation of post-war France. The 1945 Yalta Conference placed France, along with much else of Western Europe, under the financial and state control of America; as Emilie Morin records, “at that particular point, many in France believed that the principal design of the American government was world domination” (2017, 180). France relied to a still greater degree than many other Western European countries on American aid for the country’s reconstruction, and American exports, including films, flooded the French markets. Beckett refers to the increasing “French Yankeeism” he sees around him in Paris in a letter of November 1947 to Thomas McGreevy (*Letters II* 2012, 65), and several reviewers of the earliest productions of *En attendant Godot* in France throughout the 1950s expressed their appreciation of the farcical elements of the play by drawing comparisons with Charlie Chaplin’s work: see, for example, Jacques Brenner’s and Jacques Audiberti’s reviews in *Arts*, 1 January 1953 and 15 January 1953 respectively, Hubert Engelhard’s review in *Réforme*, 17 January 1953, and Gabriel Marcel’s review in *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 23 June 1956.

The other primary way in which laughter has been theorised as a means of neutralising pain's affect is the idea of group laughter as a reflection of – or even a catalyst to – communal recognition and acceptance, laughter that “is what we might call affiliative, laughter that evokes acceptance rather than rejection, that promotes relationships of inclusion rather than of exclusion” (Houck 2007, 50). According to this perspective, laughter bonds individuals together, both by embracing all physical states of being and by uniting people together in shared community, “a fellowship of laughers [...] with similar ideas and kindred values” (Oring 2003, 56). Following this line of thinking, laughter has been understood as a means of resisting the negative affect of the abject body and “knitting [laughers] into an instant fellowship” with each other and with the observed being (Gutwirth 1993, 41). Crucial to this particular reading of laughter is the theory of the comic grotesque, the “low comedy of the accidents and infirmities of the body” that Anthony Paraskeva has identified as recurrent in *Waiting for Godot* (2013, 173). As seminally theorised by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and his World* (1965) in reference to the French Renaissance writer François Rabelais's literary work,¹⁶ the carnivalesque comedy of the grotesque encourages the universal dissolution of its constituent bodies into a communal, celebratory mass, and thus offers a redemptive, detoxifying approach to a shared corporeality. It is difficult, however, to fit a Bakhtinian framework to Beckett's post-war plays, since Bakhtin's theory of the comic grotesque notably leaves out any account of laughter provoked by the body in pain specifically, rather than the abject body more generally. It is, after all, difficult to position the pained body as a source of joyful communion, and thus Bakhtin's universal medley of bodies seems to discount the phenomenon of pain when it envisions a celebration of the body in all its forms.

¹⁶ Beckett was familiar with Rabelais's work. Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon note that he had “read Rabelais quite intensively in the 1930s”, citing numerous letters from the period (2013, 43). Ulrika Maude also records that he visited Rabelais's birthplace and grave on his first trip to France as an undergraduate in 1926, and that in July 1935 he purchased, and subsequently read and “made copious notes” on, the Génie de France edition of Rabelais's *Pantagruel* (2009, 107).

Bakhtin and most subsequent theorists of the grotesque focus instead on the overturning of bodily proprieties and hierarchies, and it is primarily within this context that the most convincing previous scholarship on Beckett and the Bakhtinian has been concentrated.¹⁷ Comic grotesque laughter is less convincing when offered as a mode of negating pain or pain's affect. The experience of pain catalyses anger and division far more commonly than it does joyful unity in *Waiting for Godot*.

Moreover, Beckett typically disallows the possibility of group laughter in response to pain in *Waiting for Godot*, be this the laughter of character with character, spectator with spectator, or indeed spectator with character. When Vladimir's laugh is cut short by his prostate pain in Act I, for example – “*a hearty laugh which he immediately stifles, his hand pressed to his pubis, his face contorted*”; “One daren't even laugh any more”, he comments resignedly (2006, 13) – it is the very pain-stricken cessation of laughter which in turn prompts many spectators to laugh. Vladimir's own laughter causes him pain, and the audience responds to Vladimir's pain with laughter. This is not joyful communal laughter *with* a character, acknowledging and aligning the sufferer's body with their own, but rather a crueller form of laughter *at* the character's pain, a derisive and exclusionary laughter rather than the convivial, inclusive one imagined by the grotesque theorist; it refutes Bakhtinian redemption and refuses any opportunity for genial identification between observer and observed. Even the audience's laughter at the spectacle of physical suffering is routinely cut short, prevented from achieving any communal value by what Wolfgang Iser has identified as “a sort of shock effect, as if the reaction were somehow inappropriate and must be stifled” (1981, 159). Spectators may similarly find themselves checking their initial laughter at

¹⁷ For examples of subsequent theorists of the grotesque who have explored the overturning of traditional hierarchies and bodily decorums, see Duggan 2013, Goodwin 2009, and Harpham 2008. For examples of previous scholarship on Beckett and the Bakhtinian, see Maude 2009, and Weller 2006.

Vladimir's first expression of prostate pain; they are still more likely to curb any laughter provoked by his second expression of such pain later in the same act:

VLADIMIR: I'll be back.
(He hastens towards the wings.)
 ESTRAGON: End of the corridor, on the left.
 VLADIMIR: Keep my seat.
(Exit Vladimir.)
 [...]

 ESTRAGON: Come here.
 POZZO: What for?
 ESTRAGON: You'll see. [...] *(Estragon points off.)* Look!
 POZZO: *(Having put on his glasses.)* Oh I say!
 ESTRAGON: It's all over.
(Enter Vladimir, sombre. He shoulders Lucky out of the way, kicks over the stool, comes and goes agitatedly.)

(2006, 35)

Rather as the pointed metatheatricity of the Spectator invading the stage in *Eleutheria* implicates the projected auditorium spectator in his cruelty, here too Estragon and Pozzo's functioning as 'spectators' of Vladimir's suffering – a performance emphasised by the theatre-goer-like language such as “Keep my seat” and Pozzo's carefully putting on his glasses to see better at a distance – again recalls the auditorium audience forcibly to their own position as casual spectators to suffering. Coupled with Vladimir's more extreme pain response when he returns to the stage, the moment elicits what Michael Coffey has described as “a less automatic, more self-aware response” from many spectators, the replacement of initial laughter with “a respectful silence, or an uncomfortable one” (2016, 304). The potential for convivial group laughter in the auditorium is disrupted by this discomfiting dynamic, the feeling “of impropriety rather than confirmation”, and thus laughter at the pained body in *Waiting for Godot* is more typically “the stifled laugh” of discomfort, “not the liberating communal laugh” of the Rabelasian grotesque that would embrace all bodily states (Iser 1981, 140). Indeed, in his review of Blin's première production of *En attendant Godot*, theatre critic Jacques-Henry Jouheaud recorded that “[l]e spectateur imprudent qui se prend à

rire sera dévisagé par ses voisins furieux tandis que la tension croit” (“the imprudent spectator who begins to laugh will be glared at by his furious neighbours as the tension starts to rise”; *L’Informateur critique*, 1 January 1953, n.p.) Here, pain negates communal laughter, rather than communal laughter negating pain.

At the opposing end of the spectrum from these theories of laughter’s unifying potential, we find the pervasive idea that “[l]aughter gives us a distance on everyday life” and “lets us take up a disinterested, theoretical attitude” towards its object in such a way as to shield the laugher from the transmission of any potentially negative affect (Critchley 2002, 87-88).¹⁸ Following this line of thinking, laughter signals a spectatorial resistance to observed pain, much like the other forms of recoil from witnessed suffering explored above. Indeed, Winfried Menninghaus explicitly links laughter and vomiting as comparable forms of purgative resistance, recalling Blin’s costume designer’s reaction to Lucky’s monologue: “laughing *at* something, as an act of expulsion, resembles in itself the act of rejecting, or vomiting in disgust” so that this “contact with the abject [...] does not lead to a lasting contamination” (2003, 10-11). Several Beckett scholars have referenced Henri Bergson’s theory of laughter in *Le Rire: Essai sur la signification du comique* (*Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, 1900) in relation to laughter as a distancing or defensive device in Beckett’s work, on the grounds of Beckett’s familiarity with Bergson’s writing: James and Elizabeth Knowlson record Beckett having lectured on Bergson’s work at Trinity College Dublin between 1930 and 1931 (2007, 33), for example, and Ulrika Maude cites Beckett’s

¹⁸ The superiority theory of laughter acts more broadly as a grounding for this mode of thinking. This theory, first outlined in Plato’s *Philebus* (c. 347 BC), holds that the human being laughs at another’s suffering precisely because it is not one’s own suffering, and so provokes the idea of the laugher’s own superiority; see Simpson 2017 for a closer analysis of traditional theories of laughter in relation to Beckett’s work. Laura Salisbury emphasises that “Beckett was certainly aware of the theoretical relationship between laughter and mastery”, observing that he had taken notes from Alfred Adler’s *The Neurotic Constitution* (1917) in 1935, which underlines the link between “laughter and a desired superiority” in patients (2015, 39). However, the superiority theory of laughter would accord with a reading of Beckett’s staged pain that focused only on its aversive quality, rather than a frequently recorded sense of responsive suffering from the spectator. The frequency with which Beckett’s staged pain invades our own spectatorial bodies troubles any simple acceptance of the superiority theory of laughter in relation to *Waiting for Godot*.

reading *Le Rire* around 1930 (2014, 48); *Le Rire* would also be republished in France by Presses Universitaires de France at the war's end in 1946. It is perhaps then unsurprising that, as Shane Weller notes, “Much of the ostensibly comic in Beckett would seem to fall neatly within Bergson’s definition of the comic as a lapse of the living into the mechanical” (2006, 114). For Bergson, what makes us laugh is a person who gives the impression of being mechanic or “thing-like”, when we see “something mechanical encrusted on something living” (2013, 43), when “flailing corporeality begins to resemble a puppet or automaton”, as Salisbury summarises (2015, 189). As the observed body becomes less recognisably human, spectator empathy for its state decreases and somatic affect becomes less contagious, since empathy “relies on the human intelligibility of other bodies” (Reyes 2016, 72): Viviana Betti and Salvatore Aglioti explain that “the perceived similarity between two individuals [...] may drastically bias the empathy reaction and neural response to the sight of the suffering other” (2016, 202-03).¹⁹ Similarly, Bergson argues that it is only the body rendered unfamiliar, the body with which we do not empathise, that can stimulate laughter: “Laughter is incompatible with emotion. Depict some fault, however trifling, in such a way to arouse sympathy, fear, or pity; the mischief is done, it is impossible for us to laugh” (2013, 95).

Crucially, however – and this point has been overlooked in prior scholarship on Bergsonian ideas of laughter in Beckett’s work – just as Bakhtin’s comic grotesque does not account for physical pain as a specific form of bodily abjection, Bergson’s theory of laughter does not satisfactorily address the fact of physical pain in its reading of the “mechanical” comic body. In a particularly telling description of a performed spectacle of comic violence, Bergson denies any suggestion of actual physical pain:

¹⁹ The fact that “we feel greater empathy for those who are similar to ourselves” has been indicated repeatedly across several clinical studies (Prinz 2011, 227). It has been demonstrated the individuals tend to feel more empathy for others of their own racial or ethnic in-group, for example (Gutsell and Inzlicht 2010; Xu et al. 2009), or for their own gender identity (Losin et al. 2012).

There came on stage two men, each with an enormous head, bald as a billiard ball. In their hands they carried large sticks which each, in turn, brought down upon the other's cranium. [...] After each blow, the bodies seemed to grow heavier and more unyielding, overpowered by an increased degree of rigidity. [...] At that instant appeared in all its vividness the suggestion that the two artists had gradually driven into the imagination of the spectators: "We are about to become... We have now become solid wooden dummies."
 (2013, 44-45)

Bergson elides any recognition of physical pain from his contemplation of the body, automatically equating the body in physical distress with the body that seems "mechanical", thing-like, or otherwise non-human. As Paul Sheehan observes, "Bergsonian laughter begins with the human [...] and ends with the inhuman, with automatism, emotional anaesthesia" (2002, 154). By contrast, *Waiting for Godot* rarely encourages us to read the pained characters as "mechanical" or otherwise lacking in human responsiveness. The wincing Vladimir, limping Estragon, hysterical Pozzo, and trembling, weeping Lucky all react corporeally rather than "mechanically" to their physical distress. Bodily pain is, after all, hardly a sign of the mechanical, being instead a biological phenomenon; a machine would not wince at prostate pain the way Vladimir does, and so while we might laugh unkindly at his vulnerability to his embodied existence, we can hardly claim that he gives us "the distinct impression of a mechanical arrangement" (Bergson 2013, 51). This emphasis on pain's impact forbids the safe isolation of any "disinterested spectator" from the spectacle of suffering (Bergson 2013, 10). Since, according to Bergson's theorising, laughter is catalysed by an observed being's "fall into alterity" (Weller 2006, 90), the Bergsonian theory of laughter demands a separation between laugher and laughable object; laughter itself comprises the "very act of marking [one's] difference through laughter from all laughable alterity", as Shane Weller point outs (2006, 96). Yet the emphasis on physical pain as a catalyst to laughter in *Waiting for Godot* does not permit such easy differentiation between spectating self and laughable object, given the emphasis placed on the victim's very bodily

vulnerability.²⁰ We may laugh – hastily, uncomfortably – at the spectacle of bodily suffering on *Waiting for Godot*'s stage, but ours is not the detached response to an unrelated being such as Bergson theorises. Such unsettled laughter does not signal any reassuring dissociation from the observed body, and proffers no Bergsonian protection against pain's contagious affect in *Waiting for Godot*.

In seeking a more pertinent framework for laughter's relation to physical pain and for the relationship between laughing body and laughable body in *Waiting for Godot*, we turn finally to the theoretical writings of French writer Charles Baudelaire. In "De l'essence du rire" ("On the Essence of Laughter", 1855), Baudelaire positions pain's sufferer and the individual who laughs at this sufferer in close alignment, rather than conjecturing distance between them. Using the example of the individual who falls over, he queries our apparent inclination to laugh at another being's physical distress:

What is there so delightful in the sight of a man falling on the ice or in the street, or stumbling at the end of a pavement, that the countenance of his brother in Christ should contract in such an intemperate manner [...]? The poor devil has disfigured himself, at the very least; he may even have broken an essential member. Nevertheless, the laugh has gone forth[.]
(1969, 152)

That Baudelaire offers the example of an individual falling as a source of laughter indicates his own precise sense of laughter and its connection to physical pain. "Human laughter is intimately linked with the accident of an ancient Fall", he declares (1969, 149). The divine and the prelapsarian do not laugh, according to Baudelaire; laughter came into the world at the moment of the Biblical Fall, and belongs specifically to fallen humanity. It is at this same

²⁰ Laura Salisbury has also troubled the logic of separation in Bergson's ideology of laughter with specific attention to the mechanical as a line of connection between laughing subject and laughable object, pointing to how sardonic laughter infects the laughing subject with the same "mechanical inhumanity" that characterises the laughable in Bergson's ideology (2015, 54, 123). However, when it comes to laughter provoked by the spectacle of physical pain specifically, it is the intensely vulnerable bodily state which acts as an unsettling line of coincidence between laughing subject and laughable object.

moment that physical pain also comes into the world, following Genesis, and becomes the promised doom of Fallen humanity in Hell, according to Revelations.²¹ In Baudelaire's thinking, then, both laughter and pain are closely associated with humankind's Fallen nature and so laughing at another suffering requires "the one who laughs to forget his own fallenness" while he is engaged in the spectacle of another's (Weller, 2006, 85). The individual who laughs at a sufferer's fallen state momentarily forgets their own Fallen state – and, more crucially here, their correspondent vulnerability to physical suffering. Yet such laughter, for all it attempts to "insist upon the difference between the one who falls and the one who witnesses the fall" (Weller 2006, 84), does not in fact establish any stable distinction between laughter and sufferer, for it hurts the laughing subject too, Baudelaire claims: such laughter "lacerates and scorches the lips of the laughter for whose sins there can be no remission", transmuting her into a sufferer in turn (Baudelaire 1969, 152). The oscillation between resistance and recognition provoked by laughter at another's suffering offers no

²¹ The Biblical passages in question read:

[I]t shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Unto the woman, he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children[.]
(KJV Genesis 3.15-16)

[T]here fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image [...] and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores.
(Revelations 16.1-2 and 16.10-11)

In the Louis Segond Bible, which Dirk van Hulle and Mark Nixon record in Beckett's library (2013, 178), the references to physical pain in these passages are still more pronounced:

[C]elle-ci t'écrasera la tête, et tu lui blesseras le talon. Il dit à la femme: J'augmenterai la souffrance de tes grossesses, tu enfanteras avec douleur[.]
(LSG Genèse 3.15-16)

Et un ulcère malin et douloureux frappa les hommes qui avaient la marque de la bête et qui adoraient son image [...] et les hommes se mordaient la langue de douleur, et ils blasphémèrent le Dieu du ciel, à cause de leurs douleurs et de leurs ulcères,
(Apocalypse 16.1-2 and 16.10-11)

For further detail on Beckett's familiarity with various French editions of the Bible, see Bailey 2014, 121, and Bailey 2012, 356-59.

protection from the contagious affect of observed pain, according to Baudelaire. In fact, it ultimately only further underlines the unsettling relation between laughter and sufferer.

Beckett knew Baudelaire's work well. He refers directly to Baudelaire multiple times throughout *Proust* (1965, 76, 79, 80), and he advised Mania Péron on her translation of "Le Vieux Saltimbanque" early in his career (*Letters II* 2012, 331-32). Indeed, James Knowlson records another, more distressing link between Baudelaire's writings and the Pérons which, he hazards, Beckett likely knew: Mania's husband Alfred, whom Beckett had known since his undergraduate days at UCD, was said to have recited the poems of Baudelaire and Verlaine while undergoing forced labour in the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp, and even allegedly inspired enough feeling in the camp *capo* that he would eventually be pressed to recite them on demand for the latter's entertainment (1997, 381). Throughout his life, Beckett makes recurrent references to Baudelaire's writings in his letters,²² and Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon have recorded finding the Yves-Gérard Le Dantec edition of Baudelaire's *Œuvres complètes* in Beckett's library, which contains Baudelaire's essay "De l'essence du rire" (2013, 60). His one-time girlfriend Pamela Mitchell would also gift him with a "beautiful edition" of Baudelaire's poems when the two ended their relationship in 1954 (Knowlson 1997, 404).

Given Beckett's close familiarity with Baudelaire's body of work, it seems highly likely that he would have known "De l'essence du rire" – particularly since *Waiting for Godot* appears to follow Baudelaire's linking of falling, the Fall, physical pain, and laughter across its two acts. Indeed, immediately after Lucky's second fall in Act I following his monologue, the French script has Pozzo denigrate him as "Charogne!", evoking Baudelaire famous poem "Un Charogne" from the 1857 volume *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857), also

²² See *Letters I* 2010, 178, 181 and 295; *Letters II* 2012, 90-91, 121, 123, 522, 559 and 603; *Letters III* 2014, 358 and 567; and *Letters IV* 2016, 109.

contained in the Gérard Le Dantec *Œuvres complètes*. Characters fall regularly throughout the play, to the point that “[I]a chute” might be identified as “le mouvement naturel des corps en scène” in *Waiting for Godot* (“the fall”, “the natural movement on stage”; Noudelmann 1998, 92). These falls seem calculated to provoke audience laughter, drawing on the recognisable slapstick genre and supplemented by extra comic details: “Who farted?”, Estragon demands while all four characters are lying in a heap in Act II (2006, 76).²³ In tandem with this encouragement to audience laughter, references to man’s Fallen nature and to Hell routinely pepper the dialogue following a character’s fall, according to what Anna McMullan identifies as “lapsarian connotation” to these stage moments (2010, 38). In the English script, after Lucky falls on his first entrance, Pozzo tells Estragon and Vladimir, “He’s wicked” (2006, 23). When Lucky falls again after Vladimir and Estragon lift him, Pozzo exclaims “Damnation!”, and Estragon, “To hell with him!” (2006, 44). When all four characters fall in the second act, it is Vladimir’s turn to tell Estragon to “[g]o to hell” (2006, 78), and Pozzo responds to the names “Abel” and “Cain” (2006, 78). Similarly, the French version of the play presents a medley of interlingual allusions to Biblical redemption and damnation, beginning with Estragon’s commentary on Pozzo’s hapless attempts to rise from his own fall in Act II: “Il s’est sauvé! (*Pozzo s’effondre. Silence.*) Il est tombé!” (1952, 116). Rendered in the English translation as “He’s off! He’s down!”, “Il est tombé!” translates literally to “He’s fallen!” and, in a complex interplay of the reflexive versus the reciprocal form, “Il s’est sauvé!” can be translated as either “He’s escaped!” or “He’s saved himself!” Moments later, once all four characters have fallen, we find another instance of bilingual Biblical wordplay:

VLADIMIR: Vous êtes tombés tous les deux.

POZZO: Allez voir s’il est blessé.

²³ Beckett’s later radio play *All That Fall* (1957) likewise links laughter, falling, and the Bible, when Mrs Rooney’s quoting Psalm 145-14, “The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed down”, is swiftly followed by her and her husband’s “*wild laughter*” (2006, 198).

(1952, 123)

VLADIMIR: The two of you slipped. (*Pause.*) And fell.

POZZO: Go see if he is hurt.

(2006, 81)

Beckett's English translation of this passage does not attempt the near-impossible task of replicating the play of Francophone and Anglophone homophony here. Pozzo's query if Lucky is "blessé" – that is, "hurt", "wounded", or "injured" – offers a *faux ami* phonetic evocation of the English word "blessed", instantiating a humorous counterpoint between the two concepts. The range of Biblical allusion in relation to a physical fall, coupled with the encouragement to laugh at moments of physical pain and Beckett's familiarity with Baudelaire's work in general, suggests that *Waiting for Godot* draws directly on Baudelaire's theory of laughter's connection to both falling and the Fall.

Thus we might more productively frame how laughter provoked by the spectacle of physical pain, a "comedy of uncertainty [which] contains its own tonal instability" (Sheehan 2002, 157), oscillates disquietingly between two divergent modes of response in *Waiting for Godot*. The likely influence of Baudelaire's comic theory helps explain how "laughter causes the one who laughs to suffer" both on the stage and in the auditorium (Weller 2006, 127). Baudelaire's "De l'essence du rire" interprets the individual's laughter at another's suffering as simultaneously a signal that she has forgotten her own Fallen state, and a reminder of her own vulnerability to physical suffering. Similarly, the Beckettian spectator who laughs at the spectacle of another's pain engages herself in a discomfiting struggle between resistance and recognition, the vain attempt to mark a Bergsonian distance from another's physical pain superseded by a Baudelairean contagion of pain's negative affect, and laughter becomes "the flagellation of a seemingly comically empowered self" (Salisbury 2015, 58). The increasingly nervous laughter of the *Waiting for Godot* audience often seems more like an attempted defence mechanism, "a conscious effort on the part of the spectator"

to “ensure his own safe distance” from the distressed state of the onstage body (Tönnies 1997, 104, 48) but which more often than not fails to stimulate the feeling of physical distance and invulnerability that it is meant to signal. Instead, laughter turns on the laugher, and the spectator to suffering is reminded of her own embodied vulnerability to the physical pain that she witnesses. Such laughter signals neither universal communion nor a secure sense of detached superiority, but rather the spectator’s entrapment between fellow feeling for and repudiation of the other’s physical suffering. Thus the unsettling comic treatment of physical pain offers a crucial, if overlooked, element of the uncomfortable dynamics of witnessing another’s suffering which made *Waiting for Godot* so radical in the post-war period. As Beckett put it to Carlheinz Caspari in 1953, the “farce side” of the play is “indispensable” to “the spirit of the play”; the audience, faced with staged pain, is pushed to “[l]augh at them and get them laughed at, at unhappiness [...] and always a little reluctantly” (*Letters II* 2012, 392). Laughter at the spectacle of suffering in *Waiting for Godot* only further emphasises how difficult it is for human beings to protect themselves from pain – or even from the contagious affect of witnessed pain.

Conclusion

The staging of pain in *Waiting for Godot* is critically conditioned by the play’s appearance in the aftermath of World War II, in a France that was still struggling with the recent memory and continued effects of the war’s suffering. Yet Beckett’s text rejects any easy alignment of witnessing and healing, or witnessing and absolution, as was propagated in much other contemporary Francophone theatre. Here, to witness another being’s pain is more likely to further propagate rather than to remedy that pain. Julian Murphet asserts that Beckett’s post-war work “safeguards the unvoiced, nameless suffering written out of official histories” (2013, 126), but Murphet overlooks the darker edge to this ‘safeguarding’ of suffering that

refuses any easy expiation of pain, and that emphasises the witness's questionable position in relation to another's suffering. *Waiting for Godot* more commonly engenders in the spectator an uneasy tension between a repulsion from *and* an empathy with the physical suffering they witness, a repeated oscillation between the two states that denies the possibility of comfort or catharsis. The Beckettian spectator is left squarely confronted with the pain on stage: pain that spreads its contagious affect to us, pain that distresses us, but not pain that we can quite incorporate and manage as our own.

Similarly, throughout the play "Beckett's comedy does not function simply as a form of consolation and acceptance" (Salisbury 2015, 30); audience laughter provoked by the spectacle of physical suffering more typically acts as a further source of affective distress for the implicated spectator. The pained body as a source of laughter remains distressing precisely because it straddles the boundary between the felt self and the inaccessible other. The spectator's instinctive recoil from physical distress prevents a self-comforting dissolution into a boundary-less, carnivalesque merging of being; however, their surviving empathic sense of the pained body before them prevents a comfortable total retreat from the distressing affect of the witnessed pain. As C oil n Parsons recognised in his review of Damon Galgut's 2010 production in Cape Town's Little Theatre, *Waiting for Godot* thus simultaneously pushes its spectator "to recoil at the pain of an unjust world" and "issue[s] a challenge to us to ask why, to engage, to listen, to respond" (2011, 260). Estragon' anguished cry to Vladimir – and implicitly to the spectator – after being beaten strikingly epitomises this unresolved dynamic between recoil and rapport "Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me!" (2006, 54).

Chapter Three

The Aesthetic of the Anaesthetic:

Endgame and Pablo Picasso

One of *Endgame*'s (1957) most shocking moments comes when, late in the play, Clov finally admits to Hamm why he has been refusing the latter's repeated request for pain relief:

"There's no more painkiller. [...] You'll never get any more pain-killer" (2006, 127).

Hamm's initially "*appalled*" disbelief quickly escalates to a howl of pained despair: "(Soft.)

What'll I do? (Pause. In a scream.) What'll I do?" (2006, 127). *Endgame* never reveals the

specific cause of Hamm's compulsive need for his painkiller, but his horrified reaction

evokes the nightmare of the chronic pain patient left forever without relief. Clov's refusing

Hamm his painkiller has been strangely under-analysed in Beckett scholarship, despite

Beckett himself labelling it "one of the cruellest sections of the play" (Gontarski 1992, 65),

and despite the careful attention that he accorded to its construction. His director notebooks

for both the 1967 Schiller Theater and the 1980 Riverside Studio productions of *Endgame*,

for example, include "painkiller" in their introductory lists of the play's central motifs, and

track the appearance of the word throughout the play: the Schiller notebook keeps a running

total of the cumulative repetitions of the word at the beginning of each 'scene' (UoR MS

1396/4/5), and in the Riverside notebook Beckett underlines and numbers the word each time

it appears throughout the text (UoR MS 1974).¹ The question of pain and pain relief is a

significant concern throughout the play, and yet relatively little extended critical engagement

has been dedicated to the chronic physical suffering in *Endgame*.

¹ Indeed, the very appearance of the word "painkiller" in Beckett's English translation of *Endgame* is notable, given his translation of the original French term "calmant" as "calmative" in the novella *Le Calmant/The Calmative* (1946/1967), and the initial translations of "sedative" in the autograph manuscript and first typescript of *Endgame* (Van Hulle and Weller 2018, 290). Beckett's handwritten alteration of "sedative" to "painkiller" in the first typescript indicates a purposeful attention to the word that would continue throughout the play's performance history.

One possible explanation for the absence of close analysis of bodily pain in *Endgame* scholarship is that bodily suffering, although pervasive, is accorded little direct expression throughout the play. Hamm's howl of pain occasions such intense shock in part because the play offers so few other visual or verbal articulations of his suffering; many readers or spectators may not fully register the implications of his request for painkiller until this moment. Similarly, it is very rare for the other characters in the play to verbalise directly their physical suffering, and still more infrequently does the spectator witness any immediate causation of pain. Some form of injury has obviously occurred, resulting in the various motility problems of all four characters, but the presumable wounds, scars, amputations, or deformities are hidden from sight below blankets and darkened glasses, under clothes and within dustbins – or, as regards a possible neurological cause, within the brain itself, “something dripping in my head” (2006, 100). In fact, the *Avant Fin de partie* manuscripts,² which sketch out early variations of the play's genesis, reveal that Beckett carefully elided a number of his characters' more direct references to physical suffering as he revised the play: in one early draft, for example, the Hamm-figure “X” demands that his syringe be filled with morphine, cocaine, hashish, or cyanide – or indeed a mixture of all four, as the Clov-figure “Factotum” eventually gives him – in the apparent pursuit of pain relief (UoR MS 1227/7/16/7/16r; see also Baroghel 2010, 128).³ In the following draft, the Hamm-figure “A” weeps forlornly when the Clov-figure “B” initially refuses him his painkiller, emphatically

² Beckett began work on *Fin de partie* in early 1955. He would continue working intermittently on the play throughout 1955 and 1956, and it would finally be published by Minit in January 1957. Roger Blin directed the French-language première production at the Royal Court Theatre in England in April 1957, after George Devine stepped in to offer a venue when the initial contract with the Théâtre de l'Œuvre fell through; its première on French soil came three weeks later at the Studio des Champs-Élysées on 26 April 1957. Beckett completed the English translation of *Endgame* in June 1957, and the English-language première was held at the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York, directed by Alan Schneider.

³ For recent scholarship pertaining to the use of cannabinoids for pain relief, see Lipman 2017, and Savage et al. 2017. For the use of cocaine as a local anaesthetic, see Newport and Coyne 2010, and Marbach and Wallenstein 1988. Cyanide, the last of the drugs that “X” requests, seems a last-ditch resort to a euthanasia that will end all pain forever; still more unsettlingly, it also recalls the use of hydrogen cyanide in the form of Zyklon B in the gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek and Mauthausen-Gusen during World War II.

underlining his physical suffering (UoR MS 1660, 32r). Beckett's careful erasure of these more melodramatic expressions of pain indicates a deliberate muting of its recognisable presence in *Endgame*.

Endgame, then, fractures the relationship between the sufferer and the witness to suffering still more profoundly than Beckett's earlier post-war plays. Where *Eleutheria* interrogates spectatorial indifference to pain, and *Waiting for Godot* highlights the frequent instinctive recoil from the spectacle of suffering, *Endgame* stages pain's very incommunicability, emphasising the difficulty of articulating the subjective experience of pain by denying its expression almost entirely. The play cultivates what I am calling here "an aesthetic of the anaesthetic": a refusal to explicitly voice or stage physical suffering that anaesthetises the witness's consciousness of that pain. If "pain is a drama", in that communicating pain entails adhering to culturally determined "norms, conventions, and ritualised acts" (Moscoso 2012, 6, 11), and in that its victims "must actively say and do things before specific audiences to reveal their suffering" (Brodwin 1999, 91), then *Endgame* for the most part paradoxically denies the drama of pain, and the spectator is left with only vague intimations or sudden momentary glimpses of the other's suffering. Ironically, in a play in which "there's no more painkiller," the direct expression of pain is eliminated almost entirely from the stage text.

The previous chapter read *Waiting for Godot*'s cynical probing of the limits of empathy as atypical among contemporaneous Francophone plays which vaunted impassioned sympathy with another suffering being. Here, in turn, *Endgame*'s aesthetic of the anaesthetic distinguishes Beckett's play from the work of many other Francophone playwrights who proffered intensely graphic theatrical depictions of pain and violence in the war's aftermath. By rendering pain inexplicit onstage, *Endgame* contrasts sharply with "le caractère sanglant et grandguignolesque de tortures et mutilations spectaculaires" that typified much of the work

staged in France's theatre during this period ("the bloodthirsty and *Grand Guignol*-style character of these spectacularly staged tortures and mutilations"; Raclot 1998, 61). *Théâtre de la cruauté*-inspired dramatists like Jean Genet, Fernando Arrabal, and Arthur Adamov responded to the trauma of World War II by loading their scripts with intensely graphic stagings of physical suffering: staged brawls, poisonings, rapes, whippings, and strangulations. The shock of World War II unleashed a wave of theatricalised violence above and beyond that provoked by Antonin Artaud's 1930s *Théâtre de la cruauté*; as Marie-Claude Hubert notes, "Le théâtre européen, depuis les années cinquante, multiple les représentations de corps brisé" in response, she theorises, to "les visions de la guerre, qui ont offert au regard tant de corps déchiquetés" ("During the 1950s, European theatre staged the shattered body with increasing frequency", "the wartime images of so many destroyed bodies"; 1976, 244). In fact, the historical moment prompted another resident non-national artist to turn to this graphic theatrical staging of bodily violence: the Spanish painter and sculptor Pablo Picasso, who had been living in France since 1904 when World War II broke out, and would remain there for the war's duration and beyond. Picasso, more famous both then and now for his visual and plastic artworks, wrote two critically under-discussed and remarkably violent plays in French during the wartime and post-war period: *Le Désir attrapé par la queue* (*Desire Caught by the Tail*, 1944) and *Les Quatre petites filles* (*The Four Little Girls*, 1949).⁴ Although he continued to give visual expression to European wartime suffering in paintings such as *Guernica* (1937) and *The Charnel House* (1945), Picasso would supplement this engagement with wartime pain via the scripting of these two particularly brutal plays. Picasso had produced some brief written texts in the past (most notably *écriture automatique* surrealist poems published in *Cahiers de l'Art*) and had long been tangentially

⁴ This chapter quotes from Bernard Frechtman's 1950 translation *Desire Caught by the Tail*. I provide my own English quotations for *Les Quatre petites filles*, given the numerous inconsistencies in Roland Penrose's 1970 translation, which is at the time of writing the only commercially available English translation.

involved in the European theatre scene by way his Beateau Lavoisier playwright and actor friends such as Guillaume Apollinaire, Jean Cocteau, and Charles Dullin, and his stage set and costume design work for various Paris-based productions, including the Ballets Russes's *Parade* (1917), *Le Tricorne* (1919), *Pulcinella* (1920), and *Mercure* (1927), Jean Cocteau's *Antigone* (1922), and Pierre Blanchard's *Œdipe-Roi* (1947). However, *Le Désir attrapé* and *Les Quatre petites filles* would be the only plays that he would ever write.

Picasso's position within occupied and post-war France was in several ways very similar to that of Beckett— and indeed, Beckett himself knew Picasso's work well, even before the outbreak of the war.⁵ Like Beckett, Picasso would remain in France during World War II as both a non-national and a non-combatant, a close witness to and yet simultaneously distanced from the country's wartime suffering. During the early years of the war he moved between Paris and the non-occupied Royan region as Nazi threat levels in France fluctuated, then resettled in Paris in 1942, refusing financial aid from the occupation authorities (Podoksik 2004, 152) and offers of asylum in the United States and Mexico (Nadel 2013, 28-29). Having been declared a “degenerate artist” by the Nazi government, and in a precarious position as a foreign national with temporary residency papers and suspected Communist links (Riding 2010, 36), his Paris flat and studio were regularly raided by German officers (Düchting 2008, 79), and in May 1943 he would see his canvases in storage at the Musée de Jeu de Paume burned as ‘degenerate’ art (Nadel 2013, 35). He would, however, escape the

⁵ Some of Beckett's earliest translation work included material on Picasso's illustrations in 1930 for *Formes: An International Review of Plastic Art*, a French-English journal of art theory (*Letters I* 2010, 19-20), and in 1949 Jacques Prévert's ‘Promenade de Picasso’ and Paul Éluard's ‘Le travail du peintre – A Picasso’ for *Transition Forty-Nine* (*Letters II* 2012, 115-6). Beckett also gained an early exposure to Picasso's collaborative work for theatre on visiting a number of Ballets Russes performances in London in the mid-1930s for which Picasso had provided set design and costumes: Beckett's letters specifically mention Picasso's décor and costumes for Manuel de Falla's *Le Tricorne*, which he saw in revival at Covent Garden in July 1934 (*Letters I* 2010, 216), and Susan Jones speculates that Beckett may have seen Roland Petit's *Le Rendez-Vous*, with décor by Picasso, in Paris in 1945 (2013, 306). Beckett's letters from his travel in Germany in 1936-37 also make specific references to the Picasso originals that he was allowed to see (*Letters I* 2010, 375, 478) – many of which had been labelled *Entarte Kunst* or “degenerate art” by the Nazi government – and he frequently uses Picasso's work as a benchmark against which to judge other contemporary art (*Letters I* 2010, 383-84, 387, 618).

arrest and internment that would lead to the death of several of his French acquaintances, including his Jewish friend and fellow painter Max Jacob, and the Surrealist poet Robert Desnos, whom Beckett also counted as a friend (Brassaï 1999, 152). Picasso in fact seems to have walked a fine line between resistance and collaboration in order to survive in occupied Paris: his friendships with the Vichy officials André-Louis Dubois and Maurice Toesca and with Hitler's favoured sculptor Arno Breker allowed him to evade deportation and to keep his foreign national residency papers updated (Nadel 2013, 33, 39), for example – yet his studio also offered a safe meeting-place for members of the Resistance such as Michel and Louise Leiris, Jean Cassou, Louis Aragon, Georges Hugnet and Robert Desnos (Nadel 2013, 39), and he provided long-term shelter for the writer André Malraux when he required refuge from his *maquis* work (Nadel 2013, 35). Both Beckett and Picasso thus shared in France's wartime suffering to a certain degree, and yet in many ways were shielded from its worst horrors by virtue of their nationality, religion, and non-combatant status. This complex confrontation of the 'distanced witness' appears to have provoked Picasso's turn to the dramatic medium as a form for interrogating the experience, just as it did for Beckett. *Endgame* and Picasso's plays each stem in part from their writers' experience of the 'distanced witnessing' of intense suffering, and we can trace this influence in their shared refusal of any clear expression of physical pain to their (would-be) spectators.

Picasso wrote *Le Désir attrapé*, a surreal tragic farce which stages a meeting between mysteriously-named characters such as Big Foot (Le Gros Pied) and Skinny Anguish (L'Angoisse Maigre), during the first winter of the Nazi occupation of Paris, allegedly in a rush over the course of four days in January 1941 (Brassaï 1999, 200). Restrictions in France during the Nazi occupation – which saw severe shortages of fuel and raw materials after imports into the country were blocked, and citizens forbidden to leave their private dwellings after curfew hours every evening – made traditional theatrical productions difficult, and as a

result *Le Désir attrapé* was first ‘staged’ in a semi-public reading in March 1944 at Michel and Louise Leiris’s flat. The performance itself was allegedly spurred by the news of Picasso’s long-time friend Max Jacob’s deportation and near-immediate death in the Drancy concentration camp, and in the absence of professional actors, character-part readings were supplied by Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, and Dora Maar, among others (Crespelle 1969, 171). He wrote his second play, *Les Quatre petites filles*, in Golfe-Juan between 1947 and 1948, shortly before his memorial pilgrimage to Auschwitz in August 1948; it is a poetic rendering of the imaginative play of four young girls, unnamed but numbered from “Little Girl I” (Petite Fille I) to “Little Girl IV” (Petite Fille IV). At first glance, the graphically violent scenes of suffering in both these plays seem to sit in stark juxtaposition to *Endgame*’s erasure of most explicit expressions of pain from its stage. *Le Désir attrapé par la queue* is replete with explicit expressions of physical suffering, in scenes ranging from “[t]he two feet of each guest [...] in front of the door of their room, writhing in pain” (1950, 21) to a picnic-orgy in a bathtub culminating in all onstage characters being nailed up in coffins. *Les Quatre petites filles*’s playful garden setting and youthful characters offer a more lushly indulgent contrast to the frequent evocations of wartime privations in *Le Désir attrapé*, and Jean-Paul Crespelle aligns the later play with the sunnier paintings of Picasso’s post-war “Joie de Vivre” period that display “visions of happy creatures enjoying the pleasure of the body” (1969, 185), newly released from wartime restrictions. However, the girls’ youthful energy is tainted by darker undertones: “Let’s play at hurting ourselves”, they declare (“Jouons à nous faire mal”; 1968, 13), and “We will scratch our faces until they bleed” (“nous nous grifferons la figure, jusques au sang”; 1968, 26). The play’s violently graphic stage images include one Little Girl “put[ting] her little arm all the way into the wound of the slaughtered goat and pull[ing] out the heart which she shows to the other girls” (“elle rentre son petit bras entièrement dans la plaie de la chèvre égorgée et retire le cœur

qu'elle montre aux autres petites filles"; 1968, 39). In both plays, such explicit stagings of bodily suffering seem to offer a sharp contrast to *Endgame*'s near-total concealment of the symptoms of physical pain.

Despite this apparent dissimilarity between Picasso's and Beckett's theatrical staging of suffering, Picasso's plays do in fact demonstrate a comparable aesthetic of the anaesthetic. Like *Endgame*, *Le Désir attrapé* and *Les Quatre petites filles* present the sufferer's physical pain as something fundamentally unreal or incoherent to its witness, albeit by radically different (and often even precisely counterpointed) dramatic means. All three plays anaesthetise their spectators to the fact of physical suffering, precluding any easy comprehension of the degree of pain that the onstage characters are undergoing. If anaesthesia in a medical context usually proffers relief or comfort, these plays introduce a darker anxiogenic side to this intercorporeal anaesthesia, as epitomised in Hamm's own unnervingly dispassionate scepticism faced with his fellow beings' distress: "Oh I am willing to believe they suffer as much as such creatures can suffer. But does that mean their sufferings equal mine?" (2006, 93). As well as tracing the aesthetic of the anaesthetic in these three plays, then, this chapter will suggest that the unsettling rift these plays construct between sufferer and witness to suffering should also be read within the context of the post-war and particularly post-Holocaust aesthetic crisis which "questioned the ability of any form of representation to articulate the horrors of recent history" (McMullan 2010, 24). World War II's conflicts and crimes provoked a degree of suffering "often described as incomprehensible, as ungraspable to those who did not experience them" (Eaglestone 2004, 16). The aesthetic of the anaesthetic that operates in these plays responds to a pervasive anxiety regarding art's capacity to represent an unrepresentable degree of suffering in the post-Holocaust period, as well as to the difficulty of communicating about physical pain more broadly.

“I don’t complain”: Verbalising and Deverbalising Pain

The spectre of World War II hangs heavily over *Endgame*’s and Picasso’s interrogations of the non-explicit articulation of pain. The period provided many examples of the struggle to communicate the fact of suffering, including the agonisingly slow and complex transfer of information regarding the fates of deportees and prisoners of war during the war and in its aftermath. Olga Wormser-Migot, a volunteer in the Parisian repatriation process, recalls how for many the nine months of waiting between the liberation of Paris and the end of the war saw “le bonheur de ne plus avoir rien à craindre personnellement altéré par l’angoisse et l’ignorance” concerning their deported friends and family members (“the joy of no longer personally having anything to fear marred by anxiety and lack of information”; 1965, 11). Henry Rousso records that the earliest informed articles about the camps began to appear in the French press in late 1944 (1991, 25), but the information contained in these early reports tended to be partial and inconsistent, and was often contested. Explaining France’s ignorance of Nazi camp conditions to the 1974 *Colloque International de la Libération de la France*, Wormser-Migot records that “La Croix-Rouge internationale a eu parfois accès aux camps, pas plus loin que le bureau du Commandant, elle n’est jamais entrée dans le camp” (“The International Red Cross sometimes had access to the camps, but no further than the Commandant’s office; they never entered into the camps themselves”; 1976, 726). Beckett’s own letters testify to this state of affairs: it wasn’t until August 1945, for example, that he would receive the belated news of Alfred Péron’s and Robert Desnos’s deaths in May and June respectively, and he and Deschevaux-Dusmesnil would end the month still ignorant as to whether their friend Paul Léon had survived or not (*Letters II* 2012, 19).

Moreover, following his confrontation with wartime suffering in Paris, Roussillon and Saint-Lô, Beckett’s post-war life continued to be marked by recurrent encounters with

physical distress, particularly during the period preceding and during the composition of *Fin de partie* and the translation of *Endgame* between early 1955 and mid-1957. John Pilling draws a connection between Beckett's visit in August 1955 to his aunt Cissie Sinclair, newly installed in a wheelchair as her arthritis worsened, to Hamm's own mobility problems (2006, 124); later, in November 1956, Adrienne Monnier, a friend of Beckett's from his time spent at Shakespeare and Company with James Joyce, committed suicide after suffering from Ménière's disease for several years (*Letters II* 2012, 566). The most significant of Beckett's encounters with physical suffering during this period, however, would be his time spent in Ireland during the summer of 1954, caring for his brother Frank, who was dying of lung cancer. *Endgame*, and particularly the creeping deterioration staged in the play, bears the marked influence of Beckett's experience of witnessing his brother Frank's slow and painful death. His letters from the period emphasise the degenerative chronic pain which his brother's terminal cancer caused: "Here the situation progresses slowly from bad to worse" (*Letters II* 2012, 497) and "Things drag on, a little more awful every day, and with so many days yet probably to run what awfulness to look forward to" (*Letters II* 2012, 501), he would write to Pamela Mitchell, anticipating the gradual atrophy staged in *Endgame*. Crucially, however, while Beckett's letters from the period are intensely redolent of Frank intense suffering, they refrain from any explicit detail as to Frank's bodily condition. He speaks only obliquely of his brother's physical suffering: "Here things are as bad as they could be" (*Letters II* 2012, 495). Beckett's letters refuse any attempt to communicate the precise detail of Frank's bodily suffering, invoking the more abstract "awfulness" of "things". Indeed, Beckett's reticence on the subject of Frank's suffering stands in marked opposition to the frequently vivid particularity with which Beckett often described his own more commonplace ailments in his letters: "a thyroid that seems to want to strangle me" (*Letters II* 2012, 232), "sweat & torture" on the toilet because of "a large lump" at his anus (*Letters II* 2012, 422), a

“cyst shaped like Kelly’s 3 balls and now bursting outwards and sinuswards” (*Letters III* 2014, 52). Recalling the erasure of historical detail in *Waiting for Godot* explored in the previous chapter, Beckett’s seeming determination to speak only obliquely of his brother’s suffering indicates a hesitancy in according the same descriptive detail to the essentially unknown and unknowable suffering of another individual.

Endgame likewise repeatedly refuses the explicit verbal expression of pain. Although the play is littered with implications of physical suffering, its characters mostly neglect or refuse to speak openly of their pain. Nagg, for example, brushes off opportunities to verbalise his suffering: “How are your stumps?” Nell asks him; “Never mind me stumps,” he replies, with uncharacteristic brusqueness (2006, 96). Similarly, the couple recount the loss of the legs – “When we crashed our tandems and lost our shanks” – without any reference to actual physical suffering (2006, 100). Several critics have noted that “the choice of Sedan and the Ardennes as the site of [Nagg and Nell’s] individual mutilation is suggestive of wider historical catastrophe” (Van Hulle and Weller 2018, 353), if “Sedan” is read as alluding to “major French defeat during the First World War and the war against Prussia” (Morin 2009, 115) and the Ardennes as “the site of the last major German offensive of the Second World War” (Van Hulle and Weller 2018, 322). However, the couple do not speak explicitly of the pain that they themselves endured or possibly still endure as a result of their own accident. Clov is in fact the only character in *Endgame* to make direct verbal testimony to his physical suffering, when he complains, “The pain in my legs! It’s unbelievable! Soon I won’t be able to think” (2006, 115). Yet the Clov-figure “B” in an earlier draft of *Endgame* recites a much longer litany of aches and pains: “J’ai mal aux jambes, c’est incroyable. (*Marchant toujours.*) Et aux yeux. Et à la tête. Je ne pourrais bientôt plus marcher. Ni voir. Ni penser” (“The pain in my legs, it’s unbelievable. (*Still walking around.*) And in my eyes. And in my head. Soon I won’t be able to walk any more. Or see. Or think”; UoR MS 1660, 29r). Beckett’s redrafting

radically reduces the textual space given over to the verbal expression of physical pain.

Similarly, even when Hamm presses the limping Clov to share, the latter refuses:

HAMM: Apart from that, how do you feel?

CLOV: I don't complain.

HAMM: You feel normal?

CLOV: (*irritably*) I tell you I don't complain!

(2006, 94)

Clov intimates his suffering rather than directly expressing it, apophatically refusing to complain of a pain which presumably merits complaint, and to which his pronounced limp bears further implicit testimony.

Even Hamm, the character who most frequently and most self-pityingly laments his situation, never speaks explicitly of any actual physical pain.⁶ He has “bled [...] less” than usual, he tells Clov, indicating an ongoing wound or injury, but makes no reference to any consequent pain (2006, 95). His eyes have “gone all white”, implying a degenerative ocular condition (2006, 94), and he is confined to a wheelchair and draws on his motility impairment in order to retain a hold over Clov, but details no consequent pain in relation to either condition. His screamed “What’ll I do?” on hearing that he has no more painkiller is the closest he comes to giving explicit verbal expression to his physical suffering (2006, 127). David B. Morris has termed the human scream “speech unravelled”, the only possible expression of a pain so intense that it defeats verbal communication (1991, 73). While Hamm’s scream does include words (2006, 127) – although not words that explicitly describe his pain – the play brings us close here to what Elaine Scarry refers to as “the moment when pain causes a reversion to the pre-language cries and groans” (1985, 6). Hamm’s scream, his

⁶ Hamm’s description of the “big sore [...] inside my breast” initially seems to offer an exception (2006, 107), but the tenor of the conversation suggests that Hamm is here drawing on a metaphor of bodily wounding to express a specifically psychological rather than physical form of suffering. The French rendering of this “sore” as “un gros bobo”, the childish term, roughly equivalent to “boo boo” or “owie” in English, further discourages any particularly earnest reading of Hamm’s complaint (1957, 47).

most explicit acknowledgement within the play of the pain that he suffers, demonstrates this breakdown of linguistic capability under the pressure of extreme physical distress. Previous critical work on *Endgame* has frequently focused on the non-communicative opacity of language in general in the play – Michael Worton, for example, claims that the central problem posed by *Endgame* is “what language can and cannot do. Language is no longer presented as a vehicle for direct communication” (1994, 68) – without however considering the non-expression of physical pain specifically. Throughout *Endgame*, the direct or explicit communication of the experience of pain is one of the crucial tasks at which language fails, and this failure isolates sufferer and witness to suffering from each other. Theodor Adorno observes “the objective decay of language” that leads to “that bilge of self-alienation” in the play (2003, 281); his comment bears a marked similarity to Scarry’s later theory that pain is alienating precisely in part because of its resistance to being incorporated in language (1985, 5). The failure of language to fully or expressly articulate pain in *Endgame* testifies to what Morris identifies as chronic pain’s “radical assault on language and on human communication. There is simply nothing that can be said” (1991, 73). “Nothing to be done,” Estragon laments in *Waiting for Godot*; we might substitute “Nothing to be said” as the (appropriately) unspoken mantra of *Endgame*’s chronic pain sufferers.

We do, however, see instances of what Scarry terms the “at least fragmentary means of verbalization” in relation to pain at certain points in *Endgame* (1985, 13), most particularly by way of the play’s repeated use of the words “it” and “thing” to refer obliquely to chronic physical suffering. In Chapter Two, we noted the recurrence of the deictically unstable “it” in the repeated “It hurts” of Vladimir and Estragon’s dialogue, in relation to Scarry’s reading of the necessary ambiguity of intersubjective expression of pain: “[I]f with the best effort of sustained attention one successfully apprehends it, the aversiveness of the ‘it’ one apprehends will only be a shadowy fraction of the actual ‘it’” (1985, 4). *Endgame* is still more replete

than *Waiting for Godot* with the referent-less “it”, or “ça” or “cela” as it appears in the French text:

HAMM: Finished, it’s nearly finished, it must be nearly finished.	(2006, 93)
HAMM: Fini, c’est fini, ça va finir, ça va peut-être finir.	(1957, 13)
HAMM: Yes, there it is, it’s time it ended.	(2006, 93)
HAMM: Oui, c’est bien ça, il est temps que cela finisse.	(1957, 15)
CLOV: It may end.	(2006, 94)
CLOV: Ça peut finir.	(1957, 17)

Notably, Beckett uses the same undescriptive “it” or “ça” repeatedly in his letters concerning Frank’s dying: “Je ne sais combien peu de temps ça va se traîner encore” (*Letters II* 2012, 494), “I don’t know how much longer it will drag on” (*Letters II* 2012, 495); “Ça va finira comme toute le reste,” “It will end like everything else” (*Letters II* 2012, 495); “I think two months at the outside will see it out” (*Letters II* 2012, 497). The deictically indeterminate pronoun use here refuses any direct referent to the obliquely indicated suffering. Patrick Bixby recognises a similarly evasive use of the word “thing” or “chose” in *Endgame*, such as when Hamm and Clov agree that they have “had enough” of “this... this... thing” (2006, 94), “De ce... de cette... chose” (1957, 17). He notes, “Here the meaning of Hamm’s utterance (the identity of this ‘thing’) is contingent on an indeterminate determiner and a pronoun without a clear antecedent”, and observes that “[t]his aporia, this non-identity between language and a contextual referent, has opened the text to all manner of allegorical readings – ‘this’ lingering in a post-apocalyptic world, ‘this’ prolonged quest for salvation, ‘this’ master-slave interdependency” (2018, 116). The repeated similarities between *Endgame*’s non-referential dialogue and the terms in which Beckett describes his brother’s last sufferings, however, suggests a reading more closely aligned to physical distress than a purely

allegorical reading might acknowledge. “Something is taking its course” (2006, 98), “Quelque chose suit son cours” (1957, 27), Clov will muse, almost precisely replicating Beckett’s own resigned summary of watching his brother die: “Ici les choses suivent leurs cours”, “Here things are taking their course” (*Letters II* 2012, 492). In each of these instances, the indeterminate, inexplicit “it” or “thing” is used to testify to the experience of suffering “while annulling the prospect of any stable referent or meaning”, as Bixby puts it (2018, 116), resisting any attempt to detail the elusive, verbally resistant experience of that suffering.

The recurrence of these unstable linguistic markers across *Endgame*’s dialogue fosters an unsettling sense of a pervasive but indistinctly recognised suffering throughout the play. Herbert Blau has testified – expressing his frustration appropriately enough in terms of both physical pain and restricted verbal expression – to the impact of such moments “[w]here you could virtually bite your tongue over the painful indeterminacy” of Beckett’s theatre dialogue: “What’s the referent?” he begs (2007, 69). Indeed, the British psychologist Edward Titchener has argued that the sensation of physical pain is in fact innately bound up in the sense of ‘missing a referent’. Titchener observes that “certain feelings do, unmistakably, refer to a content, and that language indicates this reference. I am glad about something, I am pleased at something, I am sorry for something” but that, in the context of physical pain, “the reference is not immediately evident” until we add a clear “spatial localisation” by describing a precise area of the body that hurts, thus adding a more easily comprehensible referent to the experience of pain (1909, 46). Scarry would later expand on Titchener’s recognition of the common impulse to turn to “the sheer material factualness of the human body” in order to “construct the aura of ‘realness’ and ‘certainty’” around the essentially intangible pain (1985, 14-15). “If the felt-attributes of pain are (through one means of verbal objectification or another) lifted into the visible world, *and if the referent for these now objectified attributes is*

understood to be the human body”, then one renders one’s own subjective experience more easily “knowable”, more comprehensible and communicable to an interlocutor (1985, 13, original emphasis). *Endgame* roundly denies such reassuring strategies. Instead of adding a materially comprehensible corporeal referent, the play’s language instead insists upon the “it” and “thing” that refuse referential specificity or certainty, thus emphasising Scarry’s warning that, in attempting to give linguistic expression to physical pain, so often the “verbal sign is so inherently unstable” that it can only manage “not to coax pain into visibility but to push it into further invisibility” (1985, 13). *Endgame*’s reader or spectator is left with what Scarry’s language might lead us to term an “unknowable” or “uncertain” sense of the physical pain staged before us, simultaneously shielding us from direct confrontation and unsettling us by dint of its half-recognised presence.

Picasso’s *Le Desir attrapé* invokes a similarly fragmented deverbaling of pain at moments throughout its script. In Act III, Tart, the Cousin and the two Anguishes cut off Big Foot’s hair while “[t]hrough the slats of the Venetian blinds of the window, the whips of sunlight begin to strike the four women” (1950, 35):

TART – Ai ai ai ai ai ai ai...
 THE COUSIN – Ai ai ai ai...
 SKINNY ANGUISH – Ai ai ai ai ai...
 FAT ANGUISH – A a a a a a a a a...
 (*And this continues for a good quarter of an hour.*)

(1950, 35-36)

Charles Hamblett cites this scene – with palpable frustration – as an example of the play’s “incomprehensible” dialogue (1950, 23). This nonsensical chanting initially appears unconnected to any physical suffering, since the stage directions’ reference to the women being “whipped” seems merely a lyrically figurative manner of describing the manner in which the strips of light reflect through the Venetian blinds onto their bodies, and the “big pair of scissors” that they wield are used only to cut Gros Pied’s hair. The potentially

menacing verb “*peel*” in the stage direction that sees the women “*begin to cut off locks of his hair until they’ve peeled his head like a Dutch cheese known as the ‘death’s head’*” (1950, 35) is overshadowed by the unexpected detail in the rest of the direction, in which “*death’s head*” recalls the German *Totenkopf* or “death’s head” that decorated that uniform of the Nazi *Schutzstaffel* (SS) and the German Army *Panzer* units.⁷ However, the tableau’s ending, in which the characters are revealed to be “covered with blood” before all simultaneously losing consciousness (1950, 36), suddenly foregrounds the fact of the characters’ actual physical pain, an abrupt revelation comparable to the delayed recognition of Hamm’s constant suffering without his painkiller in *Endgame*. The “incomprehensible” burbling of *Le Désir attrapé*’s characters underlines not merely the fact of physical pain, but more particularly how physical pain often “actively destroys” language. The difficulty of expressing pain verbally, here indicated by the breaking down of comprehensible speech into discrete phonemes, sharpens the possibility of an initial failure to recognise another’s physical suffering. By casting doubt on the possibility of pain’s communication, the aesthetic of the anaesthetic in *Endgame* and Picasso’s plays simultaneously casts doubt on the possibility of the spectator’s very ability to perceive or bear witness to another being’s suffering.

In addition to this destruction of explicit verbal expression of pain, Picasso also routinely destabilises the linguistic referents that he accords to pain, further anaesthetising the reader or spectator to this pain’s felt-attributes. Where *Endgame* refuses any clear referent for pain by reducing its localisation to an indeterminate string of “it” and “this”, Picasso multiplies and distorts his pain referents to the point of total incomprehensibility, such as when Little Girl IV describes a “raging horse tearing strips of skin from the taut cheeks of the

⁷ See also Picasso’s 1943 sculpture *Tête de mort* or *Skull* (<http://web.guggenheim.org/exhibitions/picasso/artworks/skull>) and the description of the “Death’s Head” cheese in Émile Zola’s 1873 novel *Le Ventre de Paris*, with its oddly gruesome detail: “des hollandes, ronds comme des têtes coupées, barbouillées de sang séché, avec cette dureté de crane vide qui les fait nommer têtes-de-mort” (“Dutch cheeses, round as severed heads, smeared with dried blood, with that hardness of empty skulls that earns them the name of Death’s Head”; 1960, 827).

lake” (“Cheval furieux arrachant par lambeaux la peau des joues tendues du lac”; 1968, 66). Here, we are led along a seemingly cogent (albeit nightmarishly grotesque) description of painful injury, until – and the syntax order is identical in the original French – the subject of violence is suddenly revealed as a “lake”, abruptly undermining the hitherto apparently bodily referent of “skin” and “cheeks”, and complicating any precise or comprehensible understanding of corporeal pain here. Similarly, in *Le Désir attrapé*, Skinny Anguish launches into a monologue on her suffering that quickly degenerates into an incomprehensible string of illogical pain referents: “The burn made by my unhealthy passions irritates the soreness of the chilblains which are enamoured of the prism permanently set up on the bronze-coloured angles of the rainbow and evaporates it into confetti” (1950, 55). Picasso blurs our understanding of Skinny Anguish’s pain by amassing increasingly nonsensical details of its physical referents, thus precluding any easy comprehension of the suffering purportedly being described. Pain referents proliferate rather than vanishing in Picasso’s plays, but with similarly disorienting and ultimately anaesthetising results.

Indeed, even when physical pain is more straightforwardly verbalised in Picasso’s plays, its referents are soon rendered senseless, as for example in the bizarre scene at the beginning of Act II of *Le Désir attrapé* that sees the feet – and only the feet – of the various characters “writhing in pain”:

(A corridor in Sordid’s Hotel. The two feet of each guest are in front of the door of their room, writhing in pain.)

THE TWO FEET OF ROOM 3: My chilblains, my chilblains, my chilblains.

THE TWO FEET OF ROOM 5: My chilblains, my chilblains.

THE TWO FEET OF ROOM 1: My chilblains, my chilblains, my chilblains.

THE TWO FEET OF ROOM 4: My chilblains, my chilblains, my chilblains.

THE TWO FEET OF ROOM 2: My chilblains, my chilblains, my chilblains.

(The transparent doors light up and the dancing shadows of five monkeys eating carrots appear. Complete darkness.)

(1950, 21)

Here, although the identification of chilblains and their localisation in feet “writhing in pain” offers an ostensibly logical conceptualisation of physical pain, the visual referent of the apparently amputated feet, detached from the rest of any recognisable human body and stripped of any individualised features, radically reduces any potential for empathetic or even sympathetic recognition on the spectator’s part.⁸ Compounding this defamiliarisation is the repetition of the already phonically striking word “chilblains” in English or the equally arresting “engelures” in French (1989, 19-20), each of which soon devolve into a medley of incongruous syllables shorn of recognisable meaning by dint of repetition. Thus the purportedly clear visual and verbal referents accorded here to physical pain quickly degenerate into nonsense – even before the outlandish appearance of the silhouetted dancing monkeys and their carrots strips the scene of any lingering remnants of comprehensibility. Comparably, near the end of *Le Désir attrapé*, the uncharacteristically conventional description of Onion’s suffering goes through a similar process of disintegration:

FAT ANGUISH: Onion arrived this morning pale and drawn, soaking wet and wounded, with his forehead pierced through by a pickaxe. He was crying. We attended to him and consoled him as well as we could. But he was in pieces. He was bleeding everywhere and was screaming incoherent words like a lunatic.

SKINNY ANGUISH: You know, the cat had her kittens last night.

FAT ANGUISH: We drowned them in a hard stone, to be exact, in a beautiful amethyst. The weather was fine this morning.

(1950, 58)

The atypically realistic description of Onion’s physical suffering in the play’s final scene, with a clear bodily referent and a prescriptive emotional response, is undermined by Skinny Anguish’s non sequitur regarding the cat and kittens. The fleshly violence of mammalian birth and the drowning of the baby animals is transmuted into the mineral insensibility of

⁸ Where Beckett’s later drama will recurrently display the fragmented body part on stage, the body parts in question tend to be more expressive – the mouth, the face, the head – and to permit a greater degree of familiarised recognition than do these depersonalised feet. See Chapters Four and Five for further discussion of the disembodied heads of *Play* and the disembodied mouth of *Not I* respectively.

“hard stone”, and our attention is distracted from any embodied or visceral sense of pain to the compellingly surreal image of the “beautiful amethyst” within which the kittens are somehow drowned. Even when pain referents are more clearly allied to bodily referents in Picasso’s plays, such unexpected, even illogical details quickly disengage the reader or spectator from any clear sense of witnessed pain.

The distracting appearance of the “beautiful amethyst” in the previous example leads us to one final means by which Picasso’s plays anaesthetise their spectators to the idea of onstage suffering – and it is an approach which sits in stark contrast with that of *Endgame*. Where Beckett’s play routinely strips its characters’ language of all eloquence when they attempt to give verbal expression to their pain, Picasso’s *Le Désir attrapé* and *Les Quatre petites filles* often hyperbolically inflate the language of physical suffering to the point of rendering it aesthetically pleasing, rather than viscerally communicative of physical suffering. That is, Picasso’s plays frequently achieve the same effect of linguistic anaesthesia as does *Endgame* by radically converse means: in place of *Endgame*’s concealment of any explicit verbal articulation of pain, *Le Désir attrapé* and *Les Quatre petites filles* more often redirect the emphasis of such verbal articulation away from the fact of physical suffering and onto the beauty of the descriptive language itself. In describing the death of an eagle at the claws of a cat in *Les Quatre petites filles*, for example, Petite Fille II describes “The blue of its groans, the mauve of its jumps and the violent violets of its claws tearing from the yellow sulphur of its rage these Veronese-green tatters, unstained by the blood gushing from the fountain full of vermillion”, (“Le bleu de ses plaintes, les mauves de ses sauts et les violents violets des griffes arrachant du jaune soufre de sa rage les lambeaux de vert Véronèse détachés du sang fusant de la fontaine pleine de vermillon”; 1968 18-19). Picasso aestheticises the descriptive detail of physical violence and suffering into a perversely lyrical source of beauty, anaesthetising the potential shock of a more conventional description of pain. We can draw a

distinction here between two forms of incoherency regarding the expression of pain: Onion “screaming incoherent words” provides a deverbilised response to pain that is (rather like Hamm’s sudden shocking scream in *Endgame*) nevertheless recognisably expressive of intense suffering, whereas Fat Anguish’s description of drowning kittens “in a hard stone [...] in a beautiful amethyst” provides an overly aestheticised verbalisation that desensitises the reader or spectator to the fact of pain itself. Where *Endgame* erases any precise referent for physical pain, Picasso’s plays more typically over-elaborate that referent into meaninglessness – but both methods of destabilising the referent anaesthetise the reader or spectator to the felt-attributes of the pain in question. As Picasso’s excessively aestheticised descriptions of physical violence and suffering demonstrate, an aestheticised description of pain can quickly become an anaesthetised description of pain.

“Nicely put, that”: Aestheticising and Absenting Physical Pain

Our examination of the aesthetic of the anaesthetic has until now disregarded a significant aspect of the term “aesthetic” and its implications for our idea of the term “anaesthetic”. We have thus far been using “aesthetic” in the common sense of “the distinctive underlying principles of a work of art or a genre, the works of an artist, the arts of culture, etc” (“aesthetics, n. 1a”, *OED Online*), but our reading of Picasso’s “aestheticising” of physical pain demands that we take more explicit note of the term’s alternate definition as “giving or designed to give pleasure through beauty” (“aesthetic, adj. 4”, *OED Online*), or what Nathalie Heinich calls “[t]he aesthetic register, appealing to consumption or pleasure” that allows “delight in a work of art” (2014, 219). This distinction is integral to Theodor Adorno’s seminal articulation of the anxieties that coalesced in post-war thought around the aesthetic representation of human suffering. Adorno holds that post-war art is crucial as a “memory of accumulated suffering” (2018, 352), but that ethically appropriate engagement with the fact

of pain entails a correspondent refusal of spectatorial pleasure – or, as he trenchantly describes it, “[t]he so-called artistic representation of the sheer physical pain of people beaten to the ground by rifle-butts [which] contains, however remotely, the power to elicit enjoyment out of it” (2007, 189). It is precisely this aesthetic “enjoyment” that Picasso’s descriptions of physical pain, transmuted into “beautiful amethyst[s]” and “angles of the rainbow”, offer us. Pain is “transfigured, something of its horror removed” in these lyricised flights of verbal fancy (Adorno 2007, 189).

By contrast, in displaying a starkly austere deverbalisation of pain in place of any verbose aestheticising, *Endgame* denies the reader or spectator any beautifying flourishes that might transfigure suffering into a source of aesthetic pleasure. In this sense, *Endgame*’s anaesthetic approach to pain is also an an-aesthetic approach, a refusal to aestheticise human suffering as well as a refusal to render it explicitly, and as such “to both anaesthetize and activate the horror of history”, as McNaughton more broadly praises Beckett’s work for doing (2018, 92).⁹ In fact, the play pointedly mocks the distortive aestheticising of human suffering in Hamm’s story – or reminiscence – about his encounter with an afflicted neighbour. The dialogue directions “*narrative tone*” and “*normal tone*” indicate respectively Hamm’s grandiloquent aestheticising of the man’s suffering and his own running authorial commentary on how successful – that is, how aesthetically pleasing – he judges these figurations to be:

HAMM: (*Narrative tone.*) The man came crawling towards me, on his belly. Pale, wonderfully pale and thin, he seemed on the point of – (*Pause. Normal tone.*) No, I’ve done that bit.

⁹ To speak of *Endgame*’s an-aesthetic approach to pain is not, crucially, to deny the possibility of finding beauty or stylisation in the play itself, particularly given the extensive evidence for what H. Porter Abbott has termed “Beckett’s aestheticism”, his “overriding concern for shape and for the music of what he wrote” (1996, 60). Rather, it is simply to point out the play’s refusal to beautify pain specifically. Likewise, the chapter’s coining of the “aesthetic of the anaesthetic” is not intended to align with Lois Oppenheim’s own particular use of the term “anaesthetic” and her far larger claims as to what she terms Beckett’s “decidedly anaesthetic point of view” – that is, her conception of Beckett’s summary refusal of the work of art and its functioning as explicable or quantifiable (2000, 6).

(2006, 116)

Here, Hamm glosses the man's physical state as "wonderfully" abject, the unexpected adverb presumably indicating his delight in this distinctly Romantic description of bodily distress, before he abruptly terminates his description, deeming it extraneous to his narrative. Human suffering is subordinated to immediate aesthetic demands:

HAMM: Well, what ill wind blows you my way? He raised his face to me, black with mingled dirt and tears. (*Pause. Normal tone.*) That should do it. [...] [A]lready the sun was sinking down into the... down among the dead. (*Normal tone.*) Nicely put, that.

(2006, 117)

Hamm's monologue replicates the cryptic deictic "that" ("ça" in *Fin de partie*) which punctuates the expression of pain throughout the play, but transmutes the referent into not bodily hurt itself, but the careful stylisation of bodily hurt. The original French of *Fin de partie* offers the same startlingly aestheticised inflection of pain, with Hamm describing the man as "d'une pâleur et d'une maigreur admirables" (1957, 68), and then adding a still firmer emphasis by declaring of his description of the dead, "Joli, ça" (1957, 70). Pain here is quite literally rendered "pretty" rather than distressing, as Hamm's verbal embellishments strip his description of any visceral sense of felt pain.

By contrast, *Endgame*'s own stripped-back deverbalsation of its characters' pain paradoxically produces a decidedly stronger affect of felt suffering than Hamm's floridly aestheticised narration does. From the earliest performances of *Endgame* and *Fin de partie*, spectators have repeatedly testified not only to their recognition of the play's "general atmosphere of pain" (Mansell 2007, 3), but also to the difficulty they have found in drawing uncomplicated pleasure from its spectacle. After watching the 1957 performance of *Fin de partie* at the Studio des Champs-Élysées, for example, Maurice Nadeau mused that it would be difficult to find "une pièce aussi dure, aussi dépourvue de concessions, aussi désespérée et

désespérante” (“a play quite so harsh, quite so devoid of all concessions, quite so desperate and despairing”; 1957, 4). *Punch*’s anonymous reviewer of the Royal Court première called it a “harsh” and “cruel play [...] which strikes a certain horror” into the spectator (*Punch*, 10 April 1957). Philip Hope-Wallace compared the experience to that of “a fevered patient on a bed of pain” (*Manchester Guardian*, 5 April 1957) – uncannily recalling Frank Beckett’s own deathbed suffering that preceded the play’s composition – and Kenneth Tynan recorded that the performance “piled on the agony until I thought my skull would split” (*Observer*, 7 April 1957). It is notable that a play with so little explicit verbal or visual articulation of pain should generate such acute reactions of felt suffering from its spectators – particularly during a period that saw the far more graphic stagings of pain in other *Théâtre de la cruauté*-inspired plays such as Genet’s *Haute surveillance* (1949) and *Le Balcon* (1956) and Adamov’s *La Grande et la petite manœuvre* (1950). *Endgame*’s anaesthetic approach to pain performs a dual role: the refusal of aestheticised pain *and* the refusal of an explicit verbal or visual articulation of pain combine to generate an intensely unsettling affect. Indeed, such deliberate indeterminacy might be indexed to a strain of canonical post-World War II literature more broadly, following Marina MacKay’s observation that “the eloquence of World War II writing is essentially a kind of anti-eloquence, and is no less powerful and moving for all that” (2009b, 8). This “anti-eloquence” prohibits the comforting pleasure to be gained from a carefully sculpted and stylised articulation of pain, “la forme d’une catastrophe lisible [...] selon des règles de composition partagées, et livrée à l’entendement du lecteur ou du spectateur” (“a catastrophe moulded into a legible form [...] according to recognised rules of composition, and handed over to the reader’s or spectator’s understanding”; Touret 2007, 26) – precisely that comforting pleasure in stylised form which Hamm tries to construct in his own narrative of suffering. Instead, *Endgame* confronts us with a profoundly distressing

experience of pain left unstylised and frighteningly incoherent, for its witness as for its sufferer.

It is this very form of troubling incoherency that Adorno deems the most appropriate mode of ‘representing’ suffering in a post-war work of art, part of the “not-saying” that points “not only to the place where the image does *not* appear, but to the ban which prohibits it” which Daniel Katz identifies in Beckett’s post-war works more broadly (2009, 145).

Artworks that attempt to engage with another being’s suffering in the war’s aftermath, Adorno argues, must “renounce communication” in favour of “the force of expression”, to become “eloquent with wordless gesture” (2018, 323).¹⁰ Adorno argues that post-war art should aim at “the expression of the expressionless” (2018, 161), where the “expressionless” includes both those victims of historical atrocity who are left without means of expression, and the phenomenon of the unspeakable: suffering that is both “indescribably or inexpressibly bad” and “incapable of being expressed in words” (“unspeakable, adj. 1a and 1b”, *OED Online*). According to this framework, the indeterminate evocation of suffering should take the place of either brute semblance or aestheticised stylisation, in order to intimate rather than explicate the fact of suffering to the reader or spectator. As Holocaust writer Lawrence Langer observes, “the artist of atrocity seeks to recreate the unspeakable horror” (1975, 17) – seeks, that is, to recreate the very *unspeakable* nature of that horror, its resistance to any easy articulation or reception, rather than attempt to recreate the horror itself in any mediated form that will inevitably fail to capture the scope of the original experience. Beckett’s own advice to fellow Irish writer Aidan Higgins in April 1958 replicates a similar refusal of the over-explanation of the subjective interior or simply inarticulable experience: “I

¹⁰ Adorno’s use of the term “expression” (*Ausdruck* in the original German) is somewhat inconsistent, across his writings, as for example in his praise for “the expression of the expressionless” (2018, 161) and “asceticism against expression, far more expressive” as seemingly identical phenomena (2018, 59). Adorno’s slightly less frequently used term “the expressive” (*ausdrucksvoller*) in fact more accurately communicates his idea of an abstrusely evocative rather than concrete representation of suffering in post-war art.

suppose it is too sweeping to say that expression of the within can only be from within. There is in any case nothing more difficult and delicate than this discursive *Auseinandersetzen* ["explaining"] of a world which is not to be revealed as object of speech" (*Letters III* 2014, 142-43). This process of indirect intimation permits an affective idea of another being's suffering, while refusing the reader or spectator either the sense of any privileged insight or affording them any detached aesthetic pleasure at its spectacle.

There is, then, an ethical valence to this witness-sufferer distance as Adorno conceives it, a self-circumscribing recognition of the unspeakable and even unthinkable degree of suffering that another being has undergone, and a refusal to derive aestheticised pleasure from it, or even to suggest that any clarifying or redemptive meaning can be wrung from it. "This darkness must be interpreted, not replaced by the clarity of meaning", Adorno writes (2018, 37); "art has nothing to do with clarity", Beckett affirms (1984, 94), and "We're not beginning to... to... mean something?" Hamm worries of his and Clov's suffering (2006, 108). It is on these grounds that Adorno praises both Beckett's post-war writing and Picasso's wartime and post-war cubist paintings (and not, notably, Picasso's verbose plays). Picasso's paintings depicting suffering are wordless and void of any clear narrative meaning, leading Adorno to extol them as being "by virtue of asceticism against expression, far more expressive" than otherwise (2018, 59). Similarly, Adorno labels *Endgame* "exemplary" (2003, 268) as a post-war work that intimates without either over-simplifying or over-stylising the "speechless pain" of the historical moment (2018, 54). Adorno recognises the fact of intense suffering in *Endgame*, pointing out that "the news that there are no more pain-killers depicts catastrophe" within the play's schema (2003, 136), but notes approvingly that "Beckett keeps it nebulous", drawing an explicit parallel with the horror of the Jewish Holocaust, the incomprehensible or ungraspable suffering of the Nazi camps (2003, 13). This "nebulous" non-expression, the intimation rather than the explicit articulation of physical

pain, keeps the reader or spectator at a careful distance from the suffering hinted at in the text, creating what Ciaran Ross has termed “un gouffre ou un rempart qui s’avèrait infranchissable entre texte et lecteur” – or text and spectator – across which “on doit se contenter de témoigner ou de regarder à distance” (“an impassable gulf or fortification between text and reader”, “one must content oneself with witnessing or watching from a distance”; 2004, 13). This same trope of distance is frequently reiterated across *Endgame*’s script as well: Hamm remembers the suffering of others in the apocalyptic past as “a situation [...] beyond the gulf” (2006, 117), for example, and Clov’s using his telescope to look the audience, implying a magnified gap between stage and auditorium, emphasises the play’s continued re-statement of the fundamentally impassable distance between sufferer and witness (2006, 106). The anaesthetised pain of *Endgame* – the “nebulous” quality of its expression of pain that Adorno praises – replicates for the hapless reader or spectator the experience of the inevitably distanced witnessing of another being’s intense suffering, and refuses any comforting aesthetic or interpretative gloss.

Endgame’s aesthetic of the anaesthetic thus testifies to the incomprehensible nature of another being’s experience of pain, rather than claiming to testify to that very pain itself. By means of this “conscious and deliberate alienation of the reader’s sensibilities”, Langer observes of post-atrocity art more broadly, the reader becomes “temporarily an insider and permanently an outsider, and the very tension resulting from the paradox precludes the possibility of the kind of ‘pleasure’ Adorno mentions” (1975, 3). Here we find an idea of the reader (or spectator) as an insider-outsider confronted with the deliberately disorienting, deliberately resistant artworks such as *Endgame*: a concept which mirrors the very status of insider-outsider, of distanced witness, that this project accords to the non-national and non-combatant Francophone playwrights discussed here. By scripting *Endgame* as a text that functions as “a witness to disaster” but “a witness whose testimony is almost impossible to

read” (Holt 2004, 271), an artwork that works by intimation and sudden shocks of expressive affect, Beckett testifies to the very epistemological difficulty of bearing witness to another being’s essentially unknowable pain, the ill-fated attempt to “représenter un monde dont toute représentation reste impossible” that David Houston Jones identifies as recurrent in post-Holocaust literature (“represent a world that is impossible to represent”; 2006, 252).

Endgame is not, of course, a text set in explicit relation to the Holocaust as a precise historical event – although its decimated population and Hamm’s sense of “[a]ll those I might have helped” do much to raise a suitably hazy spectre of genocide (2006, 125) – but its bleakly circumscribed idea of the relationship between sufferer and witness mark it as an ideologically post-Holocaust text. As Houston Jones observes, “Bien que Beckett ne représente pas les camps de concentration, [...] il existe bon nombre de parallèles entre les textes de Beckett et la problématique de l’énonciation et de l’indicible”, the way in which “l’énonciation se confronte toujours à l’innommable” (“Although Beckett doesn’t depict the concentration camps themselves, [...] his texts speak often to problems of utterance and the unspeakable”, “utterance continually clashes with the unnameable”; 2006, 250). *Endgame* refuses to give clear expression to the inexpressible pain of another, refusing the idea that we can comprehend their fundamentally incomprehensible pain.

It is in relation to this issue of the politics of pain’s expression that Ato Quayson, one of the few scholars to offer an extensive engagement with the subject of physical pain in *Endgame*, misreads Beckett’s play, in a manner that has ironically inhibited rather than encouraged further reflection on *Endgame*’s representation of bodily pain. In *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation*, Quayson queries the very fact of physical suffering in *Endgame*, emphasising what he terms the play’s “absenting of pain” (2007, 58). He implies a distinction between the terms “absenting” and “absence”, explaining that there is not “an absolute absence of pain as such [in Beckett’s work], since his characters

sometimes talk about it” (2007, 54), but that “pain is referred to only tangentially in the play” (2007, 62), and does not occupy the central discursive position that we might expect to result from such a level of injury and impairment as mark the characters in *Endgame* – as indeed our examination of the deverbalisation of pain within the play throughout this chapter has emphasised. Quayson’s analysis vacillates, however, between drawing attention to the relative lack of pain *expression* in the play, and claiming that the play’s characters are not in fact in *any* physical pain, that “they ought to be in pain but patently are not” (2007, 209) and their situations “should to all intents and purposes be ‘painful’ but are not” (2007, 29). Quayson’s focus on disability representation leads him to query how *Endgame* appears to him “to anaesthetize the disabled body” (2007, 78), and he complains that the lack of direct verbal expression of suffering means that “pain is not part of the overall structure of interlocution within which it would gain coherence as a phenomenological fact” in the play (2007, 81). Criticising the fact that *Endgame*’s characters “are not perceived to be in pain in any physical sense of the word” (2007, 83-84), Quayson accuses the play of what he frames as its failure to provide a sustained and coherent expression of its characters’ suffering.

However, by interpreting the uncertain phenomenological reality of physical suffering as a problematic oversight produced by the discursive absence of pain in Beckett’s work, Quayson overlooks certain crucial elements of *Endgame*’s framing of such suffering. He ignores not only how little phenomenological reality one sufferer’s pain typically ever has for any witness, but also the play’s own engagement with a post-Holocaust conception of degrees of inexpressible suffering. Quayson idealises physical pain as a potential “mode of intersubjective recognition and identity” (2007, 79), vaunting the witness’s empathy with the sufferer as a valuable means of both establishing that pain’s definite existence, and for engendering a communicative intersection of mutual recognition between individuals. This is a rather disingenuous reading of the experience of physical suffering, and one that ignores the

established acknowledgement of pain's isolating and frequently uninterpretable nature across both clinical and theoretical pain scholarship. Quayson sees *Endgame*'s near-erasure of the expression of pain as an oversight, ignoring the frequency with which the play draws deliberate attention to its own elision of such expression. In criticising the "strenuous efforts at distancing and detachment" that he identifies in *Endgame* (2007, 209), Quayson discounts the possibility that Beckett is here focusing on a different post-war experience of physical suffering, in which pain remains something frighteningly incoherent. Indeed, he also overlooks the specifically post-war context within which Beckett was writing, in which, "[f]aced with the cruelties of the Nazi regime it is as if human discourse falls silent, unable to grasp that which has trespassed its explanatory abilities" (Loevlie 2013, 16). The fact that pain does not "gain coherence as a phenomenological fact" in *Endgame* (Quayson 2007, 81) is not a failure of insight on Beckett's part, but rather is indicative of the play's aporetic approach to pain in its social, historical, and intersubjective context, wherein the physical suffering of another individual rarely can or does gain such a coherence.

Endgame thus requires a mode of reading that recognises this particular post-war perspective on pain. Vivian M. Patra's scholarship on post-Holocaust theatre offers a more appropriate framework for analysing such deliberate elision of physical pain, and one which we can read as an instructive counter to Quayson's criticism. Patra has observed that one of the risks of presenting physical distress explicitly in post-war theatre is that "the anguish of the suffering bodies will be conveyed on stage as 'real' and somehow comprehensible, manageable, able to convey what is actually an immeasurable absence" (1999, 101-02). That is, the direct or explicit depiction of pain on the stage can misrepresent another being's incomprehensible, unbearable suffering as something neatly comprehensible and easily bearable to the spectator – just as Adorno warns against in his criticism of overly concretised post-war art. Although Patra focuses specifically on the issue of theatrical representation of

Holocaust deaths, her concept of “goneness” to describe the sense of Holocaust loss bears a marked relevance to Beckett’s post-war aesthetic of the anaesthetic, and to Quayson’s looser use of the terms “absence” and “absenting” to describe *Endgame*’s representation of physical pain. Patraka explicitly contrasts the terms “absence” and “goneness” as she employs them in relation to the Holocaust: “Although I use the term ‘absence’ elsewhere [...] I use the neologism ‘goneness’ here because it more completely reflects the definitiveness, the starkness, and the magnitude of this particular genocide by dictating the scope of what and who has been violently lost” (1999, 4). Patraka distinguishes between an “absence” that entails a simple elision or erasure, and a “goneness” that draws an insistent attention to what is lacking. The careful emphasis that *Endgame* places on its near-total erasure of the expression of pain is a crucial part of the construction of this potent absence. The near-expressionless pain of *Endgame* thus testifies more compellingly to the demands of its historical moment in the long aftermath of World War II, emphasising as it does the unspeakable degree of suffering in question.

In this context of the explicit or inexplicit articulation of the expression of pain in the post-war period, *Le Désir attrapé* and *Les Quatre petites filles* in script form appear to furnish the graphic bodily expression of physical pain that *Endgame* denies. However, Picasso’s two plays in fact also (and somewhat adventitiously) offer a ‘non-spectacle’ of suffering, by dint of their intensely surreal stage directions being essentially impossible to stage fully at their time of composition, and indeed still difficult today. As a result, the graphic bodily suffering that is ostensibly scripted in *Le Désir attrapé* and *Les Quatre petites filles* is in fact rarely embodied on the stage itself. Stage directions such as “*the dancing shadows of five monkeys eating carrots*” in *Le Désir attrapé* (1950, 21) or the appearance of “*an enormous winged horse dragging its guts, surrounded by eagle; an owl is perched on its head*” (1970, 62) and the final scene that sees the stage first erupt in flames and then flood with blood in *Les*

Quatre petites filles, make any literal staging of these plays extremely difficult without significant special effects expertise and resources. During the wartime period, when theatrical staging opportunities in France were materially and financially limited due to material and manpower shortages and the Nazi-imposed evening curfew on the city's occupants, a full theatrical staging of *Le Désir attrapé* was out of the question. With Picasso's involvement, it was instead first performed as a dramatic semi-public reading, rather than as a fully staged theatrical production, at Michel and Louise Leiris's Paris apartment on 19 March 1944. Roland Penrose records that Camus read the stage directions aloud in place of any staged action, and that the readers' physical gestures was limited to rising from their chairs to speak their lines (1950, 5). Thus Picasso ironically produces an alternative form of the 'absenting' of theatricalised physical suffering by way of this requisite failure to provide the fully embodied horror of the script's imagery. Even once the Vichy censorship of France's theatre was lifted following the Liberation, Picasso's stage directions defied any straightforward staging of *Le Désir attrapé*. Dramatic readings of the play took place again in Paris over the next few years following the city's liberation from the Nazi Occupation, and the English translation would likewise first be performed as a staged reading at the London Gallery in 1947, and again in the Rudolf Steiner Hall in London in February 1950, with the poet Dylan Thomas taking over Albert Camus's role in reading the stage directions aloud ("Silence steps into hot soup" 1950, 3; Penrose 2014, 81). Michel Cournot has gone so far as to suggest of *Les Quatre petites filles* that "Il ne semble pas que Picasso ait songé à faire présenter cette prétendue 'pièce' sur une scène" ("It doesn't seem that Picasso can ever have conceived of really staging this alleged 'play'"; *Le Monde*, 16 May 1981), and details in *Le Désir attrapé*, such as the direction to fill the auditorium with "the smoke of fried potatoes" being cooked onstage "to the point of complete suffocation" (1950, 42), likewise render this play difficult to stage in strict accordance with its original script, and its staging history likewise suggests

that Picasso may never in fact have earnestly envisioned any full theatrical staging.¹¹

Paradoxically, then, the graphic bodily suffering in Picasso's play is significantly less "coheren[t] as a phenomenological fact" than the anaesthetised pain that Quayson decries in *Endgame* (2007, 81), as a result of the near-impossibility of staging these plays as fully realised theatrical productions – or, more specifically, the total impossibility of doing so at their time of writing. We find ourselves back at a final and somewhat adventitious parallel between the anaesthetising of pain in these plays: the absented non-spectacle of a suffering without voice and without witness.

Conclusion

This chapter has read this aesthetic of the anaesthetic across these three plays in the context of a new epistemology of pain generated by the prolonged carnage of World War II. The "inconceivable" nature of the World War II's suffering, Patraka has argued, defies "the inevitable desire to articulate, negotiate, mark and define" its experience (1999, 4). The aesthetic of the anaesthetic that operates in *Endgame* responds to this contemporary anxiety regarding art's capacity to engage with an unthinkable degree of suffering in the wartime and post-war period. Beckett carefully erases most explicit verbal or visual articulations of pain from *Endgame*, yet leaves an unsettling undercurrent of veiled suffering which Harold Clurman has aptly termed "the quiet and numb ache" of the play (1980, 187). The aesthetic of

¹¹ The only notable French-language production of *Les Quatre petites filles* was directed by Jean Gilbert at the Centre Pompidou in May 1981, and received generally poor reviews. There were a few small-scale English-language stagings of *Four Little Girls* towards the end of the twentieth century, including Charles Marowitz's production at the Open Space Theatre in London in October 1971, the Reading Performance Group's four-night production at Hartle Hall in Brighton in May 1982, and David Beaton's August 1990 version at the Rose Theatre Club in August 1990, which also drew decidedly poor reviews. Similarly, *Le Désir attrapé* has been staged as a full theatrical production on occasion, but rarely with any great success. When William Jay mounted a production of the English translation in October 1950 at the Watergate Theatre in London, Charles Hamblett reported widespread criticism of "[o]utrageous scenes and incontinent dialogue" that are "likely to offend" (1950, 23), most likely due to the full-frontal nudity of "Tart" called for in the play's script. Similarly, the first French theatre staging by Jean-Jacques Lebel in Saint-Tropez in 1967 was shut down by the authorities – somewhat ironically, given that it was scheduled as part of the town's annual Festival of Free Expression (Leonard 2001, 97).

the anaesthetic that we have identified in *Endgame* emphasises the ungraspable experience of someone else's pain, while simultaneously raising disquieting implications of ongoing suffering; denied any clear articulation of the characters' suffering, we are left with a discomfiting intimation of pain as pervasive throughout the scenes we witness. In refusing any clear articulation of physical pain, these plays replicate this anxiogenic dynamic, establishing an epistemological rift between sufferer and witness to suffering. By precluding the possibility of drawing either aesthetic pleasure or deeper redemptive meaning from the suffering of others, *Endgame* in particular exemplifies what Adorno would identify as the need for post-war art to testify to the suffering of others without rendering that suffering aesthetically pleasurable or deceptively meaningful. Indeed, Beckett codes his refusal to provide any neatly explicated meaning for his play in precisely these terms of physical pain and the denial of pain relief: "If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin" (*Letters III* 2014, 82).

Yet Picasso's plays also achieve a comparable effect by almost precisely counterpointed dramatic means. Superficially closer in scope to the more graphically bloody *Théâtre de la cruauté*-inspired plays of the 1940s and 1950s, *Le Désir attrapé* and *Les Quatre petites filles* in fact foster a similar sense of pain's incomprehensibility, destabilising the linguistic grounds for pain's expression. However, although Picasso's plays foster a sense of the unfathomable nature of another being's pain, their heavily aestheticised indulgence in both the description and the spectacle of this suffering sets them at odds with the Adornian ideal of post-war art which avoids the appropriative gesture of purported comprehension. The "goneness" of the suffering body that Patraha identifies as reflecting a heightened degree of suffering while avoiding a vision of "somehow comprehensible, manageable pain" is only achieved by happenstance in Picasso's plays (1999, 102), as a result of the long-recognised near-impossibility of staging these plays as fully realised theatrical productions. It is

specifically *Endgame*'s determined anaesthetising – and indeed an-aestheticising – of pain that “create[s] the possibility of speaking in the name of pain” without oversimplification or misrepresentation (Bixby 2018, 122) – a carefully circumscribed “speaking”, that is, that attests to the unspeakable nature of much intense pain. Clov’s spirited retort provides an instructive riposte to Quayson’s misguided criticism of *Endgame*'s absencing of explicit expression of pain, and an emphatic declaration of the play’s aesthetic of the anaesthetic: “I use the words you taught me. If they don’t mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent” (2006, 113).

Chapter Four

Inescapable Pain:

Happy Days, Play, and Eugène Ionesco

Happy Days (1961) and *Play* (1964) sit at a critical juncture in Beckett's presentation of the human body in the theatre medium.¹ Beckett's early plays present incontestably material embodied presences, bleeding, farting, limping, and stumbling their way across the stage. In both *Happy Days* and *Play*, by contrast, the onstage figures tremble on the cusp between embodiment and apparent disembodiment. These liminal figures seem, as one reviewer of the première of *Oh les beaux jours* at the Théâtre de l'Odéon observed, like "vestiges de la chair et le point-limite qui est l'anéantissement définitif" ("vestiges of the flesh, the limit-point of final obliteration"; Paget 1963, n.p.). *Happy Days* and *Play* attenuate the material presence of their characters, hiding much of the onstage body from sight, and emphasising the characters' impulse to transcend their corporeal state. They do not eliminate the human body from the stage quite so conspicuously as several of Beckett's later plays, such as *Not I*, *Breath*, and *That Time*, but they do introduce a heightened quality of ambiguous or provisional corporeality to the onstage body. Yet crucially, *Happy Days* and *Play* also lay a corresponding emphasis on the vulnerable corporeal state of their onstage figures, the continued susceptibility to physical suffering that marks these figures as still unhappily entrapped within their pain-stricken bodily forms.² The impulse to transcendence or

¹ The association between the two plays begins with their writing history: Beckett recorded the initial idea for *Play* in May 1962, directly following the American première of *Happy Days* at the Cherry Lane Theatre and while preparing for the British première at the Royal Court (*Letters III* 2014, 484), and he would subsequently continue to work on the two texts simultaneously. James Knowlson links *Happy Days* and *Play* together in "feel", citing specifically the sense of "claustrophobia" that characterises them both (1997, 497), and Anna McMullan likewise muses that "*Play* seems to carry on where the last act of *Happy Days* ends" (1993, 17).

² We might trace an early instantiation of this stage image back to Nagg and Nell's partially concealed bodies in *Endgame*, although any accompanying sense of disembodiment is undercut there by the couple's corporeal concerns with their sawdust bedding and itchy backs. Olga Beloboradova and Pim Verhulst have likewise recently observed that the characters in *Play* are frequently figured as "mineral" or "mechanical" beings "rather than being represented as recognizable and sentient beings of flesh and blood. However, Beckett never dehumanises them completely, instead suspending them between the human and the nonhuman" (2019, 179).

disembodiment, the “imaginative yearning” towards “physical ephemerality” (Bates 2019, 53), is thus held in tension with an inescapable material existence. *Happy Days* and *Play* both emphasise physical pain as the inevitable symptom – indeed, consequence – of this corporeal state of being.

This chapter reads *Happy Days* and *Play* alongside Eugène Ionesco’s *Amédée, ou Comment s’en débarrasser* (*Amédée, or, How to Get Rid of It*, 1954), and *Le Piéton de l’air* (*A Stroll in the Air*, 1963). Although examined with diminishing frequency in literary scholarship in recent decades, Ionesco’s post-war theatre offers a revealing point of contemporary comparison with Beckett’s stage plays, and *Amédée* and *Le Piéton de l’air* probe a similar tension between entrapment in and transcendence of the pain-stricken corporeal form as *Happy Days* and *Play* do.³ In an explicitly post-war context, *Amédée* and *Le Piéton de l’air* stage the bodily transcendence that *Happy Days* and *Play* imagine but do not ultimately enact. In *Amédée*, first produced by Jean-Marie Serreau at the Théâtre de Babylone in April 1954, the weary titular character, trapped in a loveless marriage and a cramped flat alongside a mysterious ever-growing corpse, ends the play in a joyous ascent into the flies, elevated aloft by the suddenly buoyant corpse itself against a celebratory backdrop of the wartime liberation of France. In *Le Piéton de l’air*, first produced in France by Jean-Louis Barrault in February 1963 at the Théâtre de l’Odéon, the initially enervated Bérenger likewise escapes his war-torn settings by floating triumphantly off the stage and out of sight at the play’s midway point – but he will descend back onto the stage a few scenes later, downcast once again by the vision of continued warfare, of continued physical suffering, that he witnessed during his ascent. Ionesco’s *Amédée* and *Le Piéton de l’air* thus offer illuminating contemporaneous examples of the tension between corporeal

³ Many French theatre critics noted the broad interrelation between Beckett’s and Ionesco’s theatre in the early stages of Beckett’s career. See, for example, Brenner 1953, Dort 1953, Francis 1953, Joly 1953, Lemarchand 1953, Anouilh 1956, Vigneron 1956, and Barthes 1961.

transcendence and bodily suffering – and of physical pain as an ultimately inescapable condition of existence – that can inform a reading of the similar dynamic in Beckett's *Happy Days* and *Play*.

“Perhaps sorrow has brought them together”: Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco

Like Beckett, Ionesco was a non-native of France with a nevertheless strongly developed sense of French identity. Ionesco was born in Slatina, Romania in 1909 (not 1912, as he often claimed) to a Romanian father and French mother, but spent much of his childhood in France following his family's move to Paris in 1913. It was only in 1922 that he returned to Romania to live with his father, where he continued to study French at the University of Bucharest and then taught the subject at high-school level throughout the 1930s (Elsky 2018, 349). In 1938 Ionesco left an increasingly right-wing Romania and returned to Paris with his wife Rodica; he cited Romania's gradual Nazification during the 1930s and 1940s as critical to his psychological and geographical estrangement from his country of birth: “[J]’avais de très bons amis qui étaient devenus nazis. J’ai dû me séparer et j’ai été traumatisé si bien que j’ai fait une rupture entre ce pays et moi” (“I had some very good friends who became Nazis. I had to separate myself from all that, and I was so traumatised that I made a complete break with the country”; 1987b, 163).⁴ The couple returned one last time to Romania in August 1940 following the Axis invasion of France, to escape “the Occupation and other barbarisms” as Ionesco would later term it (1987a, 16), but quickly came to regret this decision: “What a stupid idea for us to have left France! We should have stayed there, even if the country was occupied. I kick myself!” he wrote in his journal at the time. “To get back to France is my only, desperate aim. [...] If I stay here, I will die of homesickness for my real country” (1971,

⁴ For further exploration of Ionesco's troubled relationship with nationalist and fascist Romania, see Lupas 2014, Quinney 2007, Calinescu 1995, and Hamdan 1993.

127, 113).⁵ After a fraught period spent obtaining the correct travel documents, the couple returned to France in June 1942 where, thanks to some “well-placed personal connections” (Calinescu 1995, 418), Ionesco took up a post as the cultural attaché at the Romanian Legation in Vichy. They remained in Vichy until March 1945, when they moved back to liberated Paris; Ionesco continued living in Paris until his death in 1994.

The relative safety that Ionesco accrued in Nazi-occupied France thanks to his ambassadorial role within the Vichy government contrasts markedly with the risks Beckett undertook as a member of the French Resistance.⁶ Nevertheless, the two men’s experiences as non-native non-combatants in France during World War II – and indeed as permanent residents in France in the war’s long aftermath – bear an intriguing medley of both comparable and counterpointed experiences. Following a significant period of residence in the county, both men deliberately undertook to return to a France at war, claiming a deeper sense of belonging there than in their own countries of birth: Beckett’s statement that he preferred “France at war to Ireland at peace” (Shenker 1979, 147) is paralleled by Ionesco’s daughter Marie-France’s report that her father “se sent et se veut français dans la catastrophe”

⁵ Several of Ionesco’s plays refer to similar situations of involuntary exile, even several decades after the war’s end. In *L’Homme aux valises* (*The Man with the Luggage*, 1975), for example, First Man is told, “You’ve failed. You’re expelled. I refuse you a foreigner’s permit” (1979, 30); “I warned you, didn’t I? I told you not to make this trip. I said you shouldn’t leave [...] You should have stayed in Paris”, he is later chastised (1979, 47). In *Voyages chez les morts* (*Journeys among the Dead*, 1980), Jean and Lydia express their gratitude to their adopted country in a seemingly deliberate evocation of Eugène and Rodica Ionesco’s own situation:

JEAN: Before the war, as you know, I was banished. Luckily I was able to escape to that golden country which welcomes us so warmly, which adopted us.

LYDIA: I’m grateful to that nation. No one must say anything against it.

(1985, 42)

⁶ The degree to which Ionesco’s involvement with the Vichy government – “sans être jamais ni sympathisant ni membre du gouvernement Vichy”, as his daughter Marie-Françoise claims (“without ever being either a sympathiser or member of the Vichy government”; 2004, 91) – might render him guilty of wartime collaboration remains a subject of debate. Rosette C. Lamont paints a somewhat unconvincing picture of Ionesco living in fear for his life during the French Occupation, “[d]riven by the war to hide in the French countryside, a man on the run” (1996, 225), but Ionesco’s move out of Paris was in keeping with the mass evacuation of Pétain’s collaborationist government to the town of Vichy from where they would continue their *de jure* rule of France’s *zone libre* during the war, and it seems unlikely that Ionesco ran any personal risk during the Nazi Occupation of the country, given the dual safeguard of his Vichy embassy role and Romania’s becoming a member of the Axis Powers in November 1940. For a detailed examination of Ionesco’s work for the Vichy government, see Elsky 2018.

of the war (“felt and wished himself to be French in the catastrophe”; 2004, 84-85). During World War II, then, Beckett and Ionesco confronted a suffering that they had both chosen and not chosen to witness, a prolonged period of distress wreaked on the country to which they had voluntarily returned, but to which they did not yet fully belong. Ionesco would record his feeling of being “all alone, in an uneasy minority of one” in occupied France (1979, 131), distanced from one side of the conflict by his distaste for Nazi ideology and from the other by his position within the Vichy establishment, and very much a proximate witness to wartime pain rather than a direct victim. In his 1976 lecture “Pourquoi j’écris?” (“Why Do I Write?”), Ionesco would transmute the memory into a broader statement on the isolation of suffering: “Every single one of us is at the centre of the universe, living out an anguish he is quite unable to share with those thousands of others undergoing the same experience” (1979, 125). The ordeal of World War II profoundly shaped both men’s idea of suffering as a troublingly intimate yet distancing experience.

In some respects, Ionesco would seem to have made a clearer transition to ‘French’ writer in the aftermath of World War II than did Beckett. Ionesco would never return to writing in Romanian, in contrast to Beckett’s frequent writing in and translation into English throughout his career; *Happy Days* and *Play*, in fact, mark Beckett’s second and third plays written in English since the end of World War II. Where Beckett would retain his Irish passport for the rest of his life, Ionesco would become a naturalised French citizen in 1950, and indeed would be elected as an *immortel* to the Académie Française in 1970, sealing his reputation as a high-standing member of the French literati. Nevertheless, Ionesco’s status remains distinctly ‘Francophone’ rather than ‘French’, “mi-roumain mi-français” as Gilles Plazy puts it (“half Romanian, half French”; 1994, 58), particularly as regards his perspective on questions of national suffering in the aftermath of World War II. Ionesco’s own pronouncements on the matter testify to his frequent vacillation as concerns his national

identity: where he would respond to one interviewer's question about his nationality in 1976, for example, "Euh... moi je suis français. [...] Je suis français absolument. [...] Je me sens très peu roumain" ("Umm... I'm French. [...] I'm absolutely French. [...] I really don't feel very Romanian"; 1987b, 163), he would tell another interviewer in 1991, "I have been, deeply inside, for such a long time, Romanian" (1992, 85). Even at the end of a long and successful career on the French literary scene, Ionesco's national identity remained hybrid. Similarly, political dynamics during the period in which he was writing *Happy Days* and *Play* seem to have quickened Beckett's own awareness of his semi-outsider status in France – his relation to what Morin terms "a specific configuration of the French nation over which he, as a foreigner, had no ownership" (2017, 213) – in both identarian and pragmatic terms. He would not, for example, be invited to sign the influential *Manifeste des 121* protesting French colonial repression in Algeria in September 1960 – which included the signatures of many of his friends and professional contemporaries, including Roger Blin, Jean Martin, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, André Breton, Marguerite Duras, Nathalie Sarraute, and Alain Robbe-Grillet – following the organiser Jérôme Lindon's recognition of the danger that such an action would pose to non-citizen signatories: to participate in open protest against the French government could have led to the withdrawal of Beckett's residency permit (Morin 2017, 212-13; Knowlson 1997, 495). "No talk of anything here but the [Francis] Jeanson trial and the Manifesto of the 121. If I weren't a foreigner I suppose I'd be in it", Beckett wrote to Barbara Bray in October 1960 (*Letters III* 2014, 360). Despite their return and henceforth permanent residency in France, and their professional engagement with French language and culture following World War II, both Beckett and Ionesco necessarily remained not-quite-French, not entirely assured of their properly belonging in their new country of residence. This chapter thus aligns Beckett's and Ionesco's post-World War II theatre on the basis of

this shared liminal French-but-not-quite-French identity, reading both as producing stage plays that probed the hybridised position of intimate yet alienated witnessing.

Both Beckett and Ionesco would turn to writing for the stage following World War II. Although he is now celebrated almost solely on the basis of his theatre work, Ionesco did not in fact start writing plays until 1948,⁷ having built up an impressive portfolio of Romanian-language poems (published in the volume *Elegii pentru finite mici* in 1931), a prize-winning volume of literary criticism entitled *Nu* (1934), and several hundred newspaper and journal articles during his time in interwar Romania (Lupas 2014, 77; Calinescu 1995, 407).⁸ Later in life he would admit, “I’ve been telling myself for a considerable time that I ought to begin my real work; for after all, the theatre is not my true vocation” (1987a, 24); Ionesco frames his playwriting as a matter of circumstantial necessity rather than some instinctive calling, a claim that is to some degree borne out by the chronology of his literary production. The years of witnessing France’s wartime suffering as non-national residents preceded a turn to writing for the stage in both men’s careers, the theatrical medium being the closest parallel experience to this encounter with the proximate yet distanced physical pain of another being.

In the post-war period, Beckett and Ionesco would come into increasingly close contact with each other’s theatre work. As Ionesco quickly rose to become one of the best-known Francophone dramatists of the post-war avant-garde from 1950 onwards, his reputation loomed large over Beckett’s career for some time. Beckett’s publisher Jérôme Lindon would send Ionesco a signed copy of the first published edition of *En attendant Godot* in October 1952 and then a complimentary ticket to a performance of the play in

⁷ Julia Elsky has recently uncovered evidence of Ionesco’s collaboration on a radio play entitled *La Terre roumaine*, written in French and broadcast on Radio Marseille in September 1943 (2018, 348, 353). Ionesco’s biographer Gilles Plazy has convincingly disputed Ionesco’s own claim in *La Quête intermittente* that he had begun writing drafts of *La Cantatrice chauve* as early in 1943 (1994, 59). In either case, Ionesco’s playwriting began only after the outbreak of World War II.

⁸ For further examination of Ionesco’s pre-war prose works, see Cleyenen-Serghiev 1993, Hamdan 1993, and Ionescu 1989. Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon record that Beckett also owned a copy of Ionesco’s only full-length novel, *Le Solitaire* (2013, 81).

February 1953 (*Letters II* 2012, 342, 369), seeking a statement of approval from Ionesco which promised to be highly advantageous to a new playwright on the French scene. As Beckett's career advanced, however, he came to occupy a more equal footing with Ionesco, and the two playwrights frequently shared actors, directors, programmes, and venues as the two became increasingly associated in public consciousness. When Beckett's *En attendant Godot* was revived at the Théâtre de Babylone in early 1954, the production shared a rehearsal space with Ionesco's *Amédée, ou Comment s'en débarasser*; Beckett was consequently able to watch the progress of *Amédée*, and in fact began speaking of the two plays in close conjunction in his letters of this period, often as though discussing various elements of one entity: "Looked in at the theatre the other evening, in time to enjoy Lucien Raimbourg [playing Vladimir] at the high point of his performance, torso parallel to the stage, legs blocked rigid. Not all that many people now. And *Amédée* is a long way from being ready. Jean [playing Lucky] would have to stop on Monday" (*Letters II* 2012, 454). Later directors would frequently stage Beckett's and Ionesco's work on the same programme, including Jean-Marie Serreau's double bill of *En attendant Godot* and *Amédée* at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in May 1961, Pierre Chabert's and Jean-Louis Barrault's "Spectacle Beckett-Ionesco-Pinget" at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in February 1966, and Beckett's own direction of *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Schiller Theatre in September 1969 alongside Ionesco's *The New Tenant*. Indeed, the Compagnie Renaud-Barrault would stage Beckett's *Oh les beaux jours* and Ionesco's *Le Piéton de l'air* together as part of their "Théâtre de France" season at the Aldwych Theatre in London in April 1965, with Madeleine Renaud playing Winnie and Josephine and Jean-Louis Barrault playing Willie and Bérenger respectively.

After the two playwrights made each other's personal acquaintance in 1956, they would continue to meet socially in the cafes around Montparnasse throughout the late 1950s (Knowlson 1997, 468), and Ionesco's keen sense of the interrelationship between his and

Beckett's works is illustrated in his alleged response to news of Beckett's being awarded the Nobel Prize in 1969: "Nous l'avons mérité" ("We deserved it"), Ionesco is reported to have said (Duckworth 1972, 13). Although Beckett was in turn critical of several of Ionesco's plays – he judged that *Amédée, ou Comment s'en débarrasser* didn't "com[e] off exactly" (*Letters II* 2012, 44), that *Le Nouveau locataire* was "bromidic" (*Letters IV* 2016, 82), and that *Tueurs sans gages* was "rather diffuse" and "not [Ionesco's] best play by any means" (*Letters III* 2014, 216, 207) – he also reserved heartfelt praise for much of Ionesco's work. He records finding *Le Roi se meurt* particularly "[m]oving" (*Letters III* 2014, 520), and wrote enthusiastically to Ionesco about a proposed double-bill of *Act Without Words* and *The Chairs*, telling him, "I should be very happy if my mime could go on with *The Chairs* at the Royal Court Theatre" (*Letters II* 2012, 674), and repeating "I hope it comes off" to Richard Roud (*Letters II* 2012, 678). He repeatedly recommended Ionesco's work to various directors and academics,⁹ and would even admit to dreaming of Ionesco's play *Rhinocéros* in August 1962, the titular animals "rampaging in a little mountain chapel", while he was engaged on early work on *Play* and the difficult task of translating *Happy Days* into French (Knowlson 1997, 499). As Colin Duckworth observes, "If one needs another dramatist to act as a foil to Beckett, [...] one could not do better than choose Ionesco" (1972, 14).

"Float up into the blue": Transcending the Physical Body

Beckett's and Ionesco's plays repeatedly present an abjectly materialised body that seems condemned to suffer physical pain as a consequence of its corporeal existence. In *Happy Days*, for example, Winnie and Willie undergo constant physical pain. Winnie is trapped uncomfortably in the "very tight" earth that hurts her midriff in the first act and her neck in

⁹ See, for example, *Letters II* 2012, 417 and 569.

the second (2006, 149),¹⁰ and has to contend as well with her failing eyes (2006, 139) and the “occasional mild migraine”, as she stoically puts it (2006, 140). We witness Willie’s head “trickling blood” from the blows received from Winnie’s parasol (2006, 141) and we later learn of the anthrax lesion on his neck (2006, 166). Reviewing the French première production, Jean-Jacques Gautier would respond viscerally to the scenes of bodily suffering in the play, his physically expressive language recalling the similarly embodied response and bodily recoil of Blin’s costume designer to *En attendant Godot*: “Le cœur se serre. La chair se hérissé. [...] Oui, je baissais la tête, je n’osais plus regarder le plateau. J’avais le sentiment de participer à une vision indécente. [...] On peut aussi mettre sur la scène un hospice de vieillards et l’hôpital ou meurt quelqu’un” (“Your heart clenches. You get goosebumps. [...] Yes, I lowered my gaze, I didn’t dare look at the stage any longer. I had the feeling of sharing in some indecent spectacle. [...] You might as well put a hospice, a hospital in which someone is dying, on the stage”; 1963, 20). The world of *Happy Days* is one of intense and continuous corporeal suffering – and one at times so intense that the spectator may in fact find herself periodically struggling to bear witness to it.

Even in the purgatorial world of *Play*, in which the figures seem visually to hover on the margin between embodiment and disembodiment, we are continually reminded of the figure’s corporeal suffering by way of their spoken narratives. As Anna McMullan notes, even though “the body appears atrophied on stage, sentient, fleshly experience reappears in the spoken text” (2010, 113). “Pudding face, puffy, spots, blubber mouth, jowls” (2006, 310): W1’s litany of unappealing bodily characteristics emphasises the corporeal body as an abject yet apparently inescapable phenomenon, as does the lingering threat of the “razor in her vanity-bag” (2006, 310). Later she will demand: “Bite off my tongue and swallow it? Spit it

¹⁰ James Knowlson suggests that the image of the body buried to the neck in sand and left to suffer in the hot sun may have been suggested to Beckett by the reports that the French Foreign Legion employed the practice as a torture technique (2014, n.p.).

out? Would that placate you?”, laying heavy emphasis again on the human body as a seemingly eternal source of suffering (2006, 314).¹¹ As Paul Lawley observes, *Play* “treats the human body with a violence that is unusual even in Beckett” (1984, 25); despite the visual concealment of the body, the play lays recurrent and distinctly discomfiting emphasis on the insistent corporeality of the characters’ existences. Comparably, Ionesco speaks of the distressing feeling of being “encumbered with matter” as the starting point for many of his plays, including *Amédée* (1976, viii). *Amédée* stages a steadily growing corpse, interpreted by many critics as symbolic of Amédée and his wife Madeleine’s failed marriage¹² but also acting as a grotesquely literal figure of corporeal abjection. Amédée himself suffers physically from his own material condition, described as “*a man so exhausted and overtaxed that any effort [...] is extremely painful*” (1978, 196) and complaining regularly of his corporeal suffering: “I feel so tired, so tired... worn out, heavy. I’ve got indigestion and my tummy’s all blown out” (1978, 157). In *Le Piéton de l’air*, the characters sweat, bear war wounds, and suffer from claustrophobia (1970c, 15, 12, 21); they worry about vaccinations and infections (1970c, 44) and are vulnerable to bombs and machine guns (1970c, 14, 66). Each of these plays thus not only emphasises the corporeal materiality of their onstage characters, but also routinely aligns this corporeality with physical pain. Bodily suffering is repeatedly framed as the inevitable consequence of corporeal existence for Beckett’s and Ionesco’s characters.

It is thus perhaps unsurprising that these unfortunate beings are also presented as “dream[ing] of somatic-free lives” (Ben-Zvi 2009, 13), fantasising a disembodied or transcendent existence that would free them from the burden of material corporeality and its

¹¹ Several critics have remarked upon the peculiarity of the fact that “[e]ven beyond the grave, presumably beyond any corporeality, M in *Play* can still hiccup”, as Linda Ben-Zvi puts it (2009, 13; see also Brater 2011, 95, and Salisbury 2015, 85). Although not precisely a signal of bodily suffering, M’s recurrent hiccup in the play emphasises his continued bodily existence, the fact that he is precisely *not* “beyond any corporeality”, but is rather still vulnerable to the demands and discomforts of his body.

¹² See, for example, Donnard 1973, 40; Dickinson 1973, 100; Esslin 1968, 160; and Matthews 1967, 214.

attendant aches and pains. The idea of transcending a painful physical existence is imagined in a starkly literal form in all four plays: the desire to transcend the suffering corporeality is repeatedly figured as an upwards ascension, an imagined or actual ascent skywards ‘away’ from the materially-bound human body. In *Happy Days*, for example, Winnie dreams of a day when “the earth will yield and let me go, the pull is so great, yes” and she will be able to “simply float up into the blue” (2006, 151). Multiple actors and directors have testified to the emphasis Beckett placed on Winnie’s impulse towards ascent in early productions of *Happy Days*: Aideen O’Kelly recalls Beckett instructing her in Winnie’s “precarious, precarious” state of being, her feeling that “she might float up into the sky” during rehearsals for the 1987 production at the Samuel Beckett Theatre in New York (1992, 37), and her director Shivaun O’Casey similarly remembers Beckett’s emphasis on “the pull of the beyond, the heavens” that Winnie feels (1992, 33). Billie Whitelaw records Beckett’s note to her during rehearsals for the 1979 Royal Court production as: “Winnie wants to float up, she’s bird-like” (1995, 154), and Martha Fehsenfeld likewise quotes Beckett as describing Winnie as “a bird” in comparison with the earthbound Willie, noting that this characterisation inflected her own interpretation of Winnie’s voice and posture in her own 1983 performance of the role: “[B]oth became infused with an energy that pulled me up, in contrast to the downward thrust of her immobility” (1992, 55, 56).¹³ Winnie’s entrapment in a condition of bodily discomfort in *Happy Days* produces an impulse to very literally transcend her own material state.

Moving beyond the imagined to the actual, Ionesco’s *Amédée* ends in its protagonist’s final triumphant ascension away from the world of abject materiality.¹⁴ As Martin Esslin

¹³ Elaine Wood also characterises Winnie as a “songbird” (2015, 212) and reads her moments of song in the play as instances of a triumphant form of bodily transcendence, but Wood’s upbeat reading of Winnie as “[u]sing pain and immobility as her inspiration” (2015, 211) runs counter to this chapter’s understanding of physical pain as aversive rather than inspirational in *Happy Days* and in Beckett’s theatre more broadly.

¹⁴ This emphasis on the body’s burdensome materiality as a source of suffering recurs frequently throughout Ionesco’s work for stage and screen. In *Rhinocéros* (*Rhinoceros*, 1959), some of Bérenger’s earlier lines see him complaining about his oppressive sense of his own abject physicality: “I’m so tired, I’ve been tired for years. It’s exhausting to drag the weight of my own body about... [...] I’m conscious of my body all the time, as if it were made of lead” (1990, 17-18). In *Victimes du devoir* (*Victims of Duty*, 1953), Choubert’s despair is figured

observes, “In *Amédée*, we see the two basic moods of Ionesco’s experience of the world side by side: heaviness and proliferation of matter in the first two acts, lightness and evanescence in the third” (1968, 160). In the first two acts, Amédée is trapped in his squalid, fungus-ridden flat, harbouring an unwieldy corpse which eventually grows to fill the entire apartment (and stage space) in a very literal rendering of what Ionesco elsewhere describes as the psychological distress of feeling that “matter fills every corner, takes up all the space and its weight annihilates all freedom” (1976, viii). Amédée hauls the oversized corpse out of his flat in the attempt to get rid of it, but while dragging it through the town and attempting to evade the local police officers:

a surprising thing happens. The body wound round AMÉDÉE’S waist seems to have opened out like a sail or a huge parachute; the dead man’s head has become a sort of glowing banner, and AMÉDÉE’S head can be seen appearing above the rear wall, drawn up by the parachute; then his shoulders, his trunk and his legs follow. AMÉDÉE is flying up out of reach of the policeman[.]

(1978, 223)

Abject materiality – the corpse itself – becomes transcendent here. The play’s ending transmutes the restrictive weight of material corporeality into the release of evanescence – and, notably, an escape from the gaze of witnessing bystanders, as represented here by the police officers and other townspeople on stage. In Amédée’s rapturous ascent and in the transformation of the abjectly material corpse into his triumphant means of ascendance, *Amédée* stages the joyful transcendence of the abject bodily existence that *Happy Days* imagines. Significantly, Ionesco sets this successful transcendence of pained corporeality in

by his literal descent into a deep pit of mud (1978, 282), and in *La Soif et la Faim* (*Hunger and Thirst*, 1964), Jean complains about “wallowing in the mire” and the associated bodily discomfort: “Mud everywhere! [...] The water seeps into your bones, you shiver with cold, catch rheumatism and feel permanently out of sorts (1968, 10-11). Similarly, Ionesco’s short film *La Vase* (*The Slime*, 1970) links mud and overconsumption to emphasise this sense of burdensome bodily materiality; the protagonist (played by Ionesco himself) is shown consuming heavy meals that bloat his body and slow his physical movements, before he stumbles into a marsh where his body gradually sinks and disintegrates.

specific relation to the post-war moment in France, suggesting a correlation between the end of World War II and the end of physical suffering. Rosette C. Lamont connects Amédée's joyful ascent with Ionesco's memories of post-Liberation Paris, citing the proliferation of cheerful American soldiers in the play's final act and the "sense of total jubilation [that] informs the end of the play. One is reminded of the days when De Gaulle's Free French troops, walking side by side with their US allies, entered Paris" (1996, 111). Thus in Lamont's reading "the joyous escape and liberation of the hero" – liberated from the physical suffering, from corporeal existence and consequent physical abjection, as much as from his unhappy home life – "also symbolizes the liberation of France at the end of World War II" (1996, 107). In allying the end of World War II to the end of long-endured forms of bodily suffering, Ionesco's *Amédée* appears to proffer an optimistic vision of a newly pain-free life following the war – an optimism that seems somewhat atypical, we might add, amid the more cynical or despondent probings of the continued suffering of the post-war years evident in the other plays we have been exploring.

The association between the 'peace' of transcending the pain-stricken corporeal body and the 'peace' at the end of World War II offers an additional link but also an important contrast to Beckett's *Play* and Ionesco's *Le Piéton de l'air*. Both plays connect the transcendence of the suffering body with variously coded ideas of "peace" – but both also deny their characters any final transcendent escape from physical suffering, underlining the idea of pain as an ultimately inescapable dimension of corporeal existence. In Ionesco's *Le Piéton de l'air*, the initially "tired" and miserable Bérenger (1970c, 10) feels himself becoming "relaxed", "so light, so weightless" mid-way through the play (1970c, 36), and begins levitating above the ground. After an extended period of aerial acrobatics above the stage – Ionesco's stage directions note that the actor may be "*replaced by a trained acrobat*" at this point – he "*takes flight and rapidly disappears in a flash into the flies*" (1970c, 56),

and the remaining onstage characters narrate watching him spin upwards and eventually vanishing from sight. Bérenger's ascension allows him to leave behind an onstage landscape coded in terms of World War II violence: aerial attacks by "German bombers" (1970c, 15), fears of spies of enemy agents, the return of wounded soldiers, and in what Lamont has identified as a scene "haunted by the Holocaust", the onstage murder of two small children that recalls the "most horrifying of all Nazi crimes committed against small children and infants" in the concentration camps (1996, 117-18).¹⁵ However, although Bérenger's ascension initially seems to free him from a landscape of war and from his own suffering – just as Amédée's triumphant ascent frees him from long-endured 'wartime' pain – this escape is short-lived. When Bérenger descends back onto the stage a few scenes later, he is distraught by what he has seen in the "Anti-World": a terrifying apocalyptic vision of physical grotesquerie and destruction.

I saw... I saw... some geese... [...] Men with the heads of geese. [...] I saw columns of guillotined men, marching along without their head, columns of guillotined men... [...] I saw whole continents of Paradise all in flames. And all the Blessed were being burned alive. [...] I saw some knives, I saw some graves... [...] In another place the earth was cracking... the mountains were caving in and there were oceans of blood... of mud and blood and mud...
(1970c, 74-75)

Bérenger's ascent has led not to any lasting transcendence of physical pain, but only a reiteration of continued, apparently inescapable 'wartime' suffering and bodily abjection: guillotined men, a landscape and victims in flames, weapons, mass graves, "oceans of blood",

¹⁵ Many of Ionesco's other plays evoke wartime scenarios, indexed with varying degrees of specificity to World War II. *Le Roi se meurt* (*Exit the King*, 1962), *Délire à deux* (*Frenzy for Two*, 1962), *Macbett* (1972), *L'Homme aux valises* (*The Man with the Luggage*, 1975), and *Voyages chez les morts* (*Journeys among the Dead*, 1980) all make a period of war or even an active battlefield the explicit setting of their action. In *La Leçon* (*The Lesson*, 1951), Ionesco's stage directions suggest that the Professor dons an armband emblazoned with a "Nazi swastika" in the final scene (1976, 77-78); the Detective in *Victimes du devoir* (*Victims of Duty*, 1953) speaks at length of his days as a soldier engaged in "the massacre of tens of thousands of enemy soldiers, of whole communities of old men, women and children" (1978, 287-88); in *La Jeune fille à marier* (*Maid to Marry*, 1953), the unnamed Lady and Gentleman converse lightly about Jews, Germans, and the atomic bomb (1970a, 153, 156); in *Le Pied du mur* (*The Foot of the Wall*, 1955) the antagonist Schaeffer, who first appears onstage counting time in German, admits to the mass murder of a troupe of Jewish children.

and an invocation of “geese” that evokes the Nazi party by way of the iconic “goosestep”; the linguistic parallel exists in the original French, in which Bérenger’s recollection of “des oies... [...] Des hommes qui avaient des têtes d’oies” similarly evokes the French term “pas de l’oie” (1963, 194-95).¹⁶ Leonard C. Pronko points out the implications of continued wartime suffering here, arguing that:

the Bosch-like visions of deformity and suffering, the bottomless pits and bombardments he sees [...] all suggest the terror of our atomic age, while the millions of stars exploding, the universes disappearing and the deserts of fire and ice are a frightening warning of things to come if we persevere in warlike ways.

(1965, 38)

We might see a similarity here to the apocalyptic landscape of Beckett’s *Happy Days* – particularly given that both plays were written at the height of the Cold War during France’s involvement in the Algerian War, stark examples of seemingly ceaseless warfare on the world stage in the near-immediate aftermath of World War II. *Le Piéton de l’air* thus overturns *Amédée*’s apparent optimism that would align the end of World War II with an end to physical suffering. Although France’s Liberation and later the Axis surrender were met with celebration, a conflict-ravaged French population continued to suffer long after the official cessation of hostilities, lacking food and fuel reserves and witnessing the distressing scenes of returning French prisoners of war and concentration camp deportees. As Sylvie Chalaye observes, “La Libération a mis fin à la guerre, elle n’a pas mis fin à la misère. La reconstruction s’avère plus difficile qu’on ne l’avait pas imaginée” (“The Liberation put an

¹⁶ Although the goosestep had been used by various military divisions since the eighteenth century, popular imagination in the aftermath of World War II linked the step to the Axis military, since China, Germany, Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Laos, Spain, Slovakia and the Italian Blackshirts all trained segments of their armed forces in the goose step during this period. Ionesco offers a similar evocation in the in earlier play *Tueur sans gages* (*The Killer*, 1959), when the villainous Mother Peep, whom Allan Lewis calls “a terrifying example of the Gestapo regimentation” (1972, 14), declares “Me and me geese are asking for power” (1970a, 75), before having her geese “liquidate” a man (1970a, 83), and incites her supporters, “Let’s all do the goose-step!” (1970a, 82).

end to the war, but it did not put an end to hardship. Reconstruction proved far more difficult than had been imagined"; 1998, 9). Ionesco remained resident in France following the Liberation and VE Day, a consequent witness to this protracted post-war suffering, and thus the cynicism of *Le Piéton de l'air* seems more consonant with his own post-war experience – or at least, to the post-war experience of most French residents – than does the light-hearted escapism of *Amédée*. The desire for corporeal transcendence is played out in *Le Piéton de l'air*, but the continued presence of war-related suffering negates the possibility of any permanent escape from the material body's vulnerability to pain. Both corporeal existence and physical suffering are, finally, inescapable.

Beckett's *Play* still more adamantly refuses any final transcendence of bodily suffering. The figures in *Play* also code the desired end to their physical and mental suffering in terms of "peace" – "Peace, yes, I suppose, a kind of peace, and all that pain as if... never been", as M puts it (2006, 312) – and the idea of transcending suffering is revised into a banal form of 'ascension' appropriate to what Rónán McDonald describes as the domestic, "distinctly Home-Counties English" tenor of the script (2008, 215). Here, the concept of ascension is refigured into W1 imagining M and W2 as having fled to "somewhere in the sun", now perched somewhere at an altitude from where W2 can sit "gazing down out over" her surroundings (2006, 315), set in contrast to W1's description of her most intense suffering in terms of downward motion – "I lay stricken for weeks" after M's disappearance, she tells us (2006, 311) – and wintery cold, W2's abandoned house "grey with frozen dew" (2006, 311). As in *Le Piéton de l'air*, however, this impulse to ascend is counterbalanced with a competing descendent drive. "Down, down, into the dark, peace is coming, I thought", M muses (2006, 312), figuring his own escape from the interrogative spotlight in terms of darkness and descent. Just as *Play* denies ascension as an attainable possibility, however, so too descent is discredited as equally unlikely to deliver any final respite. The figures remain

held unforagingly in place in their urns, denied any escape from pained corporeality. The purgatorial, “putatively disembodied” (Foster 2013, 217) state of the onstage figures testifies to the desire to transcend the suffering body, but even though the urns conceal the figures’ own physical bodies, the apparent material connection between the urns and the faces made up “*to seem almost part of [the] urns themselves*” (2006, 307) keeps the figures embedded in the material world and prey to continued corporeal suffering. Steven Connor points out that the once-common critical idea that Beckett’s theatre “retreats progressively from embodiment” might be more usefully replaced by a recognition of “the stubborn irreducibility of the body in Beckett’s work” (2014, 17); it is precisely this “irreducibility” which is enacted on *Play*’s stage as a corollary of pain’s inescapability. *Play* repeatedly acknowledges its figures’ desire to transcend their harrowing corporeal existence, but resolutely denies them this possibility.

Likewise, in *Happy Days*, despite Winnie’s yearnings to “float up into the blue” she is kept firmly rooted in her pain-stricken corporeal body (2006, 151), denied transcendent ascent or disembodiment, the fantasy of flight emphasised as an “impossible desire”, as Julie Bates notes (2019, 53). Several actors and directors have recorded how Beckett himself consistently emphasised the impossibility of any actual “bird-like” ascent, telling Martha Fehsenfeld to “think of her as a bird with oil on her feathers” (Fehsenfeld 1992, 55) and Shivaun O’Casey as “like a bird that can’t fly, a bird with a broken wing” (O’Casey 1992, 32). The impulse towards transcendent disembodiment is countered by the repeated restatement of not just inescapable but markedly *damaged* corporeality, vulnerable to injury and pain. Beckett’s directorial comments reflect the elements of the *Happy Days* script which repeatedly focus attention on Winnie’s material body, and specifically on the susceptibility of her flesh to physical harm. Winnie is described in the stage directions as “*plump, arms and shoulders bare, low bodice, big bosom*” (2006, 138), and Beckett paid a continued careful

attention to the matter of Winnie's "flesh" throughout the play's production history: "Hope your girl has desirable fleshiness", he wrote to the director Alan Schneider in August 1961 ahead of the play's première at the Cherry Lane Theater in New York (*Letters III* 2014, 428), and he would reiterate to George Devine in September 1962 that the "best colour" for Winnie's bodice is whatever best "enhances her fleshiness, perhaps pink" (*Letters III* 2014, 499). These comments may at first glance seem to indicate Winnie's intended sexualised appeal onstage, the female figure seemingly positioned here as "simply the lure of the flesh" as so often in Beckett's earlier prose works (Weller 2005, 145). However, the significance of the material body in *Happy Days* as the site of corporeal vulnerability to pain suggests that Beckett may have had another concern in mind in underlining the need for Winnie's visible "fleshiness". Winnie herself repeatedly references her own "flesh" in terms that emphasise its susceptibility to physical harm, periodically imagining "the happy day to come when flesh melts at so many degrees" (2006, 144): "Shall I myself not melt perhaps in the end, or burn, oh I do not mean necessarily burst into flames, no, just little by little be charred to a black cinder, all this – (*ample gesture of arms*) – visible flesh" (2006, 154). Winnie's flesh, her imprisonment in her material existence, renders her subject to physical pain, and her seemingly stereotypically feminine anxiety "can it be I have put on flesh, I hope not" (2006, 149) takes on a darker undertone when we recognise that flesh connotes Winnie's susceptibility to bodily suffering, an inescapable entrapment in corporeality that "just can't be cured" (2006, 139). Transcendence of the pain-stricken corporeal form, "escape from the homologising effect that holds mind, body and world in the same tight clench" (Sheehan 2002, 178), is impossible.

“He that can well suffer shall find most peace”: Christian Models of Pain

The recurrent emphasis in these plays on a desired transcendence to free the body from pain also underlies Beckett’s and Ionesco’s cynical assaults on Christian models of suffering. The idea of transcendent ascension offers the reverse image of the downwards fall associated with physical vulnerability and the Fall into suffering human form emphasised in *Waiting for Godot*, as explored in Chapter Two, and indeed Ionesco summarises his impulse to create literary work that bears testament to the impulse to transcend oppressive materiality by explaining, “It is as if I wanted to witness the creation of the world before the Fall” (1979, 120). Elaine Scarry has observed that modern cultural conceptions of pain have been markedly inflected by the Biblical framing of bodily suffering – most specifically the manner in which God and humankind are “differentiated by the immunity of one and the woundability of the other” (1985, 183), and by the recurrent figuring of God’s power by dint of bodily punishment in the Old Testament and Christ’s healing touch in the New Testament (1985, 212). Western Christianity figures the terrestrial embodied state as a condition of sin and suffering – “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain” while on earth (Romans ch. 8, v. 22) – and holds out the lure of bodily transcendence to its followers, the promise that they “shall ascend into Heaven” (Romans ch. 10, v. 6) once their earthly penance has been discharged, following Jesus’s own bodily suffering on the Cross and subsequent transcendence of bodily death. Beckett’s considerable knowledge of Christian thinking inflects much of his writing – Duckworth records Beckett telling him, “Christianity is a mythology with which I am perfectly familiar. So naturally I use it” (1972, 18) – but Beckett makes distinctly sceptical use of Christian frameworks of suffering and transcendence, ruthlessly undermining the possibility of redemptive pain. Ionesco, who was baptised in the Romanian Orthodox Church and attended the Curtea de Argeş seminary and the Central seminary (Seminarul Central) in Bucharest in the 1930s (Besançon 2011, 28) but whose

religious beliefs became increasingly troubled over the course of his life, similarly subverts Christian models of transcendence from the pain-stricken human body, particularly in *Le Piéton de l'air*. As Duckworth observes, “the plays of Ionesco or Beckett may make one comprehend traumatically what a Godless universe means” (1972, 111) – particularly, we might add, in how they undermine or deny the possibility of bodily transcendence and a redemptive end to suffering.

The crucified Christ, whom “God hath raised up, having loosed the pain of death” (Acts ch. 2 v. 24), stands as the preeminent example within the Christian belief system of intense physical suffering as an instrument for redemption and eventual transcendence of the bodily form. In *Le Piéton de l'air*, Ionesco evokes the Crucifixion several times, in distinctly facetious terms, before staging Bérenger’s ‘transcendence’. Early in the play, Bérenger speaks of his desire “to be cured of death” (1970, 10), echoing the New Testament figuring of Jesus as “our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death” (2 Timothy ch. 1 v.10) by way of his own Crucifixion: “Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him” (Romans ch. 6 v. 9), once “God hath raised [him] up, having loosed the pains of death” (Acts ch. 2 v. 24). Shortly afterwards, his wife Joséphine learns that her father, a fallen war veteran, has been “raised from the dead” (1970, 12); the detail that he now “has long hair. He’s been wounded” aligns the resurrected veteran still more closely, and again flippantly, with the traditional Western image of the long-haired Christ bearing his stigmata wounds (1970, 12). Indeed, even the names of the characters in *Le Piéton de l'air* carry overtones of Biblical resurrections: Bérenger’s daughter’s name “Marthe” is the French variant of “Martha”, the sister of Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead (Luke ch. 10, John ch. 11-12); it might also be noted that the name Madeleine in *Amédée* evokes “the Madeleine” Mary Magdalene, who was also present at Christ’s Crucifixion and at the tomb

when Jesus's followers first discovered that he has transcended death.¹⁷ The background characters in *Le Piéton de l'air* discuss a parodic version of the discovery of Jesus's empty tomb following his initial post-Crucifixion ascension:

1ST LADY: As soon as someone passes on and is put into a coffin, the dead body disappears.

2ND LADY: And that explains why coffins weigh so little. What happens to the bodies?

(1970, 30)

After these repeated evocations of Biblical models of the escape from bodily suffering, however, *Le Piéton de l'air* eventually stages an ironic reversal of Jesus's earthly transcendence. Where Jesus returns temporarily to earth following his Crucifixion to bring news of humanity's spiritual salvation before ascending once more to remain in Heaven, Bérenger makes only a temporary ascent in a "[d]ivinely intoxicated" state (1970, 37), and ultimately returns permanently to his terrestrial life, bearing with him only an apocalyptic vision of suffering: "I saw whole continents of Paradise all in flames. And all the Blessed were being burned alive" (1970, 75). Bérenger the "Heavenly Hiker", as the play's character list labels him (1970, 3), attains no enduring respite from embodied earthly suffering, nor hope of any lasting relief to come; the parodic Biblical parallels in *Le Piéton de l'air* serve only to undermine the Christian model of transcending bodily suffering.

Beckett interrogates the Christian framework of pain and pain's redemption with a similarly sceptical eye. Mary Bryden's tracing of Beckett's "close and careful reading of St Augustine, of Thomas à Kempis, [and] St John of the Cross" (1998, 2) points us to a particular Christian perspective on transcending physical suffering – and, notably, one which places a particular emphasis on the act of witnessing suffering.¹⁸ The three writers that

¹⁷ The names "Marthe", and "Marie-Madeleine" both reappear in Ionesco's *La Soif et la faim* (1964), in which the protagonist Jean's attempt to escape "the sufferings of mankind" (1968, 27) end with him trapped in an alarming monastery, in a seemingly unending purgatory of servitude.

¹⁸ Alain Besançon records Ionesco's own familiarity with St John of the Cross ("saint Jean de la Croix"), by way of his reading of Jean Barruzzi's theological works (2011, 27-28).

Bryden cites here are connected by their shared faith in the Pauline tradition of *imitatio Christi*, which saw Christ's followers 'imitating' Christ's way of life as a means of achieving spiritual redemption. In some instances, practitioners of *imitatio Christi* held even physical pain itself to be "a blessing to be endured in imitation of Christ" and his suffering during the Crucifixion (Bourke 2014, 111), leading in extreme cases to what Esther Cohen has termed *philopassianism*: "the deliberate, conscious attempt to feel as much physical anguish as possible" as a means of gaining redemption (1995, 52-53).¹⁹ Imitation figures here as an intensely embodied, intensely reactive form of witnessing, whereby the witness's own body comes to bear testimony to the witnessed suffering of the other. This version of suffering thus paradoxically allows for the alignment of pain and bodily transcendence. As the Bible has it, the dedicated follower may be "a witness of the suffering of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed" as a result (1 Peter ch. 5 v. 1). Pain thus offers "a redemptive opportunity to transcend the world and the flesh by imitating the suffering Christ" (Halttunen 1995, 305): witnessing pain, suffering pain, and transcending pain coalesce in one redemptive model.

However, Beckett's plays insistently undermine this idea of pain as a means of eventual escape from suffering, and indeed, Bryden has noted Beckett's own sceptical interrogation of those elements of Thomas à Kempis's ideology which replicate the idea of suffering as a means to redemption (1998, 29-34). In a March 1935 letter to Thomas McGreevy, Beckett quotes three maxims from à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ* (c. 1418-27) in their original Latin, two of which also figure the acceptance of suffering as an

¹⁹ This perspective on pain still pervaded religious thought during Beckett's own lifetime, and indeed inflected contemporary medical pain treatment in certain instances: the physician Paul C. Gibson, for example, wrote to the editor of the *British Medical Journal* in July 1956 to argue that Christian patients in pain "should not ask for relief from pain but rather for grace to endure it", since "lasting joy only come through pain" (1957, 242). Peter Flood's *New Problems in Medical Ethics*, which went through multiple reprintings in both its French and English throughout the 1950s, similarly argued that physical pain offered a means of "union with the redemptive sufferings of Christ", and that physicians might withhold pain relief as a means of better enabling the patient's ultimate spiritual salvation (1956, 188).

instrument for absolution: “qui melius scit pati majorem tenebit pacem”, and “Nolle consolari ab aliqua creatura magnae puritatis, signum est” (“He that can well suffer shall find most peace”, “For a man not to wish to be comforted by any creature is a token of great purity”; *Letters I* 2010, 257, 262). Although Beckett refers initially to these as axioms which “seemed to be made for me and which I have never forgotten” (*Letters I* 2010, 257), the rest of his letter undermines à Kempis’s principle of suffering as a means of redemption, sceptically querying the idea in terms that explicitly incorporate both pain and the Crucifixion more specifically: “Or is there some way of devoting pain & monstrosity & incapacitation to the service of a deserving cause? Is one to insist on a crucifixion for which there is no demand?” (*Letters I* 2010, 258). Beckett’s mistrust here as to how one might in fact go about “devoting” pain to some “deserving cause” recalls James Knowlson’s record of another early example of Beckett’s rejection of the concept of redemptive suffering, on hearing his father’s friend Canon Dobbs preaching at the All Saints Church in Blackrock in 1926 about his pastoral visits to “the sick, the suffering, the dying”:

“What gets me down”, said the minister, “is pain. The only thing I can tell them is that the crucifixion was only the beginning. You must contribute to the kitty.” [...] How, Beckett argued with himself, could one possibly justify pain and death as making a ‘contribution’ to anything? The ‘kitty’ was simply a senseless accumulation of pain. How then could pain and suffering have any moral value?

(Knowlson 1997, 67)

The Christian interpretation of pain is rejected here in part because of Beckett’s refusal to read suffering as having a redemptive moral value, but also because of the seemingly endless succession of suffering demanded in the name of religious salvation. Even the Crucifixion itself, covenanted to redeem all humankind, “being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Romans ch. 5 v. 9), has not ended suffering, but rather “was only the beginning” of earthly pain.

Likewise, *Happy Days* and particularly *Play* frequently undermine the idea of redemptive pain or pain-as-penance in a Christian context. *Happy Days* opens on an explicitly Christian note, Winnie first greeting “[a]nother heavenly day” and then praying at some length: “WINNIE: For Jesus Christ sake Amen. (*Eyes open, hands unclasp, return to mound. Pause. She clasps hands to breast again, closes eyes, lips move again in inaudible addendum, say five seconds. Low.*) World without end Amen” (2006, 138). Winnie’s prayer is very much “for naught” (2006, 140), bringing her neither relief from suffering over the course of the play nor anticipated communion with any divine reassuring force, and her efforts falter by the end of Act I: “WINNIE: (*Pause.*) Pray your prayer, Winnie. (*Pause.*) [...] Pray your old prayer, Winnie. (*Long pause. Curtain*)” (2006, 159). At the opening of Act II, she again immediately gestures towards her continued belief in the existence of a divine presence – “Hail, holy light” (2006, 160) – but quickly indicates that she no longer seeks any closer union with this force, no longer seems to anticipate any salvation for herself, no cessation to or reward for her own inevitable sufferings in this “world without end”: “I used to pray. (*Pause.*) I say I used to pray. (*Pause.*) Yes, I must confess I did. (*Smile.*) Not now. (*Smile broader.*) No no. (*Smile off*)” (2006, 161). Winnie has not renounced her faith in God per se, but she does seem to have abandoned any hope of her earthly suffering ending in transcendent redemption.

Happy Days thus repeatedly undercuts the Christian framework of redemptive physical pain, and local instances of this undermining continue throughout the two acts, as for example Willie’s reporting on “His Grace and Most Reverend Father in God Dr Carolus Hunter dead in tub” (2006, 142); here, the overblown ecclesiastical splendour of the sentence’s opening is belied by the bathetic fall into abject physicality at its end, the stark, distinctly mocking “dead in a tub”. Reviewing the French-language première production at the Théâtre de l’Odéon, Gilles Sandier observed that the play reveals “plus manifestement

que jamais la vision essentiellement religieuse qui est celle de Beckett” (“more clearly than ever Beckett’s essentially religious outlook”), and specifically the bleak vision of God as “cet être impardonnable d’avoir créé un monde de souffrance”, “un Dieu d’autant plus impardonnable qu’il a donné en même temps à l’homme une notion de la beauté et du bonheur” (“this being whom we cannot forgive for having created a world of suffering”, “a God who is all the more unforgivable for having also given to humankind the idea of beauty and of happiness”; 1963, 8). Even the earliest spectators, then, recognised the play’s refusal of any redemptive end to earthly suffering by dint of religious faith. Indeed, the Vichy co-opting of Christian discourse during the war years likely helped prime a subsequently disillusioned post-war French population for this bleak vision of disappointed faith. Julian Jackson observes that a Christian “rhetoric of sacrifice and redemption was central” to Vichy propaganda, detailing how “the Pétain cult tapped into the mood of popular religiosity” in order to elevate the Maréchal Philippe Pétain as a glorified icon during the interwar and early war years (2001, 280). Later, during the Nazi Occupation, the *milice*, the much-feared Vichy paramilitary group involved in the summary arrest, torture, and execution of the French Resistance alongside rounding up Jewish civilians for deportation, were accorded a veil of suspect respectability by claiming “to be defending Christian civilisation against the usual evils: Jews, Freemasons, Bolsheviks” (Riding 2010, 302). As Ahmad Kamyabi Mask observes, Beckett’s and Ionesco’s post-war plays were scripted in a cultural context in which, for many, “la morale et la religion ont été écrasés sous les roues des canons de la guerre” (“morality and religion have been crushed beneath the wheels of the war’s cannons”; 1987, 46). Following this assimilation of political propaganda and indeed bodily violence with Christian discourse throughout the war years, religious disenchantment in post-war France finds its parallel in Beckett’s undercutting of Christian frameworks of belief – and particularly of redemptive physical pain – in *Happy Days*.

Play rejects still more emphatically the idea of any redemptive end to or salvational transcendence of earthly suffering. Once again, the play opens with a litany of Christian-inflected discourse: W2's repeated assertion of "doubt"; W1's swearing on all she "held most sacred" and her surprise at M "confess[ing]" "on his knees"; perhaps most notably, M's plea for "pardon – so help me God" (2006, 307-09). Unlike Winnie's prayer to her explicitly Christian God, however, all these Biblically redolent terms are reframed in a distinctly irreligious context; M's request for "pardon", for example, is provoked by his hiccupping, a particularly farcical instance of the overwriting of the theological impulse by the actuality of the fleshly human body. This recurring disruption of the veiled theological framework throughout the early minutes of the play pervades and ultimately undermines the speakers' more sincere pleas for "mercy" towards the end of the play (2006, 312). Eventually driven to beg for an end to their seemingly ceaseless suffering, the three speakers attempt to frame their experience as "[p]enitence, yes, at a pinch, atonement" (2006, 316). W1 caustically offers increasingly grisly demonstrations of suffering – and eventually physical mutilation itself – as a mode of "penitence": "Is it something I should do with my face, other than utter? Weep? [...] Bite off my tongue and swallow it? Spit it out? Would that placate you?" (2006, 314). Physical pain is reconceived as a means to salvation, emphasised by the triform positioning of the three suffering beings across the stage, recalling Christ's Crucifixion alongside the two thieves that Vladimir so insistently invokes in *Waiting for Godot* (2006, 14), and thus correspondingly Christ's redemptive ordeal on the Cross, the corporeal agony that shared and absolved all humankind's suffering. The Crucifixion extends a promise that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed" (Romans ch. 8 v. 18); M, W1 and W2 likewise seek a state of grace that redeems previous suffering: "all that pain as if... never been" (2006, 312).

These attempts at redemption-via-suffering are unsuccessful in *Play*. The light that seems to demand atonement does not grant any final pain-assuaging salvation, but instead continues the characters' torment across the length of the play and seemingly beyond. Indeed, Beckett's repeated use of punishing, non-salvational light in his stage plays provides Lüscher-Morata with an appropriate metaphor for the manner in which his work engages with but ultimately refutes a Biblical model of salvation: "Il y a, dans cette œuvre baignée des rayons d'une sorte de théologie négative, un refus total de toute doctrine du salut" ("There is, in this body of work bathed in the rays of a sort of negative theology, a total refusal of the doctrine of salvation"; 2005, 27).²⁰ The references to the "hellish" light throughout *Play* (2006, 312, 316) underline this ongoing and distinctly non-redemptive torment, recalling Winnie's oscillating between identifying her own punishing light source in *Happy Days* as a "holy light" and a "blaze of hellish light" (2006, 140), and contrasting strongly with Ionesco's own consistent rendering of light as form of privileged reprieve throughout his work (Vernois 1991, 15; Ionesco 1971, 150-57). *Play*'s stage directions specify that "[t]he optimum position for the spot is at the centre of the footlights, the faces being thus lit at close quarters and from below" (2006, 318), and the play's production history reveals Beckett's insistence on the specifics of this positioning. Michael Lonsdale, who played M in Jean-Michel Serreau's 1963-64 production of *Comédie* at the Théâtre du Pavillon de Marsan, records Beckett's concern at rehearsals regarding the potentially misleading positioning of the spotlight: "[D]'abord il était question d'envoyer la lumière d'en haut et puis Sam a eu peur, il a dit, 'Non, ce n'est pas un rayon du Saint Esprit'. Alors, on l'a eu d'en bas" ("First they were intending to position the light above us and that frightened Sam; he said, 'No, it's not the

²⁰ Iain Bailey has also analysed in detail the Biblical allusions he finds in the concatenation of light, speech and judgement in *Comédie* (2014, 123-31), and Rosemary Pountney similarly reads an association between the interplay between light and dark in *Play* and the Biblical discussion of light and dark in St John's Gospel (1988, 34), but neither Bailey nor Bryden deal specifically with the question of physical pain in *Play/Comédie*.

light of the Holy Spirit'. So then they moved it to sit below us"; 1993, n.p.).²¹ Beckett explicitly refuses the association between *Play*'s spotlight and religious salvation – or rather, he inverts it, rendering the light both a thwarted suggestion of potential redemption and a source of continued suffering.

The substitute 'weakened repeat' that Beckett permitted in early productions of *Play/Comédie* offers an alternative reading to this rendering of specifically endless suffering. In February 1964, following *Comédie* rehearsals at the Théâtre du Pavillon de Marsan with Jean-Marie Serreau, Beckett wrote to George Devine, who was preparing an English-language production of *Play* at the Old Vic, to explain his new conception of what had originally been the text's exact repeat: "We now think it would be dramatically more effective to have it express a slight weakening" of light intensity and speech volume and speed, in order to attain the "impression of falling off which this would give, with a suggestion of conceivable darkness and silence in the end, or of an indefinite approximating towards it" (*Letters III* 2014, 594-95). In this case, there is still not offer of pain being redeemed, but the suffering at least seems more likely to eventually come to an end. However, Rosemary Pountney suggests that Beckett came to prefer the original exact repeat as *Play/Comédie*'s end: "Replying to an enquiry of my own about the repeat, Beckett wrote 'exact repeat preferable', and he recommended this approach in the 1976 production of the play at the Royal Court Theatre, directed by Donald McWhinnie" (1988, 36). Thus, Beckett parodically invokes a Biblical structure of meaning for his characters' physical suffering in *Happy Days* and *Play*, but undercuts the strictures of belief in the redemptive potential of pain that validate the structure itself. We are left with what Bryden identifies more broadly in

²¹ Perhaps the most famous example of the redemptive light of the Holy Spirit, Saul's conversion of the road to Damascus, is also the source of the Biblical quotation that provided the title for Beckett's first published work of fiction, *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934): "And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutes: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts Ch. 9 v. 3-5).

Beckett's work as "the primary experience [...] of unfathomable, meaningless suffering" (1998, 157), pain stripped of any hint of eventual salvation, pain that testifies only to continued bodily suffering rather than to redemptive transcendence.

"Beaten into activity": Pained Corporeality on the Stage

In the absence of the transcendent, Beckett and Ionesco fuse corporeal and theatrical materiality as sources of physical suffering across these four plays. That is, the experience of being imprisoned in the pain-stricken corporeal body is aligned with the experience of the human body trapped on stage; to be on stage, in these plays, is to be in pain. As director Ben Barnes observes, Beckett tends "not to conceal but to confront the act of theatre and the theatre building itself and weave it into the fabric of his world by embodying so much of the 'message' in the medium" (1984, 70), and *Happy Days* and *Play* draw specific attention to the stage mechanisms of restriction, surveillance, and bodily control as sources of both diegetic and non-diegetic pain. The theatre medium traditionally depends on the live, embodied presence of the human figure on stage, or what Alain Robbe-Grillet famously identified as "cette fonction majeure de la représentation théâtrale: montrer en quoi consiste le fait d'être là" in relation to Beckett's *En attendant Godot* ("this chief function of theatre representation: showing what it means to *be there*"; 1963, 131, original emphasis).²² In the case of depicting physical pain, the theatre medium demands that the spectator confront, in real time and relatively close proximity, the seemingly suffering body of another human being, an embodied encounter which is not required by other performance media such as film or radio, or by the written media of prose or poetry. Beckett's working proficiency across a range of literary forms asks that we recognise each of his decisions to work in a specific

²² I exclude from consideration here the burgeoning production and study of plays, and particularly of Beckett's plays, produced in virtual media forms: see McMullan 2000 and Johnson and O'Dwyer 2018 for further exploration of this field.

medium as expressly linked to the precise suitability of that medium for that text's perspective on the body and bodily experience. In *Happy Days* and *Play* in particular, the metatheatrical emphasis on the role of the stage mechanisms in occasioning physical suffering links entrapment in the pain-stricken corporeal body to entrapment on the material stage. Similarly, Ionesco's *Amédée* and *Le Piéton de l'air* each figure the stage space as a site linked with bodily constriction and suffering, and the offstage space as a potential site of escape, beyond the dimensions of the corporeal state of being. In all four plays, imprisonment in the pain-stricken corporeal body is closely associated with bodily presence on the stage and within the stage mechanisms of surveillance and control.

The most immediate examples of the association of stage mechanisms and physical pain in Beckett's case are the bell in *Happy Days* and the stage lighting in both *Happy Days* and *Play*. The “[b]lazing” stage lights of *Happy Days* (2006, 138) function as the “hellish light” and “great heat” that so distresses Winnie (2006, 140, 49), and in *Play*, the swivelling spotlight “provoke[s]” the urn-bound figures to “immediate” speech when it alights on their face (2006, 307) – or, as Billie Whitelaw tellingly described the experience, they are “beaten into activity by a lacerating light” (1995, 233). The stage directions identify the three figures explicitly as “victims” of the spotlight (2006, 318), and the figures onstage react as if the spotlight causes them intense physical discomfort: “Get off me! Get off me!” W1 cries (2006, 313), and W2 dreams of the day when the light will “[g]o away and start poking and pecking at someone else” (2006, 312). Similarly, George Devine would describe the figures as “[h]ating the light – dental drill” in his staging notes for the production of the play at the Old Vic in April 1964 (Devine 1964, n.p.), figuring the spotlight explicitly in terms of invasive physical pain. The bell in *Happy Days* offers another instance of the mechanics of theatre production correlating with bodily distress; the bell that regulates Winnie's response at the beginning of both acts bears a distinct similarity to the bell that typically rings throughout a

theatre building to alert an audience to the beginning of a performance or second act, and both the play's stage directions and Winnie's monologue make it clear that this bell causes her physical pain. The bell "*rings piercingly*" then "*more piercingly*" at the beginning of the play (2006, 138), and Winnie complains in Act II, "The bell. It hurts like a knife. A gouge. One cannot ignore it" (2006, 162). Several productions of *Happy Days* have emphasised the painful quality of the regulating bell: Shivaun O'Casey, for example recalls of her 1987 production of the play at the Samuel Beckett Theatre in New York, "the sound of the bell in our production was extremely sharp, really a kind of assault on the senses" (1992, 32), and Mary Bryden observed of Natalie Abrahami's 2014 production at the Young Vic in London, for example, that "[t]he bell was more brutally jangling than any I have heard, sending Winnie's head into cringing spasms of pain" (2014, 265). Frederick Wiseman's 2006 production of *Oh les beaux jours* at the Comédie Française provided an interesting twist on the emphasis on the bell as aligned with bodily hurt. According to Pannill Camp's review, Wiseman used "the emergency alert system attention tone – a shriek familiar to listeners of American radio – as the bell that shocks both Winnie and the audience to attention at the beginning of each act" (2007, 487). The American Emergency Alert System warning tone alerts radio listeners to broadcasts in cases of local or national emergency, such as natural disasters, nuclear disaster, war or terrorist attacks; thus, to play this as Winnie's 'bell' links her regulating device firmly to bodily danger. We might compare how Sarah Frankcom's 2018 production of *Happy Days* at the Manchester Royal Exchange manipulated the theatre's lighting system to create a similar impression of extra-diegetic emergency. Eleanor Green's performance review records:

At each performance the electrical system was purposefully tripped with overuse of the bulbs, so that briefly the entire building went into emergency lighting. Although it wasn't obvious that this was exactly what had happened during the performance, the sound of the blow and the low lighting that followed gave the impression that perhaps something was wrong, and an

urgency that exceeded the world of the narrative and effectively reflected Winnie's ambient peril took hold.

(2018, n.p.)

Both Abrahami's and Frankcom's productions magnify the correlation that *Happy Days* draws between the theatre setting and corporeal threat. Thus the regulation of the human body in the theatre space becomes closely associated with the possible encounter with physical pain, and entrapment on the stage is aligned with each play's emphasis on entrapment in an inescapable, pain-stricken fleshly body.

Where Beckett emphasises the stage mechanisms as a metatheatrical source of pain and coercion, in *Amédée* and *Le Piéton de l'air* Ionesco figures the offstage space as the site of release from bodily suffering. Amédée's and Bérenger's deliverances from corporeal abjection are dramatised explicitly as liberation from the onstage space itself: Amédée rises "out of sight" above the proscenium arch, dropping the trappings of his material life back onto the stage as he goes (1978, 226-27), and Bérenger likewise "*takes flight and rapidly disappears into the flies*" (1970c, 56). The confines of the proscenium stage are thus circumscribed as sites of physical restriction and distress, set in contrast with the liberation that characterises the offstage space, the site of literal transcendence "beyond the dimensions of physical experience" as Duckworth describes Bérenger's disappearance (1972, 32). In all four plays, then, the correlation between bodily existence and physical pain is extended to include bodily presence on the stage as a similarly inevitable source of physical suffering.

In addition to the metatheatrical dynamic of the staging devices, the frequent bodily suffering of Beckett's actors likewise underlines the stage as a site of physical pain. Speaking of her experience performing in *Play*, actor Rosemary Pountney emphasised how the functioning of the spotlight plays on the performer's experience of 'entrapment' onstage:

Any actor who leaves the safety of the wings for the stage finds himself gripped by a spotlight, marked down while he delivers his lines. [...] The essential simplicity of harnessing a process already taking place in the theatre

and drawing attention to it in itself, rather than using it as an accepted part of theatrical illusion, is typical of Beckett's contribution to the contemporary stage.

(1988, 173-74)

The spotlight in *Play* is emphasised as “a coercive force” operating within “a system created by the elements of the performance itself” (Pattie 2018, 235), and the regulation of the human body within the mechanisms of the theatre medium is correlated with physical suffering. Stage plays, of course, more typically rely on performance, imitative make-believe, rather than the actual reproduction of any experience of physical pain detailed in the script, and the awareness of this caveat is crucial to the lingering playful quality of Ionesco's plays: the spectator knows that the actor playing Bérenger is not at any real risk from aerial bombardment in *Le Piéton de l'air* (1970c, 14), and that the actor playing Amédée has likely not forced himself into suffering actual indigestion for his performance (1978, 157). By contrast, however, both *Happy Days* and *Play* in fact often oblige their actors to suffer actual physical pain in order to perform the play according to the scripts' demands; as Nadia Louar observes, “le corps de l'acteur est sacrifié sur la scène du théâtre beckettien” (“the body of the actor is sacrificed on Beckett's stage”; 2006, 326). Whitelaw testified to the pain of being trapped beneath the blazing lights of the Royal Court Stage in the 1979 Beckett-directed production of *Happy Days* – “The lights got brighter and hotter still. They seemed to burn my eyeballs through my eyelids”, she remembered (1995, 153) – and Eva-Katharina Schultz recalled being “almost blinded by the lights and needed eye-drops” when Beckett commanded her to blink as little as possible under the fierce stage lights while performing the play at the Schiller-Theater, Berlin in 1971 (Knowlson 1997, 584). Juliet Stevenson, who played Winnie in Nathalie Abrahami's 2014 production at the Young Vic, London, remembered how “the extreme restriction of a head and neck alone” required by the stage mound “caused a lot of physical pain, especially in the neck and the shoulders” (2014), and

Irene Worth recalled that she “had to go to a special doctor, because I’d got into a kind of terrible muscular spasm through tension” while playing Winnie in Andrei Serban 1979 production at the Public Theatre, New York (Kalb 1989, 147). Director Carey Perloff recorded “wast[ing] a great deal of time trying to make the mound comfortable for Charlotte [Rae] to sit in, incorporating foot rests, back supports, as so on” during rehearsals for her 1990 production at the CSC Repertory Theatre, New York before realising the futility of the effort: “[Beckett] had created this hostile environment so that the actress playing Winnie didn’t have to *act* being suffocated or constricted; she actually *lived through* these emotions every time she rehearsed or performed the play” (1994, 166, original emphasis). Similarly, the extreme restriction required of the actors’ bodies in *Play* functions as a source of physical pain in performance. Beckett’s stage directions note that “for the urns to be only one yard high, it is necessary either that traps be used, enabling the actors to stand below stage level, or that they kneel throughout the play”, and the more comfortable option of sitting in the urns is specifically forbidden (2006, 319). For the actor to either stand or kneel for an extended period of time is almost inevitably painful.²³ In both *Happy Days* and *Play*, then, physical pain is often an embodied, *lived* experience rather than a simulated performance, emphasising the stage space as a site of physical struggle.

This extended association between material stage presence and physical pain calls particular attention to the spectator’s role as a witness to this onstage suffering. If stage mechanisms and a ‘coercive’ theatre system are framed as causing pain to the body onstage, then the spectator in the auditorium is positioned somewhere on a spectrum between direct confrontation with this spectacle of suffering and complicity with its production, since the

²³ Whitelaw highlighted the physical difficulty of standing in performance when she expressed sympathy for David Warrilow performing in Beckett’s *A Piece of Monologue* – “oh god, my heart bled for him standing absolutely still” (1992, 9) – and both Elaine Scarry and Emilie Morin record enforced standing for long period of time being used as a method of torture (Scarry 1985, 47; Morin 2017, 193). Carrie Preston has testified to the significant physical pain occasioned by kneeling onstage for long periods, writing in the context of traditional Japanese *noh* performance (2016, 1).

onstage figures are prompted to action “first and foremost by the audience’s own act of witnessing, of watching, of presence”, as David Foster notes in relation to *Play* (2013, 215). Several Beckett scholars have observed, for example, how the tormenting spotlight in *Play* seems to replicate the equally tormenting gaze of the audience or, as Katherine Weiss puts it, “[t]he privileged inquisitive gaze of the audience parallels the spotlight and, as a result, is also guilty of torturing the actors” (2001, 188).²⁴ George Devine would shorthand the desired performance dynamics as “Audience privileged/actors tortured” in his staging notes for the Old Vic première production (Devine 1964, n.p.); the seated spectators ‘demand’ a performance from the onstage figures just as surely as the spotlight does, and Graley Herren argues that “just as the light exerts corrosive constraints upon the players, so too the audience ‘victimise’ the light, constraining it to illuminate, to expose, to reveal” (Herren 2009, 17). Comparably, in *Happy Days* Winnie imagines the exasperating Mr and Mrs “Shower” or “Cooker” observing her in her uncomfortable position (2006, 156). Shane Weller cites Beckett’s explanation of the etymological resonances of the names “Shower” and “Cooker”, derived from German “schauen” and “kucken” (to look) to explain how Winnie’s provoking spectating couple implicates the auditorium spectators in performance (Weller 2005, 150); the projected audience thus find themselves entangled, rendered indirectly complicit, in the couple’s insensitive gawking at Winnie’s distress. Audience members in *Play* and *Happy Days* “positioned as an inherent part of the performance”, framed by the onstage action as “participants caught up in the production process”, Anna McMullan observes (2010, 13, 126), in ways that implicate spectators disconcertingly in the spectacles of suffering before them. The emphasis on the stage as a space of bodily pain in *Happy Days* and *Plays* underlines in

²⁴ See Beloboradova and Verhulst (2019) for a detailed reading of how the spotlight was accorded increasingly “human” interrogative qualities in Beckett’s redrafting of the *Play*, “waver[ing] between anthropomorphic agency and mechanical execution” (193).

turn the presence of the spectator as witness to onstage suffering, to frequently discomfiting effect.

In fact, Beckett's unsettling depiction of physical pain in *Happy Days* and *Play* speaks to a particular vein of anxiety regarding the witness's relation to the world's seemingly unending manifestations of suffering that was preoccupying Beckett at the time. In a 1961 interview with Tom Driver, Beckett complained:

[My plays] deal with distress. Some people object to this in my writing. At a party an English intellectual – so-called – asked me why I write always about distress. As if it were perverse to do so! He wanted to know if my father had beaten me or my mother had run away from home to give me an unhappy childhood. I told him no, that I had had a very happy childhood. Then he thought me more perverse than ever. I left the party as soon as possible and got into a taxi. On the glass partition between me and the driver were three signs: one asked for help for the blind, another help for orphans, and the third for relief for the war refugees. One does not have to look for distress. It is screaming at you even in the taxis of London.

(Driver 1979, 221)

Here, Beckett is troubled not only by the very existence of suffering, but also by the witness's confrontation with it. He is careful to dissociate himself from any direct association with the physical distress that preoccupies his work – insisting to his interlocutor that he was not “beaten” by his father, for example – and instead frames his perspective as that of the witness confronted with the seemingly inescapable spectacle of others' suffering, the images of physical distress glaring at him from the partition of the taxi in an uncanny replica of the proscenium stage space or film or television screen facing the seated spectator. Emilie Morin has convincingly traced the spectre of the Algerian conflict to the scene that Beckett describes in this interview: she records that the only British campaign in aid of refugees and orphans during the period was one run by Oxfam (then the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief) to raise funds for Algerian war refugees, “featur[ing] striking images of starving Algerian children” (2017, 237). For a generation still negotiating memories of World War II,

the revelations of violent repression, torture, and slaughter carried out by France in the ongoing Algerian War seemed to replicate the mass suffering of World War II, and Beckett and many other residents of France found themselves forced back into the position of reluctant – and reluctantly complicit – witness to the agony of the war’s victims. For many post-World War II writers, then, the unremitting suffering in the world around them – and the attendant position as witnesses to this suffering – proved an ongoing source of tension in their work. The apparently inescapable fact both of suffering and of witnessing suffering thus continued to exercise Beckett during the early 1960s, and indeed his preoccupation finds an echo in Ionesco’s own later response to similar complaints about the recurrent focus on matters of suffering and distress in his literary work: “You will be told that you should not be obsessed by such matters, that you are behaving abnormally to allow these things to obsess you. It hardly seems normal to me that we should *not* be obsessed by them” (1979, 125-26, original emphasis). These plays are not only concerned with the inescapable existence of pain itself, but also and more unsettlingly with the spectator’s relation to that pain, the inescapable witnessing of suffering.

Conclusion

These four plays emphasise the human body as a site of inevitable suffering. Where Ionesco’s *Amédée* eventually allows its protagonist a successful ascension away from his grossly material world, “la froidure humide, l’eau sale et la boue qui attendent l’homme pour l’engloutir” (“the clammy coldness, the dirty water and the mud that is waiting to envelop man”; Vernois 1991, 19), in *Le Piéton de l’air* a similar moment of seeming transcendence only reveals continued suffering – and *Happy Days* and *Play* do not permit its characters even a curtailed flight from their pain-stricken corporeality. Instead, Beckett’s figures remain anchored in both the constraining material world around them and in their own suffering

bodies. Beckett moreover subverts Christian thinking as part of this thoroughgoing refusal of the concept of bodily transcendence, playing on but eventually disallowing frameworks of atonement via redemptive forms of suffering. Both *Happy Days* and *Play*, then, assert the body as an ineluctable source of pain, and indeed of pain that is left “devoid of the prospect of mitigation or spiritual comfort”, as Bryden observes (1998, 138-39), of any final compensatory end.

As part of this foregrounding of inescapable bodily suffering, these plays repeatedly associate corporeal and theatrical materiality with physical distress, drawing an insistent connection between the experience of being trapped in the pain-stricken human body and of being trapped on stage. *Happy Days* and *Play* emphasise the stage mechanisms of painful restriction and bodily control, and *Le Piéton* and *Amédée* both code bodily transcendence as a literal ascension above and away from the stage space. This extended association between physical pain and bodily presence onstage foregrounds the spectator’s role as a witness to the suffering before them – a witness who is both to some degree complicit in this spectacle, and yet is also herself trapped in the auditorium, bound by social convention to remain seated and attentive throughout the duration of the performance, and who is thus also “playing a role, and subject to the mechanisms of the theatre”, as Anna McMullan puts it (201, 113). These plays, then, interrogate not only inescapable pain, but also the seemingly inescapable experience of witnessing pain, and the troubled relationship between witness and sufferer. The spectator’s role as inadequate and even implicated witness to pain is put under increasing unsettling pressure in both plays. Yet as we will see in the next chapter, in *Not I* Beckett would intensify this pressure to a still more extreme degree – and in ways that would prove still more distressing for his spectators.

Chapter Five

Testimony and Trauma:

Not I and Marguerite Duras's *L'Amante anglaise*

Samuel Beckett's *Not I* (1972) and Marguerite Duras's *L'Amante anglaise* (1968) both stage a female voice attempting to recall an experience of intense bodily suffering. *Not I* describes a pain endured, with Mouth's illuminated lips on stage recounting her sudden physical and mental collapse and gradual return to consciousness in an anguished, fast-paced monologue.¹ *L'Amante anglaise* describes a pain inflicted, with Claire Lannes seated passively onstage, unemotionally confessing to the murder and subsequent dismemberment of her cousin Marie-Thérèse Bousquet.² Both plays are structured as a woman's verbal recollection of past suffering rather than as bodily enactment or re-enactment, and this focus on the spoken testimony to suffering is emphasised by the inclusion in both plays of a secondary character whose identity is defined entirely in relation to the women's speech: *Not I*'s cloaked and mute "Auditor" and *L'Amante anglaise*'s "Interrogator", respectively. In their shared format as "plays whose action cannot be acted, only recalled", as Gabrielle M. Cody describes Duras's text (2000, 16), both *Not I* and *L'Amante anglaise* speak to the burgeoning popularity

¹ *Not I* was written in English in early 1972 and premiered at the Forum Theater in the Lincoln Center, New York, in September 1972, with Jessica Tandy playing Mouth. It was first performed in Britain in January 1973 at the Royal Court Theatre, with Billie Whitelaw playing Mouth; the BBC would film Whitelaw's performance (in close-up, excluding the Auditor) in February 1975 and broadcast it on BBC Two in April 1977. Beckett translated the play into French by the end of May 1974 at the pressing of the acclaimed French actor Madeleine Renaud, and the play, directed this time by Beckett himself, premiered in French at the Théâtre d'Orsay in April 1975, with Renaud playing Mouth.

² *L'Amante anglaise* went through several published variations over the course of its development. Duras first tackled the story in the 1959 play *Les Viaducs de la Seine-et-Oise*, which directly enacted rather than retrospectively narrated the events of a real-life 1949 murder; Duras would later withdraw performance rights for this version, criticising it as "une vue très superficielle du crime" ("a very superficial view of the crime"; Piatier, n.p.). *L'Amante anglaise* then appeared in novel form in 1967, now structured as a *post facto* interrogation of local barman, husband Pierre, and Claire Lannes, with multiple details of the original murder having been altered. The theatrical version of *L'Amante anglaise* appeared the following year, published by Gallimard and staged at the Théâtre de Chaillot. A lightly edited version of the play would be published in 1991 under the title *Le Théâtre de l'amante anglaise*. Barbara Bray's English translation for Hamish Hamilton, also entitled *L'Amante anglaise*, is based on the 1967 novel version, and consequently this chapter will provide new English translations for quotations taken from the 1968 playtext.

of testimony literature following World War II, or what Nathalie Aubert identifies as the “social and cultural imperative to testify, born out of the war” as a defining characteristic of much literature of the period (2015, 289). Testimony literature in the war’s immediate aftermath was typified by the foregrounding of a responsibility to bear witness to these events, “the duty to preserve the memory of pain” as a motivating factor for writing (Davis 2018, 12); Dori Laub quotes one extermination camp survivor’s explanation: “We wanted to survive so as to live one day after Hitler, in order to be able to tell our story” (1992, 78). By 1977, Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel would go so far as to claim a special status for testimony literature in the long post-war period: “If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle, and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony. We have all been witnesses and we all feel that we have to bear testimony” (1996, 9). Although not dealing explicitly with the events of World War II, *Not I* and *L’Amante anglaise* both reflect the influence of this literary and broader social interest in the personal record of witnessed or experienced suffering in the war’s long aftermath.

However, both *Not I* and *L’Amante anglaise* also challenge much of what their contemporary audiences might have expected from a traditional testimony performance, sceptically interrogating the possibility of any ‘successful’ intersubjective communication of pain. Neither play offers any complete or coherent narrative of suffering, and instead presents a splintered, evasive collage of muddled memory fragments that refuses the spectator any clear sense of the events being described. Within a purported testimony framework, then, *Not I* and *L’Amante anglaise* bear formal parallels with psychological accounts of the improperly or incompletely processed trauma memory, defined by clinical literature as the repressed or fragmented trace of a traumatic event which is too unbearably distressing to be assimilated into the standard memory ‘narrative’, and which is thus more likely to overwhelm the survivor with disorienting sensory experience than to serve as the stable basis for articulate

testimony (Caruth 2014, xiii-xviii; Herman 2015, 37-47) Several scholars have noted the recurrence of trauma symptomology in post-World War II literature. Although he does not deal with Samuel Beckett's or Marguerite Duras's work directly, Colin Davis identifies trauma symptomology – such as the “compulsion to repeat” an “unsettled chronology”, and a speaker or narrator who exhibits “detachment from his own emotional life” (2018, 76-77) – as one of the “traces of war” pervading French and Francophone literature in the second half of the twentieth century (2018, 4). Elsewhere, Rhys Tranter identifies *Not I* as “one of the most distinguished traumatic stage-works of the twentieth century” by dint of its disjointed temporality of repressed suffering (2018, 112-13), and Jonathan Boulter has suggested that *Not I* parallels trauma symptomology in Mouth's bracketing of the traumatic event as though it occurred to someone else (2013, 71-73).³ Trauma historian Dominick LaCapra explain that “[t]rauma is a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence” (2014, 41), and this is precisely the phenomenon exhibited in *Not I* and *L'Amante anglaise*. These fragmented narratives deny their speakers' attempts at testimony and their spectators' attempts at comprehension, and withholding any clear understanding of the text's narrative events, or even of the precise nature of the physical suffering at their heart: what has actually happened to Mouth? What is the pain that she so fears will return? How did Claire manage to kill Marie-Thérèse by herself – and why? As David Houston Jones observes: “While testimony depends on a secure grounding in the witness's experience of trauma, trauma, by its very nature, is epistemologically insecure” (2011, 5), and the trauma of intense suffering becomes a hiatus in these two plays. *Not I* and *L'Amante anglaise* offer a radically reduced

³ By contrast, little work has yet been done to identify *L'Amante anglaise* as a post-war trauma text; its relevant resonances have been overshadowed by the focus on the more obvious status of *La Douleur* and *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) as trauma testimony.

Among those who treat *La Douleur* as trauma testimony, see Comfort 2015, Slade 2007, Kaplan 2005, Crowley 2000, and Gorarra 1997. For treatment of *Hiroshima mon amour* as trauma testimony, see Sanos 2016, Just 2012, and Varsava 2011.

sense of how far suffering – and particularly traumatic suffering – can be communicated, testified to, or witnessed.

The specific dynamics of the trauma experience explains the inclusion of Beckett's *Not I* and Duras's *L'Amante anglaise* in this project: two plays that might otherwise seem more notable for the very elision of physical pain from their scripts. Claire Lannes's refusal to acknowledge her cousin's suffering is crucially framed by our awareness that a murder and mutilation has taken place prior to her interrogation, investing the play's scenes with a pervasive sense of concealed agony. Meanwhile, although James Knowlson and John Pilling observe that "*Not I* probably comes indeed as close as Beckett has ever done to reproducing the searing screams of human suffering" (1979, 200), Beckett's play offers little explicit articulation of physical pain. In a rather literal variation of the "aesthetic of the anaesthetic" identified in Chapter Three, here Mouth focuses her monologue primarily on her experience of bodily numbing or dissociation rather than on physical pain, and even claims that she is in fact "not suffering!" at all (2006, 377). Trauma psychiatrist Judith Herman notes that somatic dissociation, "dissociative or numbing symptoms", as a common manifestation of trauma, in terms that parallel Mouth's own described experience in *Not I*: "Perceptions may be numbed or distorted, with partial anaesthesia or the loss of particular sensations" (2015, 34, 43). Mouth appears to be undergoing some degree of traumatic dissociation from her own body here, simultaneously unsettled by the absence of pain, and resisting re-association with her body, which seems to threaten the return of physical suffering. There is an implication that this is only a momentary absence of an otherwise chronic suffering, insinuated in Mouth's suspicion that she is only "painless... so far" (2006, 381), is "*meant* to be suffering" (2006, 377; original emphasis), and by her "awful thought" that "feeling was coming back" (2006, 379); we are constantly met with suggestions of a concealed pain that exists beyond the boundaries of the stage moment. Her frantic avowals that she is "not suffering" insistently

hint at a pain that we are not allowed to witness (2006, 377), rather as *L'Amante anglaise* tells us there has been a murder but refuses us any direct testimony to physical pain or violence. It has often been observed that the stated "I" in the phrase "Not I" testifies by implication to Mouth's own subjective selfhood, "assert[ing] what it cancels, bring[ing] into being in the mind what is referentially denied" (Bartlett 1987, 6); Mouth's statement "not suffering" works in the same manner; presence is apophatically declared by way of a stated absence. Kate McLoughlin has identified this "rhetorical trick of communication-by-implication", by which "absence conjures up presence", as a recurring feature of modern war writing (2009, 21-22), observing that the refusal of full expression equates to a "confession of smallness and ineptitude [...] signalling a linguistic miniature mayday" on the part of the victim or witness faced with an overwhelming degree of horror (2009, 22). Here, similarly, the refusal of pain's expression testifies to the extent of that very pain, while simultaneously withholding any possibility for lucid or rational understanding of this same suffering; Mouth denies her listeners any cognitively coherent idea of her pain, while also intimating the sheer extremity of her suffering.

This framework, moreover, undermines the idea of the successful articulation of trauma as a redemptive means of healing. European and American post-war trauma psychiatry understood the shared communication of intense suffering as being not only possible, but also crucial to recovery, "testimony as a ritual of healing", as trauma psychiatrist Judith Herman terms it (2005, 181).⁴ In a literary and cultural context wherein the recovery of the memory of suffering is equated to a recovery from the memory of suffering, the unstable narration of pain in *Not I* and *L'Amante anglaise* effects a wilful refusal of healing, with the spectator rendered helpless witness to a ceaseless struggle rather than collocutor in the process of recuperation. They reflect the contemporary "questioning of the

⁴ See particularly Miles 1951, Mulinder 1945, and the anonymous "Progress in the Psychiatry of War" (1945).

adequacy of literature to convey the magnitude of what it records” (MacKay 2009b, 8) – including the magnitude of physical suffering – that arose in the long aftermath of World War II, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s prose work of Francophone Holocaust survivors such as Charlotte Delbo, Elie Wiesel, and Jorge Semprún, who dismiss the possibility of any individual without direct experience of the Nazi camps ever being able to fully comprehend their own experiences there. *Not I* and *L’Amante anglaise* destabilise any sense of successful intersubjective communication, rendering “the activity of listening” as merely “an inexhaustible and terrible pensum” and a distressing encounter for both parties, as Elizabeth Barry observes (2008, 128). These two plays thus trouble the post-war concept of the potentially redemptive function of testimony by destabilising both the memory of suffering and the grounds for communicating it to another being in any cognitively coherent form.

Indeed, the very concept of shared and consequently healing testimony is antithetical to the more frequently unsettling experience of watching *Not I* or *L’Amante anglaise* in theatrical performance. In place of any cognitively intelligible insight into the Other’s suffering, *Not I* and *L’Amante anglaise*’s corrupted versions of testimony tend instead to stimulate a responsive corporeal discomfort in their spectators. Jonathan Boulter voices a common feeling when he describes how often the audience to *Not I*, “one of Beckett’s most disturbing plays”, is “assaulted – and I think this is the precise word – by a narrative it cannot ever fully expect to comprehend, perhaps ultimately does not even wish to comprehend” (2013, 71-72). Boulter’s choice of the word “assault” here attests to the predominantly physical – and physically unpleasant – sensation stimulated by the play. Beckett’s oft-cited dictum that *Not I* should be “[a]ddressed less to the understanding than to the nerves of the audience which should in a sense share her bewilderment” indicates that the play’s staging of corporeal distress is deliberately scripted to provoke a respondent corporeal discomfort in the audience in place of any cognitive comprehension (*Letters IV* 2016, 311; original emphasis).

Critics and reviewers of *L'Amante anglaise* too have frequently remarked on the physical effect of the play in performance, working “presque charnellement” on the spectator’s body (“almost carnally, corporeally”; Marcabru 1969, n.p.), “un corps-à-corps” between spectator and performance (“hand to hand combat”; Galey 1971, n.p.). Yet while the affective transmission of physical suffering routinely blurs the corporeal boundaries between staged and spectating bodies in both plays, this contagion is not positioned as any sort of revelatory shared experience, or as a healing unity effected between sufferer and witness. In line with the increasingly sceptical interrogation of the testimony genre in late post-war literature, *Not I* and *L'Amante anglaise* scrutinise not the experience of pain itself, but rather the severely limited scope for any intersubjective understanding of such pain. The witnessed physical suffering may elicit an affective felt response in the onlooker, but it cannot itself be *known* or *understood* in any meaningful sense. The listening figures in *Not I* and *L'Amante anglaise* are left, along with the spectators in the auditorium, to struggle with the incoherent and unstable fragments of Mouth’s and Claire’s memories of their overwhelming encounters, troubling what Debarati Sanyal has identified as the post-war idea of “the responsibility of those who did not suffer” to “bear witness to the survivor’s testimony” (2009, 92). Each play is “less a drama of emission than a drama of reception” (Elam 1986, 139); more specifically, they are dramas of *frustrated* reception, less about pain itself than about the thwarted attempt to bear witness to that pain. *Not I* and *L'Amante anglaise* probe the experience of witness, not victim; the ordeal of the suffering Other, the unknowable “not I”, remains fundamentally incomprehensible.

“tell how it had been”: Samuel Beckett, Marguerite Duras, and World War II

Like Beckett, Duras was not a native of mainland France. Born and mostly raised in Indochina, and fluent in Vietnamese, she moved to France permanently only in 1932 to study

at the Sorbonne, and throughout the rest of her life she would frequently testify to her sense of alienation from the French national identity, telling Luce Perrot in his television documentary of her in 1988, for example, “Je pensais partir de France, souvent, quitter ça. Peut-être que je ne me suis jamais tout à fait habituée à ce pays” (“I have often thought of leaving France, abandoning all this. Perhaps I never really got used to this country”; Perrot 1988). Apart from their shared status as non-native inhabitants of France, Beckett’s and Duras’s experiences of World War II bore a number of other marked similarities. Both found themselves caught up in the chaos of the Nazi invasion of France. Both joined the Paris Exodus during the German invasion in June 1940 – Duras fleeing to Tours with her Vichy government employers and Beckett to Arcachon with Deschevaux-Dusmesnil – and both returned to Paris in September 1940, when the initial violence of Nazi Occupation appeared to have subsided. Both would eventually work for the French Resistance during the Occupation – although Duras joined much later than Beckett, in September 1943, following an extended period working for the Vichy government as a secretary at the *commission de contrôle du papier* – and both worked as delivery messengers for their respective networks. Beckett’s Gloria SMH cell was betrayed in 1942 by Robert Alesch; Duras’s cell, headed by the future president French François Mitterrand, was betrayed in June 1944 by a still-unknown individual (Adler 1998, 119). Both saw their friends arrested and deported by the Gestapo in Paris: Beckett’s friend Paul Léon died at Drancy and his translator Alfred Perón at Mauthausen; Duras’s friend Paul Philippe and her sister-in-law Marie-Louise Antelme perished at Ravensbrück, her younger brother Paul was killed in September 1940 during the Japanese invasion of French Indochina, and her husband Robert Antelme would nearly die in Dachau. Duras’s later writings on the war emphasised her sense of the period as one of intense physical suffering: she chronicles her own “sympathetic anorexia” as she awaited Antelme’s release from Dachau (Comfort 2015, 558). She graphically details nursing

Antelme back from the brink of death on his return to Paris in “La Douleur”, and recounts her experience of both witnessing and inflicting torture in semi-fictionalised form in ‘Albert des capitals’, in *La Douleur* (1985).⁵ Indeed, although *The War* has become widely accepted as the English title of *La Douleur*, as per Barbara Bray’s translation for the first 1986 English edition, a direct translation of the text’s title would be *The Pain* or *The Suffering*; the very title of Duras’s text emphasises the centrality of pain to the wartime experience, for non-combatants as well as combatants. Both Beckett and Duras were thus acutely aware of the profound physical suffering occasioned by World War II.

Beckett’s and Duras’s parallel experiences of World War II became, in the war’s long aftermath, two frequently intersecting lines of professional affinity. Barbara Bray, Beckett’s close confidant from 1956 onwards, would translate much of Duras’s work into English, including the 1968 prose version of *L’Amante anglaise* for the Hamish Hamilton publishing house; Anthony Cronin credits Beckett with first suggesting to Bray that she translate Duras’s work after his being impressed by the latter’s play *Le Square* (500), and correspondence between Beckett and Bray reveals that the two continued discussion of Duras’s work for many decades.⁶ Jean Pierrot surmises that “Duras a très certainement lu très attentivement l’œuvre de Beckett” (“Duras certainly read Beckett’s work very closely”; 1986, 153), and Laure Adler observes that she began writing in a Beckett-inflected style when she began sending her work to Jérôme Lindon, Beckett’s editor at Éditions de Minuit, after the war (1998, 238). Both playwrights also shared a number of actors as regular interpreters of their work in France, including Michael Lonsdale, Catherine Sellers, and Madeleine Renaud.

⁵ I follow broad convention throughout this chapter in using “La Douleur” to refer to the short text in which Duras recalls waiting for her husband Robert Antelme’s return home from Dachau and his subsequent slow and painful recovery, originally published in *Sorcières* in 1976, and *La Douleur* to refer to the 1985 collected volume in which “La Douleur” eventually appeared.

⁶ See, for example, *Letters III* 2014, 80 and *IV* 2016, 15, 183. Indeed, Bray’s involvement in Duras’s work might explain Beckett’s refusal to write a preface for Sonia Pitt-Rivers and Irina Morduch’s English prose translation of *Le Square* for John Calder in 1958 (*Letters III* 2014, 186); his fervent admiration for the play may have yielded to his personal loyalty to Bray, who even by 1958 was quickly establishing herself as Duras’s primary English translator.

Renaud would in fact play both Claire Lannes in Claude Régy's première production of *L'Amante anglaise* at the Théâtre de Chaillot in 1968, and Mouth under Beckett's own direction in the 1975 production of *Not I* at the Petit d'Orsay.⁷ Adler notes that it was Beckett who had encouraged Renaud to take on her first Durassian stage role in Jean-Louis Barrault's 1965 production of *Des journées entières dans les arbres* at the Théâtre de l'Odéon (1998, 253), just as he had earlier encouraged Bray to take up translation of Duras's work. Following this early championing of her work, Beckett would continue to support Duras's theatre throughout his life. In January 1957 he wrote to Duras to congratulate her on the adaptation of her novel *Le Square*, which aired that month on Paris National Radio after having played at the Studio de Champs-Élysées in September and October 1956: "Madame, Je n'avais pas été voir votre pièce au Studio. Je viens de l'écouter à la radio. Elle est merveilleuse, merveilleuse" ("Dear Mme Duras, I had not been to see your play at the Studio. I have just been listening to it on the radio. It is marvellous, marvellous"; *Letters III* 2014, 10). He would subsequently sing the praises of this "[o]verwhelmingly moving", "quite extraordinary" play to Donald McWhinnie and Alan Simpson, recommending that both contact Duras about possible future productions (*Letters III* 2014, 13, 15), and instructing Avigdor Arikha, "You mustn't miss it. [...] Do go, and tell your friends to do the same. It is (for me) an infinitely affecting text" (*Letters III* 2014, 146). Adler also records Beckett attending what he would call the "wonderful" opening night of *Les Viaducs de la Seine-et-Oise* (the original instantiation of *L'Amante anglaise*) at the Théâtre de Poche Montparnasse in February 1963 (1998, 242), and he would write to Jocelyn Herbert that *Des Journées entières dans les arbres* at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in December 1965 was a "[t]riumph"

⁷ Madeleine Renaud also played in Roger Blin's 1963 *Oh les beaux jours* and Jean-Marie Serreau's 1966 *Va et vient*, both at the Théâtre de l'Odéon, and in Jean-Louis Barrault's 1965 *Des journées entières dans les arbres* at the Théâtre de l'Odéon, Claude Régy's 1977 *L'Eden cinéma* at the Théâtre d'Orsay, and the 1983 Duras-directed première of *Savannah Bay* at the Théâtre Renaud-Barrault. Catherine Sellers and Michael Lonsdale would also appear in productions of *L'Amante anglaise* and productions of Beckett's plays during the two playwrights' lifetimes.

(*Letters III* 2014, 682). Beckett and Duras were two writers bound by mutual admiration as well as historical circumstance.

Given the correspondence between Beckett's and Duras's intersecting professional lives, "on peut même se demander si on trouve dans le théâtre européen de cette période deux écrivains qu'on puisse comparer avec autant de profit", as Matthijs Engelberts puts it ("One might wonder if it's possible to find any other two writers in European theatre of this period who can be compared to such effect"; 2001, 223). Specifically, in this case, Beckett's *Not I* and Duras's *L'Amante anglaise* both enact the failure of any redemptive intersubjective understanding of another being's physical pain. This depiction is consistent with Beckett's sceptical probing of pain epistemology across his work, and with Duras's own broader interest in interrogating "the emptied space of unrepresentable experience" throughout her writings (Cody 2000, 17). However, the manner in which *Not I* and *L'Amante anglaise* rework assumptions about testifying to suffering also bears the more specific influence of the development of the testimony genre in 1960s and 1970s France. During the second half of the 1940s, many of the testimony texts published in France held their harsh vision of wartime suffering in balance with a predominantly optimistic idea of the redemptive function of testimony before a witnessing public. Early post-war texts such as Agnès Humbert's *Notre guerre: souvenirs de résistance* (1946), Suzanne Birnbaum's *Une Française juive est revenue* (1946), Suzanne Busson's *Dans les griffes nazies* (1946), Robert Antelme's *L'Espèce humaine* (1947), and Louise Alcan's *Sans armes et sans bagages* (1947) were grounded in a faith in the ultimately communicable nature of such pain, and in the possibility of laying traumatic suffering to rest by way of intersubjective articulation, the idea that "[r]emembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims" (Herman 2015, 1). This publishing trend corresponded to the political climate of the day, which likewise

promoted the idea of restitutive revelation-and-recovery – although by means that tended to prioritise the semblance of swift social redress and reconstruction rather than individual healing. The immediate aftermath of the war in France was marked by a period of placatory political conciliation, an attempt to lay the country’s wartime suffering to rest by means of a hasty series of trials during the *épuration légale*, which ultimately saw France exonerate the perpetrators of wartime violence far more quickly than it would acknowledge the suffering of many of its war victims – particularly its Jewish victims. Of over 7,000 death sentences accorded to Nazi collaborators by military and civilian courts during the *épuration légale*, only 1,500 would eventually be carried out, the others being commuted by de Gaulle as part of his drive for post-war reconciliation (Rousso 1991, 8); similarly, the High Court’s sentencing of eighteen of the highest-ranking French war criminals ultimately resulted in only three executions (Jackson 2001, 577). We have already seen Beckett evoking this amnesiac mood caustically in his December 1946 letter to Arland Ussher, complaining of the behaviour of General de Gaulle’s government who, “happily engaged in reorganising the salvation of the country”, were “quite prepared to forget and forgive – the so rude interruption” (*Letters II* 2012, 47). The belief in a redemptive articulation and consequent healing of past suffering typified both the literary and political climate in 1940s and 1950s France.

By contrast, resurgent anxiety about France’s role in World War II – and particularly its recurrent failures to witness or respond to the suffering within its own borders – overtook the country’s cultural imagination during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Western Europe’s gradual acknowledgement of the Nazi’s specific targeting of the Jewish people during the war stimulated new public recognition of the role the Vichy government had played in aiding and abetting the Holocaust. Further galvanised by the 1971 release of Marcel Ophüls’s documentary film *La Chagrin et la pitié*, which explored wartime French *attentisme* and

collaboration,⁸ new political and cultural attention refocused on incidents such as the mass arrests of Jewish citizens by the French police (including the infamous Vélodrome d'Hiver round-up in July 1942), the deportation of a total of 76,000 French and foreign Jews to concentration camps during the Occupation (Rouso 1991, 7), and the maintenance of the Drancy, Compiègne, Pithiviers and Rolande-la-Beaune internment camps on French soil, with all but Compiègne being run by French rather than German personnel long into the war (Jackson 2001, 360). The French people were faced with the unsettling disclosure of how many citizens had occasioned, exacerbated, or even simply ignored the intense physical suffering of those around them. Following Henry Rouso's seminal diagnosis of the "Vichy syndrome", the initial suppression and subsequent return of memories of wartime France (1991, 10), we might define the long aftermath of the war in France in terms of mass cultural trauma, the traumatic event being "not immediately assimilated [...] subjected to social and political denial" in trauma theorist Cathy Caruth's words (2014, xiii), and "mak[ing] its impact felt belatedly, often after a period of latency", as Paul K. Saint-Amour notes (2015, 14): an appropriate cultural backdrop for the incidences of individual trauma memory depicted in *Not I* and *L'Amante anglaise*. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub have coined the term "crisis of witnessing" to describe the post-war cultural recognition of forms of suffering that exceed intersubjective testimony or witnessing (1992, xvii); it was precisely this crisis, and its impact on the French literary imagination, that formed the context for Beckett's and Duras's scripting of their own plays of frustrated witnessing.⁹ The revived memory of overlooked wartime suffering reawakened anxieties about the individual's ability to disregard

⁸ French authorities would not permit Ophül's film to be screened on French television until 1981, but its near-instant global fame nevertheless rendered it a *cause célèbre* in France soon after its release in 1971.

⁹ Although Beckett wrote *Not I* in English before translating it into French, he was living in France during 1972, the year in which *Not I* was written and premiered, dividing his time between Paris and Ussy-sur-Marne, with one extended trip to Morocco with Suzanne.

the suffering of others, and raised the associated question of how far a new effort to bear witness to another's pain might expiate one's complicity or alleviate that pain.

Duras's own 1976 testimonial text "La Douleur", in which she describes waiting for her husband Robert Antelme's return from Dachau concentration camp and his slow and painful recovery from the ordeal, reflects this more sceptical shift in contemporary attitudes to war testimony.¹⁰ Duras's prose text operates through an elliptical narrative style and disorienting tendency to self-revision, constantly undermining its own claims to veracity – particularly as regards her understanding of her husband Robert L.'s pain. While waiting in recently liberated Paris for news of Robert L., Duras frequently imagines herself in intense sympathetic identification with her husband's suffering, to the point of repeatedly declaring a direct corporeal consciousness of his moment of death. This idea of a corporeally empathetic apprehension is resoundingly discredited by Robert L.'s eventual return home:

In a ditch, face down, legs drawn up, arms outstretched, he's dying. Dead. [...] Yes, that's what happened. I'm certain of it. I walk faster. His mouth is half open. It's evening. He thought of me before he died. The pain is so great.
(1986, 7)

And suddenly certainty, certainty bursts in: he's dead. Dead. Dead. [...] It had happened in the space of a second. No more throbbing in my head. Not now. [...] I can't feel my heart any more. Horror mounts in a slow flood, I'm drowning. [...] Where is D.? [...] I must see him because something new has happened.
I went to see him. Apparently nothing had happened.
(1986, 37)

Duras proffers an extreme version of the idea of corporeal empathy between victim and 'witness', only to caustically reveal the self-deluding nature of this model of pain in each instance. This self-subverting form of testimonial writing indicates an intensified scepticism

¹⁰ Claire Gorarra draws "La Douleur" into direct comparison with Antelme's own *L'Espèce humaine* and its "faith in a mimetic and linear form of testimonial narrative [...] with a stable self at its centre" in *L'Espèce humaine* in order to demonstrate how Duras's writing "posits a far more complex model of bearing witness than that of texts written in the immediate aftermath of the war" (1997, 244-45). For further direct comparison of the testimony style in Duras's *La Douleur* and Antelme's *L'Espèce humaine*, see Davis 1997.

about the process of bearing witness to another being's intense suffering in the long aftermath of World War II, as the French public increasingly came to see the intense suffering of others as a fundamentally incommunicable, incomprehensible phenomenon: "You'll never comprehend. And I cannot explain it to you", as French writer Charlotte Delbo explained in *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, her searing 1965 memoir of her time in Auschwitz and Ravensbrück (1995, 255). It was within this post-war cultural context of the loss of faith in the redemptive power of testimony, of the possibility only of "bear[ing] witness in the name of the impossibility of bearing witness" (Agamben 2012, 34), that *Not I* and *L'Amante anglaise* had their geneses.

"no idea what she was saying!": Impossible Testimony

Not I and *L'Amante anglaise* are both structured as compulsive attempts to testify to trauma, to piece together a comprehensible narrative of the experience or witnessing of physical suffering that can be communicated to a waiting listener. In *Not I*, Mouth speaks urgently, almost without drawing breath, constantly attempting and re-attempting to shape her narrative correctly, correcting it obsessively as she goes: "all silent as the grave... no part-... what?... the buzzing?... yes... all silent but for the buzzing" (2006, 378). Indeed, psychiatrist Dori Laub's description of the trauma therapy 'talking treatment' reads uncannily like an account of *Not I* in performance:

The pressure to testify is like an instinct. There's an urgency to deal with the experience, to shape it, to make it happen, and it's like something is born. And survivors definitely have the pressure to do so. They need appropriate circumstances – a totally present listener who creates the holding space for them to do it. But once they find it, they really allow it to come. And it comes out with a force. They don't want to stop.

(2014, 48)

L'Amante anglaise replicates this same anguished drive to testimony, with Claire Lannes not only responding willingly to the Interrogator's questions but in fact fighting to continue her confession beyond his own disheartened admission of defeat: "Vous voulez qu'on essaye encore?" she demands following his final words ("Shall we try again?"; 2017, 166). The text ends with her plaintive call to be allowed to continue: "Moi à votre place, j'écouterais. Écoutez-moi... je vous en supplie..." ("If I were in your place, I would listen. Listen to me... I'm begging you..."; 2017, 167). The discomfort of self-revelation is twinned in both plays with a seemingly uncontrollable desire to testify to an experience of intense suffering.

Indeed, this paradoxical compulsion to testify to an experience too horrific to acknowledge as one's own can provoke an auto-dissociation between self and memory, a refusal to accept the memory as one's own that further complicates the idea of the 'witness' to the event in question.¹¹ Duras herself describes her own apparent trauma dissociation from her war memoir "La Douleur" in her introductory note to the text:

I found this diary in a couple of exercise books in the blue cupboards at Neauphle-le-Château. I have no recollection of having written it. I know I did, I know I was the one who wrote it. I recognize my handwriting and the details of the story. [...] But I can't see myself writing the diary.

(1986, 3)

According to Duras, even the very textual history of "La Douleur" exhibit the trauma symptomology of the belated memory and auto-dissociation from the traumatic event. The female speakers in *L'Amante anglaise* and *Not I* will demonstrate a similar auto-dissociation from their own trauma memories: "Qui a dit ça?" Claire asks of her own recorded voice confessing to Marie-Thérèse's murder, vaguely assenting when the Interrogator offers her name, "Claire Lannes peut-être", in response ("Who said that?" "Claire Lannes, perhaps"; 2018, 156-57). In *Not I*, Mouth demonstrates a still more insistent version of what the

¹¹ See Herman 2015, American Psychiatric Association 2013, and Schore 2009 for further discussion of the auto-dissociation as a common symptom of traumatic memory.

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders identifies as the trauma patient's "[r]ecurrent, involuntary, and intrusive distressing memories of the traumatic event(s)" or even "[d]issociative reactions (e.g. flashbacks) in which the individual feels or acts as if the traumatic event(s) were recurring" to the point of "a complete loss of awareness of present surroundings", alongside the experience of "depersonalization", of "feeling detached from, and as if one were an outside observer of, one's mental processes or body" (2013, 271-72). "What?... Who?... No!... She!" Mouth replies furiously to some inaudible or imagined interlocutor apparently prompting her to acknowledge the suffering she speaks of as her own, and instead attempts to bear witness to her own suffering as if it is that of another, even while she is afflicted by its intrusive – and distinctly embodied – memory.

Despite these compulsive attempts at testimony, however, the fractured nature of Mouth's and Claire's accounts of suffering precludes understanding for their would-be witnesses, recalling instead "the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud" that trauma psychiatrist Judith Herman cites as "the central dialectic of psychological trauma" (2005, 1). Both women offer severely corrupted versions of the events to which they ostensibly bear testimony, leaving out numerous details which are central to their narratives of suffering – particularly details pertaining to corporeal pain and violence, whether suffered (in Mouth's case) or inflicted (in Claire's case). For an ostensible testimony to a brutal murder, for example, *L'Amante anglaise* offers very little detail of the actual violence done to Marie-Thérèse, concentrating primarily on reconstructing Claire's life and behaviour prior to the crime rather than on her murder and dismemberment of her cousin. Unlike the earliest instantiation of Duras's play, published as *Les Viaducs de la Seine-et-Oise* in 1959 and subsequently repudiated by Duras, which dramatises rather than narrates the planning and execution of Marie-Thérèse's murder and ends with Claire and her husband's arrest, in *L'Amante anglaise*, no figure representing the murdered Marie-Thérèse ever

appears on the stage; the only bodies we see are those of Pierre and Claire Lannes, seated and unmoving throughout their respective interrogation. Moreover, Marie-Thérèse's suffering is barely mentioned throughout Pierre and Claire's interviews, and although Claire does not deny committing the murder, she does repeatedly refuse to recognise her victim's pain. Even when the Interrogator manages to persuade her to briefly describe her actions in the aftermath of Marie-Thérèse's murder, she elides any graphic details as to how she dismembered her victim, substituting instead a literal moment of blindness to the other's suffering: "Dans la cave j'ai mis des lunettes noires et j'ai éteint l'électricité, j'ai éteint et j'ai mis les lunettes. Je l'avais assez vue depuis cent ans" ("In the cellar I put on dark glasses and I turned off the electric light; I turned it off and I put on my glasses. I'd seen enough of her to last me a hundred years"; 2017, 152-53). Claire doubly erases the violence she inflicts on her victim's body: first by her action of putting on glasses and extinguishing the light, and then again syntactically in the compulsive chiasmus of her confession. By thus refusing the spectator any clear sense of the physical brutality that has occurred, the play insists on the difficulty of bearing witness, immediately or retrospectively, to another being's suffering.

Likewise, Mouth's testimony is "fragmented and incomplete, punctuated (punctured) throughout with ellipses, silences, and ambiguous gestures" (Tranter 2018, 119), refusing straightforward cognitive comprehension. The rapid pace of the text in performance – "ideally at the speed of thought," Whitelaw recalled (1995, 126) – renders Mouth's words bewildering to the point of near-total unintelligibility.¹² Yet even the reader of the play's text, able to examine and re-examine Mouth's dialogue at their own leisure, struggles to piece the text together into any coherent integrity. In the long aftermath of World War II, Giorgio

¹² Estimating that *Not I* was designed to be delivered at a speaking rate of approximately 200-250 words per minute, Josh Powell has noted that "behavioural experiments have found that subjects show the ability for some comprehension at far greater speeds" – but that, crucially, "the comprehension shown in these experiments is not necessarily conscious comprehension. Comprehension may be performed but that does not mean it is experienced" (2017, 228). Beckett's play, he suggests, is built around the experience of "straining to decipher" Mouth's words (2017, 228), of confusion rather than comprehension.

Agamben would observe, “it became clear that testimony contained at its core an essential lacuna; in other words, the survivors bore witness to something that is impossible to bear witness to” (2012, 13), and Agamben’s idea of the “essential lacuna” of the testimony to intense suffering becomes literalised in the elliptical gaps that puncture the printed text of *Not I*, refusing reader or spectator any clear sense of what happened to Mouth one April morning to provoke this cycle of anguish.¹³ Textual hints have led many scholars and practitioners, from the première production’s director Alan Schneider and actor Jessica Tandy onwards, to speculate that it is an instance of sexual assault that occasions Mouth’s distress and subsequent trauma symptoms,¹⁴ but Beckett reinforced the play’s carefully constructed textual indeterminacy by way of his own refusal to provide any authorial elucidation of the central absence at the heart of Mouth’s testimony to director Alan Schneider in October 1972: “I no more know where she is or why thus than she does. All I know is in the text” (*Letters IV* 2016, 311). Again, then, we find a void at the heart of trauma testimony, an incommunicable suffering unknowable to victim and would-be witness alike. In clinical terms, the trauma experience “cannot be fully captured in *thought*, memory and *speech*”, trauma psychiatrist Dori Laub explains (1992, 78; original emphasis); so too Mouth is trapped in the compulsive attempt to testify to “nothing she could tell... nothing she could think” (2006, 382), to “effectively bear witness to the impossibility of bearing witness” (Anderton 2016, 51).

The idea of ‘unwitnessed suffering’ is also underscored by the actor’s own embodied performance onstage, and specifically the tension in *Not I* between the pain the actor experience in performance which is carefully concealed from the audience. Actors playing

¹³ For a more extensive reading of Agamben’s *Remnants of Auschwitz* (1998) in relation to Beckett’s post-war writing, see Anderton 2016 and Houston Jones 2007.

¹⁴ Alan Schneider’s notes from a pre-rehearsal meeting with Jessica Tandy, Barney Rosset, and Beckett in August 1972 mention “that he had somehow come by the idea that the woman in *Not I* had been raped” (*Letters IV* 2016, 305). Enoch Brater sees “an ominous sexual assault” in Mouth’s description of her distress lying “face down in the grass”, noting sardonically that “Beckett said he was not thinking of a rape scene, though his text seems to think otherwise” (2011, 45). Sandra Wynands argues that that “one can speculate that Mouth was raped” (2007, 103), and Lois Oppenheim refers to the text’s central-but-elided experience as “presumably a rape” (2008, 196).

Not I have repeatedly testified to the bodily pain that playing Mouth entails. Billie Whitelaw spoke of the play as the “most painful” to perform of all Beckett’s texts, and revealed that she suffered a chronic injured spine and neck as a result of her repeated performances of the role (1995, 131, 124). Ruth Geller recalls that she “suffered physically” as well as mentally when playing Mouth, and Joy Coghill-Thorne called the play “a form of torture” (Levy 2001, 145, 141); theatre critic Anthony Lane even reported the remains of blood from Lisa Dwan’s lacerated head left on her punishing stage set (2014, n.p). However, the spectator of a production of *Not I* would be forgiven for failing to detect the actor’s physical suffering in performance, given how little of her body is typically on show. In line with the script’s focus on the experience of bodily dissociation, its staging drastically curtails the visibility and the movements of the corporeal body, in what Billie Whitelaw, following Jocelyn Herbert, has called Beckett’s experiment in “how far you can remove the body altogether from the stage” (1995, 123) The play’s speaker is reduced to a pair of lips “faintly lit from close-up and below” (2006, 376), the rest of the actor’s body typically hidden from the audience’s view. Jessica Tandy, for example, was installed in a box on stage with an aperture for her mouth in the 1972 premiere performance at the Forum Theatre in New York. Billie Whitelaw’s body was covered in black cloth and kept shrouded in darkness, lit only at the mouth with the rest of her face covered with black hood, in the 1973 Royal Court production (Wakeling 2015, 97); Lisa Dwan’s entire body was hidden behind a plywood board (with an opening for her mouth) and her face was painted black in her 2009 performance directed by Walter Asmus. Even the close-up film recordings of the actor’s mouth, as in the 1977 BBC Two recording featuring Billie Whitelaw and the 2000 *Beckett on Film* recording featuring Julianne Moore, only offer some qualified indication of physical distress by way of the muscle strain visible around the mouth. *Not I*, then, goes still further in the elision of observable bodily distress from its stage than do Beckett’s own earlier plays, “poursui[vant] d’une manière logique

l'anéantissement corporel entamé dans *Fin de partie* puis poursuivi dans *Oh les beaux jours* et *Comédie*" ("following on logically from the obliteration of the body begun in *Endgame* and continued in *Happy Days* and *Play*"; Ehrhard 1976, 140). In concealing the staged body from the spectator's view – and, more specifically, bodily indications of pain – both *Not I* and *L'Amante anglaise* minimise the potential for the explicit enactment or recognition of corporeal suffering. The insistence on the actor's concealed pain on *Not I*'s stage neatly reflects the paradox of the simultaneous attempted expression and concealment of suffering throughout the play's script.

Thus we might see Julia Kristeva's description of "l'insistance sur le « rien » à dire comme manifestation ultime de la douleur" ("the insistence on 'nothing to say' as the ultimate manifestation of pain"; 1987, 264) as exemplified not only by Duras's work but also by *Not I*. The seeming coincidence of Kristeva including a section subtitled "« Pas moi » ou l'abandon" ("Not I', or Abandonment"; 1987, 45) in her essay tracing the radically alienating nature of suffering in Duras's writing points to a much deeper correspondence of thinking about the experience of pain and of witnessing pain within Beckett's and Duras's post-war work. That is, suffering – and particularly traumatic suffering – does not easily fit within the framework of verbal or visual representation. The witness's very failure to comprehend another being's pain may itself testify compellingly to the most intense experiences of unwitnessed and unwitnessable individual agony.

"helpless compassion": The Affective Transmission of Suffering

Both *Not I* and *L'Amante anglaise*, then, withhold any coherent cognitive understanding of another being's suffering, and instead work to provoke an affective corporeal response in their spectators, a "visceral, experiential" rather than an "intellectual" sense of physical suffering (Wynands 2007, 83), by way of a range of non-conventional staging methods.

Despite its lack of any explicit verbal acknowledgement of physical suffering, *Not I* routinely manoeuvres its spectators into a state of intense physical distress. Mouth's repeated instruction "pick it up" (2006, 382, 383) comes to echo the manner in which the spectators' bodies seem to "pick up" the affect of intense physical suffering in performance (2006, 382-83). The sensory overload occasioned by the sheer physical force of the performer's monologue in *Not I* stimulates a responsive corporeal discomfort or even outright distress in the spectator's own body. Spectators in various productions of *Not I* have reported experiencing intense physical shock, including hyperventilation, panic attacks and injuries sustained in attempted rushed exits from the auditorium, occasioned by the play's staging conditions.¹⁵ Theatre critic Benedict Nightingale wrote that watching Whitelaw's 1973 performance as Mouth at the Royal Court was "unusually painful – tearing into you like a grappling iron and dragging you after it, with or without your leave" (1973, 135), coding his experience of spectatorship in terms of intense physical pain and compulsive bodily response. Similarly, audience member Hannah Hiatt recalls finding herself sweating and close to tears while watching Lisa Dwan in performance at the Royal Court (2014, n.p.), and theatre critic Rosie Clarke remembers the sensation of her eyes watering and the air being driven from her lungs "almost as if compensating for the breaths that this mouth is unable to draw", alongside her awareness of how "the bodies in the darkness around me seize up in pained attentiveness" during the same production run (2014, n.p.). *Not I*'s spectators recurrently testify to their embodied response to the performance, the manner in which the physical distress before them seems to leak across the stage-audience, self-other divide and infect their own bodies.

The extreme darkness of the *Not I* auditorium heightens this sense of painful affective transmission between staged and witnessing bodies. In early productions of the play, Beckett instructed that all possible sources of illumination, other than the spotlight on Mouth and the

¹⁵ See Lennon 2018, Nonemaker 2016, Finlay 2015, Hemming 2015, and Lane 2014,

faint light half-illuminating the Auditor, be extinguished during performances of *Not I*.

Whitelaw recalls how, for the 1973 Royal Court staging:

Sam wanted *all* the lights taken out of the theatre, including the exits, the lavatories, and the aisles. There was to be no spillage of light anywhere. Jack's lighting box was covered. Heavy curtains were drawn over the doors at the back of the theatre. For the short duration of the play, there was to be no escape from Mouth for the audience.

(1995, 123)

Whitelaw's account underlines the odd combination of sensory deprivation and sensory overload that results from this intense darkness, or what theatre critic Lucia Cox described as "the sort of blackness that nudges all the other senses into overdrive" (2014). Martin Welton observes in relation to conditions of extreme theatrical darkness, "In the apparent absence of anything to *see*, the haptic senses are piqued: not necessarily [becoming] any more sensitive, but forming a more important part of awareness" (2007, 154); indeed, a similar theory has been posited to explain why temporary or permanent blindness has produced reports of lower pain thresholds and hypersensitivity to bodily pain in clinical pain studies trials, since "the absence of vision leads to a general hypersensitivity to threatening stimuli" (Slimani et al. 2013, 1997; see also Mancini 2013, and Zubek et al. 1964). The intense darkness of the auditorium plays painfully on the spectator's nervous system, provoking a sense of corporeal vulnerability in a body that is simultaneously deprived of and bombarded with sensory stimuli – and which, moreover, has lost the very literal means of escape from the auditorium typically available to the theatre spectator, since the intense darkness of *Not I*'s staging makes leaving one's seat difficult to the point of impossibility. As lighting technician and Beckett scholar Andrew Lennon observes, "The displacement of physical surroundings makes every action potentially fraught, destabilising the potential of one's own agency, as you cannot approximate any sense of distance with which to undertake an action with certainty" (2018, 60). This loss of bodily agency seems to have been felt with particular severity during Lisa

Dwan's 2016 tour of *Not I*. Health and Safety legislation permitted the production to black out the auditorium on the condition that the theatre staff wore night vision goggles; if spectators needed to leave, they could raise their hand – a hand which they could not themselves see – and staff would escort them out. Despite such precautions, the experience of this loss of bodily autonomy, combined with the assault of *Not I*'s text, proved profoundly troubling to many spectators, and incidents of panic attacks and fainting were a regular feature of the tour (Lane 2014, n.p.; Nonemaker 2016, n. p.). The intense darkness of the stage and auditorium in *Not I* denies its audience members any “positions of detached spectatorship” from which they might dispassionately contemplate the staged body (McMullan 2010, 126). The extreme darkness erases any visible boundary between stage space and auditorium space, thus blurring the associated boundary between spectator and performer to unsettling effect. We observed earlier how in *Eleutheria* the intrusion of stage matter into auditorium and of “Spectator” onto stage similarly confounded any clear line of distinction between performer and audience member; the extreme darkening of the *Not I* auditorium offers a more sophisticated version of this effect, from a playwright now more fully versed in the possibilities of stagecraft. Denied any clear cognitive understanding of the agonised attempted testimony before them, *Not I*'s spectator is nevertheless subjected to a corporeally discomfiting, disconcertingly close engagement with the physical distress enacted on stage.

Records of the early stagings of *L'Amante anglaise* demonstrate a comparable drive to intensify the spectator's unsettling sense of the corporeal encounter by bringing the actor and spectator bodies into a closer and frequently disquieting affective proximity, building on “theatre's potential to draw actors and spectators into a space of indeterminacy where the self is fluid and amorphous” to distressing effect (Noonan 2014, 6). In the play's première production in 1968, director Claude Régy placed the actors playing Pierre and Claire not on

the stage but on a platform in the middle of the auditorium, surrounded on three sides by the audience (Rykner 2017, 22), bringing more of the spectators into a closer bodily proximity to the performers than the proscenium stage would typically permit – an arrangement that in fact anticipated the “almost in the round” staging that would, unusually for one of Beckett’s plays, characterise *Not I*’s première 1972 performance at the Lincoln Center in New York (Knowlson 1997, 592). Duras specifies that the Interrogator “n’a pas de place fixe au cours de la représentation. Il fait ce qu’il veut” (“has no fixed place during the performance. He does what he likes”; 2017, 39), and Régy placed him among the audience, “déambul[ant] silencieusement, surgissant ici, surgissant là, apparaissant tout d’un coup à côté de vous quand on l’imaginait de l’autre côté de la salle” (“wandering around silently, emerging suddenly here, suddenly there, appearing out of nowhere beside you when you thought that he was at the other end of the room”; Rykner 2017, 22). This staging challenges the spectator with an uncomfortably close corporeal encounter with the Interrogator, rendered still more unnerving by the spectator’s lack of control over the performer’s proximity to her. As in *Not I*, the spectator is placed in a discomfiting position of bodily vulnerability, denied the reassuring boundary between stage and auditorium, and the transmission of bodily affect extends more readily between performer and spectator. As Liliane Papin observes, “Un spectacle de Duras n’est jamais reposant car il implique une participation totale, il se fait *avec* le spectateur et non *pour* le spectateur” (“A Duras play is never a relaxing experience, because it demands total participation. It is constructed *with* the spectator, not *for* the spectator”; 1988, 32; original emphasis). The afflictive address to the spectator’s own body is a crucial element of both plays’ probing of the dynamics of witnessing distress.

“Écoutez-moi...je vous en supplie...”: Auditor and Interrogator

We seem to have reached a paradox here in our reading of how testimony to pain functions in these two plays. If *Not I* and *L'Amante anglaise* provoke a responsive corporeal distress in their spectators, then have the plays not in fact succeeded in communicating this suffering to the spectator? That is, if physical distress can be replicated as a viscerally felt experience in the spectator's own body, surely these plays do not in fact refuse the possibility of an intersubjective understanding of pain? Indeed, Papin's observation that *L'Amante anglaise* “se fait *avec* le spectateur” (“is constructed *with* the spectator”; 1988, 32, original emphasis) recalls the distinction we noted in our introductory chapter as to the contemporary definition of “sympathy” as a feeling *for* another being, and “empathy” as a feeling *with* them. If, as Lauren Wispé puts it, “Sympathy is a way of ‘relating’ [...] empathy is a way of ‘knowing’” (1986, 318), then to “feel with” someone is to “know” what they feel. Moreover, in modern trauma and testimony theory, the responsive feeling provoked in the witness's body is frequently positioned as an essential step in aiding recovery from the traumatic experience, a crucial part of the process that allows the sufferer to undo their “entrapment” in memory and begin their healing (Laub 1992, 68). Does the manner in which *Not I* and *L'Amante anglaise* beset their spectators' bodies with a responsive physical distress not in fact imbricate the plays in a mode of testimonial healing that they otherwise seem determined to resist?

To answer this question, we must turn to the *Not I*'s and *L'Amante anglaise*'s explicit scripting of two receptive and suffering listeners within their own performance frameworks: the Auditor and the Interrogator, respectively, both crucial to our understanding of these plays as concerned primarily with the experience of witnessing suffering over the experience of suffering itself. Indeed, Enoch Brater argues for the central importance of the Auditor in *Not I*, noting that the original concept for the play seems to have been “initially sparked by Beckett's preoccupation with the isolated listener, the unidentified auditor on stage” (1975,

50). Brater's argument is supported by the close attention that Beckett pays to the Auditor figure in his early description of his idea for *Not I* in a February 1972 February letter to Barbara Bray:

Vague image for a short play of a lit face (mouth) with ? to say and a cloaked hooded figure, sex unclear, completely still throughout, listening and watching. Latter suggested by an Arab woman all hidden in black absolutely motionless at the gate of a school in Taroudant and by the watching figures in the Caravaggio Malta decollation.

(*Letters IV* 2016, 287)

Following a very brief outlining of Mouth's role – Beckett's elliptical “?” providing an early indication of the critical affective power rather than cognitive sense of Mouth's lines – Beckett focuses the rest of his description on the Auditor figure and the precedents of silent witnessing that informed it: the solitary figure observed in *El Jadida* and the onlookers to the decapitation in Caravaggio's *Beheading of St. John the Baptist* (1608). Beckett would repeat this emphasis more than a decade later; his description of Caravaggio's painting, which he again records as having “had some part in the conception of the auditor in Not I”, focuses solely on the witnessing figures within the frame, rather than the more spectacular images of the beheading itself: “The Caravaggio painting in the Valetta shows, outside & beyond the main area, at a safe distance from it, a group of watchers intent on the happening. Before the painting, from another outsideness, I behold both the horror & its being beheld” (*Letters IV* 2016, 671). Here, and still more explicitly than in his previous reference, Beckett underlines the fact of both witnessing and ‘witnessing witnessing’ that aligns both Caravaggio's painting and *Not I*: “I behold both the horror & its being beheld”. In both *Not I* and *L'Amante anglaise*, the listening figures act as framing models of spectator response in each play, “reflect[ing] the audience's role back at them from within the performance”, as Anna McMullan observes (1993, 82). The names and actions of both figures define them entirely in relation to the women's speech: the Auditor listens, and the Interrogator ask prompting

questions. They are denied any further identifying characteristics within the texts: “Policer? psychiatre? journaliste? écrivain?”, Rykner would wonder of Duras’s Interrogator (“Police officer? Psychiatrist? Journalist? Writer?”; 2017, 24); “C’est un faux problème de chercher l’identité de l’Interrogateur. Il n’y en a pas”, Duras would clarify (“It’s a false problem, trying to figure of the Interrogator’s identity. He doesn’t have one”; 1991, 1091). Both figures exist within the framework of the performances purely to receive, to bear witness to, these women’s attempted testimonies. Consequently, these two listening figures offer a crucial insight into the plays’ framing of the intersubjective communication of suffering.

On a superficial reading, it might seem that Duras’s Interrogator and *Not I*’s Auditor showcase instances of successfully shared feeling. The Interrogator, Duras’s stage directions tell us, feels intensely for Claire: “Il est désespéré par elle, pour elle” (“He is desperate for her, made desperate by her”; 2017, 40). *Not I*’s description of the Auditor’s response to Mouth likewise evokes this sense of ‘feeling with’, emphasised by the etymology of his or her “*gesture of helpless compassion*” (2006, 375): the word “compassion” very literally means ‘feeling with’, from the Latin stem *com*, “together with” and *pati*, “to suffer” (“compassion, n.”, *OED Online*). The Auditor’s ‘suffering with’ Mouth suggests a form of successfully communicated testimony.¹⁶ Yet it is crucial to recognise the way in which *Not I* and *L’Amante anglaise* carefully undermine any potentially optimistic interpretations of their listening figures’ functions. However closely they attend to these women’s testimonies, and however much they suffer responsively with them, both the Auditor and the Interrogator ultimately fail in their attempts to bear comprehending witness to Mouth and Claire, let alone

¹⁶ Indeed, the frequency with which Beckett scholarship has interpreted the Auditor as some form of therapist or psychiatrist demonstrates how this idea of shared feeling or experience has been read as indicative of some potential recovery or resolution from the experience of traumatic suffering. “We might consider the figure of the Auditor as analogous to the psychoanalyst, [...] perhaps fulfilling a therapeutic function”, Rhys Tranter muses (2018, 118). “The Auditor’s absorbed attention may well seem the profession listening of a psychiatrist”, Katharine Worth likewise observes (1986, 170), and Sandra Wynands more emphatically asserts that the “Auditor assumes the role of the psychiatrist” (2007, 102).

to help them heal. *Not I*'s stage direction specifies that the Auditor responds to Mouth not simply with “*compassion*”, but with a “*helpless compassion*” that offers no aid to Mouth, and that is powerless to effect any meaningful change in her suffering. In performance, the Auditor’s failure to fully comprehend or aid Mouth is conveyed by the very literal form of ‘compassion fatigue’ that he or she exhibits in response to Mouth’s relentless tirade, his or her responsive gestures “lessen[ing] with each recurrence till scarcely perceptible” by the end of the play (2006, 375). The French translation *Pas moi*, completed later in May 1974, intensifies this sense of the defeat or failure of fellow feeling in the face of intense suffering: here, Beckett describes the Auditor as responding to Mouth with “un mouvement fait de blâme et de pitié impuissante” (“a gesture of disapproval and helpless pity”; 2014, 95),¹⁷ the Auditor’s powerlessness to help Mouth now coupled with a more adamant recoil from the suffering that threatens a distressing contagion without any hope of consequent healing.

Similarly, Duras’s Interrogator surrenders his attempts to comprehend Claire’s testimony by the end of the plays, “découragé” (“discouraged”; 2017, 166) at the lack of progress towards any fuller understanding as to “qui est cette femme, Claire Lannes, et pourquoi elle dit avoir commis ce crime” (“who this woman, Claire Lannes, is, and why she claims to have committed this crime”; 2017, 54). Finally acknowledging that the crime has “une raison mais inconnaissable. Une raison ignorée” (“a reason, but an unknowable one. An unknown reason”; 2017, 146), he gives up his quest for understanding. Both *Not I* and *L’Amante anglaise* end in a failure both of communication and of recovery, emphasised by the ‘unfinished’ endings of both texts:

MOUTH: ... nothing but the larks... pick it up – (*Curtain fully down. House dark. Voice continues behind curtain, unintelligible, 10 seconds, ceases as house lights up.*)

¹⁷ This change can be traced to an undated typescript of *Pas moi* held in the University of Reading archives. In the margin beside the typed section that reads “le geste consiste en une sorte de haussement de bras dans un mouvement de compassion impuissante”, Beckett has added the handwritten addition, “fait de blâme et de pitié impuissante” (UoR MS 1396/4/27, 15).

(2006, 383)

CLAIRE: Vous voulez qu'on essaye encore ? Qu'est-ce que j'ai dit qui vous a découragé tout à coup ? [...] Moi à votre place, j'écouterais. Écoutez-moi... je vous en supplie...

CLAIRE: Do you want to try again? What did I say to suddenly discourage you? [...] If I were in your place, I would listen. Listen to me... I'm begging you...

(2017, 167)

No clear understanding of either woman's experience has been achieved, and no healing or even lessening of any physical distress has occurred. If anything, the situation has only been exacerbated by the attempted communication of the testimony to suffering. Claire is distressed both by the Interrogator's more probing questions and by his final withdrawal from her; Mouth's suffering seems to increase as she tries to express her own experience, in what Eric P. Levy terms the "Beckettian mimesis of pain" whereby "[i]nstead of relieving pain, the outward expression of suffering only increases it" (2007, 28). Pertinently, Laub has warned how "[t]he act of telling might itself become severely traumatizing, if the price of speaking is *re-living*; not relief, but further traumatization" (1992, 67; original emphasis); we might recall how many famous Holocaust survivors eventually died by suicide, despite their investment in literary testimony, including Primo Levi, Paul Celan, Jean Améry, and Tadeusz Borowski. The Auditor and the Interrogator now suffer alongside the speaking women. Witnessing the attempted testimony to suffering has ultimately only resulted in a further increase in, rather than easing of, physical distress – for everyone involved. The scripting of the speaker-witness relationship in both *Not I* and *L'Amante anglaise* repudiates any idea of the successful communication or consequent healing of witnessed suffering.

In emphasising the failure of even these most committed listeners to realise any fuller comprehension or alleviation of this suffering, both plays might prompt us to ask, as Katharine Worth does, "What use is it to have a 'helpless' Auditor, however compassionate?"

(1986, 172). The question is negated by productions of *Not I* that remove the Auditor from the performance altogether. Although the initial Anglophone version of *Not I* presented the Auditor as per the script's directions, Beckett eliminated the role of the Auditor when he directed the French première production of *Pas moi* at the Théâtre d'Orsay in 1975, after experiencing "[t]echnical difficulties" in staging the figure to his satisfaction (Knowlson 1997, 617), and in November 1986 he advised the young directors David Hunsberger and Linda Kendall "simply to omit the Auditor" in their own production of the play in at the Performance Network Theatre in Ann Arbor, commenting that the figure "is very difficult to stage" and "I have never seen him function effectively" (*Letters IV* 2016, 680); numerous subsequent productions have followed this lead and eliminated the Auditor from their stage. Yet in this same 1986 letter to Hunsberger and Kendall, Beckett offers the seemingly self-contradictory remark, "For me the play needs him but can do without him" (*Letters IV* 2016, 680). In the context of *Not I*'s interrogation of the relationship between sufferer and witness, this apparently oxymoronic statement become somewhat more comprehensible: *Not I* needs the Auditor's *failure* as a witness, or at least a clear vision of *failed witnessing*, in order to frame the difficulty of communicating or responding to suffering. This failure can be conveyed either by way of the Auditor's own struggle, or by the total elision of any effective witnessing figure – an extreme if rather less visually emphatic version of the utter failure of the listener figure to provide any tangible benefit to the sufferer.¹⁸ Beckett's remark, "I have never seen him function effectively", takes on a double meaning: the Auditor does not function effectively precisely in that he fails to aid the suffering speaker – and, on another

¹⁸ Although he speaks specifically of 1977 BBC recording of *Not I* rather than of stagings eliminate the Auditor's role, R. Thomas Simone convincingly suggests that in the absence of the Auditor figure, "the viewer effectively absorbs the role of the auditor and even becomes the sympathetic and threatened body" (1988, 60) – and thus, we might surmise, the spectator's own baffled presence takes the place of the 'failed witnessing' in these instances.

level, he functions very effectively in that he demonstrates this very failure of any redemptive of healing relationship between sufferer and witness.

In staging the failure of witnessing, both *Not I* and *L'Amante anglaise* refuse the possibility of the witness to suffering as being able to achieve any meaningful identification with the sufferer; pain remains resoundingly 'other' in both plays. This rejection of the idea of intersubjective identification between witness and sufferer corresponds to the prevailing cultural perspective of 1960s and 1970s France, which saw widespread criticism of any assumed identification between witness and victim in the context of late Holocaust testimony reception. Given the nearly unprecedented degree of suffering endured by the victims of the Nazi regime, contemporary feeling had by this time begun to decry texts that sought to generate a sense of identification between reader or spectator and sufferer – and indeed to decry the reader or spectator who claimed such an experience. Such “grasping” at another’s painful experience became, from the perspective of many post-war writers and commentators, “not simply an epistemological problem about other minds; it is an ethical concern [...] and it *should not* happen”, as Robert Eaglestone puts it (2004, 71; original emphasis). Any such appropriative identification between witness and victim risked reducing the experience of intense suffering to a something within the bounds of everyday comprehension, accessible to the outsider and comparable to their own more quotidian experiences, “as though the hunger in Auschwitz were the same as that of someone who has skipped a meal”, as Primo Levi remarks sardonically (2013, 178). At a certain extremity of pain, no such identification could be possible – and certainly could not be appropriate. The testimony to suffering – and particularly to intense or historically specific physical suffering – began to be understood as more properly “an encounter with otherness” (Eaglestone 2004, 71) rather than a means of gaining a full intersubjective understanding of the individual’s pain, and reminding the reader or spectator that they “possesses no body or experience that is

equivalent – or even analogous – to the worlds they evoke” (Foley 1982, 342). Beckett’s and Duras’s use of the theatre medium helps underline Mouth’s and Claire’s non-identificatory testimonies as encounters with ‘otherness’ – particularly as differentiated from Dura’s intermediary scripting of Claire’s story in novel form. In contrast to the disembodied self-projection more readily facilitated by the prose narrative, the theatre medium places a visibly separate body on stage in front of the spectator, a distinctly ‘other’ site of suffering away from the spectator’s own body: “the other is always concrete and particular [...] the embodied other before us in the here and now” in the theatre, Anna McMullan reminds us (2010, 121). We noted in Chapter Two how the neurological process of kinaesthetic empathy can catalyse a felt sense of physical identification between the spectator and witnessed body, but the manner in which *Not I* and *L’Amante anglaise* stage bodies that narrate rather than enact experiences of physical pain and violence curtails the opportunity for any such kinaesthetic empathy. By circumscribing explicit representation or even description of bodily suffering, Beckett and Duras minimise the possibility of facile audience identification with their subjects’ experiences of suffering or inflicting bodily pain.

This refusal to permit easy identification with suffering is a crucial element of these two plays’ wilful rejection of the witness’s illusion of healing, the “non cathartique” or “non-cathartic” quality that many, following Julia Kristeva, have identified in Duras’s writing (1987, 141), and which is particularly palpable in *L’Amante anglaise* and indeed in Beckett’s *Not I*. Aristotelian catharsis – the arousal of a sympathetic pity or fear in the spectator followed by the therapeutic purging of these emotions – is a process which depends on vicarious identification with the witnessed subject. The proscription of such catharsis in these two plays is thus generated in large part by the texts’ refusal to allow the reader or spectator to assimilate the speakers’ testimonies to their own experiences and thus to disingenuously cleanse them of their necessarily distressing affect, “to identify with them [...], and then

wrongly to resolve, assimilate, or normalize them” (Eaglestone 2004, 33). Whereas traditional Aristotelian catharsis would purge the audience member of all lingering negative affect, *Not I* and *L’Amante anglaise* refuse such spectator-focused relief, which soothes the witness to suffering in a manner that becomes ethically suspect in a post-war literary context so enmired in the painful awareness of recent historical failures of witnessing; instead, the two plays “make demands on its audience’s emotional responses beyond the satisfaction of self-purgation” (Allard and Martin 2009, 7). To acknowledge a failure of comprehension regarding another being’s physical suffering is to acknowledge the extreme degree of that suffering, and thus the “refusal to give way to the impulse to narrative, to sense-making” emerges as “an ethical strategy” (McTighe 2013, 130). The failure to comprehend or resolve becomes a carefully cultivated dynamic of these plays of witnessing suffering, and we are left with a deeply circumscribed, even pessimistic, vision of the relationship between sufferer and witness to suffering as manifested in *Not I* and *L’Amante anglaise*. The rejection of any redemptive ideas of cognitive or corporeal empathy, although part of a careful demarcation of epistemological and ethical boundaries in the long post-war period, seems to leave little opportunity for effective interpersonal communication regarding suffering – or for any hope of bearing witness or offering comfort to the sufferer.

“elle parlait sous ses mains”: Renegotiating Witnessed Suffering

In closing, we will examine three specific productions of *Not I* and *L’Amante anglaise* that reshaped the relationship between witness and sufferer, specifically by revising the functioning of the listener figure’s hands in relation to the speaker. These adjustments in the listener figure’s embodied response to the sufferer’s attempted testimony produced strikingly different models of witnessing another’s unassimilable pain, even without any alterations to the scripted dialogue of either play. Examining these staging variations and their vastly

differing effects demonstrates the importance of “phenomenological scrutiny of the embodied processes or articulation [...] and the intercorporeal relations that this involves” (McMullan 2010, 12), both in Beckett’s plays and in late-twentieth century Francophone theatre more broadly, as a means of more fully exploring the particular resonances of their performance histories.

The first staged version of *L’Amante anglaise*, directed by Claude Régy at the Théâtre de Chaillot in 1968, added a specific additional direction to the Interrogator’s unscripted wandering around the auditorium that offered a more optimistic conception of his role as listening witness. In the final moments of the performance the Interrogator “montait sur la scène et, lentement, il allait derrière [Claire] et posait ses mains sur ces cheveux et il restait là jusqu’à la fin. Et elle, elle parlait sous ses mains, tout à coup heureuse” (“climbed onto the stage and slowly walked behind [Claire] and put his hands on her hair, and he stayed there until the end. And she talked beneath his hands, suddenly happy”; Duras 2017, 40). Régy characterised the Interrogator’s gesture as evidence of “une sorte d’amour”, a reassurance that “ce personnage abstrait puisse même toucher cette femme, qu’il y ait un contact des mains” (“a sort of love”, “that even this abstract person could in fact reach this woman, touch her, that there was a contact of hands”; Papin 1988, 141), intended to establish his acceptance of her, even if he does not fully comprehend her and her testimony: “il a accepté totalement la distance irréductible qui les sépare” (“he came to a total acceptance of the irreducible distance that separates them”; Papin 1988, 23). The Interrogator’s “contact of hands” with Claire balances his admitted incomprehension of her attempted testimony with an accompanying expression of willing connection across the unknowability of physical experience. Across an acknowledged lack of cognitive understanding or complete corporeal empathy, in this production the Interrogator substitutes an alternative form of intercorporeal

connection through the sympathetic touch of his hands, one that affirms both distance and intimacy.

By contrast, in the 1978 Beckett-directed revival of *Pas moi* at the Théâtre d'Orsay, the Auditor uses his hands as a shield against Mouth, rather than as a point of contact. Following the intensification of Auditor's "*gesture of helpless compassion*" (2006, 376) into "*un mouvement fait de blâme et de pitié impuissante*" ("a gesture of disapproval and helpless pity"; 2014, 95) in the play's French translation, Beckett here directed the final instantiation of the Auditor's responsive gesture as a still more distressed and distressing response. The Auditor's final onstage movement was now to cover his head with his hands, "in a gesture of increased helplessness and despair, as if unable to bear any longer the torrent of sound" (Knowlson and Pilling 1979, 198). This physical recoil from Mouth – and, indeed, the manner in which it replicates instances of distressed spectators attempting to escape from the auditorium – sits in precise opposition to the Interrogator's sympathetic touch in Régy's *L'Amante anglaise*. The Auditor's hands cover the witness's own body in a protective recoil from the overwhelming testimony to suffering, and Trish McTighe's characterisation of *Not I* as a play that exhibits "a pessimism about 'getting in touch', either with oneself or with the other" is here rendered upsettingly literal (2013, 153). The hand of the witness to suffering here indeed offers no sympathy or comfort, but only a self-defensive drive to reinforce the cognitive and corporeal divide between sufferer and witness. In this production, all hope of any intersubjective understanding or connection between sufferer and witness to suffering is emphatically denied.

One of the most recent contemporary stagings of *Not I*, however, has reworked the implications of encounter with the suffering of another being, and particularly of the staging of the Auditor's hands as a crucial node of the witness-sufferer interaction. Jess Thom's 2018 production of Beckett's play at the Battersea Arts Centre was distinguished by two particular

innovations: Jess Thom's revised set design to accommodate her Tourette's motor tics, and the reworking of the Auditor, played by Charmaine Wombwell, as a British Sign Language translator, both alterations made with the full permission of the Beckett estate. Thom's motor tics meant that it would have been unsafe for her to be strapped into place for the duration of her performance, as previous Mouth actors had been. Instead, she was secured in her elevated wheelchair with a belt around her waist, with LED lights positioned inside her hood to ensure that her mouth would remain lit without the necessity of her head being restrained. Consequently, the production was a markedly less painful one for Thom to perform, although the presence of Thom's verbal and physical tics (which included Thom repeatedly thumping her chest with her fist) throughout the performance afforded a different type of affective physical struggle on the stage, and indeed a form of struggle that felt distinctly 'other' for spectators lacking personal experience of Tourette's syndrome.¹⁹ The recent intense media focus on Dwan's physical suffering during promotion for her 2009 performance and subsequent tour – or what Derval Tubridy has termed “[t]he abject fetishisation of the female body in productions of *Not I*” (2018)²⁰ – may have influenced Thom's refusal to either submit to similar physical demands herself, or to discuss her own physical suffering as Mouth's performer during promotion for her performance as Mouth: “I'm absolutely committed to not talking about how [physically] hard it is, I think that there's been so much said about that that I don't really want to add, and some of that is problematic to me” (personal interview, 2017). Thom's staging was characterised from the beginning by its resistance to emphasising pain.

¹⁹ Thom has emphasised the principle of disability access in the theatre industry as part of the motivation behind her determination to perform *Not I* rigorously but in accordance with her own bodily needs: “Disabled people and non-disabled people can achieve the same things but it doesn't always look the same. For me, inclusivity is about understanding that people do things differently. That had to be present in the making of the piece” (Tripney 2018, n.p.).

²⁰ Promotional images showing Dwan's bare limbs shackled behind her set board were circulated extensively before and during her production of *Not I* – so extensively, in fact, that one might wonder if the play's reputation as a performance that occasioned female physical suffering was being positioned as a titillating part of the play's commercial appeal. Thom revealed that when her theatre company designed her stage set, “we didn't want it to look bondage-y” (Caird 2018, n.p.), in what might be read as an indirect reference to the aesthetic of Dwan's staging.

Still more striking in performance, however, is the staging of the Auditor's role as a BSL interpreter, which forms the production's clearest reworking of the relationship between Auditor and Mouth, between witness and suffering speaker. The Auditor's hands are again here central to establishing the precise dynamics of the embodied relationship between Mouth's distress and the Auditor's response. Wombwell's BSL interpretation of Mouth's monologue (and of Thom's tics, which Wombwell meticulously translates alongside the scripted text) connects Mouth's testimony and the Auditor's responsive reception in a very literal "gesture of translation, communication and correspondence" (Tubridy 2018, n.p.), one that draws the two figures into close but not appropriative alignment. Wombwell's live translation of Mouth's testimony is a feat of careful witnessing, "only achieved through unwavering attentive listening" (Kriegler-Wenk 2017, n.p.). This is witnessing that is intensely responsive to another's suffering, while occupying a distinctly defined position as interpreter which clearly frames that testimony as that of another individual being, resisting any appropriative or illusory identification with it. The BSL interpretation of Mouth's monologue replicates her testimony without resorting to mimicry or misappropriation; Wombwell's Auditor bears witness to Mouth's suffering in both cognitive and embodied terms, while very clearly framing it as Mouth's own experience, and without denying the bodily facticity of Mouth's – and Thom's – physical struggle in performance. In direct contrast to Beckett's 1978 Auditor's self-protective recoil, Wombwell's Auditor offers an embodied gesture of accommodation rather than withdrawal; as Leah Sidi observes, "the play becomes warm as well as urgent. It invites us in to the possibility of a new, communal form of understanding, rather than pushing us away" (2018, n.p.). It's relevant here that the Battersea Arts Centre production of *Not I* was staged as a relaxed performance, a measure which "aim to render audience spaces more accessible to all spectators, via measures like allowing exit out of and re-entry into the auditorium throughout the performance, leaving the

house lights on dimly, [...] and training front-of-house staff and actors to accept higher levels of audience noise” (Simpson 2018, 229). The contrast between Wombwell’s ‘accommodating’ Auditor and Beckett’s 1978 ‘recoiling’ Auditor can thus also be aligned with a contrast in the broader forms of audience listening response that each modelled: the panicked recoil and the entrapment in the dark auditorium that typified earlier productions of *Not I* were replaced by a comparative audience freedom, a recognition of mutual bodily facticity and vulnerability across stage and auditorium. While presenting a rigorous performance of Beckett’s text which garnered full support from the Beckett estate, Thom’s *Not I* stages a notably optimistic rendering of Beckett’s text as regards the relationship between sufferer and witness, one “not so much about damage as it is about repair” (Heron 2018, 287). As in Régy’s 1968 production of *L’Amante anglaise*, we find a new balance between distance and intimacy: an acknowledged distance from the sufferer’s own personally felt, and epistemologically discrete physical distress, and the profound intimacy of the attentive witness. In Thom’s production, the opportunity for a sympathetic concordance between sufferer and witness is established once again.

Conclusion

Both *Not I* and *L’Amante anglaise*, as they are typically read and produced, foreground the difficulty of articulating traumatic instances of suffering, and undermine the idea of the intersubjective communication of one’s pain as a redemptive means of healing. Beckett’s and Duras’s commentators have repeatedly turned to the image of the unhealed and unhealing wound as a means of describing the impact of their writing, from Julia Kristeva’s theorisation of “la permanence de la blessure” (“the permanent wound”; 1987, 244) that she finds in Duras’s writing to Billie Whitelaw’s description of the “very painful” experience of performing *Not I* as being “as if I had an opened wound, and every night I went on in all that

pain” (1992, 9), for example.²¹ Not merely the wound but specifically the *incurable* wound returns again and again as an apposite metaphor for those attempting to describe their sense of Beckett’s and Duras’s texts. The recurring appearance of this metaphorical chronic wound testifies to the widespread recognition – implicitly or explicitly articulated – of the lack of any final redemptive healing in Beckett’s and Duras’s post-war work.

There is an oft-cited linguistic connection between the word ‘trauma’ and the physical suffering of the ‘wound’ that returns us to the subject of trauma and trauma testimony here. Observing that the roots of the word lie in the ancient Greek term for “wound”, trauma theorist Cathy Caruth describes trauma as “the story of a wound that cried out, that addressed us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or a truth that is not otherwise available” (1996, 3), and psychiatrist Dori Laub likewise concludes that, if trauma is the wound, “so testimony is the healing of the wound by shaping and giving shape to an experience that’s fragmented” (2014, 48). *Not I* and *L’Amante anglaise* refuse the idea of witnessed testimony as a straightforward means of healing the trauma wound. Each play typically provokes a distressing physical response in their spectator, “operat[ing] viscerally on the audience’s eyes, ears, brain, nerves” (McMullan 2010, 119), but simultaneously refuses any easy cognitive comprehension or spectatorial sense of catharsis. However persistently the two plays provoke a responsive physical distress in their spectators during performance, the central experience of suffering remains unfathomable, ungraspable, in both plays, “ce noyau d’incompréhensible, d’irréductible au sens” (“this kernel of the incomprehensible, irreducible to meaning”; Rykner 2017, 14). Both *Not I* and *L’Amante anglaise* are less concerned with reproducing the

²¹ Further examples of critics turning to the metaphor of the wound to describe the effect of Beckett’s and Duras’s writing include: Eric P. Levy’s theorising what he calls “the Beckettian wound”, the running wound which is never allowed to heal (2007, 13); Janice Berkowitz Gross’s description of “Duras’s delicate caress of wounds, allowing seepage and drainage without providing permanent relief” as appearing “relentlessly” throughout her writing (1989, 45); Mary Noonan’s sense of “this wound that is opened up by [Duras’s] plays but never healed” (2014, 67); and Gerald and Yulia Naughton’s characterisation of Duras’s writing as being “like an injured body that takes pleasure in its wounds” rather than trying to soothe them (2012, 222).

experience of pain than with reproducing the experience of bearing witness to pain, of bearing witness to the extreme pain of another that cannot be assimilated, and which refuses any illusion of ‘healing’ by way of witnessed testimony.

However, individual productions of *Not I* and *L’Amante anglaise* have highlighted the possibility that both plays offer for more generative forms of witnessing suffering, a form of responsive communion that, while not claiming to assimilate or heal the other being’s wound, does manage to establish a sympathetic, intercorporeal connection between witness and sufferer. Claude Régy’s 1968 production of *L’Amante anglaise* and Jess Thom’s 2018 production of *Not I* both reworked the relationship between speaker and listener, by redirecting their hands in a thoroughly corporeal process of witnessing. In doing so, these productions modelled new modes of embodied attentional engagement, in which the witness engages closely with the pain of the Other, acknowledging and bearing witness to its facticity without claiming to ‘heal’ – or rather, to erase from the witness’s own troubled consciousness – this fundamentally unknowable experience.

Conclusion

Cries of Pain: Distance, Intimacy, and the Empathic

In conversation with the older playwright, Harold Pinter once observed that Beckett's writing seemed to him an effort to impose some semblance of form, upon "the wretched mess mankind had made of the world". Beckett allegedly responded:

If you insist on finding form, I'll describe it for you. I was in hospital once. There was a man in another ward, dying of throat cancer. In the silence, I could hear his screams continually. That's the only kind of form my work has.
(Bair 1993, 528)

Apocryphal or not, the anecdote neatly reiterates the particular tensions which Beckett's plays ascribe to the experience of witnessing another being's pain, and which we have traced over the preceding chapters. The other's pain is unsettlingly proximate yet distanced, familiar yet ungraspable; the sufferer's screams echo through the same hospital building, yet the sufferer himself remains hidden out of sight in another ward. Pain is simultaneously expressed yet unexpressed: the wordless scream communicates the fact of suffering, but leaves the specifics of the experience obscure. Comparably, Beckett's post-war plays elide graphic spectacles of bodily pain or explicit references to distinct atrocities, and their characters speak only elliptically of their own suffering. The theatre spectator sits in relatively close physical proximity with the live body onstage, but is left uncertain as to just how far the character is meant to be suffering – or indeed how much the actors themselves are actually suffering in performance. As early as 1953, in fact, French theatre critic Bernard Dort recognised the significance in Beckett's theatre work of not only "la proximité mais [aussi] la distance entre le spectateur et le spectacle, entre lui et les personnages engagés dans une action et dans un monde duquel il est, de par sa situation (bien calé dans son fauteuil, face à la scène), exclu" ("the proximity but [also] the distance between the spectator and

staged spectacle, between him and the characters who are engaged in an action and in a world from which he himself (ensconced in his seat, facing the stage), is excluded"; *Les Temps modernes*, 1 May 1953, n.p.). This is the unsettling 'distant intimacy' of pain which Beckett's post-war plays construct: an affectively felt rather than cognitively comprehended encounter with another's agony.

Comparing the sceptical interrogations of pain and the pain encounter as staged by Francophone artists resident in France during World War II reveals intriguing lines of similarity between these works, and usefully illuminates Beckett's own post-war staging of physical pain. It is precisely the distanced intimacy outlined above that characterised the wartime experiences of the Francophone playwrights examined here. Beckett, Camus, Ionesco, Picasso, and Duras each lived out the course of World War II in metropolitan France, witnessing the protracted suffering inflicted by the conflict as non-native, non-combatant individuals. They witnessed this suffering from the liminal position of intimate strangers, closely sharing in their neighbours' pain – and indeed sometimes their own family members' pain – and simultaneously situated as inevitably alienated witnesses. All five artists turned to writing for the stage during or after the war, and their post-war plays demonstrate a concern with a proximate yet distanced witnessing of pain. It is in part from this historical grounding that these post-war plays recurrently draw their dramaturgical structures of unsettling confrontation with another's physical suffering, the struggle with "the massive overdose of pain we have inherited" in the aftermath of the war (Blau 1990, 170). The theatrical encounter with pain is structured as a live witnessing from a paradoxically intimate distance across these playwrights' wartime and post-war work.

One particular example of this 'distanced intimacy' – one which we have thus far overlooked, but which offers a remarkable compression of this unsettling dynamic – is

Beckett's 1969 playlet *Breath*.¹ *Breath* is a wordless stage piece that lasts only thirty-five seconds in performance, which Beckett offered to Kenneth Tynan in response to the latter's request for new material to use in his 1969 New York revue *Oh! Calcutta!*. The curtain rises on a dimly lit stage "littered with miscellaneous rubbish". After a five-second pause, we hear a "[f]aint brief cry" coupled with the "[a]mplified recording" of an intake of breath: "immediately inspiration and slow increase of light together reaching maximum together in about ten seconds". After another five-second pause, we hear the sound of the breath released, "[e]xpiration and slow decrease of light together reach minimum together" over another ten-second period, followed by a silent five-second hold, and the curtain (2006, 371). *Breath* thus eliminates all visual representation of the human body from the stage, troubling our earlier distinction between Beckett's late and early theatre work according to degrees of corporeal representation. Indeed, it was specifically the disputed presence of the human body onstage which led Beckett to withdraw *Breath* from Tynan's *Oh! Calcutta!* when it premièred, after Tynan took the liberty of adding prone nude bodies to *Breath*'s stage setting.²

Despite its careful absenting of any visible human body from the stage – and, recalling Chapter Three's discussion, this is very much an 'absented' rather than an 'absent'

¹ *Breath* premièred at the Eden Theatre, New York, in June 1969 as part of Kenneth Tynan's *Oh! Calcutta!* revue, and with Tynan's staging alterations included. The UK première, this time staged according to Beckett's original written directions, opened at the Close Theatre Club, Glasgow, in October 1969. Beckett finished translating the playlet in January 1971 as *Souffle, invention dramatique pour soufflé et lumière* (*Letters IV* 2016, 248); the first French production of the play appears to have been in June 1974 at the Théâtre de la Cité Internationale, directed by Henri Rose. Further details of *Breath*'s composition history are shrouded in a certain degree of mystery. The clearest record of the script's genesis is in Beckett's 17 July 1968 letter to Tynan in which he provides a copy of *Breath* along with the explanation, "This lude has never appeared in print or been performed anywhere so far as I know. Indeed I write it down here for the first time" (*Letters IV* 2016, 135). Ruby Cohn has claimed that when she asked Beckett in the summer of 1968 whether he was working on a new play, he wrote out the script for *Breath* on the paper tablecloth of their café table; Cohn records, "I never thought to retrieve the paper table-cover. Nor do I know whether that was Beckett's first spontaneous rendition of his dramaticule, *Breath*, or whether he had already brooded about it. However, I do not think he wrote it for Kenneth Tynan in 1969, as is sometimes claimed" (Knowlson and Knowlson 2007, 129; original emphasis).

² For a detailed overview of Beckett's engagement with and subsequent withdrawal from Tynan's *Oh! Calcutta!* revue, see Saunders 2016 and Gontarski 2006. For a history of notable subsequent stagings of *Breath*, see Goudouna 2018. For an overview of the extant holograph versions of *Breath*, see Pountney 1988, 153.

body – *Breath* still challenges the spectator with a sense of half-revealed, half-concealed pain, in a striking demonstration of what Anna McMullan and Graham Saunders have called “the intimate address” in Beckett’s writing, “the way in which his work speaks to the vulnerability of being human” (2018, 8). *Breath*’s human cry in particular suggests a form of embodied distress, in line with the wordless hospital scream. The term “brief cry” is revised later in the stage directions to the less familiar word “vagitus” (2006, 371), “a cry or wail; *spec.* that of a new-born child” (“vagitus, n.”, *OED Online*). Richard H. Abrams reminds us that although such a cry is “normally greeted as a sound of joy”, nevertheless “from the baby’s standpoint the cry expresses agony” (1983, 49) – or, as Claire Lozier has put it, the vagitus “expresses vulnerability and the shock of birth as a traumatic experience” as per Otto Rank’s theory of the birth trauma (2010, 245). The notes that Beckett made during the 1930s on Rank’s work inform the emphasis on human breath and the birth cry in *Breath*. Beckett’s notes pay particular attention to the “new-born child’s physiological injuries” resulting from labour, and the trauma of birth itself as arising from “the change from a highly pleasurable situation to an extremely painful one” (Feldman and Matthews 2020, 252-53). He also recorded Rank’s theorising that “neurotic disturbances in breathing” that arise later in life, such as asthma and dyspnoea, might be understood as “physical reproductions of the birth trauma” (Feldman and Matthews 2020, 352-53). This dense interweaving of birth, breath, and physical suffering underlies the structures of *Breath*. More broadly, the play amplifies the breath and the cry of the human body, pulling the spectator into an unsettling intimacy with a corporeal soundscape while denying any clear sight or narrativized understanding of the body itself that might allow the spectator to orient herself in relation to it. The amplified corporeal noises provoke the sense of an uncomfortably close proximity to another’s body, intensified by the difficulty of escaping or ignoring these sounds in the absence of any other verbal or gestural event on stage – yet the lack of any visible human body and the extra layer of

mediated alienation occasioned by the fact that the sounds are recorded rather than live dissociates spectator and ‘staged’ body.³ Sozita Goudouna observes that *Breath* simultaneously generates both “an ‘aesthetics of presence’ (respiration) but also an ‘aesthetics of absence’ (missing figure)” (2018, 19), and this tension between presence and absence, between intimacy and distance, aligns with our reading of the unstable forms of intersubjective perception that typify attempts to bear witness to another’s suffering in Beckett’s theatre. We find ourselves on the boundary of the experience, simultaneously resisting the unsought physical affect that threatens to invade our own body and straining to comprehend the scene before us. Distance and intimacy merge in the encounter with the not-quite-witnessed event.

The intense decorporealising of *Breath*, like the bodily fragmentation that would follow a few years later in *Not I*, gestures towards the mode of the corporeal disjunction that would come to typify Beckett’s continued interrogation of the encounter with pain in his later theatre. In plays such as *That Time* (1976), *Footfalls* (1976), *A Piece of Monologue* (1979), *Rockaby* (1981) and *What Where* (1983), we are confronted with a series of spectral, fractured or otherwise dehumanised figures who, although exhibiting the most minimal of bodily function and sentience, are nevertheless steeped in an unsettling affect of suffering: “Would you like me to inject your again? [...] Dress your sores? Sponge you down? Moisten your poor lips?” May asks her mother in *Footfalls* (2006, 400); the Speaker in *A Piece of Monologue* evokes “The dead and gone. The dying and the going” (2006, 429); in *What Where*, Bam demands, “You gave him the works? [...] He wept? [...] Screamed? [...] Begged for mercy?” (2006, 472). Direct representation of physical pain is distanced still further from the stage, carefully concealed from the spectator, but the recurrent intimations of

³ The recorded nature of the bodily sounds may of course be more or less obvious depending on the sound design in individual productions. In all cases, however, the “strictly synchronised” timing of the sounds and Beckett’s instruction that the “two cries be identical” heightens the sense of bodily irreality (2006, 371).

intense, unseen agony remain profoundly troubling. Many of these later plays also demand a physical suffering from their performers: Billie Whitelaw recorded, “I have actually twisted my spine by doing *Footfalls*, because in fact something happens whereby my spine starts to spiral down as though I am disappearing. And it’s physically very painful to do” (Kalb 1989, 236), and she expressed sympathy for the similarly painful “physical extremes” required of the performer of *A Piece of Monologue*: “And when David Warrilow played in *A Piece of Monologue*, oh god, my heart bled for him standing absolutely still” (Ben-Zvi 1992, 9). This suffering, although technically ‘present’ on the stage, is rarely directly obvious to the spectator – few audience members could guess that the performer of *A Piece of Monologue* is in intense pain, for example – but may nevertheless subtly facilitate the transmission of this troubling affect of suffering from stage to spectator.

However, in its sheer extremity of minimalist form and feeling, *Breath* also helps to underline the qualitative distinction that remains between Beckett’s staging of pain and that of the other Francophone artists we have examined here. Beckett’s early post-war plays distinguish themselves by dint of how relentlessly they refuse a redemptive perspective on the encounter with physical pain, withholding any gesture or framing that might quell or purge the unsettling affect which they generate. The only clear instance of affective comfort that we have encountered in these plays is in Jess Thom’s 2018 staging of *Not I*, in which the production’s reworking of the Auditor as BSL interpreter brought a new tenor of receptive accommodation to the play – a dimension which, although offering a freshly generative perspective on the play’s engagement with suffering, is not readily discernible in its original script or productions. By contrast, although Camus, Picasso, Ionesco and Duras all stage similarly sceptical negotiations of the encounter with physical suffering, we can nevertheless trace the thread of a surviving redemptive impulse running through their plays. Camus situates the theatre as a site of potential intercorporeal communion, for example; Picasso

offers an intense aestheticising of physical pain as a source of beauty or pleasure; Ionesco permits the possibility of a joyful transcendence of the pain-stricken body in *Amédée*'s cathartic ending; the première production of Duras's *L'Amante anglaise* had the play close with a comforting gesture towards intercorporeal connection and sympathy. The consoling or redemptive rendering of the encounter with another being's pain is still more prevalent in the metropolitan French theatre of the post-war period, in which physical suffering is consistently figured as an opportunity for atonement or communion: in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Mouches* (1943), for example, Orestes takes the suffering of his sister and the people of Argos upon himself – represented by the Érinnyes' physical torture – in order to relieve them of their fifteen years of torment; in *Les Bouches inutiles* (1945), Simone De Beauvoir gives voice to the value of shared suffering: “Pendant dix-huit mois, nous avons lutté côté à côté, et, malgré les souffrances, la joie était en nous” (“For eighteen months, we have fought side by side and, in spite of our sufferings, we have been happy”; 2015, 75) – as does Jean Anouilh's *Roméo et Jeannette* (1946), in which mutual physical pain is vaunted as a proof of true love. The redemptive representation of bodily suffering, then, is certainly attenuated in the Francophone theatre we have examined here – but it is still more radically refused in Beckett's post-war theatre, in which any possibility of shared or conclusive understanding is denied.

In tracing the unsettling dynamics of witnessed pain specific to Beckett's post-war plays, then, we might turn to what trauma theorists Dominick LaCapra and Jill Bennett have defined as “empathic unsettlement”: “the aesthetic experience of simultaneously *feeling for* another and becoming aware of a distinction between one's own perception and the experience of another” (Bennett 2005, 8; original emphasis). This mode of engagement is grounded in the affective relationship between sufferer and spectator – and typically in the relationship between sufferer's and spectator's embodied presences – rather than in any

rationalised cognitive understanding of the other being's experience. The "embodied sensation" that characterises the empathic response for the witness (Bennett 2005, 34) is directly "responsive to the traumatic experiences of others" (LaCapra 2014, 41), while simultaneously emphasising that this witnessed pain or trauma is fundamentally that of someone else, "something irreducible and different, often inaccessible" (Bennett 2005, 10). A felt sense of distance thus remains crucial to the empathic encounter. Whereas the empathetic response comprises a vicarious sharing of that experience through imaginative identification, the empathic entails a recognition of the essential otherness of another's experience, of that which cannot be directly grasped by the witness or spectator. The experience is "*transactive* rather than *communicative*", Bennett observes; the witnessed spectacle of suffering "touches us, but it does not necessarily communicate the 'secret' of personal experience" (2005, 7; original emphasis). Beckett's stage plays, critically influenced by their post-war context, frequently prompt spectatorial experiences congruent with Bennett's description of empathic unsettlement, the threshold mode of witnessing "that seeks comprehension and must acknowledge comprehension's impossibility while being haunted by that incomprehension", as Katherine Hite describes empathic unsettlement more broadly (2015, 39). Evincing a post-war and particularly post-Holocaust scepticism regarding the witness's access to another's subjective experience, these plays exhibit not only a resistance to testifying 'on behalf' of another being, but also a self-conscious replication of the epistemological uncertainty of the witness's sense of someone else's pain. In place of a misguided attempt to annex another's experience of suffering, the empathic response instead entails the "encounter with otherness" that Robert Eaglestone claims as essential to a more appropriate encounter with another being's suffering (2004, 71) – and one profoundly better suited to Beckett's literature of witnessing.

In sum, the sceptical stagings of pain we have traced in Beckett's plays constitute a crucial element of his broader interrogation of intersubjective perception and communication, and of the "radical transvaluation of vulnerability and otherness" that McMullan discerns in Beckett's post-war work more generally (2010, 10). Beckett's earlier post-war plays insistently frame the experience of witnessing pain as a bewildering and frequently aversive one, rather than a restorative or a redemptive process for either party. The expression of pain in these plays undermines established modes of both verbal and gestural communication, and the consequently ambiguous nature of onstage pain emphasises the phenomenological and even epistemological distance between sufferer and witness, between lived and witnessed experience. "Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now?" Vladimir asks himself in *Waiting for Godot*, perturbed by precisely this rift between sufferer and proximate witness (2006, 84). The encounter with another's physical pain in these plays reveals the limits of intersubjective and intercorporeal empathy, and leaves the spectator to contend with the ethical implications of this by herself. However, the affective impact of these spectacles of suffering, heightened by the live proximity of spectating and staged bodies in the theatre auditorium, also draws the witnessing and the suffering bodies into a contingent but nevertheless compelling form of intimacy. While these spectacles of bodily distress consistently refuse any appropriative or illusory sense of identification with the witnessed suffering, the spread of corporeal affect emphasises the spectator's own comparable vulnerability to physical pain – or, as disability theorist Tobin Siebers puts it, the recognition that all of us as "human beings are fragile. Human life confronts the overwhelming reality of sickness, injury, disfigurement, enfeeblement, old age, and death" (2013, 278). Comparably, Beckett and these other Francophone playwrights witnessed the suffering of those around them while also living in fear of Nazi violence themselves – particularly those who worked

for the French Resistance. Sufferer and spectator may not share direct bodily experience in these theatre auditoria, but they do share bodily vulnerability.

There is, finally, a decisive moral dimension to the manner in which these post-war plays withhold any easy assuaging (or even straightforward comprehension) of the encounter with another being's pain. In the introduction to this project, I cited Marina MacKay's observation that "any claim for the redeeming and compensatory power of literary art has to be humble and hesitant in the face of a war that spanned the globe, destroyed a continent and killed sixty million people" (2009b, 8), and I suggested that the post-war plays of Beckett and his Francophone contemporaries testify not to suffering itself but rather to the experience of witnessing this suffering – and to an unrelenting refusal to erase the pain of war's victims. Leo Bersani's warning against the idea that "the catastrophes of history matter much less if they are somehow compensated for in art" offers an instructive perspective on the value of these plays' ruthless spotlight on physical suffering and the responses it catalyses, and indeed on the value in our refusing to subject them to misleadingly redemptive readings (1990, 1). The empathic unsettlement generated by *Eleutheria*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, *Play* and *Not I* deny the possibility of any redemptive interpretative elision of another being's suffering. We might return one last time, then, to Beckett's pre-war question, "Or is there some way of devoting pain & monstrosity & incapacitation to the service of a deserving cause?" (*Letters I* 2010, 258). His post-war works refuse any redemptive or mitigating perspective on the fact of physical suffering, but they also encourage new modes of embodied attentional engagement, in which the spectator bears witness to another being's pain without claiming to comprehend the fundamentally unknowable experience. The "deserving cause" to which these spectacles of pain may be devoted isn't any blithe assertion of healing, but something rather more tentative: a careful balance between distance and intimacy, an

acknowledged distance from the sufferer's own physical distress, and the profound – if still unsettling – intimacy of the attentive witness to pain.

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