

Introduction: Beckett's 'Diary Novel'

According to a recent experiment with stylometric analysis, *Malone Dies* plays an important role in the periodization of Beckett's prose fiction. Usually the three novels, *Molloy*, *Malone meurt* / *Malone Dies* and *L'Innommable* / *The Unnamable* are regarded as one entity, and several periodizations based on qualitative analysis regard the end of *The Unnamable* ('I can't go on, I'll go on') as a watershed, separating the middle period from the late prose. The quantitative approach of computational stylometry (the quantitative study of style, focusing on grammatical function words) interestingly marks the *beginning* of *L'Innommable* / *The Unnamable* as a turning point, thus breaking the 'unit' of the so-called 'trilogy' (see Kestemont and Van Hulle 2016). If the watershed lies just before *L'Innommable*, this implies that *Malone meurt* / *Malone Dies* closes a period in Beckett's oeuvre. The result of this stylistic analysis corresponds with insights from narrative studies. From a narratological point of view, *Molloy* and *Malone meurt* / *Malone Dies* still present (fragments of) relatively coherent story lines, whereas *The Unnamable* shifts the attention from story to discourse. The starting point of this book is the question to what extent the genre of the 'diary novel' has been instrumental in the transition from the 'middle' to the 'late' period in Beckett's prose works.

One of the few Beckett scholars who (as early as 1984) unequivocally suggested the same periodization as the one that emerged from the stylometric analysis, is H. Porter Abbott. In *Diary Fiction*, he wrote: 'What makes his diary novel, *Malone Dies* (composed in 1948), such a critical stretch in this series of works is that in it Beckett openly wrestled for the last time with the thematic and metaphorical difficulties of written language and the paged book [...]. The key divide, then, in Beckett's career opens in the gap two-thirds of the way through the trilogy that falls between *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*' (1984, 184).² But as the analysis of the manuscript and the subsequent versions shows, *Malone meurt* / *Malone Dies* may be

- 2 It has to be noted, though, that Abbott later (in 1996) proposed another watershed, this time situating it after *The Unnamable*: 'Watt, *Mercier et Camier*, the *Nouvelles*, and the "trilogy," all conform to the quest structure, despite the manifold incompetence of the questers' (1996, 89). But the next work, *Textes pour rien*, 'marks a pause in the story of the oeuvre' (89). According to this periodization, it is the 'willful shredding of narrative linearity within the *Texts*' (90) that marks the end of a period, which coincides with the end of what Federman and Fletcher called the 'great creative period' (Federman and Fletcher 1970, 63).

considered a work of transition, rather than just the last novel of the middle period. The transition to *L'Innommable* literally materialized on the pages immediately after the closing paragraph of the manuscript of *Malone meurt* (FN2, 110v-112r). These two folios contain a short text that may represent both a coda to *Malone meurt* and a prelude to *L'Innommable* (see the Coda in chapter 2 and the Appendix for an English translation). Part of the novel's quality as a work of transition towards *The Unnamable*'s focus on discourse is due to its capacity as a 'diary novel'.

In H. Porter Abott's book *Diary Fiction*, *Malone Dies* is one of the examples of such a 'diary novel'. According to Abbott, Beckett took the genre of the diary novel and 'reduced it to its skeletal parts' (1984, 185):

So extreme is Beckett's reduction of the diary novel that one is tempted to call it a travesty or grotesque satire. Never has there been so doomed a diarist (from the very first line, 'I shall soon be quite dead at last in spite of all'). Never has there been so oppressive a room (being moribund, Malone's confinement is absolute: the room, a relentless presence that swells and changes shades). Nor has there ever been so separating a window (through which Malone, straining to see, catches a glimpse of strange goings on, and in the process, his own perfect strangeness), nor so complete an alienation (his only visitor – an undertaker? – raps him on the head and sits watching him for seven hours; no communication takes place), nor such a failure in love (relived, perhaps, in the courtship of Moll and Macmann [...]). But *Malone Dies* is not satire. It is, rather, a continuation of the diary novel in much the same spirit as its earlier practitioners. (185)

Whether or not *Malone Dies* is to be regarded as a satire is clearly a matter of perspectives: either one presents it as 'a continuation' of a tradition or one chooses to highlight the 'extreme' nature of Beckett's reduction of this genre to such an extent that it appears as a break from that tradition. Abbott prefers the former approach, but the fact that he hints at the other approach suggests that a break is at least imminent. The way Abbott describes the transition from the middle to the late period is by means of the materiality of the page, which is part of the age-old topos of the (re)discovered manuscript:

The drama of the survival of the text has become a part of the drama of the tale. Frequently augmenting this drama is the fact that the diarist or letter writer is dead by the time we read the evidence of his or her life. The text is all that remains. Moreover, a good many of them are not only dead but doomed or dying even as they write. This is the tradition that *Malone* dies into. (187)

In the sequence of novels from *Murphy* to *Molloy*, Beckett 'moves closer and closer to the page' until, in *Malone Dies*, he 'suddenly brings the document itself into focus'; the next step is not a step but a plunge: his 'plunging on through it' into *L'Innommable* / *The Unnamable* (187). In this key metaphor, the materiality of the page is crucial. But if this documentary aspect is so important (and we agree that it is), we think it is useful to take a look at the documents in which this 'diary novel' is being written. To fully explore the ramifications of Abbott's analysis, we propose a reading of *Malone meurt* / *Malone Dies* 'through' the manuscript – not unlike Alice, 'through the looking-glass' – to show how this novel constitutes the 'no-man's land' between *Molloy* and *L'Innommable* / *The Unnamable*.

If we take Abbott's suggestion literally and look for 'the author in the autograph' – to borrow the subtitle of his 1996 monograph – we find several instances where Beckett indeed 'brings the document itself into focus' and where the material seems to have a remarkable impact on the storyworld. When the narrator suddenly interrupts his story about Sapo with the exclamation 'What tedium', he reminds himself and his readers of his own situation, lying in his bed, waiting for death to come, saying he is 'far already from the world that parts at last its labia and lets me go' (1956, 12; *MD* 14) – or in the French original: 'loin déjà du monde qui se dilate enfin et me laisse passer' (FN1, 62r). Here, the end of the page coincides with the end of the paragraph ending with the idea of death. But death is presented as a form of birth, the world parting its labia to let him go. And the next page starts with a new paragraph, opening with a reference to a beginning, the beginning of his story: 'J'ai bien réfléchi au début de mon histoire' (FN1, 63r) ['I have tried to reflect on the beginning of my story' (1956, 12; *MD* 14)].

Similarly, there is a clear correlation between the apparent difficulty of writing on the recto (evidenced by multiple cancellations) and doodling on the verso. A good example is the passage where Malone is talking about

summer and harvesting in the country (FN1, 72v-73r). The doodles on the left were drawn when Beckett was writing the passage on the right, where several lines are crossed out (see Fig. 1).

Evidently, all of this still happens in the real-world writing process; but then the narrator (Malone) continues saying he has wasted hours writing just 4 sentences: 'j'ai mis des heures à faire ces 4 dernières phrases. Je m'endormais littéralement' (FN1, 73r). Only the last part – 'I fell asleep' (1956, 18; MD 19) – was kept in the published version. So, the manuscript invites us to an interesting 'who's who' game between the writer and the character, and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish who is 'the author in the autograph', and who is writing about whom: 'j'écris sur moi avec le même crayon, dans le

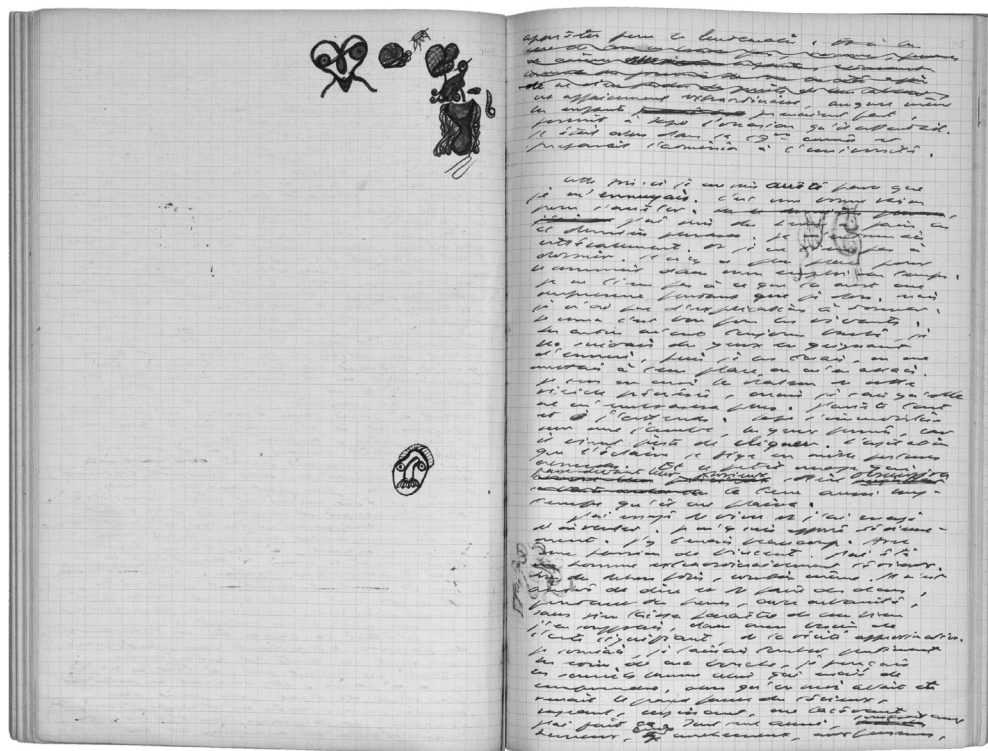


Fig. 1: Doodles suggesting creative impasse on the facing verso (FN1, 72v-73r).

même cahier, que sur lui' (FN2, 06r) ['And yet I write about myself with the same pencil and in the same exercise-book as about him' (1956, 32; *MD* 33)].

The autograph is dated at several instances, emphasizing the 'diary' aspect of this diary novel. The three main functions of diary fiction as defined by Abbott are the mimetic functions (the illusion of the real), the thematic functions (isolation and self-reflection), and the temporal functions (immediacy, suspense and timelessness). This immediacy effect of the diary novel is even greater in its manuscript. And especially when that manuscript contains long passages that did not make it into the final text, this document becomes so unique that it approaches the realm of what Nelson Goodman called 'autographic' art: 'Let us speak of a work of art as *autographic* if and only if the distinction between original and forgery of it is significant; or better, if and only if even the most exact duplication of it does not thereby count as genuine. [...] Thus painting is autographic, music nonautographic, or *allographic*' (1978, 113). Literature is allographic, but the manuscript of the diary novel *Malone meurt* is as unique as the document thematized in the topos of the threatened manuscript (Abbott 1984, 186); so unique that it becomes as 'unfakable' as a painting (Goodman 1978, 112).

In diary fiction, product and process almost coincide, especially in the manuscript of a diary novel. John Bolin mentions a few diarists who may have served as 'exemplars' for Malone: 'the failing Jules Renard and the tormented Johnson of *Prayers and Meditations* come to mind' (2012, 153). He also develops the similarity between *Malone Dies* and Mauriac's *Le Nœud de Vipères*. Here, we would like to zoom in on Jules Renard's *Journal*. Beckett wrote to Thomas MacGreevy in a letter dated 24 February 1931 that he had started reading Renard, finding 'Odd things' in it (*LSB I* 69).³ He excerpted fifty passages in his 'Dream' Notebook. A short selection of entries that were marked by Beckett in his four-volume edition of the *Journal* (still preserved in his apartment in Paris; Van Hulle and Nixon 2013, 64-7)⁴ gives a sense of the nature of this diary fiction and of Beckett's interest in it:

- 3 On 11 March 1931, however, Beckett wrote to MacGreevy that he was already 'tired out by Renard' but would 'come back to him' (*LSB I* 73). He returned to Renard in March 1936, February 1937 and September 1964 (Van Hulle and Nixon 2013, 65).
- 4 These volumes can be accessed through the *BDL*, <http://www.beckettarchive.org/library/REN-JOU-1.html>; <http://www.beckettarchive.org/library/>

Volume 1:

- 278, *3 octobre 1895* [pencil line, left margin; underlined] 'Balzac est vrai en gros, il ne l'est pas en détail.' (see DN 226)
- 282, *27 octobre 1895* [pencil line, left margin] 'Le crapaud: il marche ventre à terre.' (see DN 227)
- 310, *février 1896* [pencil line, left margin] '[...] j'éprouve certaines impressions avec une telle intensité que je défie les plus grands.'
- 311, *1 mars 1896* [pencil line, left margin] 'Rien ne sert de mourir: il faut mourir à point.'
- 314, *16 mars 1896* [pencil line, left margin] 'Il marche toujours sur la pointe des pieds, comme attiré par l'idéal même.'
- 317, *avril 1896* [pencil line, left margin] 'Si j'avais du talent, on m'imiterait. Si l'on m'imitait, je deviendrais à la mode. Si je devenais à la mode, je passerais bientôt de mode. Donc, il vaut mieux que je n'aie pas de talent.'
- 355, *1896* [pencil line, left margin] 'Une bonne grosse qui donne de gros baisers, comme si elle collait des timbres.'

Volume 2 :

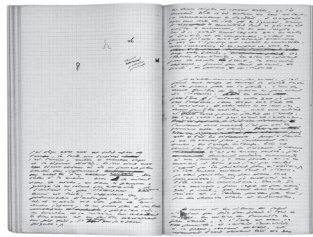
- 408, *13 juin 1897* [pencil line, left margin; underlined] 'Je suis un réaliste que gêne la réalité.' (see DN 228)

The two entries underlined by Beckett and copied in his 'Dream' Notebook (DN 226 and 228) mark his interest in Renard's opinion of Balzac and realism. They reflect his preoccupations at the time as lecturer at Trinity College Dublin. And, indeed, Rachel Burrows's student notes show how Beckett expressed his opinions on realism in his lectures, taking Balzac as a representative of this literary period and style. 'Balzac's greatness', according to Burrows's notes, lies in the 'Power of transcribing surface – cataloguing' (TCD MIC 60, 105). The problem with this approach is dealt with in Beckett's lecture as recorded by Burrows: 'Detail apprehended – but whole interest on surface – makes one impatient. Not interesting' (105). That is basically what Malone tries to do: cataloguing, making an inventory. Beckett seems to emphasize this link by means of the 'bilingual' reference to Balzac's

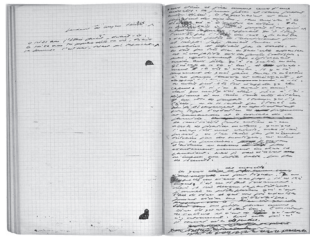
REN-JOU-2.html; <http://www.beckettarchive.org/library/REN-JOU-3.html>; and <http://www.beckettarchive.org/library/REN-COR.html>.

Louis Lambert, calling the ‘Louis’ family ‘the Lamberts’ in the English translation (Cohn 1973, 94). If *Malone meurt*, and especially Malone’s stories, are to be read as a parody of Balzac, the question is why Beckett cut so many passages in these stories (see chapter 2). Perhaps this statement from Beckett’s lectures, as noted down by Rachel Burrows, may offer a possible answer to this question: ‘Balzac never stated a “cas particulier”: expressed general at expense of particular’ (TCD MIC 60, 49). In the – quite substantial – manuscript passages that are absent from the published version, the narrative often enters into particulars. At first sight, one might be tempted to conclude that Beckett decided these non-Balzacian statements of a ‘cas particulier’ had to be removed in order to make his novel work as a parody. But then it should be noted that many of the omitted passages are about ‘the peasants’ in a generic sense, whereas Beckett did keep many of the passages about the specific family of the ‘Louis’/‘Lamberts’. Balzac did write a novel called *Les Paysans*, but the characters in this work do have names. It seems fair to say that Beckett deliberately styles his character-narrator Malone as a Balzacian author of ‘realist’ fiction, who explicitly states about his character Sapo that he wants ‘as little as possible of darkness in his story’ (1956, 13; *MD* 14) – unlike the characters in Beckett’s counterexample in his TCD lectures: Dostoevsky’s works (as presented by Gide), in which the main characters always seem to remain in the shadows (Gide 1923, 75; TCD MIC 60, 21). If Malone is to be read as a Balzacian avatar, it is significant that his main action is to die. In that sense, realism à la Balzac is put to rest.

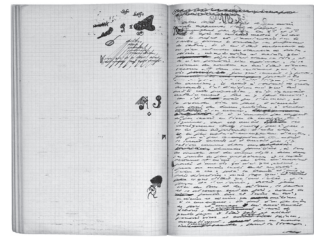
But this death is a slow process. As in the genesis of *Molloy* and *L’Innommable*, the writing process of *Malone meurt* almost coincides with the progression of the narrative. The writing of this diary novel is paradigmatic of what Louis Hay (1986–87) dubbed ‘écriture à processus’ – as opposed to the ‘écriture à programme’ of writers such as Émile Zola or Thomas Mann. This processual quality creates the impression that Beckett proceeded as gropingly as his narrator: ‘I whose every move has always been a groping, and whose motionlessness too was a kind of groping, yes, I have greatly groped stockstill’ (1956, 50; *MD* 51). This impression is even reinforced by the doodles, usually on the versos, facing passages that contain more cancellations than usual and thus indicate moments of temporary writer’s block (see Fig. 2). Nonetheless, it should also be noted that the manuscript of *Malone meurt* features several to-do lists at various stages in the writing process (FN1, 67v; FN2, 22v; FN2, 68v; see chapter 2,



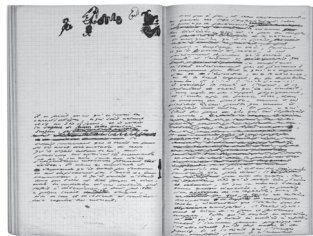
65v | 66r



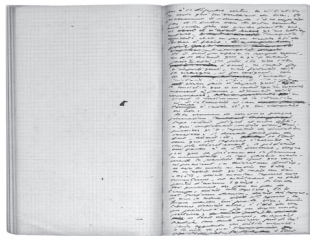
66v | 67r



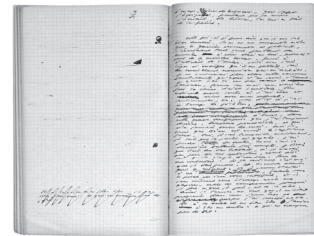
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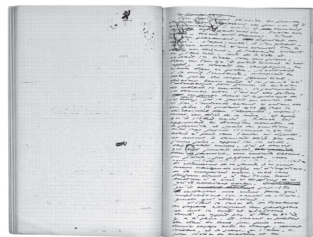
68v | 69r



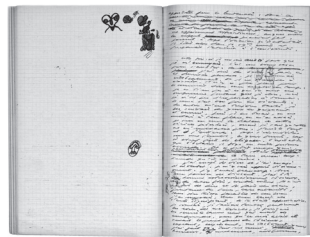
69v | 70r



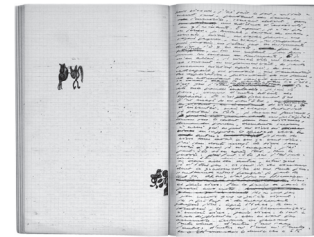
70v | 71r



71v | 72r



72v | 73r



73v | 74r

Fig. 2: Clusters of doodles on the versos, facing passages on the rectos containing many cancellations, suggestive of temporary writer's block (FN1, 65v-74r).

paragraphs 20, 60, 67) and foreshadowing paralipomena⁵ (i.e. jottings that relate to the text on the facing recto but do not strictly speaking belong to any textual version).⁶ In these lists, Beckett sums up the narrative components for the next few pages. They are as much subject to change as Malone's list at the beginning, when he says 'I think I shall be able to tell myself four stories' (1956, 3; *MD* 5) and then immediately starts modifying his plan. Beckett's lists can hardly be called a 'programme'; instead, they serve as milestones or signposts, vaguely indicating the direction of the 'écriture à processus'. In this process, we discern at least five remarkable tendencies or patterns:

- 1 First of all, there is the manuscript's apparent tendency, noted above, to enact Beckett's complex relation with *realism*, elaborated in the many passages on the peasants.
- 2 The *omission* of several of these passages is a pattern in and of itself.
- 3 While the published version is therefore shorter than the manuscript, there are quite a few instances where Beckett *added* short sentences. These additions are remarkably often *metafictional statements* undermining the reality effect.
- 4 There is a tendency towards more *negative syntactic constructions*, although this does not yet constitute as consistent a pattern as in *L'Innommable*.⁷
- 5 Similarly, there is a pattern that suggests an increasing prominence of the theme of *death*.

As to this last pattern, there are a few instances where death seems to be subdued in various stylistic manners, for instance, by means of euphemisms (as in paragraph 3, where 'je peux mourir' is changed into 'je peux m'éteindre'; see chapter 2). Especially in the early paragraphs,

- 5 FN1, 84v (paragraph 43); FN2, 58v (paragraph 65); FN2, 59v (paragraph 65); FN2, 60v (paragraph 66); FN2, 62v (paragraph 66); FN2, 70v (paragraph 66); FN2, 72v (paragraph 68); FN2, 77v (paragraph 72); FN2, 82v (paragraph 74); FN2, 106v (paragraph 87).
- 6 See the online *Lexicon of Digital Scholarly Editing*: <http://uahost.uantwerpen.be/lse/index.php/lexicon/paralipomenon/>.
- 7 For a detailed study of this tendency towards increased negativity in the drafts of *L'Innommable* and *The Unnamable*, see Van Hulle and Weller 2014.

the French equivalents for 'death' and 'dying' are being avoided or replaced by alternative phrasings. For instance, the 'voix mourante' (1951, 22) ['dying voice'] in paragraph 7 becomes a 'faint' voice (1956, 10; *MD* 11) in the English translation. In the manuscript version of paragraph 26, the narrator says he does not want to be surprised by death in his sleep, but in the published versions 'death' is omitted by means of an aposiopesis: 'I do not want – no, I have no explanations to give' (1956, 18; *MD* 19).

Gradually, however, Beckett sees to it that 'death' becomes more prominent, for instance by replacing 'vieillir' ['getting older'] by 'mourir' ['dying'] (paragraph 43; FN1, 85r). Whereas in the early paragraphs 'death' is sometimes replaced by euphemisms, the opposite occurs in later paragraphs: for instance 'vivre' ['live'] is replaced by 'ne pas mourir' (paragraph 62; FN2, 40r) ['not to die' (1956, 58; *MD* 59)]; and 'le jour moins jour' ['Night seemed less night, day less day'] becomes 'le jour moins mort' (paragraph 59; FN2, 21r) '[...] day less dead' (1956, 42; *MD* 43).⁸ Beckett added several allusions to death in the second half of the novel, thus shifting attention from the 'closure' of a concluding death to the process of dying.

But it should also be noted that Beckett is not always consistent, since there are instances where the pattern is disrupted. For example, there is a moment when the verb 'mourir' is changed into the euphemism 'm'éteindre', not in the beginning but in the latter part of the novel (paragraph 66). As with most of the patterns and tendencies we discerned, there are always exceptions. There is no absolute consistency, which is another indication that Beckett's method corresponds more to 'écriture à processus' than to 'écriture à programme'. Instead of first drawing up a grandiose programme and then executing it, he allows his creative process to proceed more freely, with the help of only here and there a short list of things to do.

Beckett also made a set of conceptual notes at the back of both the first and the second notebook (FN1, back flyleaf verso and inside back cover; FN2, 152r-152v). These notes indicate that rather early in the genesis (before Beckett reached the middle of the novel) he already knew that he was going to end the novel in the middle of a sentence, as the note on the inside of the first notebook's back cover indicates: 'Livre s'achève au milieu d'une phrase de l'inventaire' (FN1, inside back cover; see chapter 2, paragraph 49). But again, these notes are randomly jotted down as aides-memoire,

8 'la nuit lui semblait moins nuit, le jour moins ~~jour~~ mort' (FN2, 21r)

mostly relating to the last part of the novel. They are not a systematic structural programme for the entire book.

The situation is different in the case of the genesis of the English version, which is the focus of chapter 3. When Beckett started working on his translation, the text was already established, in other words, the ‘programme’ had already been fixed. This is not to say that *Malone Dies* strictly adheres to *Malone meurt*. Although Beckett generally follows the ‘programme’ set out in the French version, making no substantial changes to the narrative itself, he does let the English translation continue and develop the process initiated by the original, most notably with regard to the topic of death. *Malone meurt* famously ends with the supposed demise of the protagonist and narrator. For the English version, however, Malone had to be revived – not unlike Belacqua in the jettisoned and posthumously published story ‘Echo’s Bones’ – so that a more accurate title for the translation would have been *Malone Dies (Again)*. It seems that Beckett was well aware of the ironic effect created by his self-translation, since he further undermines death as an endpoint in the extant drafts of the English translation. Instead, he focuses on dying as a process, on the endlessness of ending rather than the end. This effect is further supported by revisions that emphasize darkness and suppress light.

In this respect, the English translation complements the French version of Beckett’s diary novel. Both versions constitute stages in a process of ending, an interdependent relationship that is consolidated by the reference to Balzac’s novel *Louis Lambert*, which only works when the French and English versions of the novel are juxtaposed. It is important to mention that the pun was not created until Beckett had completed a first draft of *Malone Dies*, so that it may be read as a commentary on the status of his bilingual text. Because it was fixed in print, *Malone meurt* could no longer be changed – unless in a revised edition. Yet by establishing a link with the French text in the English version, adding the name ‘Louis’ and thus creating the pun on Balzac’s *Louis Lambert*, Beckett devised a way to retroactively characterize *Malone meurt* and *Malone Dies* as two equal though different parts of a bilingual work, while suggesting that the one is incomplete without the other. But before we can explore this relationship in chapters 2 and 3, we need to describe the extant documents, in chapter 1.